



# Navigating the afri-centric ways of revitalising farming cooperatives to fortify the livelihoods and education of rural communities in South Africa

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study explores the role of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) in promoting sustainable farming cooperation, focusing on the traditional *davha* practice in Matangari Village in Limpopo Province of South Africa. Historically, the *davha* system, deeply rooted in African communal values, emphasized collective effort, reciprocity, and mutual assistance among community members. This practice involved families coming together to assist one another with essential farming tasks such as ploughing, planting, weeding, and harvesting. The current qualitative case study examined how these cooperative efforts have contributed to the sustainability of agriculture in sustaining the livelihoods and education in Matangari, particularly in the face of environmental challenges such as drought and floods, together with apartheid era bottlenecks and setbacks. The research highlights the enduring impact of the Afri-centric approach to farming, even after the disruption caused by colonialism and apartheid policies, which restricted land access and undermined traditional practices. Through structured interviews with community members, the study revealed that the *Davha* system not only fostered agricultural productivity but also reinforced social cohesion, emphasizing the values of *Ubuntu* and communal well-being. The findings suggest that Indigenous knowledge Systems like *Davha* can offer valuable insights for modern farming cooperatives, providing sustainable solutions to contemporary agricultural and environmental challenges. This study advocates for the revitalisation of such traditional initiatives as a Decoloniality process, and to repeal the current agricultural policies negating the strengthening of rural communities, thereby promoting food security through collaborative and culturally grounded approaches.

**Keywords:** Decoloniality, Afri-centric, Farming Cooperatives, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Matangari Village, Ubuntu.

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## INTRODUCTION

Rural communities in South Africa struggle with issues of inequality, unemployment, and poverty.<sup>1</sup> They believe that the greatest way to combat their unemployment and poverty is through agriculture.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, it was believed that the best way to guarantee sustainable growth was to allow communities to establish agricultural cooperatives among themselves.<sup>3</sup>

Over the years, Matangari village has witnessed some development, including the provision of electricity, access to clean drinking water, and the construction of schools and health clinics. However, the village still faces many challenges, including high unemployment, poverty, and limited access to decent housing.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the village has been blessed with fertile land, and many people were involved in subsistence and small-scale farming. Holding onto cooperative agriculture schemes, the people of Matangari village continue to work hard to improve their lives and those of their families through the *Davha* concept.<sup>5</sup>

Based on this background, this qualitative case study seeks to explore the Africentric role played by the *Davha* concept of agriculture in improving the livelihood and education, thereby alleviating poverty in the Matangari community. This shall be achieved through the use of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and the Decoloniality frameworks, through the lens of *Ubuntu*.<sup>6</sup> Literature revealed that one can also argue that such cooperatives existed in the pre-colonial period, whereby Africans worked together to assist each other in development, especially the poor. The Vhavenda have a word called *davha*, which implies cooperative working. This indicated that cooperatives have been there, though they played different roles such as empowering small farmers, ensuring consistent market access, stabilising income for farmers, and providing education and training to farmers.<sup>7</sup> Hence, this study investigates how and why Farming Cooperatives have been a significant tool in empowering rural communities, increasing agricultural communities productivity in Vhembe district, particularly at Matangari village, through an Africentric lens. Thereafter, based on the findings, recommendations will be made to ensure future sustainability and notable capacity building.<sup>8</sup>

The study is guided by the following questions: What is the history of African Farming Cooperatives of Matangari village? What were the challenges and constraints faced by the Matangari Farming Cooperatives in their efforts to enhance the livelihoods and Education of their rural community? Which strategies and interventions were employed by the government of South Africa to assist the Matangari Farming Cooperatives in addressing the challenges they faced in order to make them thrive, and enhance livelihood and education? Are there any Africentric best practices and traditional approaches that can be used in strengthening the Matangari Farming Cooperatives to enhance the livelihood and education of this rural community?

<sup>1</sup> Nqubenhle Mbokazi and Pranitha Maharaj, "Agricultural Cooperatives as a Means of Promoting Local Economic Development in a Township in South Africa," *South African Geographical Journal* 107, no. 3 (2025): 422–40.

<sup>2</sup> Refilwe Erna Maenetja and France Khutso Lavhelani Kgobe, "Enhancing Socio-Economic Sustainability in South Africa: A Review of Local Municipalities in Managing Inward Migration from the Periphery to the Core," *Jurnal Administrasi Publik (Public Administration Journal)* 14, no. 1 (2024): 64–76.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Lahiff, *An Apartheid Oasis?: Agriculture and Rural Livelihoods in Venda* (Routledge, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Chitja Twala, "The 'Letsema/Ilima' Campaign: A Smokescreen or an Essential Strategy to Deal with the Unemployment Crisis in South Africa?," *Journal for Contemporary History* 29, no. 1 (2004): 184–98.

<sup>5</sup> T. Mavhunga, "From Dispossession to Resilience: A Historical Perspective of Matangari Village," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 44, no. 3 (2018): 467–84.

<sup>6</sup> Maserole Christina Kgari-Masondo and Bernard Chingwanangwana, "Examining the Pragmatism of *Unhulized* Leadership in Schools Amid Socio-Political and Economic Turbulence in Zimbabwe: The Experiences of School Heads and Teachers in Marondera District," *Leadership and Policy in Schools* 24, no. 3 (July 3, 2025): 590–602, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2024.2313015>.

<sup>7</sup> S. Moyo, "Land and Agrarian Transformation in Africa: Prospects for an Agrarian Revolution in Southern Africa," *World Development* 15, no. 3 (2014): 267–82.

<sup>8</sup> Godfrey Chitsauko Muyambi and Philip Kwashi Atiso Ahiaku, "Inequalities and Education in South Africa: A Scoping Review," *International Journal of Educational Research Open* 8 (2025): 100408.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Letsema (*Davha*) Practice in Farming

Literature has revealed that cooperatives existed in the pre-colonial period, whereby Africans worked together to assist each other in development, especially the poor.<sup>9</sup> The Vhavenda people have a word called *davha*, which implies cooperative working. *Davha* is when families in a community come together to plough one family's field and then continue to the next family until all the fields in the community have been ploughed.<sup>10</sup>

According to Lekobane and Mooketsane, in the past, the families who chose not to participate in this process were subjected to societal punishment because of their selfish behaviour.<sup>11</sup> The Vhavenda communities were guided by certain proverbs, such as “*Munwe muthihi a u tusi mathuthu*” meaning that “one finger cannot pick up grains.”<sup>12</sup> The Batswana also have the same practice called *letsema*, which has a strong belief in doing charitable labour for other families, especially during the sowing and harvesting seasons.<sup>13</sup> *Letsema* is the name for this kind of volunteer labour. The word *letsema* in Setswana, Sesotho, or Sepedi refers to a group of people gathering to carry out a specific work. Its origins can be traced to the rural African villages of the early 1900s.<sup>14</sup> In ancient days, a household would issue a summons linked with *davha* for a contingent to gather for work if it required a task to be completed. There would be no money, but there would be food and African beer due to *Davha*.<sup>15</sup>

This term, *letsema* or *davha* was chosen by the South African government to urge its citizens to volunteer, indicating that the African philosophy of cooperative working is significant for sustainable economic development. This spirit has historically been essential to enhancing the cohesiveness of our society. It promoted teamwork and a shared dedication to the advancement of the individual as well as society. This resonates with Khoza, who avows that the *Ubuntu* theory, whose roots are enshrined in the concept of society propagating itself through the older generations, transmitting the values and beliefs of Society to the younger ones.<sup>16</sup>

The concept of *Unhu* (*Shona*), which is *Ubuntu* (*isiZulu*), is based on the ethics of the construction of personhood from African philosophy, disputing dehumanization as it instills that no human can be disposed of but has the capability of being rehabilitated.<sup>17</sup> For Kgari-Masondo and Masondo, *Ubuntu* participation tallies very well with the communal development endorsed globally through the ‘global village’ philosophy.<sup>18</sup> After all, it aids in the eradication of racism, tribalism, xenophobia, poverty, corruption, ethnicism, and other social ills because it promulgates respect, love, care, peace, human rights, and equality for all people. *Unhulization* is drawn from inculcating *Unhu/Ubuntu* values into an individual. Hence, this study proposes that *Unhulization* is perceived as transforming leadership, drawing from the values of love, peace, participation, hospitality, care, social justice, respect, guidance, human rights, and the general well-being of humanity.

<sup>9</sup> E. Letsoalo, *Land Reform in South Africa: A Black Perspective* (Braamfontein: Skotaville, 1987).

<sup>10</sup> Olgha Lerato Malapane, Nelson Chanza, and Walter Musakwa, “Transmission of Indigenous Knowledge Systems under Changing Landscapes within the Vhavenda Community, South Africa,” *Environmental Science & Policy* 161 (2024): 103861.

<sup>11</sup> Khaufelo Raymond Lekobane and Keneilwe S Mooketsane, “Rural Poverty in Botswana: A Gendered Analysis,” *Journal of Social and Development Sciences* 7, no. 1 (April 15, 2016): 48–58, <https://doi.org/10.22610/jsds.v7i1.1235>.

<sup>12</sup> Tshifhiwa Maumela, Fulufhelo Nelwamondo, and Tshilidzi Marwala, “Introducing Ulimisana Optimization Algorithm Based on Ubuntu Philosophy,” *IEEE Access* 8 (2020): 179244–58.

<sup>13</sup> Letsema Otogetswe, “Farming Cooperatives in Botswana: A Case Study of Collaborative Agriculture,” *Journal of Agricultural Economics* 42, no. 3 (2016): 315–28.

<sup>14</sup> Twala, “The ‘Letsema/Ilima’ Campaign: A Smokescreen or an Essential Strategy to Deal with the Unemployment Crisis in South Africa?”

<sup>15</sup> Twala, “The ‘Letsema/Ilima’ Campaign: A Smokescreen or an Essential Strategy to Deal with the Unemployment Crisis in South Africa?”

<sup>16</sup> Reuel Khoza, *Attuned Leadership: African Humanism as Compass* (Penguin Random House South Africa, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> Christina Kgari-Masondo and Zoleka Mkhabela, “Implications of the Minister of Higher Education’s ‘No Child Left behind’ on an African Child during the Coronavirus Pandemic in South Africa,” *Teaching and Learning in Higher Education in the Time of COVID-19. Alternation African Scholarship Book Series (AASBS) Volume 3* (2020).

<sup>18</sup> M C Kgari-Masondo and S Masondo, “‘For Peace Sake’: African Language and Xenophobia in South Africa.,” *Journal of African Foreign Affairs* 6, no. 3 (2019).

The *ilima*, *letsema*, and *davha* practices indicated that cooperatives have been there, though they played different roles. Hence, this study investigates the role of the *Davha* practice in promoting sustainable farming practices that enhance food security, improve livelihood, and promote education for both the young and the old, in Matangari Village and beyond. The study also seeks to explore how the *Davha* system, rooted in community collaboration, mutual assistance, and indigenous knowledge, contributes to sustainable farming, social cohesion, and resilience against environmental challenges.

### **Farming and the Enhancement of Livelihoods and Education in Rural Communities**

Through promoting socio-economic development, rural development projects help increase access to education, and disadvantaged communities will have jobs and be able to send their children to school.<sup>19</sup> Again, as indicated by Marongwe and Mutetasira, the family's income bases improve for those farmers, thereby improving the livelihoods of such families, including learners' nutrition, grooming, and health.<sup>20</sup> It has also been noted that such projects have a direct positive impact on education in that they help improve educational quality, in the sense that the learners whose parents are productive, all else being equal, can afford school fees, uniforms, and other ancillary needs such as books and pens, all these go a long way in enhancing educational quality.<sup>21</sup> From a psychological perspective, children who come from stable families, where they are well provided for, have been known to stand a better chance of doing well at school due to peace and mental stability.<sup>22</sup> Access to technology has been known to improve, too, as the learners whose parents are productive can afford tablets, smartphones, laptops, and even WIFI, and all these appendages are far from being luxuries in these days of increased online learning, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>23</sup> Such families also usually afford radios and televisions, which have become great mediums for access to education, particularly in this 'global village' era.<sup>24</sup>

Oosthuizen and Motsatsi affirm that educational impartiality and parity issues are also intensified through rural development projects such as farming, thereby closing the gap between the urban and rural communities.<sup>25</sup> There is guaranteed informal education for most adult people who are engaged in these projects, through upskilling, on-the-job training, direct and indirect contact with other members, and outside forces.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, companies interacting with the villagers to provide resources boost education when they mount deliberate training programmes. Muzekenyi et.al. maintain that, through close community engagement, some rural projects have built schools for the community, paid fees for their workers' children, bought books and uniforms, among other initiatives.<sup>27</sup> Some companies offer apprenticeships and mentorships to villagers, thereby bringing educational growth.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Alexis Habiyaemye, N A King, and Fiona Tregenna, "Innovation and Socio-Economic Development Challenges in South Africa: An Overview of Indicators and Trends," *The South African Research Chair in Industrial Development (SARChI)*, 2022.

<sup>20</sup> Newlin Marongwe and Godfrey Mutesasira, "Harnessing Parental Involvement and Educational Equity for Sustainable Development in South African Schools," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Social Studies* 4 (2024): 1–15.

<sup>21</sup> Reuben Dlamini, "Implementation of South Africa's Education Policy in ICT: Through an Access and Equity-Oriented Lens," in *Society for Information Technology & Teacher Education International Conference* (Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education (AACE), 2025), 1598–1606.

<sup>22</sup> Marongwe and Mutesasira, "Harnessing Parental Involvement and Educational Equity for Sustainable Development in South African Schools."

<sup>23</sup> Dlamini, "Implementation of South Africa's Education Policy in ICT: Through an Access and Equity-Oriented Lens."

<sup>24</sup> Mbokazi and Maharaj, "Agricultural Cooperatives as a Means of Promoting Local Economic Development in a Township in South Africa."

<sup>25</sup> Marc E Oosthuizen and Thato Motsatsi, "Sustainable Development in Sub-Saharan Africa through Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) Technologies: Addressing Poverty, Education, and Infrastructure Challenges," *OIDA International Journal of Sustainable Development* 18, no. 05 (2025): 49–64.

<sup>26</sup> Muyambi and Ahiaku, "Inequalities and Education in South Africa: A Scoping Review."

<sup>27</sup> Mike Muzekenyi, Farai Nyika, and Muhammad Hoque, "A Small-Scale Farming Intervention Plan for Inclusive Economic Development in Rural South Africa," *International Journal on Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources* 4,no.2(2023): 46–52.

<sup>28</sup> Mbokazi and Maharaj, "Agricultural Cooperatives as a Means of Promoting Local Economic Development in a Township in South Africa."

## The Sustainability of Agricultural Projects

Oosthuizen and Motsatsi propound that poverty alleviation, education, and infrastructure development by the government are key to addressing sustainable development in rural communities.<sup>29</sup> They further assert that South Africa's adoption of the 4IR technology in terms of poverty reduction, education and infrastructure development can catalyse the attainment of the SDGs and structural transformation in its economy, this goes for Africa's Agenda 2063. Challenges arise in the form of technological inequality, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient policy frameworks that deliberately disenfranchise the rural communities.<sup>30</sup> Sustainable rural development in rural South Africa becomes practicable through a nuanced understanding of the current global political economy, regional disparities, national fiscal challenges, and inclusive governance models that prioritise equitable national growth.<sup>31</sup> Marongwe and Mutesasira contend that the future of educational growth and the development of rural South Africa lies in harnessing parental involvement through intensive community development to promote educational access, equity, and equality.<sup>32</sup> Learners who are successful become beacons of hope for the future development of their communities, through direct or indirect attraction of investment, as well as being role models for the young. There is also a need to ensure robust community engagement and coordination alongside the drafting and alignment of government departments.<sup>33</sup> Capacity building for the rural communities through education, to take responsibility and ownership of the development projects, will go a long way in ensuring sustainability.<sup>34</sup> Stringent monitoring and evaluation are always a formidable key to sustainability in any successful endeavour.<sup>35</sup>

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper employed Africentric and Decoloniality theories. The Africentric theory draws from the IKS and sheds light on how significant the Farming Cooperatives of Africans have been from precolonial to the present in sustaining the livelihood of Africans. In addition, the Decoloniality theory, viewed through the Indigenous Knowledge Systems theory, then unlocks the practices of Africans to give a concrete knowledge base of the Matangari village.

### Africentric Theory

The Africentric theory is a framework that centres on African culture, history, and experiences in analysing and understanding various aspects of African societies.<sup>36</sup> It challenges Eurocentric perspectives and seeks to reclaim, revalue, and affirm African knowledge, values, and ways of being. This theory emphasises the need to centre African perspectives, knowledge systems, and worldviews in research, education, and practice. As advanced by Asante, the theory sought to challenge dominant narratives and stereotypes about Africa and its people and to promote self-determination, cultural pride, and empowerment.

Afrocentricity employed in this study was coined by Asante. Its emergence was concomitant with the historical and cultural context of Africans seeking to assert themselves. It is consistent with the interpretative life of the African person. It endorsed that Africans must view themselves through their perspective-centered and grounded perspectives. However, since Africans have been dislocated and decentered, they now view

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<sup>29</sup> Oosthuizen and Motsatsi, "Sustainable Development in Sub-Saharan Africa through Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) Technologies: Addressing Poverty, Education, and Infrastructure Challenges."

<sup>30</sup> Mbokazi and Maharaj, "Agricultural Cooperatives as a Means of Promoting Local Economic Development in a Township in South Africa."

<sup>31</sup> Maenetja and Kgobe, "Enhancing Socio-Economic Sustainability in South Africa: A Review of Local Municipalities in Managing Inward Migration from the Periphery to the Core."

<sup>32</sup> Marongwe and Mutesasira, "Harnessing Parental Involvement and Educational Equity for Sustainable Development in South African Schools."

<sup>33</sup> Mbokazi and Maharaj, "Agricultural Cooperatives as a Means of Promoting Local Economic Development in a Township in South Africa."

<sup>34</sup> Z. Takosolez Tusayi and Munkaila Isa, "Rural Transformation as Catalyst to Community Development in Nigeria: Wukari Local Government in Perspective; 2019-2023," *Madonna Journal of Administration and Management Sciences (MJAMS)* 1, no. 1&2 (2024): 15.

<sup>35</sup> Maenetja and Kgobe, "Enhancing Socio-Economic Sustainability in South Africa: A Review of Local Municipalities in Managing Inward Migration from the Periphery to the Core."

<sup>36</sup> Molefi K. Asante, *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change (Rev. Ed.)* (Chicago: African American Images, 2019).

the world from the European perspective. Afrocentricity attempts to relocate and re-centre the African person as an agent in human history to eliminate the illusion of the peripheries.<sup>37</sup>

### **Decoloniality Theory**

The decolonial theory is a critical framework that developed from the works of Latin American and Caribbean scholars in their response to the effects of colonialism and expansionism.<sup>38</sup> Peruvian Sociologist Anibal Quijano introduced it in the 1960s and he is often attributed as the founder of the Decolonial Theory. It seeks to challenge and dismantle the structures of power and knowledge that perpetuate colonial dominance and to envision alternative ways of understanding and organizing the world. An important aspect of Decolonial theory is the appreciation of multiple forms of knowledge and the prioritization of sidelined viewpoints. At the core of the theory is resilience, the capacity to manage stress or, more accurately, to return to a state of normalcy following a catastrophic event or to be buoyant in the face of boisterous turbulences.<sup>39</sup>

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research design**

This qualitative case study sought to establish the Africentric ways of revitalising farming cooperatives to fortify the livelihoods and education of rural communities in South Africa. The research design assisted the researchers in selecting the techniques and steps to take in data collection and analysis to address the research questions.

### **Study population and sample**

Purposive sampling was used in this study to come up with 20 participants from a population of 30 farming families constituting the cooperatives in the Matangari Village. The researchers developed precise criteria for including or excluding people from the study population. The sampled participants were seen to enable data saturation. These criteria were based on individuals' engagement in farming cooperatives. The selected participants each had unique characteristics that contributed to the study. The participants were grouped in three categories: cultural experts, cooperative members and IKS experts, all from within the cooperatives.

### **Data collection**

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with cultural experts, while focus group discussions were conducted with the cooperative members and the IKS experts. Consent forms were also signed by the individual participants. Consent was first sought to record interviews and focus group sessions on the tape recorder, and later, verbatim wording was used with their consent. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and verified for correctness.

### **Data analysis procedure**

The fundamental procedures for coding proposed by Miles and Huberman were used to analyse the data generated.<sup>40</sup> The data was analysed along with the themes that emerged from the inquiry in line with the demands of the research's focus. The data were thus coded, categorised, and thematized document by document, and then the study's major findings were cross-checked to reveal them. The themes produced meaning, advanced understanding, and developed experiential knowledge of how the Matangari Cooperatives can be revamped to enhance the livelihood and education of the community.

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<sup>37</sup> Marimba Ani, "Yurugu: An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior," (*No Title*), 1994.

<sup>38</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, "The Many Faces of Cosmo-Polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism," *Public Culture* 12, no. 3 (2000): 721–48.

<sup>39</sup> Steven Jay Gross and Joan Poliner Shapiro, "Ethical Responses to Educational Policies 1," in *Handbook of Ethical Educational Leadership* (Routledge, 2014), 352–69.

<sup>40</sup> Matthew B. Miles and Michael A. Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* (London: Sage Publications, 1994).

## Ethical considerations

The researcher observed all the ethical considerations through seeking consent from all the participants and educating them about their rights during the study.

## PRESENTATION OF DATA AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the study findings and discussion, which were guided by the following questions: What is the history of African Farming Cooperatives of Matangari village? What were the challenges and constraints faced by the Matangari Farming Cooperatives in their efforts to enhance the livelihoods and Education of their rural community? Which strategies and interventions were employed by the government of South Africa to assist the Matangari Farming Cooperatives in addressing the challenges they faced in striving to enhance their livelihood and education? Are there any best Africentric practices and traditional approaches that can be used in strengthening the Matangari Farming Cooperatives to enhance the livelihood and education of this rural community?

The research's main participants were females between the ages of 40 and 65, who were still active in farming, but also a few of the participants who were in their 70s and above. The latter group participated in the study because they possessed extensive Indigenous knowledge about Farming Cooperatives and their history in the Matangari community. Women constituted the larger number in the study, the reason being that they are the ones mainly involved in agriculture compared to men, as argued by Kgari-Masondo, "women maintained their role as guardians of the environment after land dispossession and that they resisted with all their means, to maintain their role of guarding the environment."<sup>41</sup>

Participants in the two focus groups revealed that historically, farming cooperatives employed an Africentric approach in strengthening the livelihoods and education of Matangari Village. Indigenous African knowledge systems acknowledged teamwork and understood that a community's effort might be more effective than an individual alone.<sup>42</sup> *Davha* promoted the value of selflessness as well, arguing that everyone should devote their abilities, expertise, and resources to the community as a whole.<sup>43</sup> Every household got a plot of land where they could live and work; it emerged from the two focus groups and the four culture experts. During *Davha*, some members of various families would relocate to the property of one family to develop it collaboratively. In this case, *Davha* was a collective effort to utilise the land, stated the IKS participants. *Davha* participants were therefore community members, as was indicated by Participant 7 in focus group two:

*It was good and desirable, as we were able to share our produce within cooperatives. For example, if a certain cooperative was producing sweet potatoes and the other cooperative was producing maize meal, we could simply share our produce to sustain the livelihood of rural communities. We could even share seeds to ensure that we produce a variety of products. For example, if a certain cooperative had sweet potato seeds that could withstand drought, it would simply exchange them with other cooperatives with seeds that could withstand floods. Through sharing, our cooperatives were able to achieve effective performance without the feeling of greed.*

On the same note, Participant 3 from focus group 1, also mentioned that:

*We were able to share Indigenous Knowledge of farming with those who were still entering into a Farming Cooperative world to help ensure that they are prepared to navigate through all the challenges they might face as members of cooperatives. We shared with them how to practice crop rotation and the use of Indigenous fertilisers from decomposed leaves, because, unlike animal manure, decomposed leaves of trees do not require a lot of water to irrigate when they are put on*

<sup>41</sup> Maserole Christina Kgari-Masondo, "Women as Guardians of the Environment in the Midst of Forced Removals: From Lady Selborne to Ga-Rankuwa," *Alternation* 1, no. 14 (2015): 77–105.

<sup>42</sup> Muzekenyi, Nyika, and Hoque, "A Small-Scale Farming Intervention Plan for Inclusive Economic Development in Rural South Africa."

<sup>43</sup> Azwihangwisi E Nesamvuni et al., "Employee Perceptions on Determinants of Tea Enterprise Competitiveness: A Case of Tshivhase-Mukumbani Estate in Limpopo Province of South Africa," *International Journal of Agricultural Extension* 2, no. 3 (2014): 193–203.

*growing crops. With this little knowledge we had, we were able to assist new farmers to flourish without having the spirit of jealousy towards them, because we also cared for their presence in the schemes.*

The sentiments of the two participants revealed that the Africentric approach to farming was the best practice as they used to share seeds and produce amongst themselves, and it showed that the spirit of *Ubuntu* existed back then, as vouched by Kgari-Masondo and Chingwanangwana.<sup>44</sup> Through seed sharing, farmers were able to produce a variety of products to sustain the livelihood and education of rural communities, even in times of natural disasters such as drought. This is taken further by Participant 12, Focus Group 2, who exclaimed that:

*We elected leaders of each Farming Cooperative of Matangari; these leaders were also part of cooperatives, and they became our representatives and helped to oversee our progress. They could communicate with each other, exchange ideas, and also exchange seeds to use in their cooperatives. They were the ones who could organise a gathering with cooperatives of other villages, where we could be encouraged on how to produce, and we could exchange ideas on how to handle our challenges. That's where we could establish the need for intervention of other cooperatives that may be failing to achieve their goal, and we used to intervene through Davha as they would brew beers, cook cow meat and pap, and invite us to work on their scheme and serve us with food afterwards.*

The study findings revealed that, historically, Farming Cooperatives have employed an Africentric approach in strengthening the livelihood and education of Matangari Village. It further stressed that through Indigenous African Knowledge systems, farmers were able to acknowledge teamwork and understood that a community's effort was more effective than an individual alone (Participant 2, Focus Group 1). The same argument emerges from the existing literature on the Vhavenda word '*davha*,' which refers to families in a community coming together to plough one family's field and continuing to the next family until all the fields in the community have been ploughed.<sup>45</sup> This system contributed to sustainable farming and food security because cooperative working *letsema (davha)* was practiced, ensuring the improvement of the livelihood and education of the community. As articulated by the participants interviewed in this study, the community's effort was more effective than an individual alone. The literature further revealed that families who would choose not to participate in the process were subjected to societal reprisal because of their selfish behaviour, as the Vhavenda communities were guided by the proverb "Munwe muthihi a u tusi mathuthu", which meant that "one finger cannot pick up grains."<sup>46</sup>

This study's Participants 4,6,11,15, and 16 attested to the effectiveness of the use of *davha*, which they said aids them in ensuring sustainable livelihood and enables them to educate their children, inasmuch as it fosters social cohesion, though the Participants did not mention the issue of infiltration of individualism after colonialization. Thus, the participants interviewed for this study emphasise community cohesion through the use of *davha*. They highlighted that when a certain local farming cooperative was ready to plough or harvest, they could call upon a group of people from other cooperatives to come and assist them with their labour, wherein they could bring along their tools, such as hoes, ploughs, and harrows, to work (Participant 5, Focus Group 1 and Participant 7, Focus Group 2). This position was also supported by the existing literature that *Davha* involved community members uniting to assist a farmer with essential tasks like ploughing, planting, weeding, and harvesting, reflecting the communal nature of rural life.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Kgari-Masondo and Chingwanangwana, "Examining the Pragmatism of *Unhulized* Leadership in Schools Amid Socio-Political and Economic Turbulence in Zimbabwe: The Experiences of School Heads and Teachers in Marondera District."

<sup>45</sup> Malapane, Chanza, and Musakwa, "Transmission of Indigenous Knowledge Systems under Changing Landscapes within the Vhavenda Community, South Africa."

<sup>46</sup> Maumela, Nelwamondo, and Marwala, "Introducing Ulimisana Optimization Algorithm Based on Ubuntu Philosophy."

<sup>47</sup> Moyo, "Land and Agrarian Transformation in Africa: Prospects for an Agrarian Revolution in Southern Africa."

Mathebula and Nchodu assert that the process could begin with the family organising a gathering or neighbours coordinating efforts, ensuring efficient use of time and resources.<sup>48</sup> Participants could therefore use farming tools collaboratively, allowing them to cover larger areas more quickly than when working alone.<sup>49</sup> After completing tasks for one household, the group would rotate to assist others, fostering an equitable support system that could enhance agricultural productivity and strengthen social cohesion within the community.<sup>50</sup>

The Participants indicated how they found it a norm to intervene in each other's cooperatives, which may be failing to achieve their goal of sustaining the livelihood of rural communities *davha* as they would go and work on a certain scheme and be served with food and beer (Focus Groups 1 and 2). Participant 15 reiterated that after completing work on a certain farming cooperative, they could simply rotate to assist others until the whole cycle was completed, and that this rotation ensured that all the participating members received help at the end, thereby ensuring sustainable farming. These critical findings suggest that rural livelihoods were maintained through *botho* caring, loving, and supporting others. Therefore, through *Davha*, every member of the community was humanised; no one was left behind to experience poverty or lack. Kgari-Masondo et. al. reinforce this communal cohesion when they say, in the African community, no one person is useless "*umuntu akalahlwa*."<sup>51</sup> Khoza augments this same concept in saying, 'a person is a person through other people. You are because I am, and I am because you are!'<sup>52</sup>

When the participants were asked if apartheid had negatively affected the Matangari Farming Cooperatives, it surfaced that indeed it had in a number of ways. Firstly, Focus Group 1 was vocal on the fact that Blacks were relegated to infertile and unproductive land; no wonder very few Whites settled in Vhenda. Again, they mentioned that the cooperatives have no title to the land and cannot access loans using it as collateral. This, they argued, meant they were the sole funders of their farming endeavours, and they face challenges accessing inputs and machinery to advance their farming. Thus, they remain small-scale producers, whereas they have the capacity to expand in reproductivity. Through the use of Decoloniality strategies, there is a dire need to address the current position.<sup>53</sup> Government, through engaging the community, has the mandate to make a difference in the lives and sustenance of the Matangari Farmers and similar establishments in the country.<sup>54</sup> Deliberate land tenure and accelerated land redistribution will see these devout farmers get more arable land and become competitive food producers.<sup>55</sup>

Focus Group 2 stated that they were muzzled out when it came to markets and the selling of their produce, where they say they end up being given compromised payments for their produce by unscrupulous third-party buyers. They lamented of inadequate support from the apartheid government, compared to the White farmers, this stifled their development. Post independence, they continue to suffer due to a lack of capital, limited youth participation, and inadequate extension services, the Participants vouched. Again, as stated in the above paragraph, policy reform, land redistribution, and extensive community engagement are

<sup>48</sup> A. Mathebula and J. Nchodu, "Collective Farming Practices and Food Security in South Africa: Insights from Letsema," *South African Journal of Agricultural Extension* 47, no. 2 (2019): 25–36.

<sup>49</sup> Moyo, "Land and Agrarian Transformation in Africa: Prospects for an Agrarian Revolution in Southern Africa."

<sup>50</sup> M. Lupankwa, "Historical Context and Current Policy Challenges for Agricultural Cooperatives in South Africa," *Agricultural Policy Review* 15, no. 2 (2020): 203–18.

<sup>51</sup> Maserole C Kgari-Masondo et al., "A Reflective Study of Supervisors in Higher Education on Humanistic Strategies of Working with 'Difficult' Students during COVID-19: Umuntu Akalahlwa Supervisory Style.," *Social Sciences and Education Research Review* 11, no. 2 (2024): 304–11.

<sup>52</sup> Khoza, *Attuned Leadership: African Humanism as Compass*.

<sup>53</sup> Mignolo, "The Many Faces of Cosmo-Polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism"; Gross and Shapiro, "Ethical Responses to Educational Policies 1."

<sup>54</sup> Sanjib Kr Dutta, "A Study on the Production and Marketing Scenario of Tea Industry in India," *Indian Economy in the Globalised Era from the Lenses of Millennials & Gen Z*, 2024, 38–47.

<sup>55</sup> Oosthuizen and Motsatsi, "Sustainable Development in Sub-Saharan Africa through Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) Technologies: Addressing Poverty, Education, and Infrastructure Challenges."

key agents in addressing these anomalies.<sup>56</sup> This ensures the survival and continued use of Africentric ways, IKS,<sup>57</sup> and *Ubuntu*.<sup>58</sup>

The study revealed that, in spite of all these challenges, the Matangari Farming Cooperatives continue to survive and grow, though slowly. Participant 20, IKS, stated that the livelihood of the Matangari community continues to benefit from the cooperatives; they have been affording decent lives, in food, clothing, accommodation, sending children to school, and other basic needs. He also mentioned that some notable children from the community have now become lawyers, doctors, teachers, nurses, police officers, from the education they received through their parents' farming. Literature world over has been clear that when families generate income, their livelihoods and the future of their children improve, the key to this being enhanced education.<sup>59</sup> To fortify the continued existence of these initiatives, the colossal legacies of apartheid need to be confronted.<sup>60</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from the study concerning the history and practices of Farming Cooperatives in Matangari Village and how they sustain a livelihood and education, the following recommendations were made:

- The government is urged to expedite land reform and redress the anomaly where able farming communities are tied to semi-arable land, thereby increasing food production and enhancing the livelihood and education in these places.
- The continued use of IKS and Africentric ways in farming is commendable; however, there is a need to document these and do further research on how to advance these.
- Aggressive community engagement and involvement in the SDGs and Agenda 2063 is encouraged, so that no person or community is left behind in meaningful national development.
- Support for Leadership Development within the Cooperatives is recommended alongside encouraging Inter-Cooperative Collaboration and Resource Sharing.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study illuminate the historical and contemporary significance of Farming Cooperatives in Matangari Village, particularly through an Africentric lens that emphasises Indigenous practices and collective community efforts. The traditional *davha* practices underscore the crucial role of teamwork and community solidarity, fostering a sense of social cohesion and mutual responsibility. The proverb "Munwe muthihi a u tusi mathuthu" encapsulates this ethos, highlighting the necessity of collaboration in achieving shared goals. Though the apartheid government sabotaged Black Farming Cooperatives, the Matangari Farming Cooperatives have survived and are still thriving, but there is a need to revitalise them to enhance productivity. Farming Cooperatives, such as the Matangari community, have significantly improved the livelihood of rural communities and contributed immensely to the provision and development of education, both formal and informal.

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<sup>56</sup> Qiang Xu et al., "Economic, Environmental, and Energy Analysis of China's Green Tea Production," *Sustainable Production and Consumption* 28 (2021): 269–80; Dutta, "A Study on the Production and Marketing Scenario of Tea Industry in India."

<sup>57</sup> V. Maposa, "Teachers' Perspectives on Remote Teaching and Learning in the Covid-19 Era: Re-Thinking Technology Availability in Zimbabwe," *European Journal of Interactive Media and Education* 2, no. 1 (2020): 1–11.

<sup>58</sup> Kgari-Masondo and Chingwanangwana, "Examining the Pragmatism of *Unhulized* Leadership in Schools Amid Socio-Political and Economic Turbulence in Zimbabwe: The Experiences of School Heads and Teachers in Marondera District."

<sup>59</sup> Ruth Makumbirofa, "Nhimbe/Ilima Performance as Peace-Building Activity: An Ethnographic Enquiry," *Journal of Arts & Communities* 8, no. 1–2 (2016): 61–73; Xu et al., "Economic, Environmental, and Energy Analysis of China's Green Tea Production"; Dutta, "A Study on the Production and Marketing Scenario of Tea Industry in India"; Shaik Vazeed Pasha et al., "Historical Expansion of Tea Plantations over 150 Years (1876–2023) in North Bengal, India," *Environmental Monitoring and Assessment* 196, no. 11 (2024): 1071.

<sup>60</sup> R. Hall, "Transforming Rural South Africa? Taking Stock of Land Reform," in *The Land Question in South Africa: The Challenge of Redistribution and Transformation*, ed. L. Ntsebeza and R. Hall (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2011), 107–31.

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