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2024
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ASSESSING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE CO-OPERATIVE PROGRAMME IN PROMOTING LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN SASSA GAUTENG PROVINCE

Matsobane Themba Matlou

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Management, University of the Witwatersrand, in 50% requirements for the degree of Master of Management (in the field of Governance and Management).

February 2024

ABSTRACT

This qualitative single case study assesses the sustainability factors within the South African Social Security Agency's (SASSA) co-operative program, with a focus on how it promotes Local Economic Development (LED) in the Gauteng Province. Positioned as a catalyst for socioeconomic progress, this initiative seeks to empower local communities—particularly women, youth, and individuals with disabilities—through co-operative enterprises. Within this program, careful selections of co-operatives, were sampled for the study. The sampled co-operatives showcase the program's extensive reach and dedication to promoting inclusive local economic development in Gauteng province.

Rooted in sustainability theory, the study explores co-operative sustainability, funding sufficiency, skills training and capacity building effectiveness, and program evaluation initiatives. The literature review integrates sustainability theory, emphasising program sustainability factors highlighted in scholarly literature. The methodology applied, included qualitative interviews and document analysis, in addition, the study engaged a number of key stakeholders for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, enhancing reliability and validity.

The research reveals critical insights into the co-operative program's sustainability. Key strategic measures, such as long-term contracts and stable funding, underscore the program's financial sustainability while emphasising the need for collaboration through stakeholder engagement. Challenges, including delayed payments, reliance on loans, and limited access to partnerships and grants, highlight the necessity for proactive measures like diverse funding models, improved financial practices, and enhanced resource access. Targeted skills training and capacity building illuminate the significance of education in sustaining co-operatives, and robust program evaluation showcases a commitment to continuous improvement.

SASSA's co-operative initiative contributes considerably to Local Economic Development (LED) by creating jobs, increasing economic community empowerment, and improving educational outcomes (school uniforms). The study advocates for a review of financial support policies, reforms to Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMME) procurement policies to reduce competition with larger businesses, targeted

skill development policies for co-operative members, and the establishment of a formalised evaluation framework to improve the program's effectiveness and sustainability. Aligned with South Africa's national and global commitment to the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, these proposals represent proactive steps toward advancing LED in Gauteng Province.

DECLARATION

NAME: Matsobane Themba Matlou

STUDENT NUMBER: 418389

QUALIFICATION: Master of Management (in the field of Governance and Management).

I confirm that this research report is the result of my own efforts, and that all sources I have referred or quoted are appropriately acknowledged through complete and proper citations. This research report is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Management (in the field of Governance and Management) in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.



……

Matlou Matsobane Themba

February 2024

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research to the resilient and dedicated co-operatives contracted by SASSA Gauteng Province, whose hard work and determination drive local economic development and community empowerment. May this work support and contribute to your continued success and transition into sustainable business enterprises.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank God the Almighty and all those who contributed to the successful completion of this research project. Thank you for your unwavering support, encouragement, and understanding during this academic journey. Your belief in me has been a constant source of motivation.

I extend my appreciation to all co-operatives, SASSA co-operative program practitioners and policy experts from the Gauteng Department of Social Development and City of Johannesburg Economic Development that collaborated in this study. Your willingness to engage in this research was instrumental in shaping the findings and recommendations. Thank you for sharing your valuable insights and experiences.

I am immensely grateful to my research supervisor, Dr Dikgang Motsepe, who provided guidance, support, and invaluable feedback throughout the research process. Your expertise and commitment to academic excellence have been truly inspiring.

Special thanks to my coach, Dr King from the Global Centre for Academic Research for generously offering his time to guide and allowing me to use his software for data analysis.

Lastly, I could not have completed this research goal without the support of my loving family and my employer, the South African Social Security Agency. I am grateful for the immense support and sacrifices during this period.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT i
DECLARATION ii
DEDICATION iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS v
List of Abbreviations x
Definition of Key Terms xi
Various lists xii

CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION 1
1.2 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT 1
1.2.1 Gauteng Province Co-operatives landscape 2
1.2.2 South African Social Security Agency's (SASSA) Co-operative Programme 3
1.2.3 Research Context: SASSA Public Entity – Gauteng Province 4
1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT 5
1.4 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY 6
1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS 6
1.6 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY 7
1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY 7
1.8 OUTLINE AND STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION 8
1.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY 8

CHAPTER 2:
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION 9
2.2 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY NEXUS 9
2.2.1 Sustainable Development and Sustainability 9

2.3 CO-OPERATIVE SUSTAINABILITY 11
2.3.1 Contextualising Co-operative Sustainability 11
2.3.2 Co-operatives as key enablers to realise the Sustainable Development Goals 13
2.3.3 Co-operative Resilience during Crisis Periods 16
2.3.4 Co-operative support programs in South Africa 17
2.3.5 Co-operatives Impact on Local Economic Development 18
2.3.6 Co-operative challenges in South Africa 20
2.4 SASSA CO-OPERATIVE PROGRAMME UNDER THE SOCIAL RELIEF OF DISTRESS AMBIT 22
2.4.1 SASSA 5-Year Strategic Direction (2020-2025) in Support of Co-operative Programme Sustainability 23
2.4.2 Sustainability Theory and Co-operative Programs 27
2.4.3 Program Sustainability Assessment Factors 27
2.4.4 Key Factors Supporting Program Sustainability 32
2.4.4.1 Financial Sustainability 32
2.4.4.2 Skills Training and Capacity Building 33
2.4.4.3 Governance Frameworks and Program Evaluation Procedures 35
2.4.4.4 Stakeholder and Government Departmental Collaboration 36
2.5 INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICES FROM DEVELOPING CONTEXTS 37
2.5.1 Brazil 37
2.5.2 Kenya and Uganda 38
2.5.3 India 38
2.5.4 National Context: Lessons from South Africa 39
2.5.4.1 The ‘Greater Uitenhage Sewing Co-operative’ 40
2.5.4.2 Lesedi Manufacturing Primary Co-operative 40

2.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY 46

CHAPTER 3:

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION 48

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM 48

3.3 APPROACH TO RESEARCH: QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY 49

3.4 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY: INTERPRETIVISM APPROACH 50

3.5 RESEARCH SETTING: SASSA in GAUTENG PROVINCE 51

3.5.1 SASSA Johannesburg District 51

3.6 RESEARCH DESIGN: QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY 53

3.7 CASE SELECTION: SINGLE CASE STUDY 55

3.8 UNIT OF ANALYSIS: SASSA'S CO-OPERATIVE PROGRAMME 56

3.9 SAMPLING: PURPOSEFUL PARTICIPANT SELECTION 56

3.9.1 Characteristics of Respondents Who Participated in the Study 58

3.9.1.1 SASSA Contracted Co-operatives (6 participants) 58

3.9.1.2 SASSA Co-operative Program Practitioners (4 Participants) 58

3.9.1.3 Department of Social Development Expert (1 Participant) 58

3.9.1.4 City of Johannesburg Economic Development Expert (1 Participant) 58

3.10 DATA COLLECTION 59

3.10.1 Document analysis 59

3.10.2 Semi-structured interviews 61

3.11 DATA ANALYSIS 62

3.11.1 Quality Criteria for Rigor Determination 63

3.11.2 Credibility and Validity 63

3.11.3 Dependability 63

3.12 DATA PRESENTATION 64

3.12.1 Coding Method 64

3.13 LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY 65

3.14 RESEARCH ETHICS 65

3.15 CHAPTER SUMMARY 67

CHAPTER 4:

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION 68

4.2 SUMMARY OF RESULTS: KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED FROM FINDINGS ALIGNED ACCORDING TO THEMES 87

4.3 CONCLUSION 90

CHAPTER 5:

DATA ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND SYNTHESIS

5.1 INTRODUCTION 92

5.2 CO-OPERATIVE SUSTAINABILITY GOALS PROMOTING LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT 92

5.3 FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY 95

5.3.1 Strategic Interventions for Financial Sustainability 95

5.4 ADMINISTRATIVE CHALLENGES AND CAPACITIES 96

5.5 EFFECTIVE STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION 98

5.6 TARGETED SKILLS TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING 100

5.7 ROBUST PROGRAM EVALUATION: ENHANCING SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH INFORMED PRACTICES 101

5.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY 104

CHAPTER 6:

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION 106

6.2 LINKING FINDINGS TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS 106

6.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE 108

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS 110

6.4.1 Recommendations for Practice 110

6.4.2 Recommendations for Future Research 112

6.5 CONCLUSION 113

REFERENCE LIST 114

ANNEXURES

List of Abbreviations

DSD	Department of Social Development
ICA	International Co-operative Alliance
ILO	International Labour Organisations
LED	Local Economic Development
NDA	National Development Agency
NDP	National Development Plan
SASSA	South African Social Security Agency
SDG's	Sustainable Development Goals (2030 Global Development Agenda)
UN	United Nations

Clarification of Essential Terminology

In this study, the designated terms are clarified as follows:

Co-operatives: The International Co-operative Alliance (ICA, 2013:2) defines a co-operative as: “An autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise".

Co-operative Sustainability: A “co-operative is sustainable when it is an economically effective enterprise that completely implements the seven co-operative principles and sustains or regenerates the ecosystem in which they are entrenched” (Sustainable Development Policy Institute and the ICA, 2013:2).

Programme Sustainability: The on-going use of an intervention (for instance SASSA’s Co-operative programme) with enough reliability to continue to have desired program outcomes and impact (Shelton, Cooper and Stirman, 2018).

Practice: Practice encompasses the everyday activities, conversations, tools, and ideas, as well as the social and material elements employed in the functioning of an organization (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009).

Practitioners: Practitioners are people involved in making strategies, both directly and indirectly. They use established practices to guide their actions (Jarzabkowski, Balogun, and Seidl, 2007).

LIST OF ANNEXURES

Annexure A: Permission Letter to conduct Research 127
Annexure B: Participant Consent Form 128
Annexure C: Editing Confirmation 129

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1: Three Pillars of Sustainability (UN Sustainability Framework 2019) 10
Figure 2.2: South Africa's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) Agenda from UN Sustainability Framework (2019). 11
Figure 2.3: Fundamental Seven (7) Co-operative Principles Adapted from Sketch Bubble Online (2023) 12
Figure 3.1 Code-Book Visualisation screen from COSTAQDA 64
Figure 3.2 Proforma Categories (Anchor Codes) 65
Figure 4:1 Job Creation through SASSA's Co-operative programme promoting LED 69

TABLE INDEX

Table 2.1: Business Model of GUSCO Co-operative 41
Table 2.2: Business Model of Lesedi Manufacturing Primary Co-operative 43
Table 3.1: Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion 57
Table 3.2: Retrieval of Documentation 60
Table 3.3: Research Instrument 62
Table 4.1: Co-operatives contracted by SASSA 69
Table 4.2: Co-operatives participated in the study 70

LIST OF MAPS

Map 1.1: Gauteng Province 4
Map 3.1: SASSA Gauteng Province 51
Map 3.2: SASSA Johannesburg District Service Delivery Footprint 52

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The co-operative business model has been underscored as a key strategy for addressing South Africa's socio-economic challenges, with a focus on job creation, poverty reduction, and improved living standards (Khumalo, 2014). However, the sustainability of these co-operative support strategies, particularly within the context of the South African Social Security Agency's (SASSA) co-operative program, remains a critical concern. This study aimed to assess the sustainability of SASSA's co-operative program in promoting Local Economic Development (LED) in Gauteng Province.

To achieve this, a qualitative single-case study methodology was employed, engaging purposefully selected participants, including co-operatives, SASSA practitioners, and policy experts from the Department of Social Development and the City of Johannesburg Economic Development Department. The study seeks to generate new insights into sustainability practices relevant to SASSA's co-operative program supporting locally based co-operatives in promoting LED.

1.2 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Globally, co-operatives are recognised for addressing social and economic needs while creating a dynamic industry (Theron, 2010). Co-operatives are defined by the International Co-operative Alliance [1](ICA, 2013:2) as autonomous associations of persons united voluntarily to meet common economic, social, and cultural needs through jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprises. In the "Blueprint for a Co-operative Decade," the ICA (2013) strongly advocates for co-operatives as pivotal drivers of economic, social, and environmental sustainability. According to the ICA, co-operatives are key in advancing the 2030 United Nations Sustainable Development (UN SDGs, 2015) agenda. Their contribution impacts various development imperatives, including ending poverty, empowering girls and women to achieve gender equality, providing quality education and lifelong learning, ensuring healthy lives, securing food security and good nutrition, achieving universal access to water

[1] The **International Co-operative Alliance** (ICA) is the voice of co-operatives worldwide and was established in 1895 to promote the co-operative model globally.

and sanitation, and promoting sustainable energy (ILO 2015; Wanyama, 2016). The co-operative sector's substantial contribution to enhancing the quality of life in local communities, eradicating poverty, and fostering employment underscore its significant role in the development agendas of numerous nations globally, South Africa included.

In South Africa, co-operative development and support are facilitated by various provincial departments, government agencies (such as SASSA), and other stakeholders, employing a diverse range of co-operative support programs and strategies aimed at establishing successful and sustainable co-operatives, particularly within previously marginalised groups (Okem, 2016:5). Specific targeted government funding is accessible across different government levels to promote the formation and growth of co-operatives. This includes provisions for funding, education, and support for skills and capacity training, empowering co-operatives in the development and implementation of effective business strategies (Okem, 2016; DTI; 2012a, 2012b, and 2012c). Against this backdrop, the sections that follow delineate the co-operative landscape in Gauteng province to enhance the scope of this investigation.

1.2.1 Gauteng Province Co-operatives landscape

The Integrated Co-operatives Development Strategy has an impact on the co-operative scene in Gauteng Province. This strategy, developed by the Department of Economic Development in 2010, is governed by four key ideas. These principles seek to build a united approach across sectors, with an emphasis on creating jobs, eliminating poverty, and ensuring long-term economic progress. Furthermore, the policy aims to promote the expansion of sustainable co-operatives, integrate them into existing value chains and emerging sectors, and coordinate support programs (DED, 2010).

The Department of Economic Development (DED) oversees numerous co-operative support initiatives in various sectors of the Gauteng province's economy. The Gauteng Enterprise Propeller (GEP), which receives money from the DED, is a prominent player in the province's co-operative sector. GEP assists township enterprises, co-operatives, and Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) that provide goods

and services (DED, 2019–2020).

Co-operatives, with the help of well-functioning institutions and initiatives such as SASSA's program, can play a critical role in producing jobs and encouraging economic growth in local communities (Rena, 2017:8). Nonetheless, a 2012 baseline analysis by the Department of Trade and Industry identifies a concerning element of co-operative performance in Gauteng. Out of a total of 2366 registered co-operatives across different sectors, only 394 have survived, while a substantial 1971 have faced failure. This indicates a survival rate of 17% and a mortality rate of 83%, underscoring the challenges faced by co-operatives established post-1994 and their diminished contribution to the economy (DTI, 2012:41; Muswena, 2018; Okem, 2016).

1.2.2 South African Social Security Agency's (SASSA) Co-operative Program

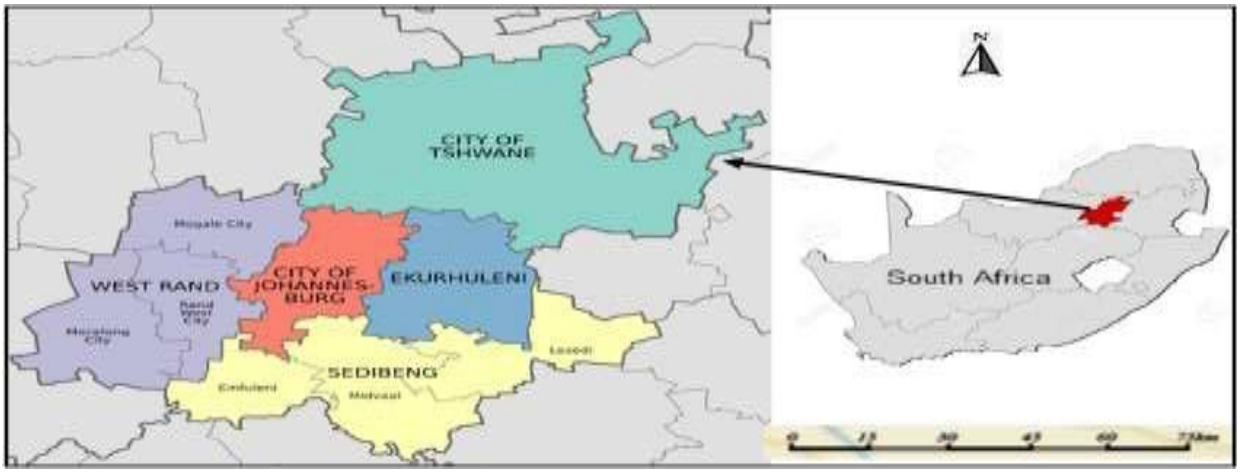
In 2015, a collaborative effort was initiated by the National Department of Social Development (DSD) along with its two implementation agencies, the National Development Agency (NDA) and the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA). This multi-stakeholder partnership aimed to bolster local economic participation through the co-operative sector. SASSA's Co-operative support programme emerged as a pivotal component of the agency's strategic direction for the period 2020-2025. The overarching goals of this initiative were to stimulate local community involvement in economic activities, foster job creation, reduce poverty, promote gender equality, and enhance the overall standard of living for local communities (SASSA Strategic Plan, 2020-2025).

To attain greater self-sufficiency, SASSA's co-operative strategy was strategically designed to prioritise the linkage of women, youth, and individuals with disabilities to various economic development opportunities. This involved an expansion of procurement spending to encompass a broader range of goods and services. The impact of SASSA Gauteng Province's co-operative programme was evident in its contributions to increased income, job creation, and economic empowerment. Contracts awarded to co-operatives, particularly those involved in supplying school uniforms, amounted to a substantial 26 million rands. This funding directly benefited 12 locally established co-operatives supplying school uniforms to 10,184 school children (SASSA Gauteng Province Annual Report, 2022-23).

Recognising the need for sustained impact, it has become imperative for SASSA to address sustainability concerns within its co-operative program. Strategic solutions are essential to enhance operational practices and support services tailored to co-operative enterprises. By establishing a sustainable co-operative programme, SASSA aims to provide existing and potential co-operatives with the opportunity to evolve into enduring, self-sufficient businesses that contribute positively to society at large.

1.2.3 Research Context: SASSA Public Entity – Gauteng Province

Gauteng province serves as the prominent economic hub within South Africa, contributing significantly to the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), with a share exceeding 34.8% (Gauteng City-Region, 2021). Despite its economic prominence, the province grapples with persistent challenges, characterised by elevated levels of unemployment, poverty, and inequality. Within its territorial expanse, Gauteng encompasses three metropolitan municipalities—namely, the City of Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni, and the City of Tshwane—as well as two district municipalities, as delineated in the map provided below:



opulation	13.4 million in 2016	Stats SA Community Survey, 2016
Poverty	25.3% in 2019	Growing Gauteng Together GGT, 2030)
Unemployment	37% in 2021	GPSERO, 2022).
Inequality	0.635 in 2019	Growing Gauteng Together GGT, 2030)

Map 1.1: Gauteng Province (Source: Adapted from GGT, 2020)

SASSA, established under the South African Social Security Agency Act (Act No. 9 of 2004), was mandated with the administration of social security in South Africa. On April 1, 2006, the responsibility for managing, administering, and disbursing social assistance grants was transferred to SASSA. The agency operates through a national

office and nine provincial offices, distributed across Gauteng, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Free State, North West, Western Cape, Kwa-Zulu Natal, Northern Cape, and Eastern Cape. Each province is further subdivided into districts and local service offices.

Beyond providing a range of social assistance services, including social grants to vulnerable South Africans, permanent residents, and refugees, SASSA extends its role to offer socio-economic support through co-operative support services that cater to community needs (Social Relief of Distress, 2022). Aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda 2030, it is evidenced SASSA's strategic outcomes (2020-2025) prioritise vulnerable groups, particularly women, in the allocation of contracts when implementing co-operative assistance programs.

1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM

This study addresses the critical issue of the sustainability of SASSA's co-operative Programme in promoting Local Economic Development (LED) in Gauteng Province. The urgency of this matter arises from the existing gap in information and empirical evidence on the investigated phenomenon, where concerns about the lack of sustainability in public sector co-operative interventions have been prevalent in South Africa's co-operative discourse (NDA, 2020). Surprisingly, public sector organisations and researchers have often overlooked or minimally explored this issue.

To comprehend the factors influencing the sustainability of SASSA's co-operative programme and identify challenges to its long-term success, this study delves into aspects crucial for both theoretical and practical considerations. It addresses potential program sustainability factors such as co-operative sustainability impacting local economic development, funding sustainability, skills development and capacity building practices, and program evaluation, including a lack of understanding and collaboration among stakeholders. Stakeholders must grasp every facet of SASSA's programme sustainability to preserve its benefits for co-operatives, positioning them for lasting success.

Drawing insights from key government strategies like the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) and the Community Work Programme (CWP), which are aimed

at tackling poverty, unemployment, and inequality in South Africa, there is contrary evidence pointing to persistently high unemployment rates. The concern extends to the sustainability of these government-led programs, emphasising the need for thorough evaluation and understanding of sustainability variables' concerns (Nzimakwe, 2008: 207; RSA 2013: 30).

In the context of health, education, and social services, certain variables prove to be crucial in assessing program sustainability, including funding, partnerships, organisational capacity, environmental support, communication, program evaluation, and strategic planning (Luke *et al*., 2014; Schell *et al*., 2013). This study narrows its focus to three selected sustainability variables for SASSA's co-operative programme: Funding, Skills and Capacity building, and Program evaluation.

Recognising the critical role of ongoing financial support for co-operatives, this research identifies funding sustainability as a key factor. Co-operatives rely on continuous financial backing to maximise their potential impact (Jones, 2020). Similarly, the importance of skills training and capacity building cannot be overstated, necessitating support from organisations like SASSA to empower co-operatives through skill development initiatives (Smith *et al*., 2020). Finally, continuous assessment, including program monitoring and evaluation, emerges as a critical component to ensure that SASSA's co-operative initiative yields sustainable benefits for the locally based co-operative sector (Wilson, 2019).

This research endeavors to shed light on these issues and contribute valuable insights to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of SASSA's Co-operative Programme, aligning with the broader goal of promoting local economic development in the Gauteng Province.

1.4 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This qualitative case study aims to assess the sustainability of SASSA’s Co-operative Programme in promoting Local Economic Development (LED) in Gauteng Province. To illuminate the complexities of this issue, the study addresses the following research

questions:

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The **primary research question** is: What are the factors that sustainably advance co-operative programs in promoting Local Economic Development?

The **secondary questions** that the study aims to address are:

- How sufficient is SASSA's funding model to support co-operatives sustainability?
- How effective is SASSA's co-operative programme in facilitating skills and capacity-building to support co-operatives sustainability?
- How effective are SASSA's co-operative programme evaluation initiatives?

1.6 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Primary Objective: To investigate and identify they key factors that sustainably advance co-operative programs in promoting Local Economic Development.

Secondary Objectives

- To evaluate the sufficiency of SASSA's funding model in supporting the sustainability of co-operatives
- To assess the effectiveness of SASSA's co-operative program in facilitating skills training and capacity building for the sustainability of co-operatives.
- To analyse the effectiveness of SASSA's co-operative program evaluation initiatives in ensuring the sustainability of co-operatives

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study holds significance as it contributes valuable insights to the current knowledge base surrounding sustainability, co-operatives, and local economic development within the public sector. The findings and recommendations derived from

this research aim to offer informed guidance for decision-making, the development of effective strategies, and the enhancement of the long-term sustainability of SASSA's Co-operative Program. In alignment with SASSA's strategic outcomes (2020-2025) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda (UN, 2015), the study emphasises the broader impact of SASSA's co-operative program on both national and global development imperatives.

1.8 OUTLINE AND STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

The dissertation consists of six chapters:

Chapter 1 introduces the study, covering the research background, context, research questions, objectives, and significance. Chapter 2 looks at important literature and provides a conceptual and theoretical framework. In Chapter 3, the research approach and methodology are explained. Chapter 4 shares and explains data about challenges and successes in sustainability. In Chapter 5, the findings are analysed in relation to existing literature. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the study, presenting important insights and recommendations to enhance the sustainability of SASSA's Co-operative Program in promoting Local Economic Development (LED).

1.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 1 serves as an introduction, offering a snapshot overview of the study, encompassing its context, research questions, objectives, and significance. The outlined structure not only sets the stage for the reader but also acts as a guide through subsequent chapters, where the intricacies of SASSA's Co-operative Program sustainability in promoting Local Economic Development in Gauteng Province are explored.

CHAPTER 2: PRESENTING THE LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION

In this chapter, an extensive examination and discussion of current scholarly and academic literature are undertaken to address the identified problem statement, research questions, and objectives. The primary focus is on assessing the sustainability of the SASSA co-operative program in promoting Local Economic Development (LED) in Gauteng province. The literature review is structured to explore the alignment of the co-operative program with three pivotal areas of literature: (a) sustainable development and sustainability, (b) co-operatives, and (c) local economic development. By delving into these domains, the literature review aims to establish a comprehensive framework that facilitates the understanding of key program factors (variables) essential for advancing the sustainability of SASSA's co-operative initiative.

2.2 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY NEXUS

2.2.1 Sustainable Development and Sustainability

Discussions surrounding sustainable development (SD) and sustainability have been prominent in global development discourse since the 1980s (WCED, 1987). The significance of these concepts was reaffirmed in 2015 with the adoption of the 2030 global United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda. Both terms are frequently used interchangeably, encompassing the notion of "*development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*" (Brundtland WCED, 1987:27).

Critics argue that this definition lacks clear operational guidance, assessment indicators, and a theoretical framework to comprehend the inherent complexity and ambiguity of sustainability (Sachs, 2015; Ibem and Dominic, 2011). The conceptual challenges have led to diverse perspectives on sustainability (Isaksson, Garvare and Johnson, 2015; Kemper and Ballantyne, 2019; Fitzpatrick, 2022). Consequently, this study aligns with literature and practices supporting the sustainability field, guiding the implementation of sustainable development (London, 2013:15–16).According to the sustainability school of thought, the concept encompasses various dimensions, integrating economic, social, and environmental aspects to foster a balanced and resilient society, as illustrated in Figure 2.1 (UN, 2015; London, 2012).



Figure 2.1: Three Pillars of Sustainability (UN Sustainability Framework2019)

In 2015, South Africa adopted the United Nations' 17 global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their 169 associated targets, with the ambitious aim of achieving them by 2030. Nilsson and Persson (2017) argue that the SDGs heighten the urgency for countries to intensify their efforts in addressing pressing global issues such as poverty, unemployment, inequality, climate change, and environmental degradation (UN 2019). Sachs (2015) underscores that eliminating poverty, reducing unemployment, and confronting inequality are paramount challenges globally, including in South Africa, essential for sustainable development.

However, the UN's (2015) "one size fits all" approach in pursuing sustainability imperatives overlooks the unique cultural, socio-economic, and developmental contexts at the national, provincial, and local levels, particularly in regions like South Africa. Achieving sustainability necessitates addressing context-specific socio-economic disparities, such as poverty, unemployment, and inequality, by ensuring equitable distribution of resources and opportunities.

The concept of sustainability permeates every facet of society, shaping the planning and implementation of programs and operations across both the public and private sectors (Thakhati, 2016; Coenen, Benneworth, and Truffer, 2012). Government and businesses alike are obligated to report on their endeavours to support sustainable development and actively contribute to sustainability goals (Thakhati, 2016; Bell,

Soybel, and Turner, 2012). Recognising the significance of researchers, public sector organisations, independent groups, and private sector corporations as crucial contributors to addressing sustainability concerns are essential (Thakhati, 2016; Garud and Gehman, 2012).

Gaining a deeper understanding of the determinant factors and variables that may either foster or hinder the sustainability of SASSA's co-operative program is pivotal. This knowledge is instrumental in identifying the specific program factors and variables, such as funding, skills training, capacity building, and program evaluation that need evaluation to assess sustainability accurately.

In light of the absence of universal consensus regarding the practical definition of sustainability, for this study, sustainability is defined as the *"continual utilisation of an intervention (SASSA's Co-operative program) with sufficient reliability ensured through sustainable funding, skills, and capacity building, and program evaluation interventions, to continue the achievement of desired program outcomes and impact*" (Shelton, Cooper, and Stirman, 2018).

2.3 CO-OPERATIVE SUSTAINABILITY

2.3.1 Contextualising Co-operative Sustainability

International Co-operative Alliance (ICA, 1995: 3) has provided a well explanation and definition of cooperative. According to the ICA, a co-operative is "*an autonomous association of individuals who voluntarily come together to address their shared economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a collectively owned and democratically controlled enterprise*." This definition, widely acknowledged worldwide, acts as a guiding foundation for numerous countries and co-operative sectors. Implicit in this definition is the co-operative's dedication to non-discrimination, irrespective of gender, social, racial, political, or religious status.

Co-operatives, as essential contributors to sustainable development, play a multifaceted role in fostering economic stability, community well-being, and environmental stewardship (Mushongera *et al.,* 2017). The identity, values, and co-operative principles (ICA, 1995) underscore their commitment to sustainable practices and community well-being (Adams, 2018). Co-operatives are characterised by individuals collaboratively addressing the needs of each member through combined

efforts and pooled resources.

In the context of co-operative sustainability, the ICA (2013:2) asserts that a co-operative achieves sustainability when it "*operates as an economically effective enterprise, fully embodying the seven co-operative principles, while simultaneously sustaining or regenerating the ecosystem in which it is rooted*" (Sustainable Development Policy Institute and the ICA, 2013:2). Co-operative sustainability, therefore, hinges on factors such as profitability, adherence to co-operative principles, and its tangible impact (job creation, economic stability and wellbeing) on the local communities in which it operates.

The principles set forth by the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) form a robust framework for ensuring the sustainability of co-operative operations. According to Adams (2018), the commitment to principles such as voluntary and open membership, democratic member control, and community welfare promotes enduring sustainability. The co-operative model, grounded in principles prioritising people and the planet, emerges as a sustainable alternative to conventional business models (Borda-Rodriguez and Vicari, 2014). Co-operatives globally adhere to a universally recognised set of seven fundamental principles, intricately linked with various Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their respective targets. These principles serve as guidelines, directing co-operatives on how to conduct and manage their enterprises, ultimately transforming them into sustainable entities (Singh, 2020; ICA, 2013; 2016). Figure 2.3 illustrates these co-operative principles:



Figure 2.3: Fundamental Seven (7) Co-operative Principles Adapted from Sketch Bubble Online (2023)

While the global co-operative principles underscore the necessity for co-operatives to attain self-sustainability, a study conducted by Tshishonga and Bandyambona (2016) reveals that South African co-operatives are struggling to address sustainability issues, including poverty, unemployment, and inequality. This shortfall is attributed to a lack of awareness of co-operative principles and insufficient support from networking co-operatives. Strategies for public sector support for co-operatives should prioritise a comprehensive understanding of operationalising and measuring co-operative sustainability in practice. For instance, SASSA could enhance its co-operative program by concentrating on aspects such as social equality, technical performance, management and leadership, and financial flexibility (Macharia, Mbassana, and Oduor, 2015).

2.3.2 Co-operatives as key enablers to realise the Sustainable Development Goals

Approximately 1 billion individuals engage in co-operatives globally, with the ILO (2014:3) highlighting their significance as LED strategies in underserved regions. Co-operatives actively initiate social initiatives benefiting members' businesses and providing social advantages to both members and their operational areas (Khumalo, 2014:66; Titus, 2014:2). International literature extensively acknowledges co-operatives as vital contributors to sustainability and sustainable development (ICA, 2012, 2013, 2016). Noteworthy contributions include job creation, gender equality promotion, provision of clean energy and financial inclusion, assurance of food security, and the establishment of social protection measures (UN, ILO, and ICA 2014).

Unemployment, poverty, and social inclusion pose persistent challenges for South Africa. To tackle these disparities, the government employs co-operatives as Local Economic Development (LED) solutions, aiming to enhance citizens' local livelihoods (Shava and Hofisi 2018, as cited in Berry and Bell 2019). Birchall (2013:1) contends that co-operatives offer a more inclusive approach to poverty reduction than other local economic development programs, rendering them more effective. The ILO (2014:3) emphasises that approximately 100 million people globally find employment in the co-operative sector, underscoring the significance of co-operatives as LED tools,

particularly in disadvantaged communities.

Co-operatives are essential for development, job creation, and environmental sustainability in various countries (Borzaga and Galera 2012:2). The Mondragon co-operative in Spain is an international example of promoting local economic development, demonstrating how co-operatives contribute to the socioeconomic resilience of the Basque region (Narvaiza *et al*., 2017). Adhering to widely accepted co-operative principles globally, Mondragon's worker co-operatives sector has experienced a 30% growth in recent years, with the introduction of grants, particularly for disadvantaged groups (DTI 2012:22), contributing to their success.

Restakis (2019) reveals that co-operatives make up about 35% of the GDP in Italy's Emilia-Romagna province, contributing to lower unemployment rates. Mondragon, starting small, has evolved into a global co-operative giant with assets exceeding nine and a half billion Euros. In India, the government's favourable policies have spurred the growth of democratic and autonomous co-operatives, especially in the credit/financial and agricultural sectors, supporting LED initiatives and providing employment in rural areas (Battilani and Schröter, 2012:47, 49).

In India, clear indications exist of the government establishing a conducive policy framework to rejuvenate democratic and autonomous co-operatives operating at the local level, supporting LED (Battilani and Schröter, 2012:49). The co-operative landscape in India has witnessed substantial growth, with the credit/financial sector and agricultural co-operatives taking precedence. These co-operatives are now ubiquitous in nearly every rural village, playing a vital role in the country's LED strategy by providing both direct and indirect employment to local communities (Battilani and Schröter, 2012:47).

SASSA's strategic co-operative intervention (2020-2025) is designed to directly contribute to South Africa's SDGs through specific targets:

1. **SDG 1: No Poverty:** SASSA's co-operative program supports local co-operatives to act as facilitators in poverty reduction within their communities. This assistance aligns with the fundamental co-operative principle of

addressing members' social and economic needs.

2. **SDG 4: Quality Education and Lifelong Learning:** SASSA's intervention focuses on skills development and capacity building, ensuring that co-operative members in leadership positions possess the necessary skills to oversee their daily activities (Okem, 2016:5).

3. **SDG 5: Achieve Gender Equality:** To promote gender equality, SASSA's co-operative program targets women, youth, and disabled individuals based on their proportional inclusion in elected positions within the co-operatives. This approach aligns with the co-operative principle of voluntary and open membership, emphasising the non-discrimination of individuals based on gender, social, religious, racial, or political orientation.

4. **SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth:** SASSA's co-operative program supports SDG 8 by providing three contracts to local co-operatives, adhering to co-operative principles of democratic and member-based concern, along with community welfare. Since co-operatives are owned and controlled by their members, they directly receive the benefits of collective business efforts (Tchami, 2007:14).

5. **SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities:** SASSA's co-operative program addresses reduced inequalities among women, youth, and the disabled, aligning with the co-operative principle of member economic participation. Through capacity building initiatives and sustainable funding, co-operatives are empowered to invest in community development programs supported by their members (Okem, 2016:4).

6. **SDG 17: Partnerships:** SASSA's co-operative intervention promotes partnerships by encouraging collaboration among co-operatives to leverage business opportunities, economic prospects, and income sharing (ICA, 2013; Okem, 2016:6).

In summary, co-operatives emerge as versatile tools for LED, showcasing their potential to address multifaceted socioeconomic challenges and contribute significantly to sustainable development goals.

2.3.3 Co-operative Resilience during Crisis Periods

The global COVID-19 outbreak, and the 2008 financial meltdown demonstrate the resilience of co-operatives during challenging times. Examples of sustainable co-operatives in crises emphasise the importance of SASSA's co-operative support program in assisting co-operatives transition to sustainable businesses. During COVID-19, India's milk co-operatives ensured households had access to milk for over 70 days, supporting livelihoods (SDG 8). These co-ops purchased milk directly from farmers, ensuring a consistent supply for daily consumption and well-being (SDG 2 and SDG 3) (Singh, 2020).

Co-operatives extend their reach across borders, fostering collaboration between countries. The All-China Federation of Supply and Marketing Co-operatives (ACFSMC) provided essential equipment (SDG 3) to support the medical staff of the Sri Lanka Consumer Co-operative Societies Federation Ltd. (ICA-AP, 2020). Various co-operatives, such as DEKOPIN in Indonesia, Rah-e-Roshd in Iran, iCOOP, HeW co-operative in Japan, Central Co-operative Society in Myanmar, and Nepal Agricultural Co-operative Federation, directly aid their communities and governments. These co-operatives contribute to healthcare, essential products, and services, including personal protective equipment, ventilators, and sanitation education campaigns to promote people's health and welfare (SDG 3) (Singh, 2020).

To alleviate the financial impact of the pandemic on communities, co-operative banks have taken various measures (SDG 10). In India, from March 1 to May 31, 2020, co-operative banks provided a three-month suspension on loan instalment payments. The Malaysian Co-operative Commission entertained requests to defer loan payments from COVID-19-affected co-operatives (Singh, ICA, 2020). Examining the notable impact of co-operatives in other emerging nations, the situation in South Africa vividly illustrates how COVID-19 affected the co-operative sector.

Co-operatives in Africa are not fully realising their sustainability potential (Bokoumbo *et al.,* 2023). Assessing the impactful role of co-operatives in other emerging nations, a closer look at the South African scenario vividly illustrates the effects of Covid-19 on the co-operative sector. Utilising data from the National Development Agency (NDA)

research "*Role and Contribution of Co-operatives towards the South African Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan*" during the Covid-19 outbreak (NDA, 2020–2021). The study revealed that the pandemic significantly negatively impacted the majority of co-operatives. Issues such as reduced revenue, key employee losses, operational shutdowns due to declining demand, restricted customer visits due to lockdowns, and a decreased clientele were evident.

The NDA study yielded noteworthy findings, including the following: inadequate sustainable funding directly impacted co-operatives' ability to procure production materials and equipment for their operations; the lack of sustainability in government-assisted co-operative support; ineffective enforcement of laws and procedures hindering local government assistance; limited financing opportunities from government, private sector, and NDA assistance; and a lack of oversight and monitoring after assistance has been provided by supporting government departments (NDA 2020-2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic showcased the resilience of global co-operatives, emphasising the crucial role of SASSA's support program. While international co-operatives demonstrated collaboration and support, South Africa faced challenges, as revealed by the NDA study. Inadequate funding and challenges in government-assisted support highlighted the need for targeted interventions to strengthen co-operatives against unforeseen disruptions.

2.3.4 Co-operative support programmes in South Africa

Fourie and Malan (2021:1) point out that planning and policy publications in South Africa emphasize co-operative support programs. A vital international framework directing these endeavours is provided by Recommendation 193 (R 193) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2003). This plan outlines the roles that different organisations—such as business sector, labor unions, government agencies like SASSA, and co-operative movements—have in fostering co-operative growth. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI, 2004) is in charge of leading co-operative development and support programs at the national level. South African government

has also assigned many other sector departments that provide aid for cooperatives in different types including National Development Agency, Department of labour

There is also the Integrated Co-operatives Development Strategy completed by Gauteng government in 2010 to foster the coordinated effort of this work (DTI, 2012). This strategy is mostly aligned to all other national policies, its intention is to create employment and economically disadvantaged groups, supports small business supports the co- operative sector, and most importantly the development of cooperatives in the province.

The Gauteng Policy emphasises the importance of city governments in driving co-operative activities at the local level. This policy highlights the importance of alignment programs with other national agencies in ensuring that there is sufficient capacity building starting from administrative, funding sustainability which will significantly develop cooperative further and contribute to local economic development.

In summary, South Africa's co-operative support is shaped by international frameworks like ILO Recommendation 193 and local strategies such as the Integrated Co-operative Development Strategy for Gauteng Province. The Department of Trade and Industry is a key player at the national level, offering support to different types of co-operatives through various sector departments and agencies. The Gauteng Strategy, finalised in 2010, serves as a comprehensive guideline emphasising inclusivity and the government's role in supporting genuine co-operatives. At the local level, municipal governments spearhead co-operative programs, ensuring alignment with broader government initiatives and local economic development plans.

2.3.5 Co-operatives Impact on Local Economic Development

For this investigation, it's essential to examine how co-operatives impact LED in South Africa, especially with the various challenges facing the co-operative sector. As community-based enterprises, co-operatives wield the potential to shape economic dynamics at the local level. Numerous studies emphasise the considerable positive contributions of co-operatives to local economies worldwide, illuminating their role in mitigating poverty, generating employment, and empowering communities (Birchall, 2019; ICA, 2020).

Co-operatives is key in achieving local economic development (LED), offering a sustainable model for community growth. Majee and Hoyt (2011) highlight their significance in mobilising local resources, fostering economic self-reliance, and breaking the cycle of poverty. This aligns with LED's goals, empowering communities to shape their economic destinies.

International experiences, exemplified during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic (ICA-AP, 2020; Singh, 2020), showcase co-operatives' adaptability to address immediate community needs. This approach encourages local ownership, participation, and resilience, extending beyond individual economic gains (Dekopin, 2020).

Thaba and Mbohwa (2015) contribute insights into co-operatives in the South African context, crucial for understanding their role in LED. Shava and Hofisi (2019) provide practical insights through a Tshwane case study, informing the evaluation of SASSA's Co-operative Program. Masiya *et al*. (2019) offers a holistic view by exploring public perception, essential for understanding co-operatives' socio-economic environment.

Co-operatives, supported by initiatives like the Social Relief of Distress (SRD) Programme under SASSA, align with the National Development Plan 2030 objectives, targeting vulnerable groups for poverty alleviation and local economic development. Theron (2010) explores co-operative policy and law in East and Southern Africa, shaping the operational landscape and contributing to LED. However, challenges such as skills gaps, limited finance, and governance issues (Thaba and Mbohwa, 2015; Titus, 2015) warrant a closer examination of co-operatives to enhance their positive impact on LED.

In summary, these studies collectively highlight the substantial impact of co-operatives on local economies, emphasising their potential in poverty reduction, employment generation, and community empowerment. The information gathered from these studies guides the assessment of SASSA's Co-operative Programme, adding to a thorough comprehension of the role of co-operatives in fostering Local Economic Development.

2.3.6 Co-operative challenges in South Africa

The challenges facing co-operatives in South Africa are diverse, impeding the sector from reaching its full potential (Thaba and Mbohwa, 2015:21; Okem, 2016; Wessels and Nel, 2014). The majority of co-operatives experience vulnerability, with only a select few managing to attain vibrancy (Okem, 2016; DTI, 2012; Titus, 2015). These challenges encompass a range of issues, including a scarcity of critical skills, limited cooperation, constrained access to finance and markets (Okem, 2016; DTI, 2004; Titus, 2015), non-compliance with legal requirements, and suboptimal management practices (Ortmann and King, 2006:3). High attrition rates, leadership concerns (Khumalo, 2014:61), government intervention (DTI, 2012), and inadequate support further exacerbate these challenges.

Lekalakala's (2017:51-52) research on worker co-operatives in selected Gauteng metropolitan municipalities highlighted significant challenges, particularly in securing start-up capital. The study found that upon business registration, worker co-operatives faced substantial difficulties in obtaining funds to initiate operations. The research identified a notable hurdle in accessing various funding options, including NYDA, SEFA, Anglo Zimele, GEP, and commercial banks. Despite the availability of these resources, co-operatives encountered obstacles in securing financial support, expressing a preference for non-repayable grants like those offered by the DSBD due to their status as newly established entities with limited market exposure.

The study underscored the critical challenge posed by the lack of start-up capital for worker co-operatives, affecting their sustainability over time and contributing to a higher withdrawal rate of co-operative members. The financial constraint also hindered their ability to purchase essential equipment for production or business purposes, leading members to seek alternative employment. Even for those securing start-up capitals, the study revealed its insufficiency, particularly in sectors like manufacturing,agriculture, and construction. This disparity highlighted the challenges faced by worker co-operatives across industries in obtaining adequate funding for their specific needs (Lekalakala's, 2017:51-52). The findings underscored the pervasive issue of inadequate start-up capital for worker co-operatives in South Africa, emphasising the need for tailored financial support to address the diverse needs of

co-operatives across sectors.

The lack of understanding among co-operative members, coupled with inadequate education and training (Okem 2016; Wessels and Nel, 2014), adds to the sector's struggles. Additionally, a lack of coordination between government institutions and tax-related issues poses obstacles (Fulton and Giannakas, 2013). Overcoming these challenges demands a holistic approach, including improved education, strategic coordination, and targeted support for co-operative growth and sustainability (Titus, 2015; Fulton and Giannakas, 2013). Members of failed or underperforming co-operatives often lack a clear understanding of co-operative principles and their rights, potentially due to limited education, experience, and knowledge (Okem 2016; Wessels and Nel, 2014).

According to the DTI's Integrated Strategy on Development and Promotion of Co-operatives (2012–2022), inadequate and inconsistent support contributes to co-operative failure. A lack of coordination between government institutions poses a significant problem for co-operative development, despite the existence of multiple agencies supporting co-operative growth (Titus, 2015).

Co-operatives in South Africa also face challenges related to tax changes, with the need for a new tax structure to support their growth. Several obstacles, as outlined by the DTI (2004), include measures for participation and production, cultural transformation, pay equity, competitiveness, centralisation, reorganisation, and difficulties in accessing markets. Market research is often overlooked, hindering co-operative sustainability, and the challenge of adapting to achieve independence is prevalent, resulting in a high dependence on external support systems, particularly from the government (Bontems and Fulton, 2009; Philip, 2003:23; Wessels and Nel, 2014).

Educational and lifelong learning principles are emphasised as critical factors affecting co-operative sustainability, with directors struggling to educate and train members

(Okem, 2016). Grant dependency and the inability to sustain without external support are common issues faced by co-operatives, making it challenging for them to transform into sustainable entities (Wessels 2014; Borda-Rodrgiuez and Vicari 2014). The Phalaborwa T-shirt co-operative is a notable exception, having been in business since 1987 (Wessels and Nel, 2014). The continuous operation of co-operatives may face challenges if the demand, often a result of market failure, diminishes (Royer, 1999 cited in Ortmann and King, 2007a).

From the literature, it is evidenced that co-operative challenges in South Africa are multifaceted; hindering the sector's full potential. The majority of co-operatives face vulnerability, with only a few achieving vibrancy. Challenges include a lack of critical skills, limited cooperation, restricted access to finance and markets, non-compliance with legal requirements, and poor management. High attrition rates, leadership issues, government intervention, and insufficient support compound these challenges. The lack of understanding among co-operative members, coupled with inadequate education and training, adds to the sector's struggles.

Additionally, a lack of coordination between government institutions and tax-related issues poses obstacles. Overcoming these challenges demands a holistic approach, including improved education, strategic coordination, and targeted support for co-operative growth and sustainability. Government agencies, such as SASSA, play a crucial role in implementing effective LED strategies to empower individuals and contribute to local economies. The success of sustainable programs in supporting co-operatives to address socioeconomic challenges and impact LED at the community level depends on the implementation of sound and trustworthy strategies by these government agencies, SASSA included.

2.4 SASSA CO-OPERATIVE PROGRAMME UNDER THE SOCIAL RELIEF OF DISTRESS AMBIT

SASSA's Social Relief of Distress (SRD) program, guided by Regulation 11(7) (a) (b), extends support to children facing economic hardships, ensuring access to school uniforms. The provision is targeted, focusing on the most vulnerable children, and is

executed through contracted co-operatives over 36 months particularly in Gauteng province.

Children from Grade 0/R and Grade 1 onwards qualify for assistance. The SRD, issued as school uniforms, is not subject to predetermined limits but is calculated based on the items comprising the school uniform pack. From June 2022, the maximum amounts were set at R2500 for boys, R2700 for girls and R3000 for children with special needs.

In response to the rising cost of living, SASSA adjusted the SRD policy, revising amounts to accommodate essential items for a complete school uniform, including blazers and sporting attire. Revised amounts stand at R5500 for girls, R5350 for boys, and R5500 for special needs.

Adherence to Social Relief of Distress Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is vital. The SOP mandates a reasonable timeframe for co-operatives to produce goods or services. In cases of non-delivery, a 3-month cooling period is enforced before re-engaging with the co-operative. Deviations require approval from the Regional Executive Manager, supported by the General Manager of Finance, with the intent to encourage compliance rather than punitive measures. Replacement procedures are in place if the child's circumstances change.

In summary, SASSA's SRD program, executed through co-operatives, addresses the specific needs of vulnerable children by providing targeted and well-calculated support in the form of school uniforms, aligning with the organisation's commitment to social relief and developmental assistance.

2.4.1 SASSA 5-Year Strategic Direction (2020-2025) in Support of Co-operative Programme Sustainability

The South African Social Security Agency's (SASSA) 5-Year Strategic Direction (2020-2025) outlines a comprehensive framework for advancing social security

initiatives, with a specific focus on co-operative programmes aimed at promoting local economic development. The strategic document reflects a commitment to sustainability across various dimensions, aligning with key areas pertinent to this study: co-operative sustainability impacting local economic development, financial sustainability, stakeholder collaboration, skills training and capacity building, and program evaluation.

SASSA's strategic direction emphasises the promotion of sustainable local economic development through co-operative initiatives. The report underscores the South African Social Security Agency's (SASSA) commitment to fostering economic growth at the community level. It highlights the positive impact of co-operatives in generating employment, income, and enhancing livelihoods. The strategic alignment between SASSA's objectives underscores the agency's recognition of co-operatives as agents of positive change within communities.

Within the context of financial sustainability, the strategic direction identifies key financial goals and resource allocation strategies. It underscores the need for efficient financial management to ensure the sustainability and success of social security initiatives such as the co-operative programme, aligning with the study's emphasis on the critical importance of financial sustainability for co-operative success. Within the context of the South African Social Security Agency's (SASSA) 5-Year Strategic Direction (2020-2025), explicit financial data and objectives demonstrate the agency's commitment to sustaining co-operative programs aimed at promoting local economic development.

SASSA's strategic strategy sets aside a significant 30% of its total budget to support co-operative activities. This financial commitment indicates SASSA's recognition of the critical role that co-operatives play in supporting community-wide economic prosperity. Allocating a significant amount of its budget to these projects demonstrates SASSA's strong financial basis, which ensures the long-term sustainability of co-operative ventures.

Moreover, the strategic plan emphasises the diversification of funding sources to bolster financial sustainability further. By exploring alternative funding mechanisms,

such as public-private partnerships and grant initiatives, SASSA aims to mitigate potential financial risks and enhance the resilience of co-operative programs. The financial sustainability objectives outlined in the strategic plan are intricately linked to broader economic development goals. The allocation of funds directly contributes to job creation, income generation, and improved livelihoods. The strategic plan serves as a roadmap for financial stability, guiding resource allocation to areas that maximise the potential for sustained economic growth within communities.

The strategic emphasis on collaboration reflects an understanding of the broader network required to ensure the success of co-operative programmes and their impact on local economic development. Collaboration with stakeholders is a pivotal aspect of SASSA's strategic vision, acknowledging its crucial role in accomplishing organisational objectives. The study underscores the vital contribution of external entities, including the Department of Social Development and the National Development Agency (NDA), emphasising their significance in bolstering co-operative sustainability. The strategic focus on collaboration demonstrates an awareness of the extensive network essential for the success of co-operative programs and their profound influence on local economic development.

SASSA's strategic direction underscores a commitment to enhancing administrative effectiveness and efficiency within the organisation. The imperative to improve administrative processes aligns with broader objectives of promoting transparency, accountability, and optimal service delivery. One key aspect of SASSA's administrative strategy is the adoption of modern technologies and systems to automate and integrate various processes. The incorporation of advanced information management systems and data analytics tools is envisioned to enhance the accuracy and timeliness of decision-making processes. This aligns with contemporary trends in public administration, where technological advancements are leveraged to augment efficiency and reduce bureaucratic complexities (SASSA Strategic Plan, 2020-2025).

Furthermore, the strategic direction places emphasis on capacity building within the administrative framework. SASSA recognises the importance of a skilled and knowledgeable workforce in driving administrative effectiveness. Training programs,

skill development initiatives, and knowledge-sharing mechanisms are integral components of the strategic plan to ensure that administrative staff is equipped to handle evolving challenges and deliver services with precision. Effective communication, both internal and external, is identified as a cornerstone for administrative efficiency. Streamlining communication processes, enhancing stakeholder engagement, and ensuring clear channels of information flow contribute to a more responsive and agile administrative structure.

In line with the study's focus on skills training and capacity building for available job opportunities within co-operatives, SASSA's strategic direction places a strong emphasis on skills training and capacity building. The document outlines initiatives to empower individuals, including marginalised groups, through skill development programs. This strategic alignment underscores the agency's recognition of the role of training in enhancing the sustainability and effectiveness of co-operative business enterprises.

SASSA's commitment to program evaluation is evident in its strategic direction, aligning with the study's emphasis on the necessity of evaluations for assessing co-operative work. The document emphasises the need for transparent governance structures and effective evaluation processes to support sustainability and development. This strategic alignment reinforces the importance of ongoing evaluation to ensure the impact and success of co-operative programmes in promoting local economic development.

The strategic direction serves as a foundational framework supporting the study's exploration of the sustainability of SASSA’s co-operative program and its impact on local economic development. Understanding the sustainability of co-operative programs, particularly in the context of local economic development, necessitates a comprehensive exploration of existing literature. The literature review focuses on sustainability theory, program sustainability assessment models, and the challenges associated with applying these models to co-operative assistance programs.

2.4.2 Sustainability Theory and Co-operative Programs

The literature highlights the unique challenges in assessing and reporting on the sustainability of co-operative assistance programs compared to investor-owned firms. Unlike traditional businesses, co-operatives operate based on distinct drivers, necessitating a tailored approach to sustainability assessment (Huge *et al.,* 2011). The study underscores the importance of critical variables, such as funding, partnerships, organisational capacity, environmental support, communication, program evaluation, and strategic planning, in determining the sustainability of co-operative initiatives (Schell *et al.,* 2013; Luke *et al.,* 2014).

Huge *et al*. (2011) argue that sustainability, as a decision-making tool, goes beyond the rhetoric, actively guiding actions and influencing organisational behaviour. Bond *et al*. (2012) provide a comprehensive definition of sustainability assessment, emphasising its role in directing decision-making towards sustainability from a broad perspective. The difficulties associated with sustainability assessment are categorised into interpretation challenges, influence challenges, and the imperative role of public participation, consensus, and societal partnerships (Devuyst *et al.,* 2001; Gasparatos *et al.,* 2008; Gibson *et al.,* 2008; Ness *et al.,* 2007; Bond *et al.,* 2012; Waas *et al.,* 2012).

The existing literature primarily focuses on sustainability practices within the quantitative tradition of private sector businesses, leaving a notable gap in the assessment and reporting of sustainability for co-operative assistance programs (ICA, 2016). The tools designed for investor-owned private companies, such as the Global Reporting Initiative and the UN Global Compact, may not be directly applicable to co-operative entities due to their fundamentally different sustainability-related drivers (Brown Leslie *et al.,* 2015; ICA 2016).

2.4.3 Program Sustainability Assessment Factors

Schell *et al*. (2013) introduces the Program Sustainability Assessment, emphasising its relevance in assessing sustainability within health, education, and social services. Recognising the need for a comprehensive tool, this study aligns with the Program

Sustainability Assessment, focusing specifically on funding, skills and capacity building, and program evaluation as key variables for assessing the sustainability of SASSA's co-operative program in promoting local economic development.

In assessing the sustainability of SASSA's co-operative program, the study employs a framework centred on the financial sufficiency or sustainability in support of co-operatives, how skills training and capacity building are facilitated, and program evaluation practices. The assessment integrates perspectives from various stakeholders, acknowledging the unique challenges faced by co-operatives. Emphasising transparency, stakeholder collaboration, and adaptability, the assessment aims to fortify the program's strategic direction for sustainable impact. This literature review provides a foundation for the subsequent analysis in Chapter 5, where findings from the literature are applied to assess the sustainability of SASSA's co-operative program in promoting local economic development.

Sustainable financial practices are essential for the long-term success of co-operative programs. Huge *et al*. (2011) argue that financial sustainability is a crucial component of sustainability, emphasising the need for co-operatives to adopt sound financial strategies. In the context of SASSA's co-operative program, the assessment delves into funding mechanisms, revenue streams, and financial management practices. The Program Sustainability Assessment Tool, as proposed by Schell *et al*. (2013), guides the assessment process by considering the financial resilience and adaptability of the co-operative program.

The study explores how the financial sustainability of the SASSA co-operative contributes to the overall sustainability of the co-operative, acknowledging the intricate relationship between financial stability and the program's capacity to fulfil its objectives. Applying the principles of financial sustainability outlined in the literature provides insights into the financial sustainability of SASSA's co-operative program.

Skills development and capacity building are integral components of sustainability, particularly in co-operative programs operating in diverse sectors such as health,

education, and social services (Schell *et al.,* 2013). The literature emphasises the need for co-operatives to invest in human capital, fostering skills that contribute to organisational resilience and adaptability (Brown Leslie *et al.,* 2015). Drawing from this literature, the assessment focuses on the skills training initiatives within SASSA's co-operative program.

The study assesses program sustainability by examining the effectiveness of capacity-building programs. It looks at how well these programs align with co-operative goals and contribute to overall sustainability. The analysis considers the co-operative's success in developing and retaining skilled members, ensuring a lasting impact on local economic development.

Program evaluation is a key aspect of sustainability assessment, providing insights into the effectiveness of interventions and the adaptability of programs over time (Luke *et al.,* 2014). Schell *et al*. (2013) introduces program evaluation as a critical variable for sustainability, emphasising the need for ongoing assessment and adaptation. In line with this, the study investigates the mechanisms in place for evaluating the success of SASSA's co-operative program.

By applying sustainability assessment practices, the analysis explores how program evaluation contributes to the adaptive capacity of the co-operative. The study considers the feedback loops, monitoring systems, and learning mechanisms within the co-operative program, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of how effective evaluation strategies enhance the sustainability of co-operative initiatives.

The literature highlights collaboration and adaptability in sustainability assessment (Waas et al., 2012). This study aligns with this perspective, examining how SASSA's emphasis on collaboration enhances the co-operative program's sustainability. By considering stakeholder perspectives and the program's adaptability, this review aims to offer a comprehensive view of co-operative sustainability.

Bond *et al*. (2012) and Martins (2006) argue for the significance of public participation, consensus-building, and partnerships in achieving sustainability goals. The study evaluates the extent to which SASSA's co-operative program integrates these elements, emphasising their role in fortifying the program's strategic direction and ensuring a sustained impact on local economic development.

In conclusion, this literature review serves as the theoretical foundation for the subsequent analysis at a later stage in Chapter 5. By applying the sustainability models discussed in the literature, particularly the Program Sustainability Assessment, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the sustainability of SASSA's co-operative program in promoting local economic development. The integration of financial sustainability, skills and capacity building and program evaluation aligns with the multifaceted nature of co-operative programs, offering a comprehensive framework for assessing and enhancing sustainability.

The literature highlights the unique challenges in assessing and reporting on the sustainability of co-operative assistance programs compared to investor-owned firms. Unlike traditional businesses, co-operatives operate based on distinct drivers, necessitating a tailored approach to sustainability assessment (Huge *et al.,* 2011). The study underscores the importance of critical variables, such as funding, partnerships, organisational capacity, environmental support, communication, program evaluation, and strategic planning, in determining the sustainability of co-operative initiatives (Luke *et al.,* 2014; Schell *et al.,* 2013).

Understanding sustainability in the context of co-operatives poses challenges, and there is a lack of literature on how to assess and report on the sustainability of co-operative assistance programs. Unlike investor-owned firms, co-operatives have unique drivers, requiring a different approach to sustainability assessment. Critical variables for assessing program sustainability in areas like health, education, and social services include funding, partnerships, organisational capacity, environmental support, communication, program evaluation, and strategic planning (Luke *et al.,* 2014, and Schell *et al.,* 2013).

Huge *et al*. (2011) argues that the application of sustainability as a decision-making tool transcends mere rhetoric, evolving sustainability from an idea with guiding influence into a concept that actively generates actions (Huge *et al.,* 2011). Various definitions exist for sustainability assessment practices, with Bond *et al*. (2012) proposing a comprehensive definition. They define sustainability assessment as "any process that directs decision-making towards sustainability" from a broad perspective (Bond *et al.,* 2012). Given the significance of using sustainability as a method for making decisions, let’s briefly focus on the primary difficulties associated with it, where sustainability assessment plays a crucial role.

Sustainability assessment involves procedures aimed at: enhancing understanding of sustainability concepts and their contextual interpretation (interpretation challenge); integrating sustainability considerations into decision-making by identifying and evaluating past and/or future sustainability impacts; and promoting sustainability objectives (influence challenge) (Devuyst *et al.,* 2001; Ness *et al.,* 2007; Gasparatos *et al.,* 2008; Gibson *et al.,* 2008; Bond *et al.,* 2012; Waas *et al.,* 2012).

It is widely recognised that achieving a sustainable plan requires a solid foundation in public participation, consensus, and partnership with the relevant society (co-operatives) (Martins, 2006). Existing studies have predominantly focused on sustainability practices within the quantitative tradition documented by private-sector businesses. However, a notable gap exists in the literature regarding the assessment and reporting of sustainability for co-operative assistance programs (ICA, 2016).

Tools within the global co-operative sector, such as the Global Reporting Initiative, Accountability, B-Corporation Carbon Disclosure Project, Global Alliance for Banking on Values, International Integrated Reporting Framework, and the UN Global Compact, were originally designed for investor-owned private companies (ICA, 2016:15–18). Adopting a prescriptive or "one size fits all" approach is evidently ineffective (ICA, 2013-3; 2016:15). Unlike investor-owned firms, co-operatives operate

based on fundamentally different sustainability-related drivers (Brown Leslie *et al.,* 2015; ICA 2016).

In contexts like health, education, or social services, key variables critical for assessing program sustainability include funding, partnerships, organisational capacity, environmental support, communication, program evaluation and adaptation, and strategic planning (Schell *et al.,* 2013). The work of Schell *et al*. (2013) introduces the Program Sustainability Assessment factors. The researcher aligns with the need for a comprehensive tool to assess sustainability, acknowledging its relevance in the study's context. As a result, we evaluate selected sustainability-related variables crucial to assessing the sustainability of SASSA's co-operative program, focusing on:
(1) Funding, (2) Skills and Capacity building, and (3) Program evaluation.

The Program Sustainability Assessment revolves around evaluating the effectiveness and endurance of SASSA's co-operative program. Notably, sustainability is viewed through the lens of financial sustainability, skills training, and capacity building, underscoring the importance of holistic support for co-operatives. The assessment process integrates the perspectives of various stakeholders and acknowledges the unique challenges faced by co-operatives. Overall, it aims to fortify the program's strategic direction, emphasising transparency, stakeholder collaboration, and adaptability for sustainable impact.

2.4.4 Key Factors Supporting Programme Sustainability

2.4.4.1 Financial Sustainability

Financial sustainability is crucial for co-operative success. Co-operatives, requiring financial support and resources, often face challenges like delayed payments, reliance on loans, and the need for advance payments (Jones, 2019; Smith, 2020). Without sustainable funding, SASSA-contracted co-operatives may heavily rely on external sources, making them vulnerable to funding fluctuations (Cloete and Bunting, 2015). Access to funding opportunities is critical for the financial sustainability of co-operatives (Brown *et al.,* 2021). Sustainable financial support can lead to employment creation and poverty decline in South Africa (Diale and Brixiova, 2015). For SASSA's program to function effectively and have a lasting impact, funding sustainability is essential for providing long-term resources and assistance to co-operatives (Jones, 2020).

Co-operatives' financial sustainability depends on consistent and adequate funding possibilities (Brown et al., 2021). Sustainable financial support is critical for providing the long-term resources and assist co-operatives to function efficiently and have a lasting impact. For example, the South African government devotes a significant percentage of its budget to promoting cooperative initiatives. According to the SASSA Strategic Plan 2020-2025, cooperative programs get around 30% of the entire budget, amounting to millions of rands dedicated to guaranteeing their long-term sustainability and assistance for local economic growth (SASSA, 2020).

Financial sustainability contributes to job creation and poverty reduction, which are critical aims for South Africa's socio-economic development (Diale and Brixiova, 2015). SASSA's program must assure funding sustainability in order to continue its impact and effectiveness (Jones, 2020). Co-operatives can attain stability by developing a strong financial model, decreasing their exposure to economic downturns and other financial risks.

Moreover, cooperatives' financial sustainability is dependent on their ability to develop internal revenue streams. Diversifying revenue streams beyond external support can help co-operatives become more self-sufficient and resilient. This includes developing business strategies that capitalize on market opportunities, providing value-added products, and increasing the co-operative's market presence (Fulton & Giannakas, 2013). Furthermore, financial literacy training programs for co-operative members can improve financial management and planning, resulting in greater resource use and long-term financial health (Adams, 2018; Roberts, 2020). Such measures are critical in establishing a solid financial basis for co-operatives participating in the SASSA program to support long-term development and expansion

2.4.4.2 Skills Training and Capacity Building

The role of skill training and capacity building is vital in strengthening co-operatives and enhancing their abilities within SASSA’s program (Smith *et al.,* 2020). Inadequate administrative processes and governance deficiencies pose challenges to co-operatives in terms of product delivery (Adams, 2018; Roberts, 2020). Skills training is crucial for improving administrative skills, governance systems, transparency, and accountability within co-operatives (Johnson, 2019; Petzold and Weckenbrock, 2020;

Davis *et al*., 2021).

Skills training and capacity building are critical components of SASSA's approach for strengthening cooperatives and improving their operational capacities (Smith et al. 2020). Inadequate administrative processes and governance issues can cause substantial problems for co-operatives, notably in terms of product delivery and general efficiency (Adams, 2018; Roberts, 2020).

Skills training is crucial for improving administrative skills, governance systems, transparency, and accountability within co-operatives (Johnson, 2019; Petzold and Weckenbrock, 2020; Davis *et al*., 2021). Improving administrative skills and governance systems through targeted training programmes is crucial. These programs seek to increase openness, accountability, and overall operational efficiency in cooperatives (Davis et al., 2021). Effective skills training can increase productivity, competitiveness, and economic growth, all of which are critical to co-operatives' long-term sustainability (Thomas, 2019; Thomas & Wilson, 2020; Harris et al., 2021).

Stakeholders, especially SASSA, play an important role in providing resources and support to cooperatives through various skill development and capacity-building projects (Smith et al., 2020). Investing in educational and lifelong learning activities is critical for increasing the ability of co-operative members. These training programs improve members' awareness of cooperative principles, business operations, and market dynamics, which are critical drivers of co-operatives' successful adaptability and resilience in the face of adversity (Wessels & Nel, 2014; Okem, 2016).

Tailored training programs that target the specific needs of co-operatives can greatly improve operational effectiveness. This includes instruction in financial management, marketing strategy, technological adoption, and legal compliance. Cooperatives can increase their market competitiveness by providing these skills to their members. Furthermore, ongoing capacity-building efforts generate an environment of creativity and adaptability, allowing cooperatives to respond proactively to market shifts and emerging possibilities. Such activities not only strengthen co-operatives' immediate capabilities but also safeguard their long-term sustainability and contribute to local economic growth (Smith et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2021).

Investing in skills training and capacity building enables co-operatives to enhance productivity, efficiency, and competitiveness, leading to increased job opportunities, economic growth, and poverty reduction (Thomas, 2019; Thomas and Wilson, 2020; Harris *et al.,* 2021). Stakeholders, including SASSA, play a vital role in providing resources and support for co-operatives through skills development and capacity-building initiatives (Smith *et al.,* 2020).

Investing in educational and lifelong learning initiatives is essential for building the capacity of co-operative members. Training programs enhance members' understanding of co-operative principles, business operations, and market dynamics. Education is a key driver for the successful adaptation and resilience of co-operatives in the face of challenges (Wessels and Nel, 2014; Okem, 2016).

2.4.4.3 Governance Frameworks and Program Evaluation Procedures

Transparent governance structures and effective evaluation methods are critical for encouraging cooperative sustainability and expansion (Johnson, 2020). SASSA's cooperative project intends to provide long-term, sustainable advantages to the local cooperative sector. Sustainable finance, skills training, capacity building, and program monitoring and evaluation are all critical components of achieving this goal (Davis et al., 2021).

Robust assessment and monitoring procedures assist stakeholders in identifying areas for development, overcoming problems, and making informed decisions. Effective assessment mechanisms are required to ensure accountability and the effectiveness of joint programs. These components contribute to the overall growth of co-operatives within the program by ensuring that they run efficiently and successfully.

Furthermore, the development and implementation transparent governance frameworks promotes a culture of trust and honesty within cooperatives. Clear governance structures define roles and duties, establish decision-making processes, and implement accountability systems to prevent mismanagement and corruption (Brown et al., 2021). These frameworks include regular audits, performance assessments, and feedback loops, which enable continual improvement and adaptability to changing situations (Smith et al., 2020). These practices not only improve the operational success of co-operatives, but also foster trust among

stakeholders such as members, funders, and the community, which is critical for ensuring long-term support and investment (Thomas, 2019; Thomas & Wilson, 2020).

2.4.4.4 Stakeholder and Government Departmental Collaboration

Collaboration between various stakeholders plays a pivotal role in ensuring the sustainability of SASSA's co-operative program. Engaging with government entities, local municipalities, and community organisations fosters a collaborative approach, aligning with principles of co-operative development. Stakeholder collaboration enhances resource sharing, expertise exchange, and the overall resilience of co-operative initiatives (Smith *et al.,* 2020; Brown *et al.,* 2021).

Effective coordination between government institutions is critical for co-operative development. Despite numerous agencies supporting co-operative growth, their functions and contributions need standardised coordination. A lack of coordination can result in fragmented efforts and hinder the overall impact of co-operative initiatives (Fulton and Giannakas, 2013; Titus, 2015).

Department of Social Development (DSD) and its affiliated agencies – the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) and the National Development Agency (NDA) supported the idea for SASSA to implement a co-operative program. The primary objective was to empower individuals, with a particular focus on women in economically disadvantaged communities, by establishing income-generating co-operatives to alleviate poverty and tackle unemployment. Within this collaborative initiative, each department plays a distinctive role in contributing to the overall success of the program.

SASSA, operating under its Social Relief of Distress Programme (SRD), was entrusted with the procurement of essential goods such as food parcels from community-based co-operatives and school uniforms from sewing co-operatives. Concurrently, the NDA, leveraging its expertise in skills training and capacity building, assumed the responsibility of fostering community education and awareness. The NDA's specialised focus on capacity building aimed to equip co-operative members with essential skills and resources, facilitating sustainable growth and development.

Recognising the need for tangible support, for instance in the form of heavy-duty machinery or materials to enhance the productivity of emerging co-operatives, the collaborative approach involved the strategic deployment of resources. The DSD, through its collaborative framework with the NDA, facilitates the provision of heavy-duty machinery, enabling co-operatives to scale their operations effectively (DSD, 2015). This multifaceted collaboration among the DSD, SASSA, and NDA in theory showcases the synergy of their respective strengths – from procurement and distribution to skills training and resource allocation. However, the need for a coordinated effort between these departments exemplifies how interdepartmental collaboration can significantly contribute to the sustainable success of SASSA's co-operative program, fostering skills development, capacity building, and tangible support for co-operative growth and sustainability.

2.5 *International Best Practices from Developing Contexts*

2.5.1 Brazil

Brazil's experience with co-operatives demonstrates the substantial impact they can have on a nation's economic landscape. Approximately 40% of Brazil's agricultural GDP is attributed to co-operatives, showcasing their global competitiveness and influence within the co-operative society (Johnson and Shaw, 2014:669). The Brazilian government's strategic support for agricultural co-operatives, focusing on marketing, technology access, and programs like biodiesel creation, has not only enhanced their global standing but also contributed to the economic and social growth of rural areas (Stattman and Mol, 2014:284-286). The Brazilian government's active role in supporting co-operatives aligns with the idea that governmental backing significantly aids local community economic growth.

Former President Luiz Lula da Silva's tenure, starting in 2002, served as a catalyst for Brazilian co-operative development. His government implemented initiatives such as establishing the Solidarity Economy Secretariat, emphasising employment growth, social inclusion, and the solidarity economy (Derr, 2013:3). Entities like the Brazilian Service of Support for Micro and Small Enterprises and the National Association of Self-Managed Workers and Companies were created to endorse self-managed and self-sustaining business co-operative models (Derr, 2013:4).

Brazil's success story underscores the transformative potential of strategic government intervention in co- operative development.

2.5.2 Kenya and Uganda

African nations like Kenya and Uganda showcase government-led efforts to establish member-owned co-operatives, especially among underprivileged communities. In Kenya, co-operatives are crucial for creating jobs, directly and indirectly employing about 300,000 people (Dondo, 2012:102). The Kenyan government's commitment to co-operatives is evident in its promotion of strong alliances between the state and co-operatives, facilitating knowledge exchange and industry capitalisation (RSA, 2012b:27). Despite success, challenges such as limited technical officers with appropriate skills for monitoring and evaluation persist in Kenya (Muthuma, 2012:182).

Uganda witnessed a transformation of its co-operatives from semi-government businesses to independent, autonomous, and commercially focused entities (Kwapong, 2013:3). The Ugandan National Co-operative Policy (2010) significantly contributed to the sectoral expansion and strengthening, aiding poverty reduction, job creation, and socio-economic transformation (Kyazze, 2010:20). The prosperity and financial independence of Uganda's co-operative sector owe much to the National Co-operative Policy.

2.5.3 India

India’s co-operative landscape has undergone evolution, facing challenges like political exploitation (Vaidyanathan, 2013:34). Despite historical misuse, there are indications that the Indian government is fostering an environment conducive to the resurgence of democratic and independent co-operatives (Battilani and Schröter, 2012:49). Co-operatives, particularly in credit and agriculture, have significantly contributed to the nation's economic development, providing direct and indirect employment in almost every hamlet (Battilani and Schröter, 2012:47).

Corporate involvement in India, especially through regional committees, has been instrumental in supporting economic growth across various sectors (National Co-operative Union of India, 2001:54). The Indian government actively supports co-operatives through initiatives like rural electrification, encouraging their participation in activities fostering village-level social and economic development (National Co-

operative Union of India, 2001:226). The commitment to co-operative sustainability is evident in the positive changes observed in community living standards.

2.5.4 National Context: Lessons from South Africa

South Africa has a long history of co-operatives that have helped to drive economic development, create jobs, and alleviate poverty. The country's co-operatives are supported and guided by a legislative framework that includes the Co-operatives Act 14 of 2005, Co-operative Regulations from 2007, and a Co-operative Development Policy. There is a significant amount assistance that government brought in by establishing initiatives such as Co-operatives Incentive Scheme (CIS). Government of According to Department of Trade and Industry (2013b), South Africa also fostered collaboration through agencies such as the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) and the National Empowerment Fund (NEF), demonstrate a commitment to co-operative development. The Co-operatives Incentive Scheme (CIS) has contributed significantly to almost all co-operatives that qualify for grant financing, with a ceiling of R350 000.00.

There are various support programs meant to benefit cooperatives in South Africa such as Black Business Supplier Development Programme, which also assist in providing grants (DTI, 2012). These comprehensive support mechanisms demonstrate the DTI's commitment to promoting the growth and sustainability of co-operatives in South Africa.

SEDA manages the national co-operative capacity-building and training program, which includes planned support interventions such as a training of cooperatives. There is also Co-operative Tribunal and Development Agency established with an intention assisting the struggling co-operatives in the sector. Apart from government support, other multinational organizations such as the United Nations, others have all contributed to South Africa's co-operative development. Their aid includes technical help and the execution of co-operative initiatives in multiple provinces (DTI, 2011; 2012; Titus, 2015).

Co-operative promotion is not only limited to government departments; various organisations, including labour movements and tertiary training institutions, actively contribute to co-operative development (DTI, 2011; 2012; Titus, 2015). Lessons from successful South African co-operatives highlight the importance of multi-stakeholder

collaboration and ongoing government commitment to sustaining co-operatives. South Africa's proactive approach to addressing challenges and fostering a supportive environment for co-operatives makes it a valuable case study for co-operative sustainability.

At the provincial level, the DTI's nine counterparts, known as the Departments of Economic Development, are in charge of promoting and developing co-operatives. These provincial departments, with DTI support, are in charge of implementing all support initiatives in their respective regions that must ensure the cooperative sustainability. Departments are tasked with developing a collaborative strategy to steer development and support projects. The National Development Agency (NDA) also plays an important role in providing training and financial assistance to maintain co-operative sustainability.

The NDA's mandate is geared towards eradicating poverty and its root causes by allocating funds to Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), encompassing both co-operatives and non-profit organisations (NPOs). These funds are aimed at implementing development projects in impoverished communities and enhancing the institutional capacity of CSOs delivering services to these communities (NDA, 2021:24). Further insights into the experiences of two noteworthy South African co-operatives that have evolved into sustainable enterprises over time are discussed below.

2.5.4.1 The 'Greater Uitenhage Sewing Co-operative'

The "Greater Uitenhage Sewing Co-operative" (GUSCO) in the Eastern Cape, highlighted in the ILO's Best Practice Co-operative Case Studies from South Africa (2016), offers valuable lessons in sustainability. GUSCO is primarily women-owned, successfully integrated economically disadvantaged women from the Greater Uitenhage area into the economy. The co-operative's journey involved industrial sewing courses, support from Standard Bank, and a strategic partnership with Woolworths for reusable shopping bags. Challenges included member retention, market access, and workplace issues. Overcoming these, GUSCO increased production, addressed workplace challenges through Seda's support, and became an independent supplier to Woolworths. Table 2.5.1 illustrated GUSCO's business model.

Table 2.1: GUSCO Co-operative Business Model

Products or service	GUSCO is a textile manufacturing enterprise that manufactures reusable shopping bags made from recycled PET bottles. In the past, the enterprise also manufactured work overalls. GUSCO is looking to diversify its product range
Target market	GUSCO's target market is the private sector; in particular retail supermarket chains. To add to its one major retail client, GUSCO has approached another major retail client as well as other private sector companies and government institutions.
Financial model	GUSCO is a self-sustainable business enterprise, generating income from the sale of textiles. Expenses include salaries and other operational expenses (rent, utilities). Woolworths supplies the enterprise with its materials and also covers transport costs (significant cost savings). A portion of annual profit is put aside as savings or as a reserve for purchasing materials and for other production needs in the new year; and the remaining portion is shared equally amongst members.
Annual turnover	R3 120 000 (approximate value of current contract with Woolworths)
Number of employees	46
Business form	GUSCO is registered as a Primary Co-operative under the Co-operatives Act of 2005. The decision to formalise as a co-operative was to enable the organisation to gain access to business opportunities. A co-operative was identified as the most suitable legal status for the organisation, taking into consideration it was a merger of three informal sewing groups.
Ownership /management structure	GUSCO is owner-managed by 13 members, who occupy the senior positions at GUSCO (i.e. administrator, manager). GUSCO consists of a Board of four members (all members of the co-operative; democratically elected) who are also responsible for negotiating agreements with clients.

Source: ILO Best Practice Case Studies from South Africa (2016)

Lessons Learned (ILO, 2016, 15-22)

GUSCO's experience emphasises the importance of business and administrative support in negotiating compliance and procurement procedures. Market access played a pivotal role in boosting economic engagement for GUSCO, demonstrating its significance for co-operative enterprises. The sustained development of GUSCO was significantly aided by mentoring, which helped the co-operative handle workplace challenges effectively. Training and skill development in productivity, performance management, and conflict resolution proved vital for increasing productivity and profitability.

GUSCO's ability to hire previously unemployed individuals highlights the role of co-operatives in creating employment opportunities. Despite the success, caution is advised due to risks like a lack of a sustainability plan, dependence on a single client, and limited product variety (ILO, 2016:15).

2.5.4.2 Lesedi Manufacturing Primary Co-operative

Another case underscored by the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2016), Best Practice Case Studies from South Africa (2016) points towards Lesedi Manufacturing Primary Co-operative, operating as a recycling business in Alexandra Township, Gauteng Province, also provides significant lessons in sustainability. Formed in 2008 by ten unemployed women, Lesedi's objectives include creating jobs, promoting environmental awareness, and fostering a clean, safe environment. Initial challenges included registration and obtaining start-up funding, addressed through non-financial support from the DTI and NYDA. Grant funding and mentorship propelled Lesedi into a profitable enterprise with a focus on job creation and waste reduction (ILO, 2016:15-22).

Initial challenges were related to registration and obtaining start-up funding, which resulted in a period of one-year for Lesedi to become operational. It must be noted that at the time when the co-operative was formed, there was a business center in Alexandra, occupied by the DTI and the NYDA, and it is in large part through the non-financial support provided by these organisations that Lesedi was able to formalise, successfully obtain grant funding, and eventually become a self-sustaining enterprise.

Lesedi started the recycling company in 2011 when it successfully obtained grant funding for R340 000, 00 through the Department of Trade and Industry (the DTI) Co-operative Incentive Scheme (CIS), to purchase machines. Lesedi also received R1.1 million in enterprise finance (over 36 months) from the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) – which also assisted the enterprise in developing a project plan and writing proposals (non-financial support) – and so in 2012, now able to purchase machinery (bailer, scale, containers), obtain a site and build offices, Lesedi began operating as a profitable business enterprise. Table 2.5.2 depicts Lesedi’s co-operative business model.

Table 2.2 Lesedi Manufacturing Primary Co-operative Business Model

Products or service	Lesedi operates a recycling drop-off site and provides a residential curb-side recycling service to residents in Alexandra.
Target market	Public and private sector. Lesedi has an MOU with Pickitup (public entity) and sells recyclable waste products to private companies, which use the waste to manufacture recycled products. Lesedi has two main clients which purchase their recyclables (Metal Co. and Plastic Revolutions); but Lesedi has the advantage in that it can sell to the highest bidder (i.e. the offer with the highest price per kilogram) .
Financial model	Lesedi operates as a self-sustainable and profitable business; however, it's supported by Pickitup, which provides it with a waste collection truck, including a driver and the fuel, which it uses to collect recycling from residential areas twice a week (i.e. non-financial support). Lesedi generates its revenue through the on-sale of recyclable waste to larger recycling companies. Expenses include employee/member salaries, utilities, office stationery and stock (i.e. the purchase of recyclables brought to the drop-off site by individuals).
Annual turnover	Fluctuates – profit is based on volume: the more waste that is gathered, the more profit that comes from the process. Did not disclose.
Number of employees	13
Business form	Lesedi is registered as a Primary Co-operative under the Co-operatives Act of 2005. The decision to formalise under the legal status of a co-operative was influenced by the organisation's relationship with the DTI and NYDA and the understanding of the opportunities provided to co-operatives. Lesedi does not have BEE credentials, but is 100 percent black-owned
Ownership /management structure	Lesedi is owned and managed by the five remaining founding members, who also occupy senior positions within the company.

Source: ILO Best Practice Case Studies from South Africa (2016)

Lessons Learned (ILO, 2016, 15-22)

Lesedi's growth was facilitated by non-financial support, including business services and information on funding initiatives. Grant funding for premises and equipment contributed significantly to Lesedi's transformation from an informal enterprise to a viable business. Mentorship through an MOU with Pickitup helped build Lesedi's capacity, fostering profitability and sustainability. These lessons underscore the importance of a supportive ecosystem, including both financial and non-financial assistance, to drive the sustainability of co-operative enterprises.

The success stories of GUSCO and Lesedi Manufacturing Primary Co-operative underscore the multifaceted nature of factors contributing to the sustainability of co-operative enterprises. These lessons emphasise the critical role of collaboration between co-operatives, financial institutions, government agencies, and private businesses in creating an enabling environment for growth and resilience.

GUSCO's partnership with Woolworths and Lesedi's collaboration with Pickitup showcase the effectiveness of public-private partnerships. Private businesses played

a crucial role in providing market access, mentorship, and financial support, contributing to the sustainability of these co-operatives. Both co-operatives received government assistance, specifically from the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA). Grant financing, non-financial support, and mentoring programs all played important roles in their establishment and expansion. Access to grant funding, non-financial support, and mentoring programs facilitated their formalisation and growth.

Mentorship, as seen in Lesedi's partnership with Pickitup and GUSCO's collaboration with the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA), played a pivotal role in building the capacity of these co-operatives. This capacity building extended beyond financial aspects to include productivity, performance management, and conflict resolution. GUSCO's persistence in securing a trial deal with Woolworths, despite initial challenges, highlights the importance of strategic market access strategies. Co-operatives need to navigate compliance and procurement procedures effectively, showcasing the need for business and administrative support.

Both co-operatives face risks associated with dependence on a single client or product. This emphasises the importance of diversification and sustainability planning. Private businesses are encouraged to provide practical mentoring, and support, and establish monitoring processes for long-term sustainability. The impact of co-operatives extends beyond economic aspects to community development. Lesedi's focus on environmental awareness and waste reduction aligns with broader societal goals, showcasing the potential for co-operatives to contribute to sustainable development (ILO, 2016).

In conclusion, the lessons from GUSCO and Lesedi Manufacturing Primary Co-operative highlight that the sustainability of co-operative enterprises is a collective effort involving co-operatives, government, financial institutions, and private businesses. A holistic approach, combining financial support, non-financial assistance, mentorship, and strategic partnerships, is essential for fostering resilient and impactful co-operative businesses that contribute to local economic development.

The literature review established a comprehensive framework for addressing the identified research questions. SASSA's 5-Year Strategic Direction (2020-2025) forms the backdrop for the study, aligning with key sustainability areas of co-operative sustainability impacting local economic development, financial sustainability,

stakeholder collaboration, skills training, capacity building, and program evaluation. Co-operative sustainability within the LED context is intricately linked to the unique challenges and opportunities of co-operatives. Drawing from the sustainability theory, particularly the work of Schaltegger and Burritt (2017), and the literature review unpacked how co-operatives, guided by SASSA's 5-Year Strategic Direction, contribute to community impact, economic development, and inclusivity. The theoretical foundation acknowledges that sustainable development involves economic, social, and environmental dimensions.

The study explores how financial sustainability, as outlined in SASSA's strategic plan, influences the overall sustainability of co-operatives. Leveraging insights from the sustainability theory by Elkington (1997), it delves into funding models, revenue streams, and financial management practices within SASSA's co-operative program. This analysis aims to discern the interconnectedness of financial sustainability with broader sustainability goals, emphasising the triple bottom-line approach.

SASSA's strategic direction places a significant emphasis on collaboration with stakeholders. Drawing on the stakeholder theory, the literature review evaluates how stakeholder collaboration is vital for the sustainability of co-operative programs. It considers public participation, consensus-building, and partnerships as essential elements in fortifying the program's strategic direction, ensuring a holistic approach to sustainability.

SASSA's commitment to skills development and capacity building is examined in the literature. In line with the human capital theory, the review scrutinises the effectiveness of SASSA's capacity-building initiatives, evaluating their alignment with goals and contribution to the overall sustainability of co-operatives. This perspective emphasises the role of skilled human resources in fostering sustainability.

SASSA's 5-Year Strategic Direction underscores the importance of program evaluation. Building on the principles of adaptive management and organisational learning, the literature investigates the mechanisms in place for evaluating the success of SASSA's co-operative program. Insights into feedback loops, monitoring systems, and learning mechanisms contribute to a comprehensive understanding of effective evaluation strategies enhancing sustainability.

2.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The literature review, grounded in sustainability theory and assessment models, provides a theoretical foundation for the subsequent analysis. Applying sustainability models, particularly the Program Sustainability Assessment, the study aims to offer a nuanced understanding of SASSA's co-operative program sustainability in promoting LED. The multifaceted framework integrates co-operative sustainability impacting local economic development, financial sustainability, skills and capacity building, program evaluation and stakeholder collaboration, and adaptability, aligning with the co-operative program's complexity.

The theoretical framework used in this chapter serves as the basis for the study design and methods in Chapter 3. It ensures that the research instruments are structured to collect data on the main factors identified for cooperative sustainability: financial sustainability, skill training, capacity building, program evaluation and stakeholder involvement. This alignment of theory and methodology ensures that the study effectively addresses both primary and secondary research problems.

In Chapter 4, the theory supports the interpretation of the findings, particularly in determining how financial sustainability, skill training, capacity building, and governance and evaluation frameworks affect cooperative sustainability. Using the theoretical framework, the data may be evaluated to emphasise the significance of these factors and how they contribute to the overall sustainability of cooperative programs.

Finally, in Chapter 5, theoretical ideas are crucial for integrating data and drawing valid conclusions. The theory helps to interpret the findings in light of prior research on cooperative sustainability, funding, skill development, and governance. This theoretical framework guarantees that the recommendations are based on a full understanding of the key factors determining the long-term sustainability of cooperative support initiatives or programs.

In summary, SASSA’s program factors such as funding, skills training and capacity building, and program evaluation collectively underline the importance of its direct bearing on both program and co-operative sustainability. These critical factors should

be optimised to guarantee the efficient and effective utilisation of resources to support co-operatives as significant contributors to LED in Gauteng Province, including realising broader goals of sustainable development and inclusive economic growth.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Research methodology includes data gathering, design, and analysis. It describes the methodologies, methods, instruments, and processes utilized to carry out the research design that the researcher wishes to apply (Zikmund, Carr, and Griffin, 2013:60). This chapter explains the overall research approach, design, and methods used in this study. It displays the research process, including data collection methods, used to address the research and questions, as well as the methodology chosen by the researcher during this study.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The research philosophy can either take the form of interpretivism or positivism. According to Creswell (2012), interpretivism is characterised as a multi-perspective view of reality or the social environment. The research sought to gain knowledge from the participant's experiences and insight into how SASSA's co-operative sustainability supports co-operatives in promoting local economic development. The participants included the co-operatives and policymakers who have experienced how the co-operative program was sustainable. According to Elliot *et al*. (2000, cited in McLeod, 2019), humans create their awareness and sense of reality through their lived experiences. This implies that people's perspectives and interactions with the world have a significant impact on the meanings they create, which form the basis for their perceptions of those meanings/viewpoints.

This study followed the interpretivism paradigm where knowledge and views were interpreted through analysis of policies and interviews with all the participants. Interpretivism involves a two-directional activity; all the way up, until we reach a point where the researcher feels informed enough (based on his or her interpretations of the data) to construct their own (new) picture or story based on the research data, and all the way down, to a final position or stance provided by some tradition, traditions, or so-called bedrock beliefs (Van der Walt, 2020:62).

According to Alharahsheh and Pius (2020:41), interpretivism is more focused on context-related in-depth variables and factors because it views people as distinct from

physical phenomena and believes that they cannot be studied in the same way as physical phenomena. Interpretivism considers the variations in cultures, situations, and historical periods that led to the formation of various social realities. The researcher also considered how different theories may have coloured their worldview, bringing some elements into sharp focus while pushing others to the background.

3.3 APPROACH TO RESEARCH: QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY

Considering the purpose and research questions of this study, the appropriate research approach used was qualitative research. Qualitative research aims to collect participant knowledge about their beliefs, while quantitative research focuses on numbers and figures. The primary advantage of choosing a qualitative approach for this study was to explore underlying values, assumptions, and beliefs in depth. (Creswell, 2013).

Because the inquiry is open-ended and broad, a qualitative technique also has the critical benefit of enabling participants to highlight the issues that are most important to them. However, qualitative research is not without its weaknesses and limitations (Patton and Cochran, 2002). These scholars concur that qualitative research findings lack rigor, which makes them susceptible to manipulation and less scientific; samples are very small and not representing the overall population, it will also be difficult to generalize the conclusion; bias and subjectivity are inherent; and it will also be challenging to determine how much the researcher's prejudice affected the results.

Despite the criticism levelled against the qualitative methodology, from the researcher’s perspective, the essential assumptions and crucial traits that identify what it means to continue from a qualitative perspective align well with this study. These characteristics include (a) comprehending the processes by which events and actions occur, (b) developing contextual understanding, (c) facilitating interactivity between researcher and participants, (d) taking an interpretive stance, and (e) maintaining design flexibility (Bloom and Volpe, 2012:20).

This study’s main focus was on subjective experiences of co-operatives in relation to sustainability co-operative program promoting local economic development in SASSA

Gauteng province. The inductive reasoning approach allowed the researcher to have a deeper understanding of the context of the research and the perceived beliefs of participants about their empirical environment (Malhotra, 2017).

3.4 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY: INTERPRETIVISM APPROACH

The research philosophy can either take the form of interpretivism or positivism. According to Creswell (2011), interpretivism is characterised as a multi-perspective view of reality or the social environment. A significant epistemological philosophy that addresses how knowledge is acquired is interpretivism, according to research philosophy based on the work of Saunders *et al.,* (2012). Qualitative research studies are included in interpretive epistemology.

This research paradigm sought to gain a level of knowledge from the participants' experiences and insight into how SASSA's co-operative program sustainability has a direct bearing on advancing the sustainability of co-operatives and supporting local economic development in Gauteng Province. As a result, this study followed the interpretivism paradigm where knowledge and views were interpreted through analysis of policies and interviews from all the purposefully selected participants. This paradigm referred to as interpretivism, aims to interpret subjective creations (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba, 2011; Creswell, 2014). The interpretive method searches for historically situated and culturally generated interpretations of the world of social existence.

According to Alharahsheh and Pius (2020:41), interpretivism emphasizes context-related in-depth variables and elements. It regards humans as separate from physical phenomena and believes they cannot be investigated in the same way. Interpretivism considers cultural differences, conditions, and historical periods that influence the construction of various social realities. This study sought to analyse the meanings connected with the long-term sustainability of SASSA's co-operative effort to promote LED in Gauteng Province. To do this, a suitable environment with co-operatives in a public sector setting (SASSA Gauteng Province) was chosen. According to Roller and Lavrakas (2015:1), in qualitative research, context is critical since "the outcomes depend greatly on the contexts from which we obtain this data".

3.5 RESEARCH SETTING: SASSA IN GAUTENG PROVINCE

Gauteng Province hosts three metropolitan municipalities, the City of Ekurhuleni, the City of Johannesburg, and the City of Tshwane, as well as two district municipalities, which are further subdivided into six local municipalities (GGT, 2020). Map 3.1 below illustrates Gauteng Province, including its urban areas and constituent local municipalities.



Population	13.4 million (Stats SA Community Survey, 2016)	Stats SA Community Survey, 2016
Poverty	25.3% in 2019	Growing Gauteng Together GGT, 2030)
Unemployment	37% in 2021	GPSERO, 2022).
Inequality	0.635 in 2019	Growing Gauteng Together GGT, 2030)

Map 3.1: **SASSA Gauteng Province**

The subsection below provides a brief explanation of the research background, deemed critical in qualitative case study research (Cresswell, 2014; Yin, 2014; Bloomberg and Volpe, 2016).

3.5.1 SASSA Johannesburg District

SASSA Gauteng Province comprises of five (5) administrative Districts: Johannesburg, Tshwane, Ekurhuleni, Westrand and Sedibeng. This investigation focused only on SASSA Johannesburg District out of the five (5) districts in SASSA Gauteng Province, located in the high densely populated province, which comprises of a population of 15 810 388 in accordance with the last Census 2022. With the province being an economic hub of not only South Africa but Africa as a whole, it is faced also with socio-economic challenges such as a high rate of poverty, unemployment and low-income households as well as in-migration with the hope of getting a better life or employment.

SASSA Johannesburg District comprises of ten 10 Local service offices which depend on contracted co-operatives to provide school uniforms (SASSA co-operative

programme) to children attending schools across the following municipal areas; Johannesburg, Lenasia, Eldorado Park, Ennerdale, Orange Farm, Midrand, Alexandra, Soweto, Orlando and Chiawelo. In addition, the Johannesburg district services the biggest social grant population in the province, totaling 852 271 out of 2 921 614 the social grant beneficiaries. SASSA Johannesburg District falls under the City of Johannesburg (CoJ) and provides services to seven (7) municipal demarcations (Region A-G). Map 3.2 locates SASSA Johannesburg District areas of operation in Gauteng Province.



Population	5.87 million	Stats SA, 2020
Poverty	45.57% in 2018	COGTA, 2020
Unemployment	26.5%, and youth unemployment estimated higher than 46.6%	COGTA, 2020
Inequality	0,624 making it a very unequal society	COGTA, 2020

Map 3.2: SASSA Johannesburg District Service Delivery Footprint Source: Adapted from City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality (City Profile, 2020)

SASSA Johannesburg District's selected co-operatives mostly focus on sewing operations to combat unemployment and poverty while also promoting social and economic equality. This survey does not include additional co-operatives that work in areas such as the environment, agriculture, rural concerns, water, or sanitation. Given this setting, the research design outlined in the next section was deemed appropriate for this investigation.

3.6 QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY RESEARCH DESIGN

In the context of this study, the research design was the plan representing the overall framework for collecting data (Leedy, 1997:195). Leedy, MacMillan and Schumacher (2001:166) define it as a plan for selecting subjects, research sites, and data collection procedures to answer the research question(s). Durrheim (2004:29) posits that a research design is a strategic framework for action that serves as a bridge between research questions and the execution, or implementation of the research strategy. SASSA represented a suitable research context for a case study design to research an active cohort of local co-operatives, SASSA co-operative support practitioners and LED and Sustainable Development policy experts from the Gauteng Department of Economic Development. The study used the qualitative case study method to examine SASSA as an organisation within its specific setting in a detailed manner, aiming to gain significant insights into the research topic (Salkind, 2012).

A qualitative case study, as defined by Yin (2014:16), is an in-depth examination of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-world environment, particularly when the borders between the phenomenon and setting are ambiguous. This method allows for thorough data collecting from different sources (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2016). A case study approach is appropriate when the focus is on addressing "how" and "why" questions, manipulating participants' behaviour is not practical, contextual variables are considered relevant to the study, or the boundaries between the phenomena and context are unclear (Yin, 2003).

The case study at hand comprised three selected co-operatives in operation under SASSA Gauteng Province, with Johannesburg District representing the case under inquiry. A single-case study allowed the study to assess the sustainability co-operative program promoting local economic development in SASSA Gauteng Province, in a structured way that was rigorous and provided an enormous amount of depth. The distinguishing factor that delineated this case study from other types of research inquiries was the boundedness of the case (Merriam 1988; Yin 1994). The case was bound to SASSA Gauteng Province’s Johannesburg District co-operative support strategy. A case study design was fitting for this exploratory inquiry, allowing substantial interface with research participants.

In addition, a case study methodology aligned well with the study as the primary research question sought to understand how sustainability feature in SASSA's co-operative program with reference to funding, skills training and capacity building, and program evaluation.

Case studies are categorised according to three approaches that researchers can use: 1) Exploratory case studies play an effective role in investigations studies. In addition, research questions should be defined after the collection of data. However, the formatting framework must be at the beginning (Demetriou, 2009); 2) Explanatory case studies are used more with experiments or casual studies. Also, pattern-matching techniques are used to analyse its data (Yin, 2009); and, 3) Descriptive cases, which can be seen more in education and social sciences, need a theory to be set primarily which has to address deep dimensions of cases through the studies (*Ibid*, 2009). This study adopted an exploratory case study, in order to explore those situations in which SASSA co-operative programme being assessed, had no clear, single set of outcomes (Yin, 2003).

Besides, the fact those most explorative studies within the qualitative tradition have used case studies to obtain the in-depth perspectives of co-operatives in South Africa. The justification for adopting a case study approach was further predicated by the dearth of comprehensive studies focusing on public sector evaluation and/or assessment of sustainability co-operative support programmes, impacting local economic development. The exploratory case study sought to clarify research objectives that required more insight or examination of a preliminary problem that warrant further research (Clow and James, 2014:27). This guaranteed better chances for the study to be detailed and in-depth.

However, this exploratory research has a limitation in that, while it sheds light on the research question, there is no assurance that it will provide an answer (Rubin and Babbie, 2005). After defining the case and its parameters, the researcher has determined that the best approach to answering the research questions will be through a qualitative case study (Baxter and Jack, 2008; Thomas, 2011). Furthermore, it was imperative that the researcher carefully consider the kind of case study that will be conducted.

3.7 CASE SELECTION: SINGLE-CASE STUDY

Researchers must select whether to undertake a single case study or if a multiple case study to have a deeper knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation (Baxter and Jack, 2008). This study used a single case design with numerous units (variables as mentioned in Section 3.8) of analysis from various case study designs (Yin, 2014). Single case studies begin by selecting a theoretical framework, then doing a literature study to determine the research problem (Merriam, 1988).

The first step to identifying the case was to determine what setting, population, and/or phenomenon would fully answer the research questions (Mirriam, 1988). For every research question (primary and secondary), there was a variety of settings or populations that could aid the researchers in better understanding the inquiry. However, binding the case to selected co-operatives in operation under SASSA Gauteng Province, Johannesburg District, also allowed the researcher to keep the focal point on the area of interest and surrounding context without getting lost in the vast amount of available data.

A single-case design must be justified; that is, there must be something compelling about the case to warrant a single-case design (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2016; Yin, 2014). This study picked a cohort of selected SASSA contracted co-operatives and serves as a revelatory case. This instance was instructive since SASSA included various sustainable development outcomes as a basic component of its strategy and governance framework. Furthermore, the sustainability of co-operatives and their impact on LED appeared to become a more essential component of SASSA's strategic orientation (2020/2025), which is supported by the global Sustainable Development Agenda (UN, 2015).

SASSA presented an ideal case study for analysing sustainability practices in the context of its co-operatives programme, which had never been researched before. The single-case design was chosen because it allowed the researcher to delve deeply into the subject under inquiry in a unique revelatory context.

3.8 ANALYSIS FOCUS: SASSA'S CO-OPERATIVE PROGRAM

As you think about your research question, it's equally important to define what your case is. Identifying the unit of analysis, or the case, can be a challenge. In this study, we are focusing on understanding the factors that assess the sustainability of the co- operative program in promoting local economic development. These factors include:

1. Funding sustainability (financial)
2. Skills Development and Capacity Building
3. Programme evaluation

SASSA's co-operative programme was assessed in light of how these sustainability factors have a direct impact on co-operatives economic and social equity (protection of poor and vulnerable), and what the outcomes for practice for SASSA at an organisational would reveal.

3.9 SAMPLING: PURPOSEFUL SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

This study employed purposeful participant selection, which involved deliberately choosing participants who could provide the most relevant and valuable data. This method allows researchers to use their discretion in selecting members of the population to participate in the study, making it a cost-effective and time-efficient approach (Yin, 2011; Creswell, 2012).

According to Chilisa (2019), random purposive sampling entails selecting a group of participants based on their extensive knowledge and experience in the field of interest. A smaller sample size allows for more intensive data collection and analysis, which achieves the goal of gaining a thorough understanding of a phenomenon (Kumar, 2014:187). This study applied inclusion and exclusion criteria based on the definition and characteristics associated with co-operatives, co-operative support program practitioners, and policy experts to ensure appropriateness and fairness in the participant selection process.

This study exclusively focuses on SASSA Johannesburg District (Municipal Region A-G) as a research area since it has the largest child support grant beneficiary population in Gauteng province, with 601,471 school-aged children. The essential premise of this study was purposeful participant selection, which ensured that participants were

carefully selected to generate the most rich and relevant data (Yin, 2011).

Participants were chosen to guarantee that the study questions were properly addressed and that the research objectives were met. To ensure appropriateness and fairness in this procedure, inclusion and exclusion criteria based on the definition and characteristics of research participants were used. According to Babbie and Mouton (2003:100), a "target population" is a group of individuals, objects, goals, or features that meet the given set of study criteria and from which one desires to draw one or more conclusions. The sample was recruited from a target population of persons who met the necessary characteristics (inclusion criteria) for participation in the study:

- Out of a total of 12 co-operatives, three (3) co-operatives were chosen, comprising of 6 participants (2 per co-operative) for the study;
- Out of 12 SASSA Gauteng co-operative practitioners, four (4) participants were chosen.
- Out of 6 LED and Co-operative and Sustainable Development policy experts from Social Development and the City of Johannesburg Economic Development, two (2) participants were chosen.

Table 3.1 below outlines the criteria for including and excluding participants.

Table 3.1: Outlines the criteria for including and excluding participants

Including	**Excluding**
Sewing Co-operatives contracted by SASSA to manufacture and provide school uniforms.	Sewing Co-operatives not contracted by SASSA.
SASSA Practitioners: Managers employed to work directly with SASSA's Co-operative support program.	SASSA experts not involved in the day-to-day operations of co-operative programme support to sewing co-operatives.
Policy experts from Social Development and City of Johannesburg Economic Development working directly in the LED and Co-operative and Sustainable Development policy space.	DED experts not working in the policy domains of DED's Local Economic Development (LED) division.

3.9.1 Characteristics of Respondents Who Participated in the Study

Overall, the research participants consist of the following respondents as illustrated above in Table 3.1.

3.9.1.1 SASSA Contracted Co-operatives (6 participants)

Selection Criteria: Three co-operatives (2 members from each of the three) out of 12 co-operatives currently contracted by SASSA for three years, involved in co-operative operations such as school uniforms supply and manufacturing in Gauteng Province. Women and youth with ownership in the co-operative, have experience and knowledge in co-operative operations to provide insights into the sustainability aspects of SASSA's Co-operative programmes.

3.9.1.2 SASSA Co-operative Program Practitioners (4 Participants)

Selection Criteria: SASSA Gauteng Province practitioners (three senior managers responsible for co-operative operations management and one senior manager responsible for procurement) with knowledge and experience in managing and implementing SASSA's co-operative program across Gauteng Province. Are directly involved in SASSA co-operative program administration; and can provide insights into the program's barriers and challenges and possible recommendations to enhance the sustainability aspects of the program.

3.9.1.3 Department of Social Development Expert (1 Participant)

Selection Criteria: Policy expert in the Department of Social Development in Gauteng Province. Expertise in local economic development, co-operative and sustainability policies, and strategies, possess knowledge and experience in the field and have the ability to provide insights into the program's alignment with sustainable factors in support of programme sustainability.

3.9.1.4 City of Johannesburg Economic Development Expert (1 Participant)

Selection Criteria: Experts in the City of Johannesburg Economic Development Unit in Gauteng Province. Expertise in local economic development, co-operative and sustainability policies, and strategies possess knowledge and experience in the field and have the ability to provide insights into the program's alignment with sustainable factors in support of programme sustainability.

3.10 DATA COLLECTION

Research technique includes philosophical assumptions, research design, and data collection procedures, all of which influence how data is acquired. Purposive sampling and semi-structured open-ended interviews are examples of qualitative methodologies. This study used two data sources: semi-structured (online) interviews and documentation analysis, as advised by Yin (2014). The evidence gathered from these sources was used to either support or refute the study findings. A careful assessment of the relevant literature guided the selection and refining of these data collection methods.

These sources have been utilised in this study; primary interpretations of the sustainability of SASSA Co-operative programme in promoting LED in Gauteng Province: Semi-structured (online) interviews.

3.10.1 Document analysis

While interviews provided data from a two-way social exchange, the collection of data from documents that existed prior to the start of this study allowed for a reflexive process wherein the data is unaffected by the researcher. This was useful to increase the credibility of interpretations of data from the interviews, if these interpretations are also reflected in the data gained from the documents (Yin, 2015:156-157). In this sense document analysis can provide an opportunity for constant comparison (Wildemuth, 2016:321).

To better comprehend certain factors and phenomena, significant research was conducted using both electronic and printed sources. Patton (2015:56) defines document analysis as the examination of organisational policies, materials, programs, and plans when conducting fieldwork. In this study, analysing the city's strategic plans and policies through document analysis revealed how co-operative development aligned with the city's goals. When compared to traveling for information gathering, accessing papers was more cost effective and time efficient.

Many organisations limit document access due to confidentiality concerns, especially when undertaking document analysis, such as reviewing strategy plans and annual reports. This limitation decreases the potential of bias since the researcher may not

have access to material that organizations may choose to keep private or present selectively in their reports.

Documentation data was collected throughout the course of the study because case study research needs to be flexible enough to enable the continuous discovery of data that may be relevant to answering the research questions (Yin, 2014). Secondary sources as in case documentation includes minutes of meetings, plans, reports, PowerPoint presentations, participants' personal journals and publicly available documents (news reports, government publications, and SASSA Reports) were accessed. These are shown in Table 3.2 below.

Some documents retrieved were irrelevant to the case study and were discarded. The relevant materials are saved in the electronic folder that accompanies this dissertation, which includes annexures, appendices, and sources of proof. Readers may check these documents and other evidence in the attached electronic folder if needed.

Table 3.2 Gathering Documents

Period	Form of Retrieval
Preparation for Fieldwork	A web search on SASSA, Co-operatives, Local Economic Development and Sustainability was conducted. Documents that are available such as annual integrated reports, news articles and third-party reports were retrieved and stored. The NDA has made available through an appointed administrator to share internal electronic document files with the researcher. In addition, PowerPoint presentations, agendas and minutes of meetings, internal reports and some previous studies were also retrieved.
During Fieldwork	Multiple information sources were used to conduct the chosen literature review, including books, dissertations, websites, and concept notes from conferences, government departmental reports, baseline studies, presentations/documents, Sage publications, academic journals, and periodicals. We accessed sources through the WITS library, Google Scholar, and ProQuest.
After Fieldwork	New studies and literature that emerged after the field was conducted, government departmental reports, academic journals, and periodicals.

Source: Authors Own Compilation

3.10.2 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews (SSI) are shown in numerous studies as essential instruments for critical qualitative research to gain knowledge from interactions with participants, dialogues, and from participants with a variety of life experiences. SSI is useful for having in-depth conversations. Usually, the researcher can critically scrutinise the conversations and superficial responses to arrive at multi-layered conclusions (Kakila, 2021:1). Due to limitations experienced with non-availability of participants for face-to-face semi-structured interviews the researcher resorted to using online interviews at a convenient time for each participant.

The researcher was mindful of the limitations of conducting online virtual interviews (Zoom) from the outset. Firstly, SSI is not practical when conducted virtually (e.g., via online platforms like video conferencing tools, emails, and similar settings) or through written interviews. As a result, data loss may occur when doing SSI. Secondly, restricted probing due to language barriers with individuals during interviews contributed to limitation of this research (Kakila, 2021). The interviews were not limited to the pre-planned questions the interviewer prepared. The questions in the interview guide were modified based on ideas emerging during the interview process.

The researcher ensured the interviews were fair by avoiding biased or leading questions, as indicated by Kotler and Keller (2016:129). To maintain ethical considerations in accordance with the Bellmont Principles, steps were taken to respect and safeguard participants. According to Rubin and Rubin (2005:104), participants were asked to complete an informed consent form stating the study's purpose and ensuring confidentiality. The emphasis was on the voluntary nature of involvement, with individuals able to quit at any moment during the research process. Information confidentiality was ensured, and interviews were done in an open and transparent manner to avoid potential harm to commercial prospects.

Researchers can use a wide variety of tools, including interviews, focus groups, artifact and document analysis, and more to gather information for their case studies (Creswell, 2013). Researchers in this study (Rashid, Rashid, Warraich, Sabir, and Waseem, 2019) asked participants semi-structured questions to elicit detailed responses pertinent to the study's aims. Table 3.3 depicts the research instrument.

TABLE 3.3 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

QUESTIONS TO COOPERATIVE MEMBERS			
Objective	Question		Literature alignment
OB 1	Q1	What kind of practical assistance have you received from SASSA's Co-operative programme?	
OB 1	Q2	How did this type of support help your Sewing Co-operative?	
OB 2	Q3	What are the main challenges facing your Sewing Co-operative regarding SASSA's Co-operative Support Programme?	
OB 1	Q4	What type of support/assistance would you like to receive from SASSA's Co-operative Support Programme?	
OB 3	Q5	What do you recommend should change in respect of SASSA's Co-operative programme?	
QUESTIONS TO SASSA CO-OPERATIVE EXPERTS (STAFF):			
Objective	Question		Literature alignment
OB 1	Q1	What type of practical assistance have you provided to SASSA contracted Sewing Co-operatives?	
OB 2	Q2	What are the main challenges encountered to provide support to SASSA Co-operatives?	
OB 2	Q3	Which aspects do you think lacks in SASSA's Co-operative programme?	
OB 1	Q4	What would you recommend needs to be done to enhance the sustainability of SASSA's Co-operative programme?	
QUESTIONS TO CO-OPERATIVE EXPERTS FROM SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND CITY OF JOHANNESBURG ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UNIT			
Objective	Question		Literature alignment
OB 1	Q1	From lessons learnt, how would you define the sustainability of a Co-operative programme?	
OB 2	Q2	What would you say are major obstacles to the sustainability of a government-driven Co-operative programme?	
OB 1	Q3	What recommendations would you offer to promote sustainability of SASSA's Co-operative programme?	

3.11 DATA ANALYSIS

Cresswell (2013) asserts that data analysis is a process in which the researcher is tasked with gathering and organising data into topics before the examination (cited in Sanousi 2019:44). According to Mouton (2006:161), the researcher can gather a considerable amount of data during data collection, which must be reduced to manageable amounts by recognising recurring patterns that emerge as themes. A combination of content and thematic analysis was used in this study to analyse the data collected from the research participants.

According to Maguire and Delahunt (2017:3352), thematic analysis "*is a process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data*". In both types of analysis, codes were employed to process the collected data in order to identify and understand the meanings of the key terms used by the participants, to divide those terms into categories and themes and ultimately to draw inferences from the data. The choice of CAQDAS for this study was COSTA QDA software, a technique based on cloud computing approach, which allowed for robust, intuitive and collaborative capabilities between coders, while enhancing the rigor and credibility of findings (Mvelase, 2019; Costa, 2020; Ntsobi and Costa, 2022). These core and fundamental ethics adopted by this study are discussed in depth in subsection 3.14 below.

3.11.1 Quality Criteria for Rigor Determination

To ascertain quality control of collected data through a qualitative study, four criteria were used widely to ensure the trustworthiness of the study and these are credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability (Stenfors, Kajamaa and Bennett, 2020).

3.11.2 Credibility and Validity

Credibility means that the research findings are believable and trustworthy (Stenfors *et al.,* 2020). In this study, credibility was achieved by ensuring that there is alignment between the theory, the research questions, the data collection, the data analysis, and the findings of the study. Further establishing relevant sampling method, the richness of the collected data, and the analytical steps taken, are appropriate (Stenfors *et al.,* 2020). In this study, all of the above sections were aligned, and the appropriate methods which were used. The research findings were referenced to direct quotes from the interview transcripts and are described in detail as the views and perceptions of the participants. There was a direct correlation or relationship between the themes of each question and coding done.

3.11.3 Dependability

Authors define dependability as the extent to which the research could be replicated elsewhere under similar conditions and this is made possible by ensuring that there is sufficient information through the study to enable another in place or time to follow the same procedural steps to conduct the study although the researcher may reach a different conclusion or have different findings altogether (Stenfors *et al*., 2020). The

study's methodology and the steps that were undertaken are clearly outlined, making replicability of the study by another researcher possible.

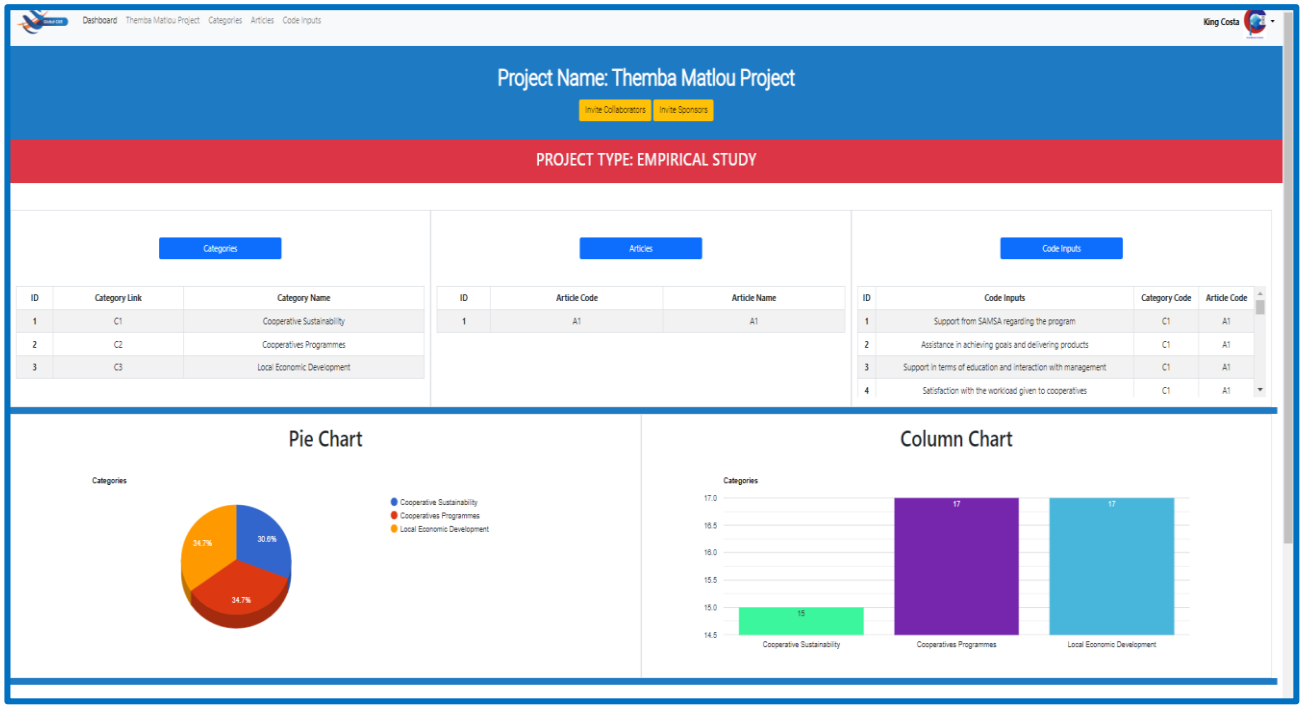
3.12 DATA PRESENTATION

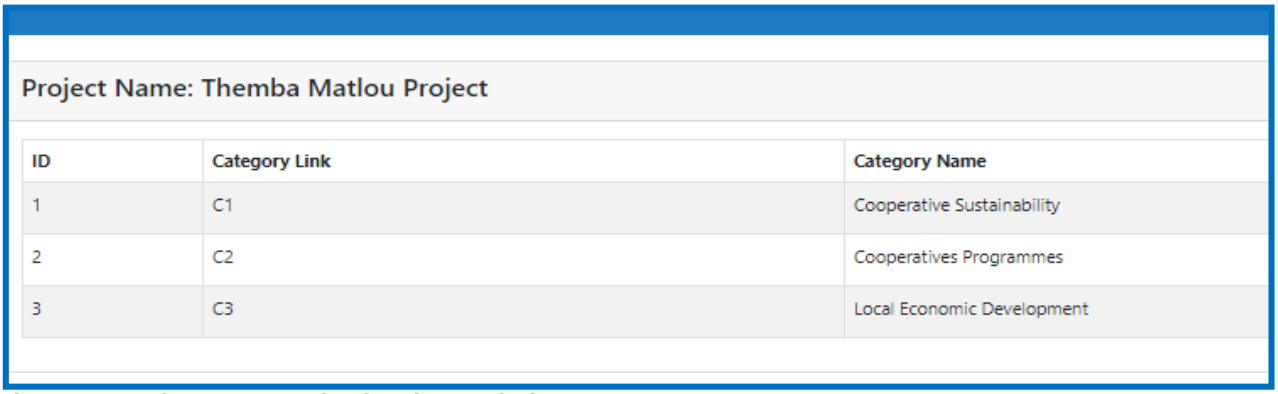
The interviews were conducted using an online VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol), popularly known as Zoom. Permission was sought to record interviews, so as to enable data analysts/coders to retrieve transcripts. The recorded data was transcribed in collaboration with the researcher. This was done to meet some of the quality criteria for rigor determination, whereby the researcher required the services of a transcriber.

3.12.1 Coding Method

After the full iterative process of familiarisation with data, the researcher then used COSTAQDA which is a qualitative data analysis software to generate inductive codes (significant statements) from the data documents. These were then linked to deductive codes (anchor codes or apriori codes) using both constant comparative analysis and thematic analysis concepts to generate code frequencies and final themes. Figure 3.1 demonstrates the interface of the software with the deductive/anchor codes created as part of the code book.

Figure 3.1 Code-Book Visualisation screen from COSTAQDA





Project Name: Themba Matlou Project

ID	Category Link	Category Name
1	C1	Cooperative Sustainability
2	C2	Cooperatives Programmes
3	C3	Local Economic Development

Figure 3.2 Proforma Categories (Anchor Codes)

3.13 LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY

The researcher expected limitations in this investigation. Interviews, in particular, presented difficulties because co-operatives were hesitant to engage for fear of revealing SASSA's failings. Co-operative members were cautious because they were concerned about losing their empowerment and disclosing their identify. During interviews, the researcher pledged anonymity, addressing similar concerns expressed by government officials and policymakers who worried disclosing their involvement in SASSA debates.

The researcher, through Costa Research Consulting's Dr Pule, interviewed co-operatives and experts to improve impartiality and positionality since the researcher himself is an Executive Manager in the same organisation. Consideration was given to the fact that the findings would not be representative of co-operative programmes in all contexts. Therefore, findings that were uncovered by this study make no claims about groups or other organisations since qualitative research does not test whether the results are statistically relevant (Yin 2014:30-32). Thus, the findings will not be generalised to other SASSA offices or organisations.

3.14 RESEARCH ETHICS

In any research study, ethical issues relating to the protection of the participants are of vital concern (Merriam, 1998; Pring, 2000; Punch, 1994; Schram, 2003; Berg, 2004; Marshall and Rossman, 2006). A social science researcher is responsible for both informing and protecting respondents. The research process involves enlisting voluntary cooperation, and it is a basic premise that participants are informed about

the study's purpose. The central issue with respect to protecting participants is the ways in which the information is treated. It was anticipated that no serious ethical threats were posed to any of the participants or their well-being, this study employed various safeguards to ensure the protection and rights of participants.

Written permission was obtained from SASSA Gauteng Province, in order to ensure this inquiry is a legal exercise. The letter of permission is provided in Appendix 1. Informed consent remained a priority throughout the study. Consent to voluntarily proceed in this study was received from each participant.

Confidentiality refers to handling the information concerning the respondents in a confidential manner. Respondents were assured that their names would be dealt with in the strictest confidence. The researcher committed to keeping the names and/or other significant identity characteristics of the sample organisations (co-operatives, SASSA and DED) confidential. Cautionary measures were taken to secure the storage of research-related records and data, so that nobody other than the researcher had access to this material. This aspect also includes the principle of trust in which participants were assured that their trust would not be exploited for personal gain or benefit, by deceiving or betraying them in the research route or its published outcomes (Lubbe, 2003:41).

Voluntary participation and informed consent remained a priority throughout the study. The principle of voluntary participation was explained to the respondents and they were also informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. The principle of informed consent was verbally explained to the interviewees. Both principles entailed explaining the research process and its purposes to the participants. The research also complied with ethical rules of the university and consent was provided by the ethics committee.

3.15 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter focused on methodological choices and activities that the researcher applied in this inquiry. Metaphysical aspects of the inquiry focused on the description of research paradigms and justification for a chosen paradigm, which is the interpretivist approach. In addition, the procedures and activities that the researcher chose for this study are clearly discussed, including the population, sampling approaches, data collection and analysis. The final discussion in this section was concerned with ethical considerations. The next Chapter (4) will focus on the presentation and interpretation of the study results.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This study focused on the sustainability of SASSA's co-operative program in supporting local economic development in Gauteng Province. The goal was to provide policymakers with a thorough understanding so that they could make informed judgments about the program's design and implementation. This chapter presents seven major results and related sub-themes gleaned from data collected in 12 semi-structured interviews with co-operative members, SASSA practitioners, and experts from the Department of Social Development and the City of Johannesburg's Department of Economic Development.

In navigating the program sustainability terrain, seven major themes emerged, each illuminating a critical aspect of SASSA's co-operative program landscape. These themes, accompanied by their respective sub-themes, are discussed in detail in sections to follow, to provide the reader with insights into factors that seek to assess the sustainability of SASSA's co-operative program in promoting LED. Essentially, each theme and their sub-themes, are meticulously explored and discussed in subsequent sections featuring:

1) Co-operative Sustainability goals in promoting Local Economic Development (job creation, increased local economic development benefits and improved quality of life); 2) Financial Sustainability (long-term contracts and renewal); 3) Administrative Challenges; 4) Stakeholder Engagement and Communication (collaborative stakeholder engagement gap); 5) Skills Training and Capacity Building for Co-operatives (training gaps for skills acquisition, specialised skills training gap and capacity building gap); 6) Program Evaluation and Monitoring (monitoring and evaluation systems); and 7) Local Economic Development.

The introduction to this chapter provides a roadmap for the reader, and a preview into the richness of the subsequent discussions to follow. Firstly, let's provide a snapshot of various co-operatives contracted by SASSA Gauteng Province co-operative program for a period of three years. Table 4.1 below illustrates representation of co-operatives and the distribution of jobs created across different demographics.

Table 4.1: Co-operatives contracted by SASSA

Co-operative Name	Women Members	Men Members	Youth Members	Disabled Members	Total Jobs Created
Rebohle Primary Co-operative	2	3	0	0	13
Ditholo Co-operatives	3	1	0	0	9
Sonke Sibahle coop	4	1	1	0	20
Sagwati Consulting and trading enterprise	1	0	0	0	6
Ndalo Primary Co-Operative Limited	4	1	1	0	11
Dressing Masters for Women 2 Women Primary Co-Operative Limited	5	0	0	0	9
Rorisang Modimo Sewing Project Primary Co-Operative Limited	5	0	0	0	8
Sinqobile Sewing Primary Co-Operative Limited	4	1	0	0	9
GMM Community Textiles Primary Co-Operative Limited	3	3	2	0	27
Madlangempise Branding	1	1	0	0	12
Total	**32**	**11**	**4**	**0**	**124**

These 10 SASSA contracted co-operatives play a vital role in the local economy by providing employment opportunities for local community members. The co-operative landscape, as seen in the table above, has a diversified gender and age demographic. Across the co-operatives, 32 women and 11 men actively participate in these collaborative efforts as members as well. Notably, attempts are made to involve the youth, with a total of four young people collaborating in these co-operative activities. Unfortunately, the mentioned co-operatives do not appear to have any disabled members. The absence of disabled members within SASSA contracted co-operatives, as seen by the numbers supplied, is a significant gap in SASSA's strategic direction for precision targeting. SASSA's strategic approach focuses on precision targeting, ensuring that excluded groups benefit from co-operative projects. The inclusion of disabled people offers a complete strategy, reaching out to persons who face specific problems in the employment market and contributing to their economic empowerment.

In addition to promoting community engagement and participation, these co-operatives have a significant impact on the local economy by creating job possibilities.

These initiatives have created an astonishing 124 employment. This emphasises the co-operative sector's substantial contribution to employment creation and economic empowerment in the respective communities.

Examining individual co-operatives, GMM Community Textiles Primary Co-Operative Limited stands out for its remarkable contribution, employing a total of 27 people. Rebohle Primary Co-operative added 13 jobs, Sonke Sibahle Coop added 20, and Madlangempise Branding added 12 jobs. This assessment not only illustrates the demographic mix of these co-operatives, but also emphasises their practical impact on local economic growth through job creation, demonstrating the importance of co-operative actions in promoting community well-being. The co-operatives that actively participated in the study are presented in Table 4.2 and briefly discussed, shedding light on their sectors, services, and job creation.

Table 4.2 Co-operatives participated in the study

Co-Operatives	Sector	Services	Jobs Creation
Rebohle Primary Co-operative	Textile	School uniform and other clothing	13
Ditholo Co-operatives	Textile and Clothing	School Uniform and other corporate Clothing	9
Sonke Sibahle coop	Textile and Clothing	School uniform, blankets and other corporate clothing	20
Total Jobs Created			**42**

Examining the co-operatives that took part in the study and focusing on their specific sectors and services reveals a clear picture of their different contributions to the local economy. Three co-operatives were researched, each of which operated in the textile and garment industries and provided important services to both individual and corporate customers.

Rebohle Primary Co-operative manufactures school uniforms and clothes, leading in the creation of 13 jobs. Ditholo Co-operatives, which operates in both textile and garment industries, helps to create jobs by producing school uniforms and corporate clothes, employing nine people. Sonke Sibahle Coop, which provides textile and clothing services, expands its influence with a variety of products such as school uniforms, blankets, and corporate clothes, creating an astonishing 20 jobs.

In total, these three co-operatives created 42 jobs, demonstrating their critical role in creating job possibilities and encouraging economic development in the study area.

This analysis not only highlights the numerous services provided by these co-operatives, but also underlines their tangible contributions to job creation, which is consistent with the overall theme of local economic growth through co-operatives initiatives.

The next section delves into a nuanced discussion of the findings, meticulously organised under distinct themes and sub-themes.

In the spirit of "thick description" (Denzin, 2001), the researcher aimed to encapsulate a diverse array of experiences, providing readers with an immersive understanding of the participants' reality. The focal point remains on amplifying the voices of participants, and illustrative quotations extracted from interview transcripts are incorporated to convey myriad perspectives, ensuring a comprehensive portrayal of the intricate subject matter. To fortify and enrich the discussion, relevant secondary evidence from program data is seamlessly interwoven with interview data, presenting a cohesive narrative that captures the depth and complexity of the study's findings.

THEME 1: Co-operative Sustainability Goals in Promoting Local Economic Development

The primary finding of this study is that sustainability is a pivotal concept, essential for both the co-operatives and SASSA. This finding is highly significant in terms of both co-operatives and SASSA’s role to facilitate the transformation of co-operatives into sustainable and prosperous enterprises, impacting local economic development through job creation, increased economic stability and overall quality of life within their communities.

It emerged from the interviews with SASSA participants that the aim of the program is to see co-operatives sustainable after the tenders, self-sufficient by continuing with sewing and manufacturing school uniforms. All co-operative members as well conceded that their co-operatives can be sustainable, but SASSA has to get involved as they highlighted that there is a need to improve the work of the co-operative.

The excerpt from a SASSA participant articulates the program's goal of ensuring the sustainability of co-operatives beyond the tender phase, emphasising self-sufficiency through ongoing activities like sewing and manufacturing school uniforms. This finding

identifies a gap between envisioned roles and practical implementation, emphasising the need for SASSA's active engagement to foster co-operative sustainability goals. This suggests a perceived gap in current engagement levels and highlights the co-operative's willingness to collaborate for improvement. This finding clearly shows that co-operative sustainability goals are central to the success of both co-operatives and the broader SASSA program. Throughout the interviews, co-operatives consistently champion sustainability, emphasising its potential to create job opportunities, foster economic stability, and enhance the overall quality of life within the community.

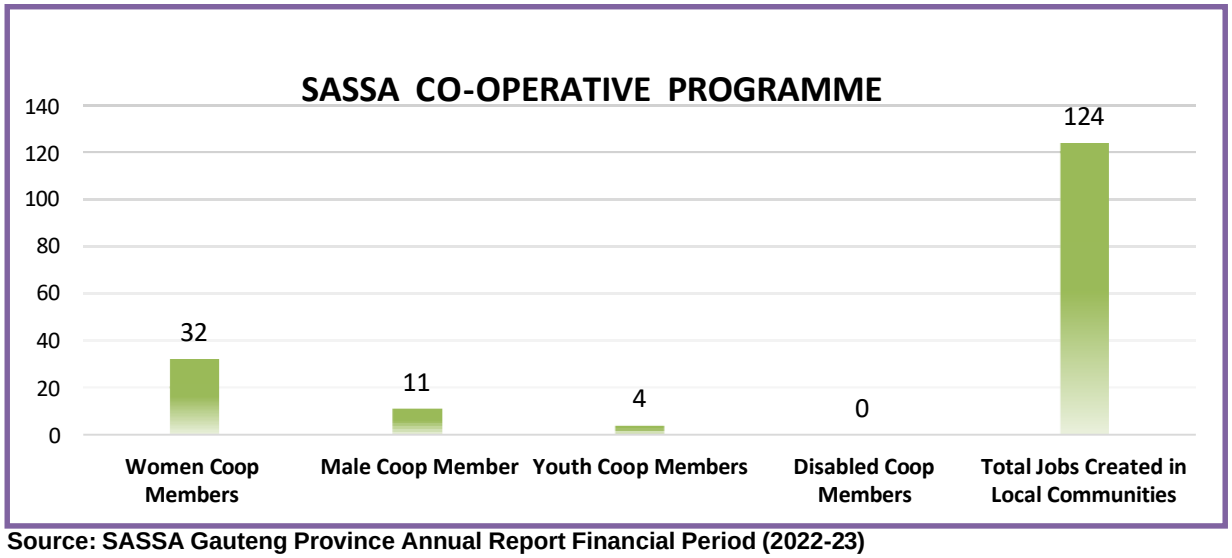
Sub-theme 1: Job Creation

The exploration of the sub-finding on job creation unveils a dual benefit derived from co-operatives—employment opportunities for members and assistance extended to individuals within the local community. This section delves into the positive impact of co-operatives on local job markets and examines the SASSA co-operative program's contribution to job creation, as evidenced by both participant perspectives and secondary data.

Out of the interviews, the co-operative participants expressed their level of satisfaction since they indicated that they managed to create jobs as a result of the current contract they got from SASSA. All of them were satisfied with SASSA's job allocation which emphasised the co-operative's role in providing meaningful employment opportunities.

According to the SASSA Annual Report (2022-2023), 45 co-operative members were hired, while 124 additional jobs (73%) were created for local community members, as indicated in figure 4.1. This demonstrates the importance of co-operatives in employment creation and community benefit. The report reveals how SASSA's co-operative initiative has a substantial impact on local job markets.

Figure 4:1 Job Creation through SASSA's Co-operative programme promoting LED



Source: SASSA Gauteng Province Annual Report Financial Period (2022-23)

Sub-theme 1.2: Increased Local Economic Development Benefits

The sub-theme focuses on the increased economic benefits stemming from co-operatives, emphasising financial independence and stability. This section delves into SASSA's role in enhancing economic benefits for co-operatives and the challenges faced, particularly regarding cost thresholds for school uniforms. SASSA Gauteng Province Annual Report (2022-2023) reveals an increased in economic benefits in one year for co-operatives contracted by SASSA, exceeding R 26 million.

One of the SASSA Participants during the interview indicated "*Our support has been primarily financial, focusing on procurement opportunities and facilitating access, offering co-operatives the opportunity to procure school uniforms."*

This reveals that this participant as an expert on the program underscores the financial support provided, emphasising procurement opportunities for co-operatives. This affirms that focusing on procurement opportunities enhances market access and growth potential for co-operatives.

One of three co-operative participants indicated that "*Now we've got five employees. We all benefit. So, 10 households, they are benefiting*."

The co-operative participants highlight the collective benefits of employment contribution towards increased economic benefits and positive impact on multiple households. All of the co-operative participants raised concerns that "*the issue of the*

thresholds (prices per item) becomes a serious challenge because of the high inflation rate, the repo rate in South Africa".

Concerns raised by a co-operative participants highlight challenges related to cost thresholds for school uniforms. Insights from SASSA's Strategic Plan (2020-2025) and the SRD policy (2022) showcase SASSA's proactive measures to enhance economic benefits, including an increase in procurement spending. School uniform prices per package increased from R2000 to a maximum of R5700 per child. It is evident that co-operatives contribute to economic stability and independence. SASSA's procurement opportunities and financial benefits significantly impact economic benefits for co-operatives and local communities.

The interviews revealed that there has been a great linkage on LED encapsulates the broader impact of the SASSA co-operative program on the community. Participants shared positive stories of job creation, income generation, and improved livelihoods. However, challenges such as market access limitations and competition dynamics require strategic interventions to optimise the program's contribution to local economic growth.

SASSA's contribution towards the co-operative sector in terms of its program budgeted for the next 5 years, evidenced that enhanced local economic benefits for co-operatives are intricately tied to the strategic foundations outlined in SASSA's Strategic Plan 2020-2025. Notably, SASSA has earmarked a substantial portion of its annual Social Relief of Distress (SRD) budget, with an allocation of 30% (approximately R123 million) per year dedicated to the Co-operative Support Program strategy. This allocation not only signifies a commitment to the growth and stability of contracted co-operatives but also serves as a safeguard, ensuring a predictable and sustained financial foundation.

The 30% budget allocation to the Co-operative Support Program within the SRD budget for the next 5 years is a strategic move that aligns with the broader vision of promoting socioeconomic development and alleviating poverty. This financial commitment provides co-operatives with a reliable and sustained resource pool,

allowing them to thrive and contribute significantly to local economic growth. This allocation shows that SASSA acknowledges the important role co-operatives play in developing communities.

SASSA intends to assist co-operatives prosper by providing substantial financial support, allowing them to create jobs and improve community well-being. This budget approach demonstrates a commitment to financial sustainability and emphasizes co-operatives as critical to attaining broader socioeconomic goals outlined in the SASSA Strategic Plan.

Sub-theme 1.3: Improved Quality of Life

Co-operatives, by their nature, contribute to social well-being by providing basic services and fostering community pride. This sub-theme demonstrates how co-operatives contracted under the SASSA program contribute to an improved quality of life, focusing on the broader social impact. This section examines the co-operative support program's influence on community empowerment and social well-being.

All the co-operative participants highlighted that **"***the impact of our co-operative is about empowering our community, providing opportunities, and creating a sense of pride*". While the expert participant from the department also conceded that **"***it enhances social well-being and provides a pathway for community members to actively participate in economic activities"*.

The SASSA Gauteng Province Annual Report (2022-2023) indicates that in one year over 10,000 school children benefitted from SASSA's co-operative program through the direct procurement of school uniforms from locally contracted co-operatives. It is evident that co-operatives contribute to community empowerment and create a sense of pride. Clearly, SASSA's co-operative program positively impacts education, school attendance, and social well-being.

THEME 2: Financial Sustainability

The overarching finding underscores the financial sustainability of the SASSA Co-operative Program, rooted in its integration within SASSA's permanent national Social

Relief of Distress (SASSA SRD Policy, 2022) program. A deeper understanding of the financial sustainability emerges when exploring the strategic foundations outlined in the SASSA Strategic Plan 2020-2025. Notably, secondary evidence reveals a substantial commitment, with 30% (± R 123 million) of the annual SRD budget per year allocated to the Co-operative Support Program strategy (SASSA Strategic Plan, 2020-2025 and SRD Policy, 2022). This commitment signifies a robust financial foundation for the co-operative program over 5 years. This strategic allocation serves as a safeguard, providing a predictable and sustained financial foundation for the co-operative program. Despite this commitment, individual co-operatives face complexities, such as securing initial start-up capital, leading to financial challenges.

During the interviews one SASSA participant revealed that "*Our support has been significant, with 30% of the budget allocated to co-operative procurement, a considerable financial strength*." This assertion indeed makes a point that the program does provide substantial financial commitment, indicating a robust foundation opportunity for co-operative to be sustainable.

Albeit but 2 of 3 co-operative participants highlight the financial challenges they face in accessing external funding to initiate their day-to-day operations. They further indicated *"Co-operatives are facing challenges to secure funding because they end up getting loans to equip their operations."*

Some of their recommendations were that "*Co-operatives must be offered 50% advance for work to avoid delays*." They have further emphasised that SASSA or the government must make pre-payments for the co-operative to sustain their financial muscle.

SASSA Participant**:** "*In my experience, one significant barrier is the limited access to finance. Unlike some companies or departments that offer a 25% deposit to begin the work, SASSA does not provide such financial support. This lack of upfront funding becomes a major challenge for co-operatives, despite receiving contracts. They often have to seek loans to finance equipment, expand operations, or compete in different markets. SASSA's absence of a pre-funding hinders the co-operatives' ability to commence work immediately upon receiving a contract*."

The policy expert participant from the Economic Development unit highlighted that there is a comprehensive approach to this type of program**:** *"There are several*

programs designed to support co-operatives, but they are scattered across various government departments and agencies like SEDA the Small Enterprise Development Agency, SEFA the Small Enterprise Finance Agency and the Gauteng Enterprise Propeller".

The expert participant advocates for a broader approach to be explored in seeking alternative financial avenues to address micro-level financial challenges faced by SASSA contracted co-operatives to secure initial start-up funding.

The SASSA Strategic Plan (2020-2025) demonstrates a commitment to financial sustainability, with 30% of the annual SRD budget allocated to the Co-operative Support Program strategy. Financial sustainability is evident in the substantial budget allocation to SASSA's Co-operative Program in promoting LED. Despite SASSA's financial commitment to co-operatives in the programme, individual co-operatives are still encountering challenges in accessing external start-up funding. In the absence of sustainable financial support, reliance on external funding, such as loans, introduces additional financial burdens for co-operatives. These challenges necessitate co-operatives to explore a more comprehensive approach to access start-up funds to start their operations.

Sub-theme 2.1: Long-Term Contracts and Renewal

This emerging sub-theme highlights the significance of long-term contracts in ensuring the sustainability of co-operatives to have financial capacity to do more business. Participants unanimously stress the pivotal role of renewable contracts in providing ongoing funding and cash flow within the co-operative program to avoid them borrowing money when they get an order for supply. Long-term contracts are seen as a strategic approach to providing stability, allowing co-operatives to plan for the future and invest in their growth. One of the issues co-operative members raised is that SASSA gives them more jobs but small in quantity but they are optimistic about long-term contract though.

Expert participants from Social Development and Economic Development unit during the interviews highlighted the importance of long-term contracts in providing stability and enabling co-operatives to plan for future growth. While two co-operative program

experts from SASSA indicate that "*co-operatives contracts are renewable and they will certainly do similar contract for further three years*".

The inclusion of long-term contracts through the procurement expansion in the SASSA Strategic Plan 2020-2025 supports this idea for fostering sustainability and economic stability for co-operatives. In this finding it is evident that long-term contracts play a pivotal role in ensuring the sustainability of co-operatives. Strategic planning, stability, and reduced concerns by co-operatives about contract renewals are highlighted as benefits of long-term contracts.

THEME 3: Administrative Challenges

In this theme, the administrative challenges embedded within the SASSA Co-operative Program manifest through participants' experiences of bureaucratic hurdles, significantly contributing to delayed payments. Notably, internal inefficiencies of SASSA's program emerge as a pivotal factor having a direct bearing on the financial sustainability of co-operatives. This section delves into the experiences of participants, highlighting bureaucratic hurdles and procedural inefficiencies that contribute significantly to delayed payments and financial obstacles. Participants shared their frustration and experiences navigating bureaucratic hurdles and procedural inefficiencies.

Almost all members of the three (3) co-operative expressed frustration with the sluggish payment process due to administrative delays and payment challenges within SASSA and reflect that waiting for 30 days of payment as per its system can lock working capital.

An expert underscores the direct impact of delayed payments on the financial sustainability of co-operatives, affecting operational efficiency. However, one SASSA participant during the interviews highlighted the challenges faced by co-operatives themselves amounting to the level of literacy, especially when completing the invoices which delays payments.

Economic Development experts concede that there is a greater need for guidance

from SASSA finance department regarding invoicing processes and other tedious challenges such as registration in the system, which will go a long way in ensuring program efficiency. Most of the interviewed SASSA participants acknowledged the problem of delayed payments and express a commitment to addressing these challenges for co-operative sustainability.

Administrative challenges contribute significantly to delayed payments, impacting the financial sustainability of co-operatives. Literacy challenges among co-operatives and issues with response times and criteria adherence are identified as factors affecting administrative efficiency. SASSA expresses commitment to addressing administrative challenges for the sustainability of co-operatives.

THEME 4: Stakeholder Engagement and Communication

Stakeholder engagement and communication emerge as crucial findings in the success of the SASSA Co-operative Program. The participants highlight the need for open communication and collaboration among all stakeholders involved to ensure the smooth functioning and success of the program.

All interviewed SASSA participants highlight the importance of co-operatives as critical stakeholder in delivering school uniform and also clear communication to ensure everyone is on the same page. There were issues that co-operative members raised which demonstrated communication imperatives such as lack of clarification. An expert participant underscores the importance of inclusive involvement and transparent communication for the program and co-operatives success, while the other concedes the significance of this stakeholder engagement.

Expert Participant (Inclusive Involvement) said: *"Inclusive involvement is a cornerstone of co-operative success. It's a collective effort that requires transparent communication and understanding among all relevant parties."*

Sub-theme 4.1: Collaborative Stakeholder Engagement Gap

This sub-theme highlights the critical need for collaboration and effective cooperation among SASSA, co-operatives, and other stakeholders. Despite the overarching goal of poverty alleviation and job creation in promoting LED, a noticeable gap in stakeholder engagement practices is identified, particularly in comparison to other government departments involved in similar co-operative initiatives.

All SASSA respondents that we interviewed mentioned that there should be regular stakeholder consultation with these co-operatives, even within local communities, and other government agencies to say, "*listen to each other and avoid silo operations*". The co-operative program's overarching goal should be focusing on collaborative and broad stakeholder consultation to enhance both program and co-operative sustainability.

Interviewed expert participants from Social Development and Economic Development placed more emphasis on Comprehensive Support that unlike other government departments involved in co-operative initiatives, SASSA's role predominantly centres on procurement, lacking comprehensive support for the co-operatives.

Despite records from secondary data highlighting the formation of a multi-stakeholder partnership in August 2015, between Social Development and its implementing agencies SASSA and the National Development Agency (NDA) in 2015 (DSD, 2015), to drive the co-operative strategy targeting particularly women, youth and disabled people from poor communities. A gap in comprehensive support provided by SASSA, compared to other government departments for example the NDA, raises concerns about the program's attempt to provide more holistic support for contracted co-operatives.

There is also an important contrasting operational focus between SASSA and the National Development Agency (NDA) within the co-operative landscape. While SASSA primarily directs its attention towards procurement contracts for co-operatives, the NDA assumes a broader role, extending essential services for skills development and capacity building. Recognising the NDA's expertise and extensive offerings, encompassing needs assessment, identification of sustainability opportunities, and provision of accredited training modules emerge as a potential remedy for the

prevailing skills gap within the SASSA Co-operative Program.

The other key finding centres on the strategic opportunity presented by collaborating with important stakeholders such as NDA to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of co-operatives. The emphasis is on aligning with the overarching goals of poverty alleviation and job creation. Recognising the NDA's extensive offerings, participants highlight the need for SASSA to support co-operatives not just in procurement but also in facilitating skills training and capacity-building activities. This collaboration becomes crucial for addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by co-operatives and promoting their sustainable development.

Almost all co-operatives indicated a lack of training conducted to them by the National Development Agency and this emphasises the importance of stakeholder engagement with SASSA.

THEME 5: Skills Training and Capacity Building for Co-operatives

Skills training and capacity building emerge as an overarching finding within the SASSA Co-operative Program, showcasing negative outcomes and challenges. The exploration of skills training and capacity building uncovers challenges and concerns raised by participants. A closer analysis contradicts the alignment suggested by secondary data in SASSA's strategic direction outlined under the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act, 2003, as amended (Act No. 53 of 2003). Despite the strategic direction emphasising the importance of increasing co-operatives access to skills training and capacity building, the findings reveal a disjunction in the implementation of skills training and capacity building within SASSA's co-operative program.

Sub-theme 5.1: Training Gaps for Skills Acquisition

The majority of participants, in particular all co-operative participants, expressed concern about the scarcity of opportunities for acquiring new skills within the co-operative program. They fervently advocate for the integration of specialised training

tailored to their unique activities, as they contend that generic skill development falls short of meeting the specific needs of co-operatives. The excerpts from both SASSA and co-operative participants unveil critical perspectives on the current state of training within the SASSA Co-operative Program.

One SASSA Participant during the interview highlighted that **"***SASSA exclusively offer training on the service level agreement, particularly in the highest-level implementation of our school uniform program, involving the incorporation of co-operatives*".

One of the Co-operative Participants even went further to say: "*SASSA is not providing training to co-operatives*."

The straightforward assertion that SASSA is not providing any training to co-operatives raises a red flag. This participant's statement aligns with the broader theme of insufficient training support from SASSA, potentially hindering the development and self-sufficiency of co-operatives for transitioning into sustainable business enterprises.

One co-operative participant emphasises the significance of "*repeated training as a means of grooming individuals for long-term independence*". The implicit expectation is for SASSA to play a proactive role in ensuring the comprehensive training required for co-operative sustainability. One co-operative participant went further to say: "*SASSA has never provided the co-operative with any training. The co-operative has been receiving training from other sectors where we were doing other work, but SASSA has never provided any training."*

The stark revelation that SASSA has not contributed to the co-operative's training initiatives is a significant finding. The participant accentuates that the co-operative sought training independently from other sectors, implying an unmet need for direct training support from SASSA.

Sub-theme 5.2: Specialised Skills Training Gap

Participants underscore the need for specialised training relevant to their activities. The absence of tailored training opportunities poses a challenge, as generic skill development may not address specific co-operative needs. By empowering co-operatives with skills, they can have equal opportunities to do business with SASSA and other entities. Based on participant descriptions, there appeared to be a lack of connection between participant's needs for specialised training and current status of specialised training offered by SASSA's program. Participants expressed this disconnect in the following ways.

One of three co-operative participants did express a desire for comprehensive training initiatives from SASSA. The use of terms like "adequate" suggests an unmet need, indicating a potential gap in the current training framework.

The emphasis on workflow improvement and the call for initiating training programs underscore participants' expectations for a more hands-on and proactive role from SASSA in co-operative development.

All co-operative participants during the interviews put emphasis on the actual training and pointed out a specific deficiency in business-to-business marketing training and advocates for a more specialised approach. The mention of financial management training highlights a critical aspect where co-operatives seek targeted support.

The co-operative participant's statement emphasises a need for increased education among co-operative members regarding SASSA operations. The analysis of this excerpt reveals several key points. The participants' mention of members needing more education implies an existing knowledge gap within the co-operative. This gap could be related to understanding SASSA's operations, procedures, or other essential aspects of their engagement. The participant highlights the importance of workshops in addressing the knowledge deficit. Workshops are viewed as a practical and effective means to enhance understanding and skills related to SASSA operations.

SASSA Participant**:** *"I believe that SASSA should provide more robust training and support, especially in critical areas such as finance and supply chain. There's a need for enhanced training that covers compliance requirements. Strengthening these aspects within SASSA would significantly benefit the co-operatives."*

The use of terms like "robust," "critical areas," and "enhanced training" emphasises the urgency and importance of focused support. The participant suggests that strengthening finance, supply chain, and compliance training is pivotal for co-operative success.

The key finding here is the recognition that ongoing education is crucial for co-operative members to navigate the complexities of their engagement with SASSA successfully. Addressing this need for education through targeted workshops could contribute significantly to the knowledge enhancement, efficiency, and overall sustainability of the co-operatives involved in the SASSA program. Collectively, these participant excerpts depict a consistent narrative of unmet needs and expectations regarding training from SASSA.

Limited opportunities for skills acquisition pose a significant challenge for co-operatives, as SASSA is not directly involved in providing necessary training. This training gap, if unaddressed, could impede the growth, self-sufficiency, and long-term success of co-operatives within the SASSA Co-operative Program. The key takeaway is the urgent need for SASSA to reassess and enhance its training strategies to align with the developmental needs of the co-operatives it engages with.

Sub-theme 5.3: Capacity Building Gap

The participant excerpts in this section reveal a notable gap in capacity building within the SASSA program, deviating from the outlined strategic direction in the Prescripts of the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act, 2003 (SASSA Strategic Plan,

2020-2025). Despite the strategic emphasis on increasing access to capacity building, challenges persist.

The co-operative participants emphasised the need for increased funding to acquire machinery, highlighting a direct link between financial support and capacity building. The mention of running in a small-scale operation due to insufficient machines underscores a crucial impediment to the co-operative's growth. One of the co-operative members indicated they have no single machines for sewing the school uniform and most of their work they outsource. Two of the co-operatives mentioned that they have some machines which are, however, limited in terms of what they can do which gives a clear indication of the capacity level of these co-operatives.

The participants accentuate the priority of training before acquiring more machines, indicating recognition of the foundational role of skills development and capacity building. The aspiration to work on a larger scale for job creation aligns with the broader theme of local economic development. The participants effectively communicate the interdependence of training, resource (CNC machines) acquisition, and socio-economic impact.

The SASSA participants during the interview conceded there is a need for a comprehensive overhaul, emphasising the incorporation of sustainability elements like providing sewing machines, long term contracts to build capacity levels of the co-operatives.

The key finding revolved around the identified capacity-building gap within the SASSA program, government support program, and adequate resources for co-operatives as highlighted by interviewed co-operative members, SASSA participants and policy experts. Bridging this gap becomes imperative for achieving the outlined strategic goals for long-term sustainability and promoting local economic development effectively.

THEME 6: Program Evaluation for Sustainability Assessment

Within the complex landscape of SASSA's co-operative strategy, program evaluation and monitoring emerge as critical components, intertwining with overall sustainability assessment. An expert from the Department of Social Development as a policy developer mentioned the importance of a structured evaluation system, emphasising its role in guiding continuous improvement to align with policy of co-operative development.

Sub-theme 6.1: Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

Implicit in this sub-theme is the importance of noting that the success of any government program requires that data and reports submitted must be checked against the set targets and plans. The interviewees cited that monthly continuous checking of the work of co-operatives is paramount in assessing success or bottlenecks that the program observes. The use of the term "sustained success" underscores the long-term perspective, suggesting that periodic assessments are viewed as a tool for ensuring the ongoing effectiveness and impact of co-operatives contracted under SASSA's co-operative strategy.

While almost all the co-operative participants mentioned the necessity for SASSA to conduct evaluations, proposing a hands-on approach through inspection. This suggests a desire for a comprehensive assessment that goes beyond mere paperwork, providing a tangible understanding of co-operative activities. The SASSA participant provides an insider perspective, acknowledging a gap between the strategic imperatives outlined in the SASSA Strategic Plan 2020-2025 and the actual evaluation practices. The emphasis on transparent and accountable governance structures suggests an understanding of the holistic approach needed for effective evaluations (SASSA Strategic Plan, 2020-2025).

The key finding under this sub-theme revolves around the absence of a robust evaluation system, posing a challenge to assessing the program's impact. This finding contradicts the commitment outlined in the SASSA Strategic Plan 2020-2025, indicating a disconnect between strategic imperatives and operational practices.

Transparent governance structures are deemed essential for effective evaluations and sustained success. The participant excerpts collectively underscore the urgent need for SASSA to implement a comprehensive evaluation framework, aligning with its commitment to program evaluation outlined in the strategic plan. The discrepancy identified in the current evaluation practices emphasises the critical importance of closing this gap to ensure the program's sustainability and development impact.

4.2 SUMMARY OF RESULTS: KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED FROM FINDINGS ALIGNED ACCORDING TO THEMES

1. Co-operative Sustainability for Local Economic Development: The theme unravelled the fundamental role of co-operative sustainability in shaping the broader impact on local economic development. Through the narratives of participants, positive stories echoed about the transformative power of co-operatives in fostering job creation, income generation, and improved livelihoods within the community. These first-hand accounts served as testament to the potential of co-operatives to serve as catalysts for positive change in the economic landscape, this is evident through the 124 jobs created since co-operatives were contracted to SASSA.

These findings collectively underscore the multifaceted impact of SASSA's co-operative program, revealing its instrumental role in economic development, job creation, and the enhancement of overall community well-being. The statistics provided in the SASSA Annual Reports serve as quantitative evidence supporting the qualitative narratives shared by participants, creating a comprehensive understanding of the program's achievements and contributions.

The SASSA Annual Report (2022-2023) further substantiates these positive outcomes. According to the report, 45 co-operative members directly benefited from job creation, while an additional 124 jobs (73%) were generated for members of the local community. This statistical insight is depicted in figure 4.1 underscoring the pivotal role of co-operatives in job creation, benefiting both members and the broader community. SASSA's co-operative program, as evidenced by the annual report, significantly contributes to local employment, aligning with the program's overarching goal of promoting economic development.

The impact of SASSA's co-operative program on the quality of life extends beyond economic dimensions. The SASSA Gauteng Province Annual Report (2022-2023) reveals a substantial contribution to education and community well-being. In a single year, over 10,000 school children directly benefited from the program through the procurement of school uniforms from locally contracted co-operatives. This not only emphasises the positive influence of co-operatives on education but also highlights their role in enhancing school attendance and social well-being. The co-operative program, as reflected in the annual report, becomes a driving force for community empowerment, instilling a sense of pride and positively impacting various facets of social life.

2. Financial Sustainability: The theme illuminated the critical importance of financial sustainability for the sustainability and success of co-operatives. The financial sustainability theme unveils the economic dimensions of the SASSA Co-operative Program. While SASSA's Co-operative Program exhibits a robust financial foundation, evident in the mandated allocation of 30% from the SASSA SRD budget for five years, as outlined in the Strategic Plan 2020-2025. This allocation underscores the program's long-term commitment to financial sustainability.

However, the data exposes a nuanced reality—while the program is strategically supported at the macro level, individual co-operatives face financial challenges. Lack of start-up capital, delays in payments, reliance on loans, and the need for advance payments emerged as key challenges, highlighting the vulnerability of co-operatives to financial strains. The key finding emphasises the necessity for financial support and resources to ensure the growth and success of co-operatives.

3. Administrative Challenges: Administrative hurdles surfaced as a significant impediment to the efficient operation of co-operatives. Participants shared their experiences navigating bureaucratic hurdles and procedural inefficiencies. Beyond the conventional administrative challenges, participants shed light on the additional strain caused by delayed payments from SASSA. The extended waiting periods for payments disrupts product delivery timelines and exacerbate governance deficiencies, compounding the administrative challenges faced by co-operatives. The delayed payments from SASSA emerge as a notable barrier within administrative challenges, affecting not only the financial stability but also the overall operational efficiency of co-

operatives.

Difficulties in product delivery and governance deficiencies were underscored by participants, urging the need for improved administrative processes and governance structures. Administrative challenges, notably stringent inspections, also emerged as a critical factor influencing the financial sustainability of co-operatives. The analysis points to the necessity of addressing these challenges for the effective and efficient functioning and growth of co-operatives.

4. Stakeholder collaboration and Communication: Stakeholder engagement and communication emerge as a crucial finding in the success of the SASSA Co-operative Program. The participants highlighted the need for open communication and collaboration among all stakeholders involved to ensure the effective functioning and success of the program. A notable contrast in operational focus between SASSA and the National Development Agency (NDA) came to light, with the NDA providing essential services for skills development and capacity building. Leveraging the NDA's expertise emerged as a strategic opportunity to bridge the skills gap within the SASSA Co-operative Program.

In addition, what emerged is the level of continuous financial support the Department of Economic Development and other entities from financial institutions provide funding capacity for the sustainability of the co-operatives. There were also emphasis on the need to look at policy imperatives by Department of Social Development, local municipalities like City of Joburg on how these funding can be made available for sustainment of the program. The key finding emphasises the potential impact of collaborating with all these financial and/or funding sectors to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of co-operatives.

5. Skills Training and Capacity Building: Skills development and capacity building emerged as pivotal theme within the SASSA Co-operative Program, showcasing barriers. A closer examination of the data reveals the multifaceted nature of skills development within the co-operative program. The theme emphasised the key role of skills training and capacity building in supporting the success of co-operatives. However, challenges associated with skills training and capacity development highlight the need for targeted training interventions. Participants articulated the need

for specialised training tailored to the unique needs of co-operatives, particularly in areas such as finance and supply chain management.

The absence of access to modern sewing machines and training tools poses a challenge to effective skills development and capacity building. The key finding underscores the significant hindrance posed by the lack of specialised skills training and capacity building, demanding improved initiatives from SASSA in collaboration with key stakeholders such as the NDA.

6. Program Evaluation for Sustainability Assessment: Program evaluation emerged as a critical theme, intertwining with the overall sustainability assessment. Participants highlighted the importance of ongoing evaluation processes, aligning with the principles of effective program monitoring and evaluation. In addition, participants express a keen interest in evaluating the outcomes and impact of the co-operative work in their respective communities.

Program evaluation and monitoring were highlighted as critical components for assessing co-operative work and ensuring accountability. The absence of a robust evaluation system posed a challenge to assessing the program's impact, contradicting the commitment outlined in the SASSA Strategic Plan 2020-2025.

4.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the findings that emerged in this study. Findings were organised according to the research questions. Data from individual semi-structured interviews and secondary data, revealed research participants' perceptions vis-à-vis their experiences of the research process. As is typical of qualitative research, extensive samples of quotations from participants are included in the report. By using participants' own words to a certain extent, the researchers set out to build the confidence of readers by accurately representing the reality of the persons and situations studied.

The findings from the diverse findings/themes collectively paint a comprehensive picture of the SASSA Co-operative Program. The importance of co-operative sustainability to promote local economic development, strategic interventions focusing on financial sustainability, streamlined administration, effective stakeholder engagement, targeted skills training and capacity building, and robust program

evaluation are imperative for ensuring the enduring success of co-operatives in promoting local economic development. Strengthening administrative processes, fostering transparent stakeholder engagement and communication, practices, addressing skills and capacity building gaps, implementing robust program evaluation systems, and strategically enhancing local economic development are imperative for the program's sustained success in fostering co-operatives transition into successful and sustainable business enterprises.

CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND SYNTHESIS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this key pivotal chapter, the study delves into a detailed analysis, interpretation, and synthesis of findings, intricately contextualising them within the theoretical framework established in the literature review. The six key themes—Co-operative Sustainability Impacting Local Economic Development, Strategic Interventions for Financial Sustainability, Streamlined Administration, Effective Stakeholder Engagement, Targeted Skills Training and Capacity Building, and Robust Program Evaluation—are systematically explored and aligned with relevant literature citations to provide a comprehensive understanding in an attempt to address the primary research question; what are the factors assessing the sustainability of the co-operative program in promoting local economic development.

5.2 CO-OPERATIVE SUSTAINABILITY GOALS PROMOTING LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Co-operatives play a vital role in South Africa's Local Economic Development (LED) strategy, as indicated by significant contributions to poverty reduction and employment creation (Khumalo 2014; ILO, 2014:3). Analysing the sustainability of SASSA's co-operative program in promoting Local Economic Development necessitate considering various dimensions aligned to sustainability. The ICA defines co-operative sustainability as operating as an economically sustainable enterprise, embodying co-operative principles, and making a tangible contribution to the local community context (Sustainable Development Policy Institute and ICA, 2013:2). This definition serves as a robust framework for evaluating the sustainability of SASSA's Co-operative Program in promoting LED. Drawing parallels with successful international examples from literature review, such as India, where favourable government policies spurred co-operative growth and employment in rural areas particularly rural women. The local economy of India has witnessed a change in sustainable livelihood for local community.

We argue that SASSA's Co-operative Program is undeniably sustainable. The program displays a high level of sustainability, which is supported by numerous key characteristics identified throughout the researcher's examination. The following

considerations support the sustainability claim of SASSA's co-operative initiative, based on its enormous success, which is demonstrated by its alignment with the SDGs and financial commitments. SASSA dedicates 30% of its yearly Social Relief of Distress (SRD) budget (≈ R 123 million) to the Co-operative Support Program for a 5-year term (SASSA Strategic Plan, 2020-2025). SASSA's financial contribution serves as a firm foundation for long-term co-operative support, reflecting the economic benefits essential for sustainability.

According to the literature and the SASSA Annual Report (2022-2023), the program considerably benefited co-operatives, increasing their economic gains by more than R26 million in a single year. This expansion directly resulted in more jobs and better well-being. Notably, 45 co-operative members found work, and 124 new employment (73%) were generated for local community members, aligning with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and demonstrating the program's positive influence on local economic growth.

Furthermore, the program's efforts to provide 10,000 children with new school uniforms reflect its commitment to SDG 4 (Quality Education and Lifelong Learning). This specialised educational support not only satisfies present needs, but also aligns with the global sustainable development goal (UN SDGs 2015 and SASSA Strategic Plan 2020-2025) of promoting inclusive and equitable education, indicating the program's larger social impact.

SASSA's Co-operative Program focuses not only locally, but also on successful models in emerging nations such as India, Brazil, Kenya, and Uganda, to assure its long-term viability. Battilani and Schröter (2012:47-49) emphasize how supporting government policies can promote cooperative growth, local economic development, and job creation in rural areas. This aligns with the South African government's cooperative policy and the objectives of SASSA's cooperative program.

According to Johnson and Shaw's (2014) study, Brazil's co-operative success exemplifies the potential impact of co-operative activities on local economies. Co-operatives account for 40% of Brazil's agricultural GDP, and their strong growth is credited to good coordination between co-operatives and government-led projects. This highlights the critical significance of government programs in promoting co-

operative sustainability, particularly in agriculture. The Brazilian model is firmly aligned with the goals of SASSA's Co-operative Program, emphasising the critical link between good policies and co-operative development. Aligning with worldwide best practices strengthens the rationale for SASSA's co-operative program and increasing its chances of long-term sustainability and meaningful contributions to local economic development.

In Africa, particularly in Kenya and Uganda, governments have aggressively spearheaded attempts to form and strengthen member-owned co-operatives, particularly in economically challenged and impoverished regions. Dondo's (2012) research sheds light on these initiatives, emphasising co-operatives' transformative potential in tackling socioeconomic inequality (Dondo, 2012:102). Co-operatives in Kenya and Uganda have had a revolutionary influence that goes beyond economic gains. These co-operatives frequently play an important role in increasing social cohesion, promoting a feeling of community, and tackling specific difficulties encountered by vulnerable groups. Kenya and Uganda's experiences demonstrate the transformative potential of African co-operatives.

Co-operative development undertakings in other developing contexts, which are supported by government initiatives, represent the concept of sustainable development and are consistent with SASSA's stated strategic commitment to co-operative sustainability. The alignment with such notable instances from Kenya and Uganda strengthens the case for SASSA's Co-operative Program's long-term sustainability, emphasising the shared ideals and transformative potential of co-operative activities in diverse socioeconomic contexts.

SASSA's program's sustainability is proved by its practical impact, which includes activities such as economic development, employment creation, and school uniform distribution to eligible students. This strategic move exemplifies the program's holistic approach to sustainable development. The program is consistent with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, 2015), including poverty reduction (SDG 1), education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), decent work (SDG 8), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), and partnerships (SDG 17), providing compelling evidence for the program's sustainability. SASSA's Co-operative Program stands out as a

comprehensive force in local communities, making diverse and significant contributions in these crucial areas of socioeconomic development to impact LED.

The ILO (2016) considers that lessons garnered from successful local South African co-operatives such as GUSCO and Lesedi Manufacturing Primary Co-operative provide practical examples of co-operatives achieving sustainable goals. These case studies demonstrate the importance of factors such as business and administrative support, market access, mentoring, and skill development training. The significant successes of GUSCO and Lesedi Manufacturing Primary Co-operative give compelling evidence, echoing the important components that enable co-operative sustainability within the larger co-operative framework. Drawing similarities between these practical experiences and the SASSA program indicates a clear alignment, which supports the researcher's conclusion that the SASSA Co-operative Programme is sustainable.

SASSA’s co-operative initiative not only fulfils, but exceeds, the key benchmarks of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), establishing itself as a driving force for social well-being. The collaborative synergy between co-operatives, government bodies, financial institutions, and private firms emphasizes the importance of a comprehensive strategy to developing strong and sustainable co-operative enterprises. As we conclude, while declaring SASSA’s co-operative program’s sustainability, this study recommends for continual monitoring, evaluation, and adaptive measures to overcome potential obstacles and improve the program's influence on local economic development holistically.

5.3 FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

5.3.1 Strategic Interventions for Financial Sustainability

Financial sustainability is regarded as a critical component of co-operative success in the context of SASSA's co-operative programme. This result is consistent with sustainability theory, specifically Huge et al. (2011)'s emphasis on the importance of financial sustainability for long-term success. The investigation of funding models, revenue streams, and financial management procedures is guided by Schell et al.'s (2013) program sustainability evaluation, which emphasises the necessity of financial resilience and adaptation. This study is further supported by the findings' consistency

with the ILO's Best Practice Case Studies of South African co-operatives such as GUSCO and Lesedi Manufacturing Primary Co-operative, which highlight the importance of non-financial support, grant money, and mentorship in maintaining co-operative sustainability.

Evaluating the financial sustainability of SASSA's co-operative program necessitates a thorough assessment of the organisation's strategic strategy and particular allocations. SASSA's strategic plan (2020-2025) outlines a strong financial commitment to co-operative efforts, with a 30% allocation (approximately R123 million per year) of the entire budget (R400 million). Secondary sources, such as SASSA's financial reports and data from co-operative programs, are used to support this research. For example, numbers from the SASSA Annual Report (2022-2023) that show the number of beneficiaries and specific accomplishments, such as providing over 10,000 school uniforms to children, provide visible evidence of the program's financial impact.

All co-operative participants highlighted issues that SASSA contractual co-operatives confront, such as late payments and dependency on loans. This is consistent with the literature, citing Jones (2019) and Brown et al. (2021), which highlight co-operatives' vulnerability to financial constraints. Lekalakala's (2017:51-52) study on worker co-operatives in selected Gauteng metropolitan towns highlights these problems, particularly in obtaining start-up money. The study indicated considerable challenges for worker co-operatives in accessing various finance options, despite the availability of resources from entities such as NYDA, SEFA, Anglo Zimele, GEP, and commercial banks. In line with the literature, research referencing Jones (2019) and Brown et al. (2021) highlights the vulnerability of co-operatives to financial stress. These observations highlight a common thread of financial risk among co-operatives.

Despite the commitment and financial support outlined in SASSA's strategic plan, co-operatives grapple with sustaining themselves financially. Several factors were cited that contribute to this overarching issue:

Delayed Payments**:** Co-operatives reported challenges related to delayed payments from SASSA. Timely and consistent cash flow is essential for the day-to-day operations of co-operatives, and delays in payments disrupt their financial stability.

Reliance on Loans**:** To bridge the gaps caused by delayed payments or to meet operational expenses, some co-operatives resort to taking loans. Dependence on loans adds financial strain, especially if repayments are not aligned with the irregular payment schedules evidenced from SASSA.

Limited Financial Resilience**:** Co-operatives may lack the financial reserves or contingency plans needed to navigate unexpected challenges or disruptions in their cash flow. This lack of financial resilience makes them susceptible to setbacks.

Start-up Capital and Operational Costs**:** The initial stages of the co-operatives' engagement with SASSA, including the procurement of materials, hiring of staff, and meeting compliance requirements, often require substantial upfront investment. Insufficient start-up capital and high operational costs can strain their financial sustainability.

Market Challenges**:** Co-operatives, especially those in competitive markets, may face challenges in securing a consistent and sustainable market for their products beyond the SASSA program. This makes them heavily reliant on SASSA contracts for revenue.

Further analysis points out gaps in SASSA's co-operative program, such as the integration of public-private partnerships and grant initiatives. This underscores the need for a proactive approach to mitigate financial risks, particularly regarding start-up funding for struggling co-operatives. Diverse funding models, revenue streams, and effective financial management practices are identified as crucial for the enduring success of co-operative enterprises, echoing the literature's emphasis on sustainable finance for co-operative growth, job creation, and poverty reduction (Diale and Brixiova, 2015; Cloetta and Bunting, 2015). Recognising the role of stakeholders, including SASSA, the narrative emphasises the need for long-term resources and assistance (Jones, 2020). The findings underline the complexity of financial sustainability and the necessity for continuous evaluation and strategic interventions to ensure the long-term financial success of SASSA's co-operative program.

The interviewees suggest that SASSA should allocate resources and funding to support the sustainability of co-operatives, particularly in terms of providing training and access to industrial machinery. The narrative's emphasis on financial support

resonates with findings in the literature, which consistently highlight the pivotal role of sustained funding for co-operative success. Leaning towards lessons and the different projects discussed under financial sustainability models in the literature review (Chapter 2), including diverse funding sources, public-private partnerships, and grant initiatives, align with the interviewee's suggestion. For example; Projects like the All-China Federation of Supply and Marketing Co-operatives and various initiatives in Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Myanmar, and Nepal (ICA-AP, 2020; Singh, 2020) exemplify the importance of financial backing.

The literature, especially the case studies from different countries, emphasises the positive impact of government policies and support programs in fostering the growth and sustainability of co-operatives. The lessons from projects like GUSCO and Lesedi Manufacturing Primary Co-operatives highlight the role of collaboration with government agencies and private businesses. Partnerships can provide co-operatives with access to mentorship, business services, and funding opportunities. The success of Lesedi, facilitated by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Pickitup, showcases the benefits of collaboration (ILO, 2016).

One pertinent finding in assessing the financial sustainability within the SASSA co-operative program is the strategic inclusion of long-term contracts, a cornerstone of the SASSA Strategic Plan 2020-2025. This strategic initiative aligns with the overarching goal of ensuring the financial sustainability of contracted co-operatives, emphasising the importance of financial stability for sustainability. Long-term contracts provide a stable and predictable income source, crucial for co-operatives' planning and investment in projects that contribute to local economic development. The literature, notably Elkington (1997) and Jones (2020), underscores the significance of financial stability for sustainability, making the SASSA Strategic Plan's emphasis on long-term contracts a proactive measure.

The strategic value of long-term contracts is illuminated by the benefits they bring to co-operatives. With reduced uncertainty about contract renewals, co-operatives can efficiently allocate resources, make long-term investments, and implement sustainable business practices, aligning with insights from Martins (2006) on the need for strategic elements in co-operative programs. Economic stability, as highlighted by Huge *et al*. (2011) and Schell *et al*. (2013), is paramount for co-operative success, and long-term

contracts in the SASSA Strategic Plan contribute significantly to the economic stability of contracted co-operatives.

Furthermore, economic stability for co-operatives aligns with the economic dimension of sustainability, while the stability provided contributes to social and environmental goals. Co-operatives, with financial stability, can actively participate in community development initiatives, promoting inclusivity and environmental responsibility. This approach reflects a comprehensive understanding of the importance of financial sustainability in co-operative programs, aligning with Elkington's (1997) principles emphasising the triple bottom line. The synthesis of participant experiences, expert opinions, and SASSA's strategic direction suggests a holistic approach that addresses immediate financial concerns and contributes to the long-term sustainability of co-operatives.

In conclusion, while SASSA's financial commitment is evident, addressing the intricacies of financial sustainability within the co-operatives demands a nuanced approach. The lack of financial sustainability among these co-operatives highlights the need for a holistic and adaptive strategy to fortify their economic sustainability over the long term. It involves not only ensuring timely payments but also providing targeted support to enhance financial management skills, facilitating access to additional funding sources, and fostering market linkages for sustained business beyond the scope of SASSA contracts.

5.4 ADMINISTRATIVE CHALLENGES AND CAPACITIES

Within the theme of administration challenges in the SASSA Co-operative Program, the literature review, particularly informed by Waas *et al*. (2012) and Devuyst *et al*. (2001), illuminates the pivotal role of administrative efficiency for the success and sustainability of co-operative initiatives. This section elaborates on the administrative challenges faced within the program, linking them to broader themes of financial sustainability and program efficiency.

The participants' experiences revealed significant bureaucratic hurdles, contributing to delayed payments and financial challenges within the SASSA Co-operative Program. The literature, particularly the work of Waas *et al*. (2012), corroborates the idea that internal inefficiencies directly impact the financial sustainability of co-operatives.

Delving into these experiences, this section highlights the nuances of bureaucratic challenges and procedural inefficiencies affecting the operational dynamics of the co-operatives.

Drawing insights from economic development experts and aligning with Jones (2020), the study underscores the profound impact of delayed payments on the financial sustainability of co-operatives. It emphasises the interconnectedness between financial stability and the operational efficiency of co-operatives, highlighting the critical need for timely payments. The study unveils literacy challenges among co-operatives, particularly in the completion of invoices, adding a layer of complexity to administrative processes. This internal challenge contributes to delays in payment. As pointed out in the literature review, literacy support is crucial for addressing procedural inefficiencies, as highlighted by Schell *et al*. (2013).

The literature review advocates for increased guidance in administrative processes to ensure program efficiency. Recommendations from economic development experts stress the need for support from SASSA's finance department, especially regarding invoicing processes and system registration. This guidance is seen as instrumental in navigating bureaucratic complexities for improved program efficiency. Interviews with SASSA participants reveal recognition of administrative challenges leading to delayed payments. The organisation expresses a commitment to addressing these challenges, aligning with the sustainability goals outlined in SASSA's strategic direction. This commitment is pivotal for ensuring the sustained success of co-operatives within the program.

SASSA's 5-Year Strategic Direction places strategic importance on administrative effectiveness and efficiency. This resonates with the findings from Waas *et al*. (2012), highlighting the significance of administrative processes in achieving sustainability goals. The strategic direction incorporates the adoption of modern technologies and systems, aligning with contemporary trends in public administration to streamline operations and reduce bureaucratic complexities.

The synthesis of participant experiences, expert recommendations, and SASSA's strategic direction emphasises the overarching importance of administrative efficiency in sustaining co-operative programs. The literature reviewed underscores the need for

clear administrative processes, literacy support, and technological integration to address challenges and ensure streamlined operations.

The streamlined administration not only resolves immediate challenges but also has broader implications for the sustainability of co-operative programs. Efficient administration ensures timely payments, reduces operational bottlenecks, and enhances the overall resilience of co-operatives. Addressing administrative challenges is a pivotal step in fortifying the foundations of co-operative sustainability within the SASSA program.

In conclusion, the identified administrative challenges, when synthesised with relevant literature, present a comprehensive understanding of the critical role administrative efficiency plays in the financial sustainability and overall success of co-operatives in the SASSA Co-operative Program. SASSA's commitment to addressing these challenges, especially through technological integration, aligns with contemporary administrative trends and bodes well for the continued success of co-operative initiatives in promoting local economic development.

5.5 EFFECTIVE STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION

Co-operatives participating members do emphasis the consistent communication with government as part of important support program for the sustenance of their businesses. With this experience provided, stakeholder collaboration and communication are critical aspects of co-operative program success especially with the indication that sometimes government provide orders for co-operatives to deliver goods within short notices ignoring the fact that they have to gather the resources first. This section delves into how SASSA strategically engages stakeholders and communicates, drawing insights from seminal work from Freeman (1984) and Waas *et al*. (2012).

Examining SASSA's stakeholder engagement, the study resonates with Freeman's (1984) stakeholder theory, evaluating public participation, consensus-building, and partnerships. The literature supports the idea that collaboration is vital for the sustainability of co-operative programs. This section interprets the findings, emphasising the strategic importance of stakeholder engagement and communication in reinforcing the program's strategic direction. According to the literature, the co-

operatives program is mostly supported through coordinated efforts with other agencies or government departments such as National Development Agencies, the Department of Social Development and the Department of Economic Development. The literature also emphasised a notable contrast in operational focus between SASSA and the National Development Agency (NDA) which came to light, with the NDA providing essential services for skills development and capacity building. Leveraging the NDA's expertise emerged as a strategic opportunity to bridge the skills gap within the SASSA Co-operative Program.

Lessons also learned from projects like GUSCO and Lesedi Manufacturing Primary Co-operatives evidenced by literature on their partnerships with Woolworths and Pickitup showcase the effectiveness of public-private collaborations. Both co-operatives benefitted from government support, particularly from the Department of Trade and Industry and the National Youth Development Agency (ILO, 2016).

As emphasised by participating members, stakeholder collaboration in supporting co-operative program becomes the cornerstone in responding to the question as an important factor that assesses the sustainability of the co-operative program. In the area (SASSA Johannesburg District) within which the study was conducted, there has been an effort by the Gauteng government as highlighted in the literature through the Integrated Co-operative Strategy for Gauteng Province to provide comprehensive guidelines, which guides the government role in supporting the co-operative movement. The city of Johannesburg is part of the important level at the municipality that has spearheaded co-operative initiative to advance local economic development. It was also revealed during the interview with a policy expert from the Economic Development unit within the City of Joburg that, the city also coordinated the registration of all co-operatives from different sectors trading around the city which includes those contracted by SASSA for massive boost in various capacity programs.

Synthesising the findings with literature, the section establishes a coherent narrative. Freeman's (1984) stakeholder theory aligns seamlessly with the emphasis on collaboration in SASSA's strategic direction. The synthesis highlights the significance of effective stakeholder collaboration in ensuring a holistic and sustainable approach to co-operative programs.

5.6 TARGETED SKILLS TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

The evaluation of SASSA's co-operative program reveals that skills training and capacity building are vital components contributing to the effectiveness and resilience of co-operatives. The lack of training and skills among the participating co-operatives underscores the need for government intervention in skills development, indicating a crucial pathway to ensuring sustainability. Co-operative members emphasised the importance of mentorship and coaching during document completion and delivery of school uniforms, highlighting the pivotal role of capacity building through mentorship in building co-operatives' resilience.

The experiences of co-operatives, particularly GUSCO, underscore the significance of a supportive ecosystem, including both financial and non-financial assistance, in driving co-operative sustainability. GUSCO's journey emphasises the role of business and administrative support, strategic market access, and mentorship in navigating compliance and procurement procedures. Training in productivity, performance management, and conflict resolution emerged as vital elements for increased productivity and profitability.

In assessing SASSA's skills training initiatives, the study examined their effectiveness, alignment with co-operative goals, and contribution to sustainability. The analysis emphasises the co-operative's ability to develop and retain skilled members, ensuring the long-term impact of the program on local economic development.

The interpretive lens underscores the strategic significance of skills training and capacity building, extending beyond routine procedures to actively contribute to the human capital development of co-operative members. This aligns with sustainability literature, highlighting the pivotal role of human capital in fostering resilience and adaptability. A well-trained and skilled co-operative membership is deemed fundamental to the program's sustainability and impact. Schell *et al*.'s (2013) literature, establishes a cohesive narrative. It highlights the symbiotic relationship between skills training and co-operative sustainability, echoing the sustainability literature's emphasis on the pivotal role of human capital in fostering resilience and adaptability. This synthesis reinforces the notion that a well-trained and skilled co-operative membership is fundamental to the program's sustainability and impact.

Aligning with the co-operative principle of "Education, Training, and Information" the section emphasises that SASSA's initiatives are in harmony with this guiding principle. The focus on empowering and enhancing the knowledge base of co-operative members through education and training aligns with the broader goal of strengthening the internal capabilities of co-operatives. By investing in education and training, co-operatives strengthens their internal capabilities and contribute to the overall development of the co-operative movement. The synthesis of these insights implies that skills training and capacity building are not merely isolated activities but integral components of SASSA's sustainable co-operative program.

Practitioners should view these initiatives as strategic investments, recognising their potential to enhance administrative efficiency, governance, and overall co-operative effectiveness. Incorporating continuous learning into the co-operative culture can lead to a more robust and adaptable community of co-operative members.

5.7 ROBUST PROGRAM EVALUATION: ENHANCING SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH INFORMED PRACTICES

Program evaluation is a key aspect of sustainability. This section highlights how SASSA's emphasis on program evaluation aligns with principles of adaptive management and organisational learning (Flood and Romm, 1996), as well as insights from Luke *et al*. (2014). It is evident from the interviews with co-operative members that not all of them have been in the co-operative industry for longer period hence one of them conceded that consistent monitoring of the program becomes part of the significant support the government can provide. Co-operative experts through their interviews emphasis that the integration of robust program evaluation practices within SASSA's co-operative program is paramount for enhancing sustainability and achieving long-term impact. Despite the absence of a formalised evaluation framework outlined in the SASSA Strategic Plan (2020-2025), this section discusses the critical role that robust program evaluation can play in fostering sustainability. The synthesis of literature, particularly Schell *et al*. (2013), further informs the narrative, shedding light on the significance of informed evaluation practices.

The SASSA Strategic Plan (2020-2025) serves as a foundational document guiding the co-operative program's trajectory. However, a notable gap exists in the plan

regarding a comprehensive evaluation framework. The absence of a formalised structure presents an opportunity to explore how robust program evaluation, despite not being explicitly outlined, can still be woven into the fabric of co-operative sustainability initiatives. This introduction sets the stage for an in-depth examination of the co-operative program's evaluation practices and their alignment with the broader goals of sustainability.

The evaluation practices of SASSA's co-operative program are characterised by a decentralised approach, suggesting an informal rather than a structured framework. Despite lacking a formalised structure, the co-operative program showcases a strong commitment to continuous assessment, utilising informal mechanisms such as feedback loops, inspections, monitoring systems, and learning mechanisms. This commitment is evident in the practices observed, emphasising a practical and hands-on approach to program evaluation within the unique context of co-operatives.

One aspect that emerges from the analysis is the emphasis on feedback loops as a means of evaluation. Co-operatives within the program are engaged in ongoing interactions that involve feedback from various stakeholders, including SASSA. This iterative process allows for real-time adjustments, fostering a dynamic and responsive system that adapts to the evolving needs and challenges faced by co-operatives. Such informal yet continuous feedback loops contribute to the resilience and adaptability of co-operatives, aligning with principles of sustainability that emphasise the importance of responsiveness to changing circumstances. The iterative nature of feedback loops and the emphasis on organisational learning, as inspired by Schell *et al*. (2013), contribute to adaptive management. The interpretation underscores the dynamic relationship between program evaluation and the sustainable evolution of co-operatives. Insights gained through systematic evaluation processes become foundational in steering the program toward resilience and long-term impact.

Monitoring systems are another element of the decentralised evaluation model. While these systems may not adhere to a rigid, centralised structure, they involve the regular tracking of key performance indicators and other relevant metrics. Co-operatives are observed to engage in self-monitoring and reporting, providing a mechanism for internal evaluation. This self-reflective approach aligns with the co-operative principles

of self-help and self-responsibility, empowering co-operatives to take an active role in assessing their progress and identifying areas for improvement.

Synthesising the findings with literature and the SASSA Strategic Plan highlights the nuanced interplay between the absence of a formal framework and the active pursuit of robust program evaluation. Schell *et al*. (2013) emphasise ongoing assessment and adaptation, aligning with the co-operative program's practical approach. The synthesis delves into how the co-operative program, despite the absence of a structured plan, exemplifies principles outlined in the strategic direction, showcasing adaptability and a commitment to continuous improvement.

With the experience of most of these participating co-operatives, interpreting the co-operative program's approach to program evaluation reveals a dynamic and responsive model which will help as an important factor in assessing the sustainability of the co-operative program. Co-operatives cited several jobs created and employment opportunities, this makes the program evaluation significant to check indeed to what extent the Local Economic Development initiatives are achieved. While lacking a predefined structure, the co-operative program leverages its flexibility to address emerging challenges and opportunities. The interpretation emphasises that the absence of a formalised framework does not equate to a lack of commitment to evaluation but rather reflects an adaptive and context-specific strategy that aligns with co-operative principles.

The implications derived from the synthesis and analysis underscore that while a formalised framework could enhance clarity and standardisation, the current approach reflects a practical and adaptive model. The section encourages practitioners to recognise the value of contextualised evaluation practices and advocates for a balance between structure and flexibility in sustaining co-operative initiatives. Furthermore, by adopting a proactive approach to evaluation, practitioners can identify areas for improvement, address challenges promptly, and foster a culture of continuous improvement. The section underscores that viewing evaluation as an integral aspect of co-operative governance is fundamental to sustaining positive outcomes.

In conclusion, the analysis of the co-operative program's evaluation practices showcases a decentralised model that relies on informal mechanisms. Despite the

lack of a structured framework, this approach is underpinned by a commitment to ongoing assessment, feedback loops, monitoring systems, and learning mechanisms. The evidence from interviews and data analysis underscores the practical aspects of this evaluation model, highlighting its effectiveness in contributing to the sustainability of co-operatives within the program.

5.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 5 served as a comprehensive examination of SASSA's co-operative program, aligning with the predefined research objectives. Objective One focused on evaluating the sustainability of the program, particularly in terms of funding and its impact on Local Economic Development (LED) in Gauteng Province. The analysis illuminated the indispensable role of financial sustainability for co-operative success, substantiated by co-operative members' experiences. The commitment to allocate a substantial portion (30%) of the Social Relief of Distress (SRD) budget to the Co- operative Support Program strategy over the next five years was identified as a robust financial foundation. Despite this, challenges such as delayed payments and reliance on loans were acknowledged, prompting the proposal of proactive measures, including diverse funding models and effective financial management practices.

Shifting to Objective Two, the assessment centered on the effectiveness of SASSA's co-operative program in providing skills and capacity-building support to co-operatives. The analysis emphasised the importance of skills training for co-operative sustainability. Challenges, like a lack of training and skills, highlight the need for government collaboration (SASSA and NDA) in skills development. Proposed solutions advocated for targeted skills training initiatives and mentorship programs, aligning with the overarching goal of empowering co-operative members and enhancing their developmental contributions to society.

Objective Three explored the specific program evaluation initiatives within SASSA's co-operative program. The analysis uncovered a decentralised evaluation approach, relying on informal mechanisms, feedback loops, monitoring systems, and learning mechanisms. While effective, potential barriers to formal program evaluation were

identified. Lessons learned emphasised the importance of continuous assessment and feedback, aligning with co-operative principles of self-help and self-responsibility. The proposed solution involved leveraging both informal and formal evaluation practices, underscoring the need for a dynamic and responsive evaluation system.

In conclusion, the analysis of these objectives painted a holistic picture of SASSA's co-operative program, demonstrating its commitment to sustainability, skills development, and ongoing evaluation. The identified limitations and proposed solutions provided valuable insights for enhancing the program's overall effectiveness and sustainability, emphasising the importance of collaborative efforts, self-help principles, and continuous improvement. This sets the stage for the next Chapter (6), the final chapter, where the study's key findings and recommendations will be synthesised and presented.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter marks the culmination of the study, which sought to assess the sustainability of SASSA's Co-operative Program in promoting Local Economic Development (LED) in Gauteng Province. The research objectives were systematically addressed, leading to key findings that contribute to the broader discourse on co-operative sustainability within the UN sustainability framework and South Africa's 2030 sustainable development goals.

The study was propelled by a primary research question: "What factors contribute to assessing the sustainability of the co-operative program in promoting Local Economic Development?" This inquiry served as the compass, directing the investigation into diverse facets of SASSA's co-operative initiative. The secondary questions complemented this primary inquiry by adopting a nuanced approach to discerning the specific factors influencing SASSA’s program sustainability. This holistic approach aligns seamlessly with the overarching objective of comprehensively presenting the factors contributing to the sustainability of SASSA's co-operative program, particularly in the context of promoting Local Economic Development.

6.2 LINKING FINDINGS TO RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The inquiry of the sustainability of SASSA's Co-operative Programme, as matched with the research objectives, has yielded crucial insights that add to a comprehensive understanding of the program's dynamics. Each objective is explored in conjunction with specific facets, resulting in a unified narrative that navigates the multifaceted environment of co-operative sustainability.

1. Financial Commitment and Funding Models

Objective One: Evaluate the sustainability of SASSA's co-operative program with a specific focus on funding.

The analysis revealed that financial sustainability is pivotal for the success of co-operatives, aligning with the United Nations' comprehensive sustainability approach. SASSA's pledge to contribute a considerable amount (30%) of the national Social

Relief of Distress (SRD) budget to the Co-operative Support Program plan for the next five years (2020-2025) provides a solid financial base. However, acknowledged issues in the program's internal financial administrative practices, such as delayed payments and reliance on loans, necessitate SASSA taking proactive measures. Diversifying funding patterns, developing new revenue streams, and putting in place strong financial management techniques are among the recommendations. These proposed solutions are consistent with South Africa's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, which emphasise economic empowerment and poverty reduction through co-operative sustainability.

2. Skills Training and Capacity Building

Objective Two: Assess the effectiveness of SASSA's co-operative program in providing skills and capacity-building support.

The study discovered that the relationship between skill development, capacity increase, and cooperative sustainability is complex. Issues such as a lack of training and skills among co-operatives underscore the need for government assistance in skill development. Proposed solutions include concentrated skill training and mentorship programs, which recognise the value of well-trained and talented co-operative members to the program's long-term success. Continuous learning is viewed as critical for improving skills and adaptability within co-operatives.

3. Program Evaluation Mechanisms

Objective Three: Examine the specific program evaluation initiatives implemented by SASSA's co-operative program.

The evaluation of the program's sustainability has revealed a decentralised approach, leveraging a combination of informal mechanisms, feedback loops, monitoring systems, and learning mechanisms. While effective, the study identifies potential barriers to formal program evaluation. Emphasising the importance of continuous assessment and feedback, the proposed solutions advocate for a dynamic and responsive evaluation system. This approach aligns seamlessly with co-operative principles of self-help and self-responsibility, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing program sustainability.

4. Government Collaboration and Support

The critical role of government collaboration and support in enhancing co-operative sustainability is accentuated in the study. The proactive commitment outlined in SASSA's 5-Year Strategic Direction and the substantial allocation of the SRD budget underscore a government-led approach to co-operative development. Challenges such as delayed payments necessitate ongoing government support, emphasising the vital role of sustained collaboration in addressing barriers and promoting long-term sustainable growth.

5. Strategic Planning and Long-Term Contracts

The inclusion of long-term contracts in the SASSA Strategic Plan 2020-2025 emerges as a strategic pillar fostering sustainability and economic stability among contracted co-operatives. These contracts provide a stable and predictable income source, enabling effective strategic planning and long-term investments. Lessons learned from case studies emphasize the multifaceted nature of factors contributing to co-operative sustainability, highlighting the pivotal role of collaboration between co-operatives, financial institutions, government agencies, and private businesses.

The exploration of factors influencing the sustainability of SASSA's co-operative program revealed a multi-dimensional landscape encompassing financial commitment, skills development, evaluation mechanisms, government collaboration, and strategic planning and long-term contracts. The study's findings contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the intricate factors that collectively shape the sustainability of co-operative programs, providing valuable insights for enhancing their impact on local economic development.

6.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The study's findings hold significant implications for SASSA and other organisations involved in co-operative programs. These implications are vital for shaping informed decision-making and enhancing the sustainability of co-operative initiatives. The key areas of implications for practice include;

1. Financial Management

The study emphasises the importance of proactive financial management to address

challenges faced by co-operatives, such as delayed payments and reliance on loans. Practical implications for practice include the need for SASSA to streamline payment processes, ensuring timely disbursement to contracted co-operatives. Additionally, the study suggests diversifying co-operatives funding models and incorporating effective financial management practices to mitigate financial risks. This implies that public sector organisations engaged in co-operative programs should establish robust financial systems, monitor cash flows, and explore alternative funding sources to promote the financial sustainability of co-operatives.

2. Skills Development and Capacity Building

The study underscores the integral role of skills development and capacity building in ensuring the sustainability of co-operatives. Practically, this implies that SASSA and similar organisations should invest in targeted skills training initiatives and mentorship programs. These programs should not only focus on routine procedures but also actively contribute to the human capital development of co-operative members. The implications extend to recognising the value of continuous learning within co-operative cultures, promoting ongoing education for members, directors, and staff. This involves creating a supportive co-operative eco-system that fosters individual and collective growth.

3. Program Evaluation Practices

The study reveals a decentralised approach to program evaluation, emphasising the importance of continuous assessment and feedback. SASSA practitioners should consider leveraging both informal and formal evaluation practices. This implies that public sector organisations like SASSA involved in co-operative programs should establish dynamic and responsive evaluation systems. While informal mechanisms like feedback loops are effective, incorporating formal evaluation frameworks can provide a more structured understanding of program effectiveness and impact including areas for improvement. Practitioners should embrace a holistic approach to program evaluation, aligning with the global fundamental co-operative principles of self-help and self-responsibility.

4. Government Collaboration and Support

The study highlights the essential role of government collaboration and support in enhancing the sustainability of co-operatives. Practically, this implies that SASSA and

should maintain and strengthen their commitment to co-operative development. Ongoing government support is crucial for addressing barriers and promoting sustainable growth. This involves addressing internal organisational challenges such as delayed payments and adopting proactive measures to ensure the smooth functioning of co-operatives. Practitioners should actively engage with government agencies, financial institutions, and private businesses to create an enabling environment for co-operative success.

5. Strategic Planning and Long-Term Contracts

The strategic inclusion of long-term contracts is identified as a key factor in fostering sustainability and economic stability among co-operatives. Organisations like SASSA should consider adopting a strategic planning approach that includes long-term commitments to provide co-operatives with stable and predictable income sources. Practitioners should actively explore the benefits of long-term contracts, enabling co-operatives to plan and invest for the future. Collaboration with financial institutions, government agencies, and private businesses becomes crucial in creating an ecosystem that supports the sustainability goals outlined in co-operative programs.

In conclusion, the practical implications drawn from the study provide a roadmap for enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of co-operative programs. By addressing financial, skills development and capacity building, and evaluation aspects, practitioners can contribute to the long-term success of co-operatives, fostering local economic development.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.4.1 Recommendations for Practice

Building on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed for enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of SASSA's co-operative program and similar initiatives;

6.4.1.1 Streamline Payment Processes

SASSA should streamline payment processes for contracted co-operatives, ensuring timely disbursement of funds. Timely payments are crucial for the financial sustainability of co-operatives. Streamlining payment processes reduces financial strain and promotes a stable operating environment.

6.4.1.2 Diversify Funding Models

SASSA should explore diverse funding models beyond the Social Relief of Distress (SRD) budget allocation, including public-private partnerships and grant initiatives. Diversifying funding sources enhances financial resilience, mitigates risks, and provides co-operatives with alternative revenue streams.

6.4.1.3 Enhance Financial Management Practices

SASSA and co-operatives should implement effective financial management practices, including monitoring cash flows, budgeting, and managing resources efficiently. Robust financial management practices contribute to long-term financial sustainability and resilience against economic challenges.

6.4.1.4 Invest in Targeted Skills Training

SASSA should invest in targeted skills training initiatives for co-operative members, focusing on areas identified by co-operatives as crucial for their development. Skills development is essential for enhancing the capacity of co-operative members, fostering growth, and increasing their contributions to local economic development.

6.4.1.5 Implement Mentorship Programs

SASSA should establish mentorship programs to provide ongoing guidance and support to co-operatives, particularly during the initial stages of their engagement. Mentorship contributes to the resilience of co-operatives by addressing challenges effectively, sharing expertise, and promoting best practices.

6.4.1.6 Incorporate Formal Program Evaluation Frameworks

SASSA should incorporate formal program evaluation frameworks alongside informal mechanisms, ensuring a more structured and comprehensive assessment of program effectiveness. A combination of formal and informal evaluation practices provides a holistic understanding of the program's impact, areas for improvement, and success stories.

6.4.1.7 Strengthen Government Collaboration

SASSA should actively engage with government agencies, financial institutions, and private businesses to strengthen collaboration and support for co-operatives. Government collaboration is pivotal in addressing challenges, providing resources,

and creating an enabling environment for co-operative success.

6.4.1.8 Promote Strategic Planning with Long-Term Contracts

SASSA and co-operatives should embrace strategic planning with a focus on long-term contracts, providing stability and predictability for co-operatives. Long-term contracts contribute to economic stability, enabling co-operatives to plan and invest in projects that support local economic development.

6.4.1.9 Establish a Robust Support Ecosystem

SASSA should establish a robust support ecosystem, including both financial and non-financial assistance, to drive the sustainability of co-operative enterprises. A supportive ecosystem enhances co-operative development by addressing various needs, fostering collaboration, and promoting long-term success.

6.4.1.10 Foster a Culture of Continuous Learning

SASSA and co-operatives should foster a culture of continuous learning, emphasising ongoing education for members, directors, and staff. Continuous learning contributes to the internal capabilities of co-operatives, promoting adaptability and resilience in a dynamic economic environment.

This study's 10 recommendations, when implemented collaboratively by SASSA and co-operatives, can contribute to the overall sustainability and success of co-operative programs, aligning with the principles of self-help and community empowerment.

6.4.2 Recommendations for Future Research

Future research endeavors could explore additional dimensions of co-operative sustainability, investigate the impact of external factors on program success, or delve into comparative analyses with similar programs in different regions. These endeavors could provide a more holistic understanding of co-operative programs and contribute to the broader field of LED.

6.5 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study offers valuable insights into the sustainability of SASSA's co-operative program in promoting LED in Gauteng Province. The findings align with the research questions, providing practical implications and recommendations for enhancing the program's impact. As a comprehensive exploration of co-operative sustainability, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on effective strategies for fostering local economic development through co-operative initiatives.

Reflecting on the research journey, the researcher sees the process and study as a voyage of discovery and learning. Delving into the subtle dynamics of co-operative program sustainability has increased the researcher's understanding of the complexities involved in promoting local economic growth. This journey underscored the importance of interdisciplinary perspectives and continuous adaptation in the landscape of local community economic development oriented initiatives such as SASSA’s co-operative program.

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