



Skills Development for Economic Growth

# IMPACT EVALUATION STUDY ON THE RURAL AREAS LEARNERSHIP (INFORMAL SMALL BUSINESS PRACTICE).

**FINAL REPORT**

**MARCH 2023**



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## Executive Summary

Urban-Econ Development Economists (Urban-Econ) in collaboration with Urban-Econ: NIKELA (Nikela) were appointed by the Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&RSETA) to conduct an impact study on the Rural Areas Learnership (2018/19).

This study considers numerous aspects of the Rural Areas Learnership (Informal Small Business Practice 2018/19) implemented by W&RSETA. This includes an investigation of the project's efficiency and effectiveness in terms of its goals and inputs, and outputs. The impact on beneficiaries and livelihoods of the Rural Areas Learnership (ISBP) will also be considered. This study will lastly investigate the strengths and weaknesses of the project throughout its facilitation, implementation, and conclusion to provide practical recommendations for future projects. This study is engaging with the project retrospectively, which involves considering the programme as per its implementation in 2018. Thus, concerning the relevant policies, W&RSETA Strategic Objectives, goals and NSDS III targets of 2018.

This study has undergone a mixed-methods approach, using both qualitative – in the form of interviews and focus groups – and quantitative – in the form of surveys – research methods. The data gathered from these research approaches has been triangulated.

The Rural Areas Learnership was implemented in Mpumalanga in 2018. It was executed to equip beneficiaries with knowledge about Wholesale and Retail sector, both generally speaking and to the SMME landscape. In this vein, this learnership was designed to expand beneficiaries' knowledge and skills base in the South African retail sector and broader business contexts. The skills taught in this learnership focused on the operations and principles of the Wholesale and Retail sector, with attention paid to encouraging beneficiaries to learn about starting their businesses. This is to encourage beneficiaries to be actively self-employed and effective employers within society (W&RSETA, 2019).

Through this learnership, beneficiaries were given the opportunity to acquire an NQF Level 3 qualification, additional business and operational capabilities and opening and registering their small businesses (through the workplace learning component of the programme) (W&RSETA, 2019).

***Rural areas are defined as being sparsely populated and situated outside of city or town limits. Examples include rural villages, small towns, and dense rural settlements.***

(Pernegger, 2007)



## Alignment of the Rural Areas Learnership with Strategic Goals and Objectives.

In considering the project's success, an analysis was done of the alignment of the Rural Areas Learnership with the goals and objectives of the NSDS III and W&RSETA. The project aligned with three **NSDS III goals and strategic objectives**:

1. **Increasing access to occupationally directed programmes.**
2. **Expanding the public TVET system for sector, local, regional, and national needs requirements.**
3. **Encouraging more efficient and effective use of workplace skills development.**
4. **Encouraging and assisting small enterprises, cooperatives and worker-initiated NGO and community training initiatives.**

Additionally, the Rural Areas Learnership aligned with three **W&RSETA goals and strategic objectives**, namely:

1. **Establishing a skilled and competent workforce in the Wholesale and Retail sector.**
2. **A skilled, lively SMME and cooperative sector.**
3. **Addressing historical imbalances in the wholesale and retail sector.**

## Impact of the Rural Areas Learnership.

The impact of the Rural Areas Learnership on the livelihoods of beneficiaries is considered regarding the qualifications achieved by beneficiaries and the employment and income of the beneficiaries and households, both before and after..

The project enabled **457 beneficiaries** to obtain an occupational qualification. The Rural Areas Learnership has also increased the ability of the beneficiaries to seek and acquire stable employment in terms of employment and self-employment through the skills acquired. This is indicated in that **68% of beneficiaries said they now have increased career opportunities**, and **92% noted that they feel prepared to start and run a small business** after completing the learnership. Additionally, the number of employed beneficiaries has increased from 2% to 16% since the project's conclusion.

In terms of self-employment, the number of self-employed beneficiaries has increased from 17% to 28% since the closure of the project. When asked about their experience with the learnership, **28% of beneficiaries had the skills and opportunity to start their businesses**, either through the project directly (24 beneficiaries) or after the project with the skills obtained (15 beneficiaries).

This indicates that the learnership has positively impacted beneficiaries in terms of skills development. **Most beneficiaries are satisfied with the project, and only six said** they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. This indicates that most of the beneficiaries are satisfied with the skills taught in the project.. Many beneficiaries noted that the skills taught are relevant and essential to their current work. Overall, the programme appears to have improved the skills and knowledge of beneficiaries in the sector. **96% of the respondents** saying that they **learned more about the wholesale and retail industry** through the



learnership. In addition to the work-based skills obtained, the beneficiaries reported having found **personal value, growth and development** through the Rural Areas Learnership.

Several beneficiaries commented on not being able to navigate the challenges of running a business alone, particularly in a rural context, so soon after the completion of the project. On the other hand, a number of beneficiaries indicated the lack of post-programme communication and guidance, which they noted would have been beneficial to themselves and their business ventures. Herein, the beneficiaries noted that contact with their facilitators and mentors from the project for a ,more extended period would have benefited their business sustainability. The beneficiaries also noted that the **stipends were too low** to cover what was required throughout the project. Although stipends were received regularly (98%),; the stipend amount was insufficient to cover personal and business-related costs such as stock and stall rental.

### **Effectiveness of the Rural Areas Learnership.**

The effectiveness of the learnership has been outlined based on the skills provided by the project and the ability of the project to meet the goals and objectives laid out upon its conceptualisation and inception. In this way, an analysis of the project's success can be measured.

The Rural Areas Learnership intended to provide individuals with an NQF Level 3 qualification; this was achieved in that **457 beneficiaries completed** the training and obtained an occupational qualification.

Furthermore, the project provided beneficiaries with an opportunity to engage in the retail space and its operations to gain the relevant knowledge and understanding to apply the skills learnt to their own contexts. The project's success herein is indicated in that **92% of beneficiaries feel equipped to start and run their businesses**, and **96% feel that they learnt more about the wholesale and retail sector through the learnership**.

The goals to help beneficiaries obtain employment was achieved somewhat as the number of **employed beneficiaries has increased from 2% to 16%** since the project's conclusion. As per the goal to grow the SMME environment, the number of **self-employed individuals has also risen from 17% to 28%** since the learnership ended, indicating success in helping beneficiaries embark on their business ventures.

Another major goal of the project was to grow the local economies of rural area Another major primary goal of the project was to grow the local economies of rural areas. In terms of employment and self-employment, and the positive impacts an increase herein has on wider communities and economies. Regarding employment and self-employment, and the positive impacts an increase herein has on broader communities and economies. The fact that 28% of beneficiaries have become self-employed since the project indicates positive effects herein. This is because many beneficiaries currently reside in the same areas as before the learnership, and these businesses grow and strengthen the local economy.

In terms of introducing more individuals into the wholesale and retail sectors, the results are mixed. As noted, the ratio of beneficiaries who were funded to the number of beneficiaries currently working in the wholesale and retail sector is only 1:0,16. This is not a very favourable result. However, the project's positive impacts are seen in that of the 28% self-employed beneficiaries, **84% of businesses in the wholesale and retail sector**. This shows that most of the beneficiaries are self-employed are, within this sector, indicating a positive upswing of beneficiaries entering the sector as more businesses get started and grow.

Lastly, it was a goal of the Rural Areas Learnership to increase the beneficiaries' confidence in both their business ventures and them. Overall, the beneficiaries reported having learnt skills which have helped them **grow and feel confident in starting business ventures**, as well as skills which have helped them **grow as individuals** and have a better approach to their future.

### Efficiency of the Rural Areas Learnership.

The efficiency of the Rural Areas Learnership has been examined based on the resources spent on the project against the outputs and benefits derived from these. This aids in understanding the achievement of the project from a financial point of view.

The total unit cost per learner in the project is R54 000. The unit cost per learner who completed the project was R54 236 (1: 0.99). This indicates a positive input-to-outcome ratio, at almost 1: 1 or 100%. Looking further, the cost per learner employed as a result of the programme was R195 597 per learner (1: 0.28). This is calculated to the number of learners currently employed since the completion of the project in 2019. Lastly, the unit cost per learner currently employed in the wholesale and retail sector was R331 010 (1: 0.16); this is less positive. However, the project aimed to encourage beneficiaries to start their businesses, which can be challenging and take slightly longer to find employment traditionally.

### Strengths and weaknesses of the Rural Areas Learnership.

The learnership experienced many strengths and weaknesses throughout its implementation, facilitation and conclusion phases. These are important to note to fully understand the project and provide practical recommendations for the future.

*The strengths and weaknesses of the Rural Areas Learnership.*

Strengths	Weaknesses
Positive relationships between the training providers and W&RSETA.	The project's duration was insufficient for the beneficiaries to fully absorb and translate the skills training and mentorship to their business ventures.
W&RSETA provides adequate quality assurance.	The administrative tasks in the contract stage of the project (in terms of which training providers were appointed and

Strengths	Weaknesses
	the subsequent information) was not expressed in an adequate time frame.
Align various role-players at the project's implementation phase to allow all to be aware of their roles and responsibilities.	The numeracy and literacy skills of the beneficiaries are not always adequate at the outset of the project
Open communication is provided to the training providers and W&RSETA, and between beneficiaries and traditional leaders and authorities.	Mentors, facilitators and training providers paid inadequate attention to discussing the challenges of running a small business in a rural context.
Positive relationships between the beneficiaries and the mentors/facilitators	Beneficiaries experienced challenges with transport, the resources available to beneficiaries to work and inadequate stipends.
Fewer drop-offs due to dedicated learners	The beneficiaries were not initially fully informed about project nature or subject matter.
Stipends were received on time and regularly.	Lack of support after the closure of the project in terms of business mentoring.
The vital and informative implementation phase of the project.	

## Recommendations

- W&RSETA is urged **to keep accurate, up-to-date, and ongoing records of beneficiaries.**
- W&RSETA is urged to **conduct workplace mentoring training sessions** to guide mentors and supervisors on their roles and responsibilities, orientate them on the programme and provide guidelines regarding the required training for beneficiaries based on the project's goals.
- W&RSETA is urged to **lengthen the running period of the Rural Areas Learnership** as it is not long enough for the beneficiaries to absorb the training and mentorship and apply it to their business ventures.
- More attention should be paid to mentors, facilitators, and training providers to **discuss the challenges of running a small business in a rural context specifically.**
- W&RSETA is urged to be more proactive in adhering to deadlines in the project allocation and contract phase of the project.
- W&RSETA is urged to ensure that **beneficiaries are fully aware** of what is required in the project and are well informed about what the project entails.
- W&RSETA and training providers should ensure **constant follow-ups with beneficiaries** during the project and allow them to raise concerns or pose questions.
- W&RSETA and training providers should also provide **post-programme support** to beneficiaries.



- W&RSETA should **consider raising the stipend** amount.
- W&RSETA and training providers should ensure **adequate and comfortable spaces** within which training is provided.

## Acronyms and Abbreviations

<b>AET</b>	Adult Education and Training
<b>APP</b>	Annual Performance Plan
<b>DHET</b>	Department of Higher Education and Training
<b>FET</b>	Further Education and Training
<b>GETC</b>	General Education and Training Certificate
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental Organisation
<b>NSDS III</b>	National Skills Development Strategy
<b>NSA</b>	National Skills Authority
<b>NSF</b>	National Skills Fund
<b>NDP</b>	National Development Plan
<b>NQF</b>	National Qualifications Framework
<b>SAQA</b>	South African Qualifications Authority
<b>SETA</b>	Sector Education and Training Authority
<b>SMME</b>	Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises
<b>SSP</b>	Sector Skills Plan
<b>TVET</b>	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
<b>UMALUSI</b>	Quality Council for General and Further Education and Training
<b>WCED</b>	Western Cape Education Department
<b>W&amp;RSETA</b>	Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority
<b>YFP</b>	Rural Areas Learnership

## Glossary of Terms

### **Beneficiary**

An individual who took part in a Learning Programme.

### **Host Employer/Organisation**

The company or organisation where the beneficiary was permitted to conduct the workplace learning component of the Learning Programme. The beneficiary would have been employed through a contract at this company or organisation.

### **Credits**

A numerical representation of the hours required for achieving the learning outcomes necessary towards a qualification or a part qualification. One (1) credit is representative of ten (10) hours of learning.

### **Learning Programme**

A set of coordinated learning experiences which leads to a qualification or part-qualification.

### **Lifelong Learning**

Learning takes place in all contexts, both formal and informal and over one's lifetime. Lifelong learning involves gaining knowledge in all areas, such as learning behaviours, attitudes and abilities for personal growth and employability.

### **Recognition of Prior Learning**

The process by which an individual's prior learning and experience are recognised, considered and assessed to access further or alternative learning pathways or recognition and certification (SAQA, 2020).

### **Skills Programme**

An occupationally-based learning programme accredited by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) may contribute credits towards a qualification recognised by the National Qualifications Framework.

### **Workplace-based Learning**

Exposure to workplace skills through interaction and knowledge-application in a workplace environment.

## Section 1: Introduction

### 1.1. Background of the Study

W&RSETA is responsible, as per the National Skills Development Strategy (which was still active in 2018, at the time these projects were implemented), for conducting relevant research on their projects and programmes and reporting their findings herein (DHET, 2011). According to the NSDS III, it is the responsibility of the SETAs to **evaluate and monitor their initiatives** in terms of their alignment with various strategic objectives and goals as well as their impact on the beneficiaries and broader communities they target (DHET, 2011).

Therefore, the study at hand provides an opportunity for W&RSETA to consider the impact that the Rural Areas Learnership (2018/19) has had on the livelihoods of beneficiaries as well as the effectiveness and efficiency of the project in creating a skilled and capable workforce in the Wholesale and Retail sector. Along with these investigations, this study will also assess the extent to which the projects align with the relevant policies, NSDS III goals and the W&RSETAs strategic objectives, outline the projects' strengths and weaknesses and provide recommendations for future projects to be rolled out, based on the feedback received by various stakeholders.

### 1.2. Scope and Objectives of the Study and evaluation objectives

This impact evaluation study seeks to:

- **Evaluate the impact** of the Rural Areas Learnership (2018/19)).
- **Evaluate** the projects' **efficiency** in reaching their goals, strategic mandates, and targets.
- **Determine the alignment** of the project to the relevant **strategic mandates and set objectives** laid out.
- **Evaluate** the projects' **effectiveness** in terms of skills development and set objectives.
- **Identify challenges** experienced in the project or areas of deficiency and **recommend methods for improvement** or potential policy alteration.
- **Identify key strengths** within the project and provide recommendations for enhancement or replication in other areas or projects.

To investigate the aims of the W&RSETA effectively and efficiently as they pertain to this study, six evaluation objectives have been formulated:

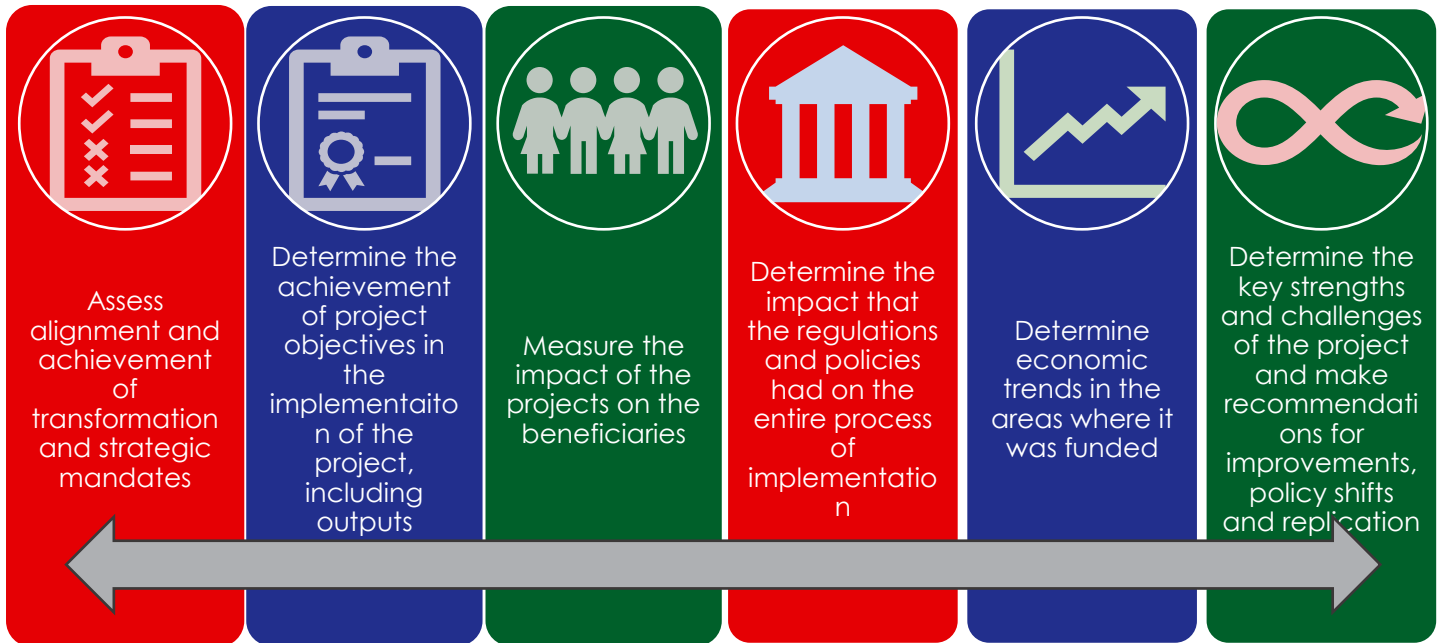


Figure 1: Evaluation objectives for the study

### 1.3. Study Methods and Approach

This section unpacks the methods through which this study examined the Rural Areas Learnership:

#### 1.3.1. Research Design

The research design is the central strategy for collecting, analysing and interpreting data for the study.

The data herein has been collected through a mixed methods design using both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. These include stakeholder interviews, focus groups and online and telephonic surveys, and desktop research.

A mixed-method approach allows various types of data sources to understand and analyse a question effectively. In this study, the use of each method has been vital to analysing the entire project. Online surveys have been used to understand the project's impact on multiple beneficiaries. In-depth interviews have also been used to understand the effectiveness and efficiency of the project, the projects impact on beneficiaries and understanding the goals and targets of W&RSETA and the NSDP III. Lastly, the use of focus group discussions has been vital to understanding the different views of the project's impacts, effectiveness and efficiency. This highlights how this study has embraced both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods to meet the evaluation objectives set out for the Rural Areas Learnership.



This study also embraces two types of triangulations for the evaluation of the project, method triangulation and data triangulation of, in this case, both primary and secondary data. Data triangulation is the collecting of data, such as both qualitative and quantitative data and analysing both, to enhance the validity and credibility of the findings. Method triangulation involves using different methodologies for data analysis and collection.

### 1.3.2. Literature Review

3. A literature review was undertaken as part of the desktop research component of this study following the study objectives. This was done to provide a context through which the remaining steps of the study can be understood. The sources included herein are, among others;

- **Project reports and associated project documents**

Project documents such as the *project progress reports*, and *closure report* was reviewed to understand the project's goals, implementation and conclusion. This also provided an opportunity to understand the challenges and strengths of the project insofar as they were recorded herein. The project outline on the SAQA website was also used to gain a better understanding of the project overall.

- **Policies and strategies**

A review of the NSDP III and W&RSETA's SSP was undertaken to understand the strategic objectives and goals of W&RSETA and provide a base of knowledge from which to analyse the alignment and responsiveness of the project to strategic mandates, transformation and set objectives.

A literature review report was produced as an interim deliverable for this study. Insights and inputs from this report are incorporated to address the objectives stated earlier.

#### 1.3.1.1. Primary Data

The primary data, which was generated and analysed within this study, was obtained in the following ways:

- **In-depth participant interviews with various stakeholders.** The project stakeholders were engaged with understanding the different role players' (training providers, beneficiaries, facilitators and mentors as well as W&RSETA) perspectives and feedback on the project overall.
- In-depth focus group discussions were also conducted with various stakeholder groups (beneficiaries and training providers) to gain insight and understanding of the project from the points of view of various role players.
  - These engagements considered the project's efficiency, in which budget, outputs, outcomes and activities and value for money were highlighted. They also discussed the effectiveness of the project, in which discussions concerning the skills training regarding its benefit, usefulness, the strengths and weaknesses of the project. Finally, the impact of the project was analysed by discussing the growth of the beneficiaries.

- **Telephonic and online surveys.** These were conducted with beneficiaries to gain a perspective on the impact of the project herein, the status of the beneficiaries both before and after the project and their perceptions of the project.

Below is a breakdown of the different participants according to the key primary data collection methods:

#### **1.3.1.2. Key Data Collection Methods and Participants**

- **Telephonic and Online Surveys**

A stratified random sampling approach was employed for the telephonic and online surveys. This means the categories are formed based on shared attributes or characteristics such as the beneficiaries' location, programme type or relevant W&R sub-sector. In this case, the shared characteristics were participation in the Rural Areas Learnership between 2018 and 2019. A sample of approximately 200 beneficiaries was drawn from the pool of Rural Area Learnership beneficiaries (459). The sample size was ultimately dependant on the correctness and availability of the contact information of the beneficiaries and host employers supplied by W&RSETA.



##### **Telephonic and Online Surveys:**

- There was a total of **200** responses received from the survey.

*Figure 2: Telephonic and online surveys*

- **Key stakeholder Interviews**



##### **Stakeholder Interviews:**

- A total of 3 interviews were held with key stakeholders of the project.
  - One key member from W&RSETA.
  - One training provider.
  - One facilitator and mentor.

*Figure 3: Stakeholder interviews*

Interviews were used to speak to key informants involved in the Rural Areas Learnership, as well as internal W&RSETA staff involved in the administration and quality assurance of the project. The sample design for the interviews was purposive sampling, where respondents/subjects were located and chosen based on their ability to provide specific information. Participants were selected and contacted based on the correctness and available and current contact information supplied by W&RSETA.

- **Key Stakeholder Focus Group Discussions**



**Stakeholder Focus Group Discussions:**

- A total of 2 focus group discussions held with key stakeholders of the project.
  - Beneficiaries (2)
  - Training Providers (2)

*Figure 4: Stakeholder focus group discussions*

Participants will be sampled using purposive sampling, where specific participants with knowledge about and experience with these programmes are invited to participate and share their feedback on the project.

## 1.4. Study limitations and mitigations

The terms of reference set out for this study provided the research parameters. This, along with some challenges experienced, culminated in the study's limitations. These limitations and mitigating measures are captured in the table below:

Limitations	Mitigations
The tracing of the study happened two years post the learnership's end. This resulted in many stakeholders not remembering the adequate details to participate or providing detailed and thorough answers to some questions.	Efforts were made to contact a larger sample of stakeholders in all areas to gain as much detailed and accurate information as possible.  Data triangulation was also used to ensure that the data was valid and plentiful.
Several stakeholders could not participate in focus group discussions due to scheduling conflicts or unwillingness to attend.	Attempts were made to reschedule at a time which was suitable for each stakeholder.  Attempts were made to widen the scope of those we invited to participate in the hopes that more individuals would be available and willing.
We were unable to contact traditional leaders and authorities to participate in interviews and focus group discussions.	Attempts were made to contact traditional leaders and authorities through email and phone calls. Attempts were also made to acquire contact details through training providers unsuccessfully.
Several stakeholders could not participate in interviews due to scheduling conflicts.	Attempts were made to reschedule at a time which was suitable for each stakeholder.  Attempts were made to widen the scope of those we invited to participate in the hopes that more individuals would be available and willing.

## Section 2: Programme description – Rural Areas Learnership (ISBP)

### 2.1. Background

The Rural Areas Learnership was a project provided by the Tourism and Business Institute of South Africa (TTBISA) and Edutel, intending to provide an opportunity for beneficiaries to obtain a National Certificate: Informal and Small Business Practice NQF Level 3 (W&RSETA, 2019). The project aimed to encourage beneficiaries to make use of the knowledge acquired through the learnership and the qualification in their own small or informal business operations and potentially translate this knowledge and experience into more extensive or more formal business contexts elsewhere and positively grow the local economies of rural areas within Mpumalanga (SAQA, n.d.).

The Rural Areas Learnership focused on the SMME landscape as it aimed to encourage individuals to venture into the SMME environment and begin their businesses or potentially grow their businesses with the skills and knowledge gained through the learnership (SAQA, n.d.). The project's main objective herein was to grow the SMME environment and facilitate skills development interventions that teach and encourage long-term, sustainable business operations within the sector. The project's end goal was to encourage beneficiaries to become long-term employers and employees within the economy and the Wholesale and Retail sector. The project also aimed to increase the beneficiaries' confidence in their business ventures and themselves (SAQA, n.d.).

### 2.2. Structure

The Rural Areas Learnership was designed so that the knowledge obtained through this qualification was fundamental and could be related to broader business contexts. Knowledge could also be built upon through additional courses (SAQA, n.d.). As such, the project was structured so that it formed a pathway from an NQF level 02 qualification to an NQF level 05 qualification. This learnership culminates in 120 credits, and the beneficiaries were required to complete both the core (64 credits) and the total (36 credits) components, as well as the elective portion of the course, to obtain the necessary credits and receive a qualification which is nationally recognised (SAQA, n.d.). This course also made up the prerequisite requirements for other qualifications in the same field but of a higher level, which allowed beneficiaries to expand and grow their expertise and skills further, beginning with this qualification (Edutel, 2020).

This learnership was primarily a workplace-based qualification. However, this learnership comprised both a theoretical and a practical element; the assessment of beneficiaries occurred through two primary mechanisms: the completion of a knowledge-based test and the submission of evidence portfolios (SAQA, n.d.). Overall, to encourage fairness and equal opportunity within the learning process, the learnership embraced an integrated assessment model. This enhanced the beneficiary's ability to combine different areas of learning and demonstrate the ability to translate theoretical learning into a practical environment and produce a high standard of work herein (SAQA, n.d.).



Thus the programme was conducted in such a way that it allowed beneficiaries to start and maintain their small businesses with the help of a facilitator and mentor as a means to learn more about navigating the Wholesale and Retail sector as well as the SMME environment and all that this entails..

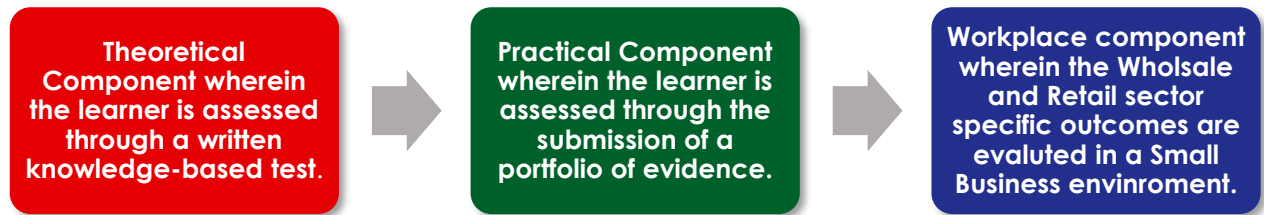


Figure 5: Structure of the Rural Areas Learnership

This learnership also functioned on a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) basis. This means that beneficiaries could achieve the relevant qualification either fully or partially through RPL (SAQA, n.d.). Recognition of prior learning is a process through which informal learning obtained across various contexts is measured and recognised (SAQA, 2020). In the case of RPL, previously gained learning and experience are recognised and certified against the relevant requirements for credit, inclusion or advancement in the formal education and training environment (SAQA, 2020). As such, in the case of the Rural Areas Learnership, previous learning was to the beneficiary's benefit. The NQF Level 3 qualification could be achieved insofar as beneficiaries were able to prove that they could express knowledge of, and competency in the units and outcomes of the course, as a result of prior credits and learning achieved through experience and learning in the workplace (SAQA, n.d.). Herein, beneficiaries were required to produce this evidence in the form of a Portfolio of Evidence to be assessed for RPL (SAQA, n.d.).

### 2.3. Preliminary Impacts

The importance of skills development is highlighted in understanding the significance of the small, medium, and micro enterprise (SMME) environment in terms of job creation, with the SMME environment representing up to 99% of the Wholesale and Retail sector (SAQA, n.d.). As an ever-increasing number of individuals begin their business ventures, the SMME environment is considered the central focus for employment opportunities in the sector (SAQA, n.d.). This means that it is vital to consider the relevance of the SMME environment and the importance of skills development within to encourage successful and viable business ventures within the sector (SAQA, n.d.).

The Rural Areas Learnership aimed to encourage beneficiaries to use the knowledge acquired through the learnership and the qualification in their own small or informal business operations and translate this knowledge and experience into larger or business contexts elsewhere (SAQA, n.d.).

The project exhibited several positive impacts for various stakeholders:

Table 1: Positive impacts of the Rural Areas Learnership

Stakeholders	Positive Impact
<b>Learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Good beneficiary engagement and retention throughout the learnership.</li> <li>✓ Successful knowledge gained and applied as exhibited through the businesses produced.</li> <li>✓ The completion of the learnership in the allocated time frame of 12 months.</li> </ul>
<b>W&amp;RSETA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Positive impact on the beneficiaries of the learnership.</li> <li>✓ The creation of small businesses and therefore active engagement in the economy resulted from this learnership.</li> <li>✓ Functional relationships are established with local leaders throughout the learnership (W&amp;RSETA, 2019).</li> </ul>
<b>Industry</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Opens opportunities for job and career creation.</li> <li>✓ Encourages increased business success in the Wholesale and Retail sector.</li> <li>✓ Encourages long-term business sustainability in the Wholesale and Retail sector.</li> </ul>

## 2.4. Alignment with Objectives

As previously noted, one of the main objectives of the W&RSETA is to develop a skilled and well-trained workforce to transform the Wholesale and retail sector (W&RSETA, 2022). In the 2018 annual report, the W&RSETA laid out several goals to effectively achieve this mission. These include:

- Produce a well-trained and competent workforce in the Wholesale and retail sector.
- Effectively and efficiently uphold and seek to achieve the goals set out in the Strategic Plan.
- Participate in mutually beneficial partnerships with stakeholders.
- Produce capable and engaging training providers who can effectively accommodate the sector's needs.

The NSDS III directs W&RSETA in terms of the main framework for setting goals and strategic objectives to follow and meet. The NSDS III is concerned with skills development and career development, making a clear connection between skills training and sector needs and creating employment opportunities and opportunities for growth within employment (DHET, 2011).

The NSDS III has some goals which are relevant in ensuring the quality, longevity and significance of skills training provided in all sectors. These include (DHET, 2011):

- Establishing a reliable and relevant mechanism for skills planning.
- Expanding access to occupational programmes for beneficiaries.
- Expanding the public FET college system, which is well-informed of the sector, local, regional, and national skills needs and requirements.

- To encourages more training opportunities in addressing the low level of numeracy and literacy skills in the youth and adults
- Encouraging improved workplace-based skills development.
- Working with cooperatives, small businesses, NGOs, community-based and worker-initiated training schemes, and programmes.
- Growing career and vocational guidance.

The Rural Areas Learnership is aligned with several strategic goals and objectives; the four primary NSDS III targets with which this project aligns are:

*Table 2: Alignment of the Rural Areas Learnership with policies*

NSDS III Target	NSDS III Outcome	Output
4.2: Increasing access to occupationally directed programmes.	4.2.1: Middle-level skills requirements are recognised and addressed in all sectors.	4.2.1.1: SETAs recognise middle-level skills requirements and address them strategically through education and training facilities and with workplaces for practical exposure.
4.3: Expanding the public TVET system for sector, local, regional, and national needs requirements.	4.3.2: Industry needs are met through active partnerships between SETAs, DHET, employers and education and training institutions.	
4.5: Encouraging more efficient and effective use of workplace skills development.	4.5.1: Ensuring the training of employed workers addresses skills needs within the sector, enabling enhanced productivity and economic growth and improving the capacity of the work force to respond to changes in the labour market.	4.5.1.1: SETA stakeholders agree to ensure quality and good training programmes are provided to employed workers and to monitor the impact of the training. 4.5.1.2: Sector skills gaps are noted, and relevant projects are implemented to address them.
4.6: Encouraging and assisting small enterprises, cooperatives and worker-initiated NGO and community training initiatives.	4.6.2: Partnership projects are established with small businesses in mind, training and development support is provided, and the impact is reported.	4.6.1.2: The National Skills Framework (NSF) establishes and supports sector skills projects.

The project also aligns with the W&RSETAs goals and strategic outcomes as per the W&RSETA Strategic Plan:

**Goal 1:** Establishing a skilled and competent Wholesale and Retail sector workforce.

**Goal 2:** A skilled, lively SMME and cooperative sector.

**Goal 3:** Addressing historical imbalances in the wholesale and retail sectors.

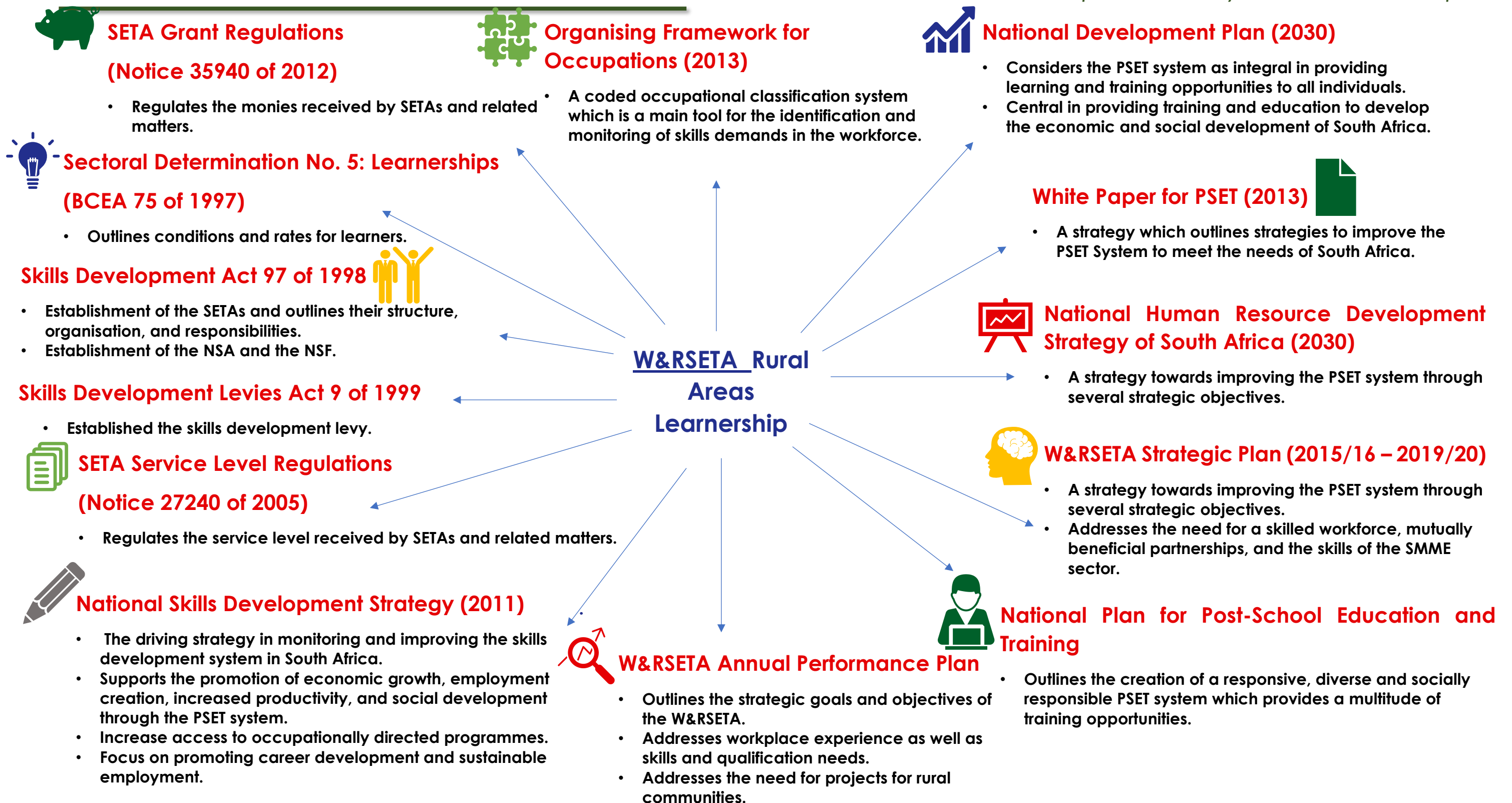


Figure 6: Policy Framework for the Rural Areas Learnership



## **2.5. Theory of Change**

The Theory of Change is outlined in this section of the report. The Theory of Change can be understood as a guideline for understanding the journey to achieving the project's goal. This is achieved by outlining the steps between the initial problem statement and the goal.

A Theory of Change is a comprehensive explanation of how change happens within the context of a project. It fills in the missing steps between the beginning and end of a project. It considers the different aspects of the project in more in-depth detail, for example, the projects' activities and assumptions necessary for final change to occur. The theory of change does this by outlining the project's ultimate goal and working its way backwards understanding outcomes and activities of the project. It understands how these relate causally for change to occur.

The following diagram outlines the Theory of Change in Rural Areas Learnership. It considers the steps between the problem statement and the project's goal respectively, and the elements needed for change to occur.

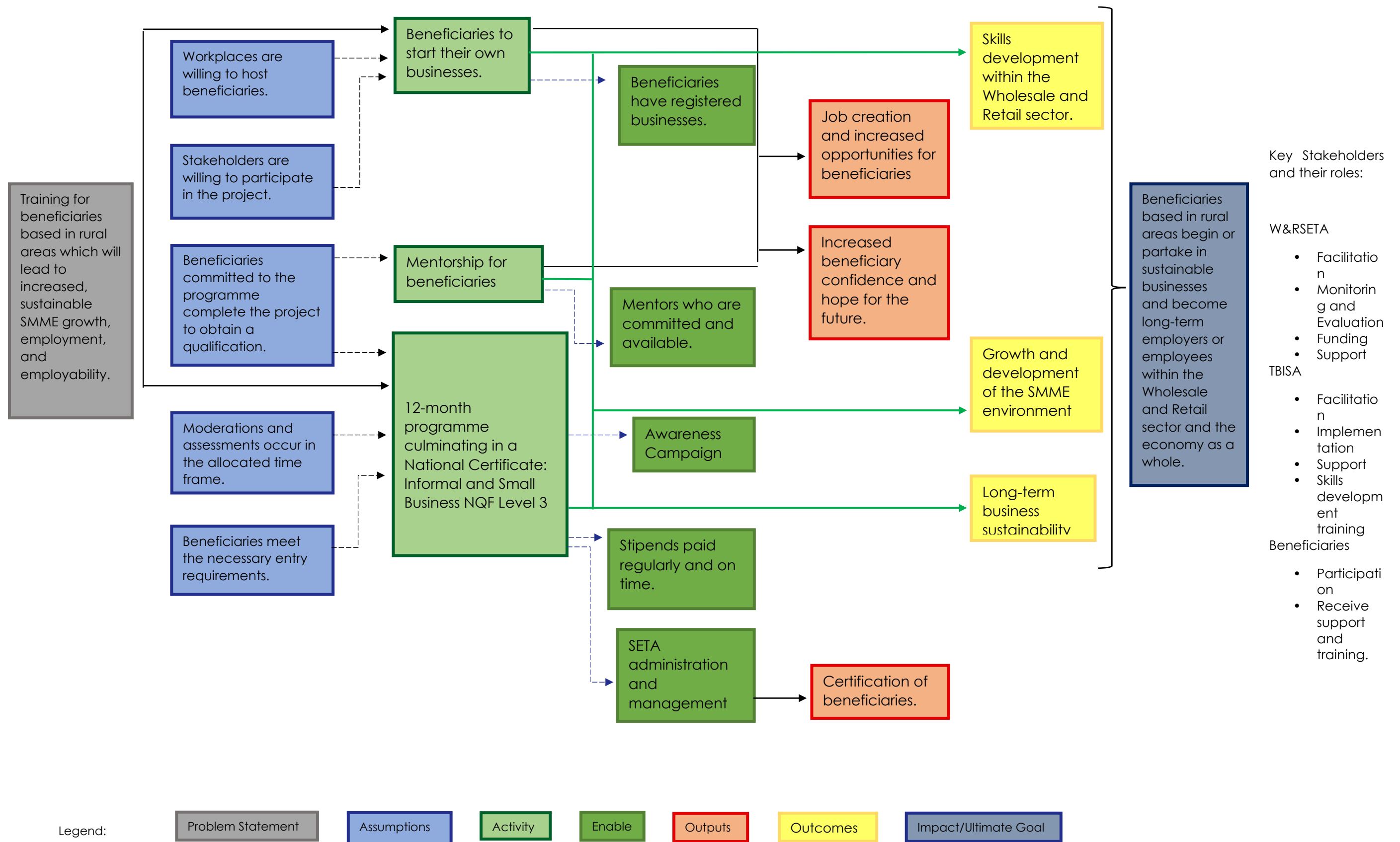


Figure 7: Theory of Change for the Rural Areas Learnership

## 2.6. Evaluation Framework

The evaluation framework of this study is paramount to providing the guidance through which the study is enacted and achieved. This includes the Theory of Change, which analyses the project; the Policy framework, with which the alignment of the project with strategic objectives and mandates is investigated, and the different key stakeholders within the project. The objectives and goals of the project, both long and short-term, are also analysed to provide a thorough and accurate evaluation of the project at hand, in this case, the Rural Areas Learnership.

The evaluation framework involves understanding the project context, which is central to providing an evaluation herein. The evaluation framework lays out the activities, long and short-term outcomes of the project, and the goal of the project. This enables an accurate evaluation as it is only with such understanding that the study can consider project goals and impact fully and completely.

The evaluation framework for this study is set out below:

Category	Research question
<b>1. Problem Statement</b>	
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is the context within which the programme was implemented?</li> <li>What are the goals/mandates/strategic objectives with which this programme aligns?</li> <li>What are the rationales of the goals/mandates/strategic objectives with which this programme aligns?</li> </ul>
Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What approach does the W&amp;RSETA follow in identifying and understanding rural-related needs?</li> <li>What role does the W&amp;RSETA play in identifying and understanding skills needs in rural communities?</li> </ul> <p>Who are the key stakeholders in the programme?</p>
<b>2. Theory of Change</b>	
Intention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the immediate outcomes of the Project?</li> <li>What does the Rural Areas Learnership contribute towards or achieve?</li> <li>What outputs result from this programme?</li> </ul> <p>What activities form part of the programme?</p>
Translation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Did the programme produce the outputs, outcomes and ultimate goals intended upon their inception?</li> <li>Did the programme's outputs translate to the intended outcomes and, finally, the goal?</li> <li>Did the activities of the programme result in any foreseen benefits for beneficiaries?</li> </ul> <p>Did the activities in the programme result in any unforeseen negative results for the beneficiaries?</p>
<b>3. Effectiveness of Interventions</b>	

Inputs, Activities and Outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What activities were undertaken within the programme? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Did they occur as intended?</li> <li>Was anything done differently?</li> <li>What caused this variation?</li> </ul> </li> <li>What were outputs achieved as a result of the activities performed? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Did they occur as intended?</li> <li>Was anything done differently?</li> <li>What caused this variation?</li> </ul> </li> <li>What were the outcomes of the project?</li> <li>What were the outcomes of the project to their intended outcomes?</li> <li>What did the programme achieve?</li> </ul>
Strengths and Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What were the strengths of the programme?</li> <li>What were the weaknesses of the programme?</li> <li>Are there any opportunities to improve upon challenges experienced within the programme?</li> <li>Are there any strengths or 'best behaviours' to replicate in other programmes?</li> <li>How can the efficiency and effectiveness of the programme be improved upon?</li> </ul>
<b>4. Efficiency of Interventions</b>	
Expenditure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What were the costs of implementing the programme?</li> <li>Did the programme exhibit value for money based on their outcomes and budgets?</li> </ul>
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the overall social benefits of the programme?</li> <li>What are they overall economic benefits of the programme?</li> <li>What are the benefits of the programme on the interventions for beneficiaries? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In rural communities?</li> <li>For youth?</li> <li>For SMMEs</li> <li>In terms of income?</li> <li>In terms of employment?</li> <li>In terms of the local economy?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What can be done to improve the programme? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In terms of efficiency?</li> <li>In terms of effectiveness?</li> <li>In terms of impact?</li> <li>In terms of the sustainability of the programmes?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>5. Impact on beneficiaries</b>	
Demographics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What were the characteristics of the beneficiaries before and after the programme? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Place of residence?</li> <li>Personal income?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Employment status?</li> <li>o Level of education?</li> </ul>
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What kind of programme took place?</li> <li>• What NQF Level did it offer?</li> <li>• What kind of skills were obtained?</li> <li>• Did beneficiaries complete the programme?</li> <li>• How long did this take?</li> <li>• Did beneficiaries enrol for further qualifications after the programme?</li> </ul>
Impact on beneficiary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What were the programme's impacts on the socio-economic standing of the beneficiary's household? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Employment status following the programme?</li> <li>o Time period?</li> <li>o Career progression following the programme?</li> <li>o Income following the programme?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• When did these changes take place concerning the programme?</li> <li>• Were the changes a result of the programme (in line)?</li> <li>• Expand on the changes in income following the programme.</li> <li>• Did the abilities of the beneficiaries change following the programme?</li> </ul>
Impact on livelihood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What were the characteristics of the household before the programme? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Size of the household?</li> <li>o Number of working-age members?</li> <li>o Number of employed members.</li> <li>o Household income?</li> <li>o The primary source of income?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How has the livelihood of the beneficiaries changed following the programme? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o How has the financial situation changed following the programme?</li> <li>o How has the household income changed following the programme?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>6. Perceptions of beneficiaries</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the perceptions of the beneficiaries on the programme?</li> <li>• Did the programme provide skills?</li> <li>• Did the programme provide opportunities?</li> </ul>



## Section 3: Assessment of programme performance

This chapter assesses the project's performance to the following four parameters.

- The project's relevance is in line with the objectives set out for the programme.
- Impact of the programme on beneficiaries
- Effectiveness of the programme in achieving the objectives of the programme
- The efficiency of the programme in terms of funding and implementation aspects

The project's performance is assessed to thoroughly analyse the Rural Areas Learnership as it relates to the study objectives. This is necessary to fully understand the impact, effectiveness, and efficiency, as well as its strengths and weaknesses, in the broader context of South Africa. This will provide appropriate and applicable recommendations for future projects.

### 3.1. Relevance of the Rural Areas Learnership.

This sub-section displays the degree of alignment with the programme's rationale against the project's actual performance. This section will consider the profile of the beneficiaries following the project objectives to analyse the impact of the Rural Areas Learnership on beneficiaries' livelihoods and the communities within which the beneficiaries reside and the local economies herein.

#### 3.1.1. Profile of the Beneficiaries

The project was facilitated by two training providers, Edutel and TTBISA, who each provided the skills training. Of the total of beneficiaries who completed the survey, 2% were unsure which training provider they completed the project with. This is significant as, according to the project's rationale, a significant goal was to expand the public TVET system for the sector, local, regional, and national needs requirements. This indicates that the project has successfully expanded the training available for local and national needs within South Africa.

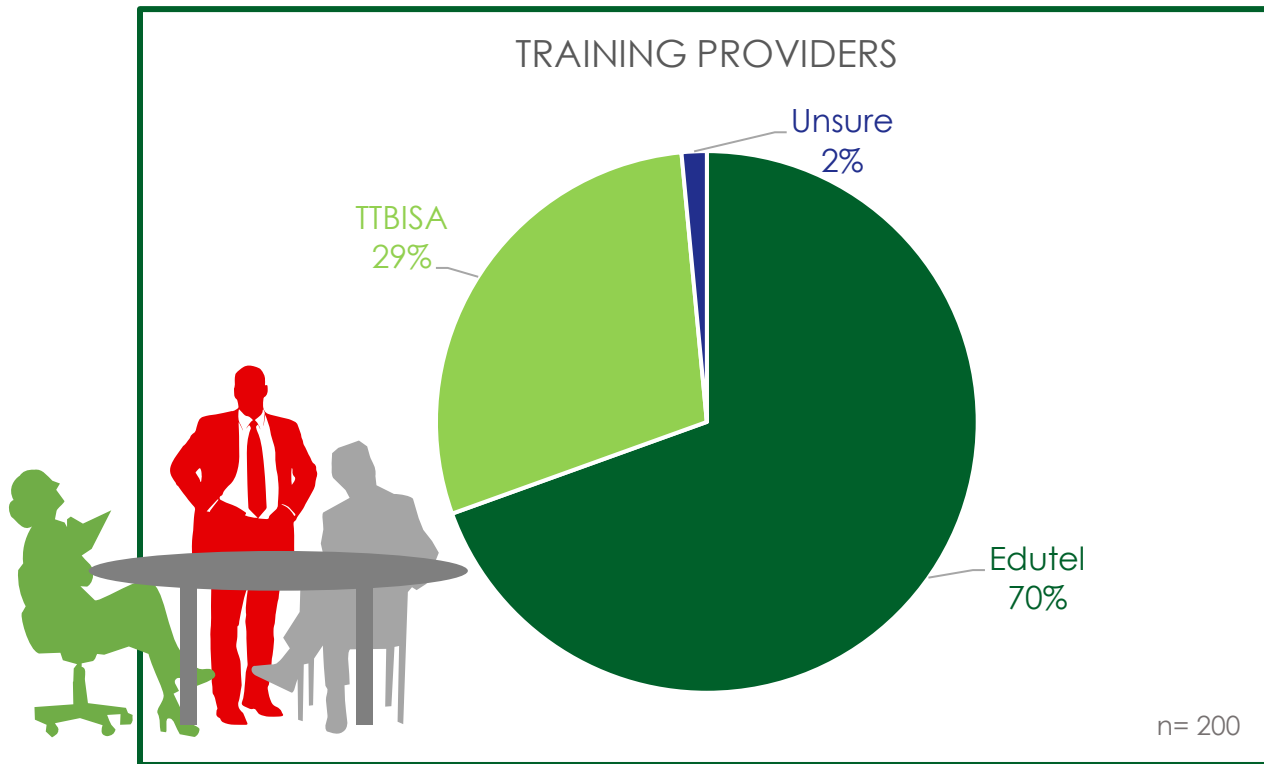


Figure 8: Training providers of the Rural Areas Learnership

A goal of the Rural Areas Learnership was to enable individuals in rural areas to obtain a qualification. The highest level of education of the beneficiaries before the Rural Areas Learnership has been detailed in the bar graph below. The most prominent qualification (72%) held by the beneficiaries of the Rural Areas Learnership before the learnership was a matric/grade 12 qualification. This is significant because, as a result of this project, the education level of 457 beneficiaries has increased to an NQF Level 3 Qualification. This was an outstanding result on the part of the project, training providers and W&RSETA, as the number of beneficiaries funded and completed is almost 100% and only two beneficiaries not yet completed.

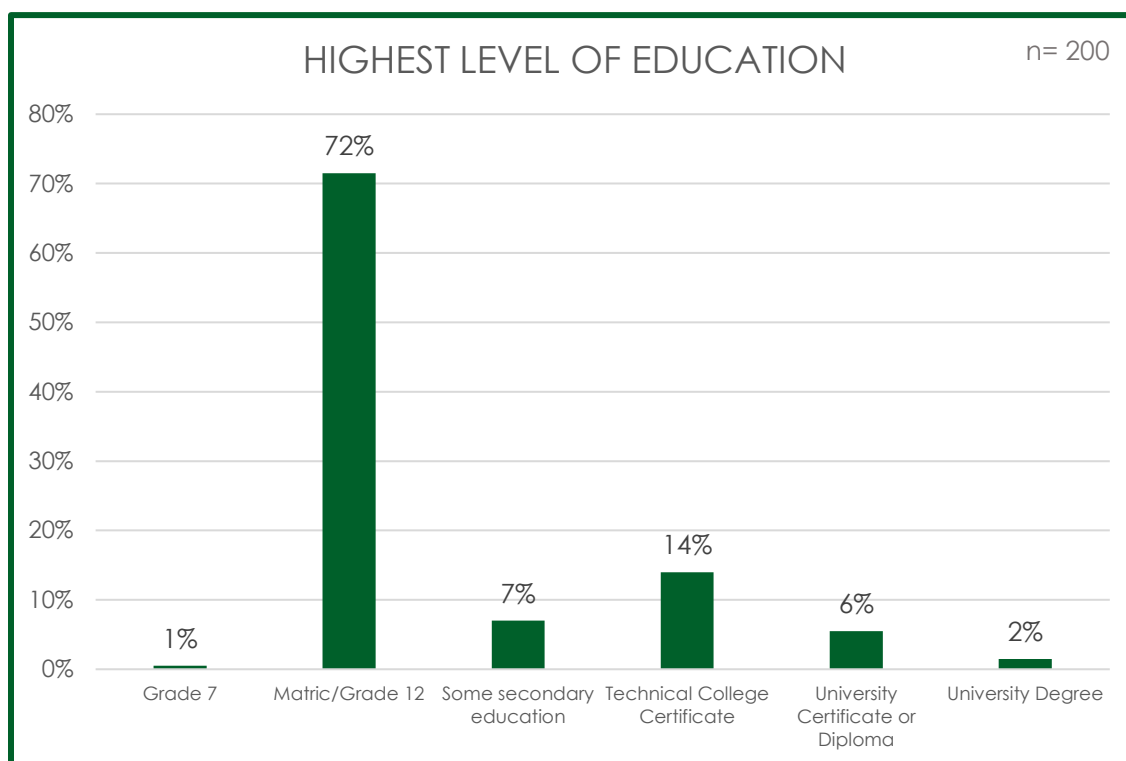


Figure 9: Highest level of education of beneficiaries

In terms of how the beneficiaries came to know about the Rural Areas Learnership, it is shown through the survey data that **49%** of beneficiaries came to know about this project from **community contacts**, such as community/WhatsApp groups, community meetings, and community/council members. This indicates the significant presence of social media as well, as WhatsApp is a prominent source of information. This can also be noted for future contact purposes on that part of W&RSETA. Additionally, several beneficiaries learnt about the project through the traditional authorities and leaders **14%**. This is notable because this played a prominent role in the project overall. The community's involvement not only provided spaces within which to train beneficiaries but also provided accountability for the beneficiaries. This was also achieved through communication and connection with traditional leaders and authorities within the project, who kept beneficiaries on track throughout the project's facilitation.

Additional demographic signifiers of the beneficiaries have also been outlined in the study. The **median age** of the beneficiaries participating in the Rural Areas Learnership is **29 years old**. This indicates the age group targeted by this project as the project was open to all individuals, and not only youth formed part of the beneficiaries. The project aimed to encourage a range of individuals within rural areas to enter the SMME environment for secure employment per the goal of encouraging and assisting small enterprises, cooperatives and worker-initiated NGO and community training initiatives.

The race profile of the beneficiaries who participated in the Rural Areas Learnership was **100% black African**, and the nationality of the beneficiaries was **100% South African**. This is notable concerning South Africa's history and the country's historical imbalances. A primary strategic

goal of the W&RSETA is addressing historic imbalances within the wholesale and retail sectors. The Rural Areas Learnership, aims to consider such imbalances and open up opportunities for vulnerable individuals to benefit from the sector in terms of skills and employment or self-employment.

### **3.2. Impact of the Rural Areas Learnership.**

This project was born from the need of the hope to provide business-based knowledge to individuals in rural areas to enable beneficiaries to start and run their sustainable businesses or apply their skills to other business contexts and build up or contribute to the local economy in rural areas of South Africa. Therefore, the project provides an avenue for employment and self-employment for beneficiaries who may not have had such opportunities otherwise, which has a positive impact on growing local economies.

Regarding the impact of the Rural Areas Learnership, the study first considered the livelihood of the beneficiaries before and after the Rural Areas Learnership. This has been achieved through telephonic and online surveys, as well as a focus group discussion with beneficiaries of the learnership.



A total number of **200 individuals** were contacted through the online and telephonic survey based on the databases for each training provider, which was provided by W&RSETA on the outset of the project.

The impact of the Rural Areas Learnership on beneficiaries analysis the overall enrolments of the project and the subsequent number of beneficiaries who successfully achieved the qualification. The total number of beneficiaries enrolled in the project, as per the databases provided by W&RSETA, is 459. The project culminated in **457 beneficiaries completing the training programme**. This indicates a **99% achievement rate** from the project. Indicating a positive rate from the Rural Areas Learnership. It also shows a very positive impact on the beneficiaries, as the project has provided 457 beneficiaries with an NQF Level 3 Qualification.



The impact of the Rural Areas Learnership on beneficiaries is informed by the profile in several areas. The household (employment and income), the location (province and municipality) and the role (i.e. sole breadwinner, co-breadwinner, dependant etc.) along with other parameters, both before and after the project. This allows the study to investigate whether the beneficiaries have had the opportunity to move outwards participating more in the economy and society and whether their businesses have been sustainable and successful. Herein, inferences can be drawn between the current livelihood of the beneficiaries and their participation in the Rural Areas Learnership based on an analysis of their livelihood both before and after the completion of the project.

To fully consider the potential growth of the beneficiaries socially and economically, several aspects of livelihood were analysed. The **median size of the household before the Rural Areas Learnership was 6, which remained the same** post learnership. The **median number of employed members per household before the learnership was 0**; this did not change post-learnership and **remained with 0** members employed per household. This does not indicate a wholly positive impact on this aspect of the learnership. However, since this project focussed on encouraging individuals to start their own businesses ventures, it is plausible that the beneficiaries of the project are remaining within the household to receive support whilst their businesses are still in their infancy phase, as this can be a challenging process.

According to the database provided by W&RSETA, before the project, **100%** of the beneficiaries who participated in the Rural Areas Learnership Project resided in **Mpumalanga**. It has been deduced from the survey data that after the project's completion, approximately **98% of the beneficiaries continued to reside in Mpumalanga**, and most of the beneficiaries **remained in their original municipalities** after completing the learnership. Alternatively, 4% moved elsewhere,

namely: The Eastern Cape (1%), the Western Cape (1%) and Gauteng (2%). According to the survey data, most beneficiaries who have moved elsewhere have done so for work, and one beneficiary is currently studying.

The area description of the areas in which the beneficiaries reside was also noted in the study to analyse the movement of the beneficiaries post-learnership:

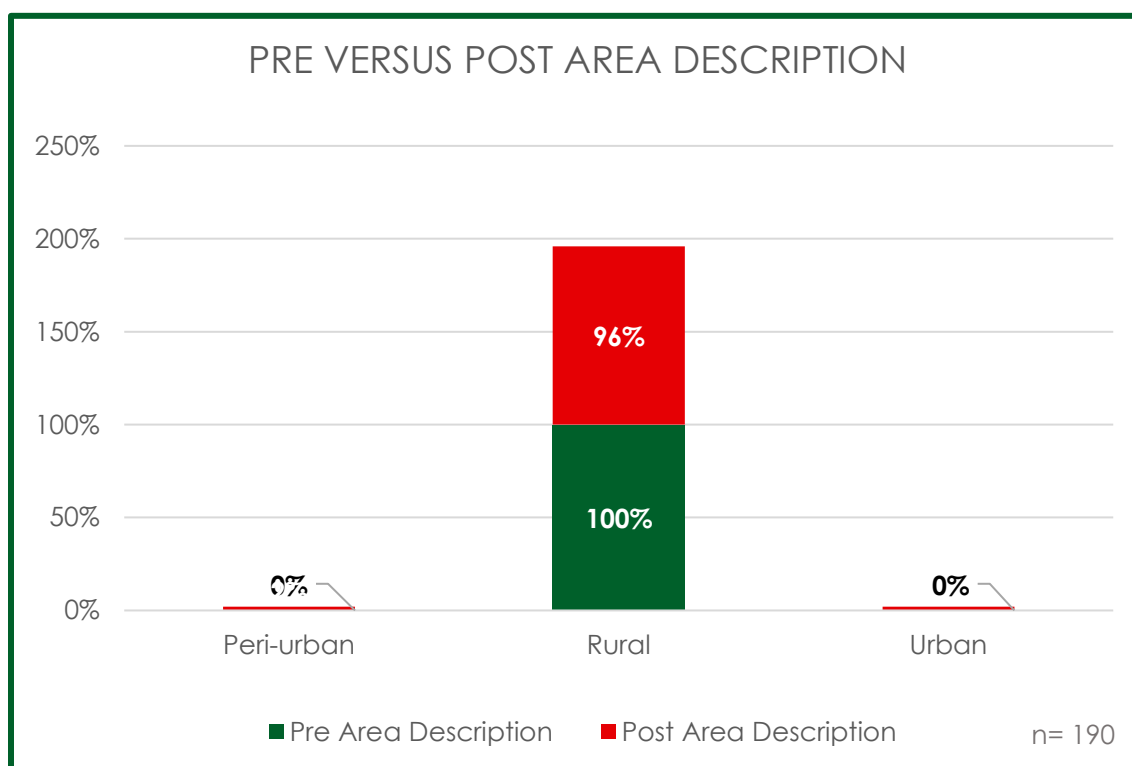


Figure 10: Pre versus post area description

As can be seen in the graph, **96%** of the beneficiaries said that after the learnership, they resided in a **rural area**. Notably, prior to the learnership which was **100%**. The percentage of beneficiaries who resided in peri-urban and urban areas was 0% respectively.

This indicates that **none of the beneficiaries had moved out of a rural area after the completion of the project**. However, it is important to note that the goal of the project focused on starting small businesses and participating in local, rural economies.



A major goal of the project was to encourage individuals to start their businesses within their communities and encourage growth in local rural economies. The fact that most of the beneficiaries have continued to reside in the same areas is significant as it indicates a positive impact of the project on local economies. This is a possible positive aspect of beneficiaries remaining in Mpumalanga after the closure of the project.

A comparison of the beneficiary's role in the household (no dependents, sole-breadwinner, co-breadwinner, dependent) was also analysed to consider economic growth among the beneficiaries. The data indicates the number of beneficiaries who were the **sole breadwinner** of their household **decreased from 23% by one percent to 22%** after the learnership. The number of beneficiaries who were the **co-breadwinner** of their household **has stayed at 43%** after the learnership. This indicates a positive impact as this implies a stable income level on their part and, thus, an ability to contribute to the household. Additionally, the number of beneficiaries who were **dependents within their household increased by six percent to 33%**. Herein it must be noted that this could be attributed to the challenges of running a small business. The beneficiaries may need additional support from the family whilst their businesses are growing.

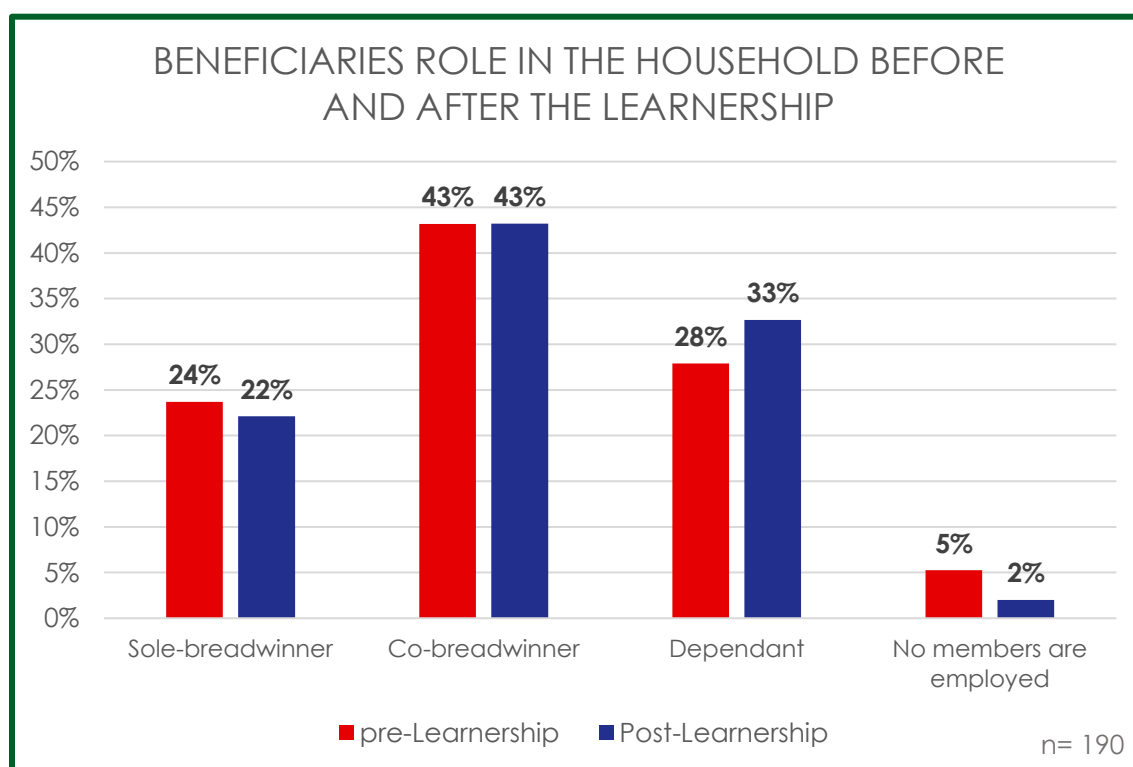
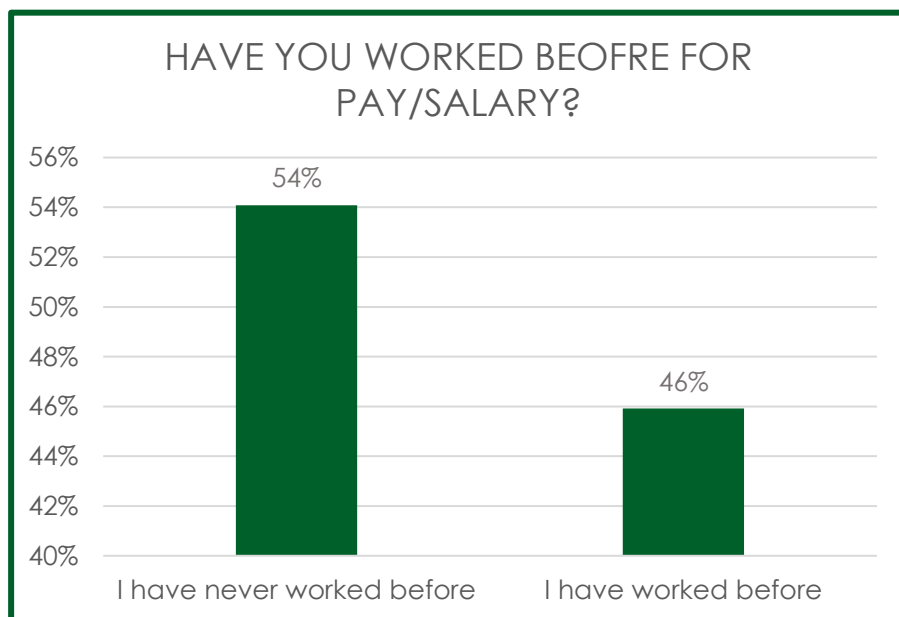


Figure 11: The role of beneficiaries in the household before and after the learnership

Along with this, the employment status of the beneficiaries was investigated to understand whether the Rural Areas Learnership can be attributed to helping beneficiaries search for secure employment or successfully start and run their businesses. Before the commencement of the learnership, the survey data notes that **80%** of beneficiaries had been **unemployed** for more than two years at the time of application.





The survey indicated, however that 46% of beneficiaries notes that they had worked before per pay or salary.

Figure 12: Worked before for pay/salary.

At the time of application for the project, **80% of beneficiaries were reportedly unemployed**. After the learnership, this number **decreased to 54%** of beneficiaries not working. Currently, **16% (32 beneficiaries) work full-time or part-time**, and **28% (56 beneficiaries) are self-employed**. This indicates the project's positive impact as many beneficiaries have been provided with the necessary skills to seek and obtain work. Of those beneficiaries, only **16% are employed in the wholesale and retail sectors**. Beneficiaries' primary reason for not being employed in the Wholesale and Retail sector is the lack of opportunities within the sector (**81%**).

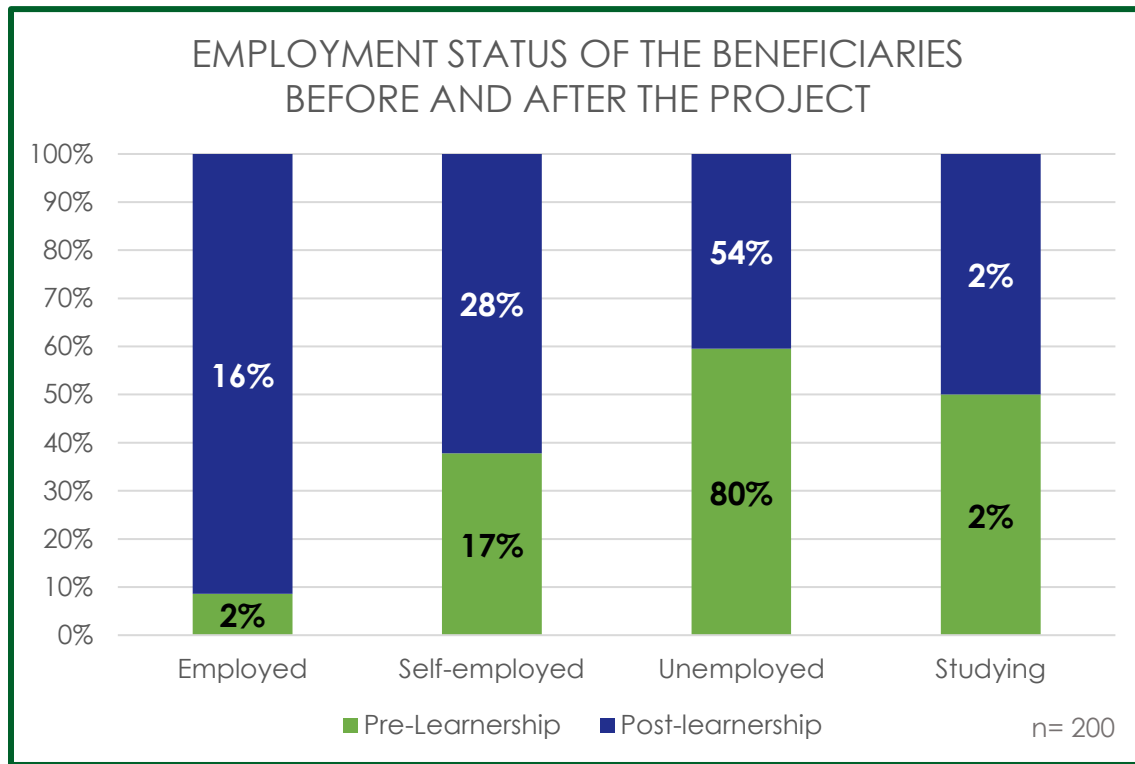


Figure 13: Employment status of the beneficiaries before and after the learnership

The increase in employment and self-employment after the learnership also indicates a positive impact of the project, not only for the beneficiaries but also for the local economy/community. This is because the local communities of the beneficiaries benefit from the stimulation of the economy.

The number of beneficiaries who are currently **self-employed (28%)** also indicates the positive impact of the Rural Areas Learnership, as the principles taught are relevant to starting and running a successful business. Additionally, in the focus group discussion held with beneficiaries,, all three participating beneficiaries' businesses reported that they are running their businesses successfully and producing a stable income. It was shared by the beneficiaries that they were expanding their businesses and producing income. This is positive as it indicates stable income for the beneficiaries and the local economies wherein they reside.

A positive impact was also gained from employment income, such as wages/salaries and commissions, on the local economy and community. This was a central goal of the project and thus indicates success. Many stakeholders also noted the positivity of the income gained from the project. For example, the stipends received throughout the learnership helped beneficiaries support their families and contribute to the local economy. Overall, The median personal income of beneficiaries is **R1403 per month**.

In the survey, four main reasons for part-time employment emerged. The most common reason was the inability to find full time work, this was followed closely by being hired on a fixed-term contract. The remaining two reasons were being on probation at a workplace and awaiting results from a learnership.

The primary source of monthly household income pre and post learnership was also considered, along with the monthly household income in ranges. This was to gain a better understanding of the livelihood of the beneficiaries and their families before and after the Rural Areas Learnership.

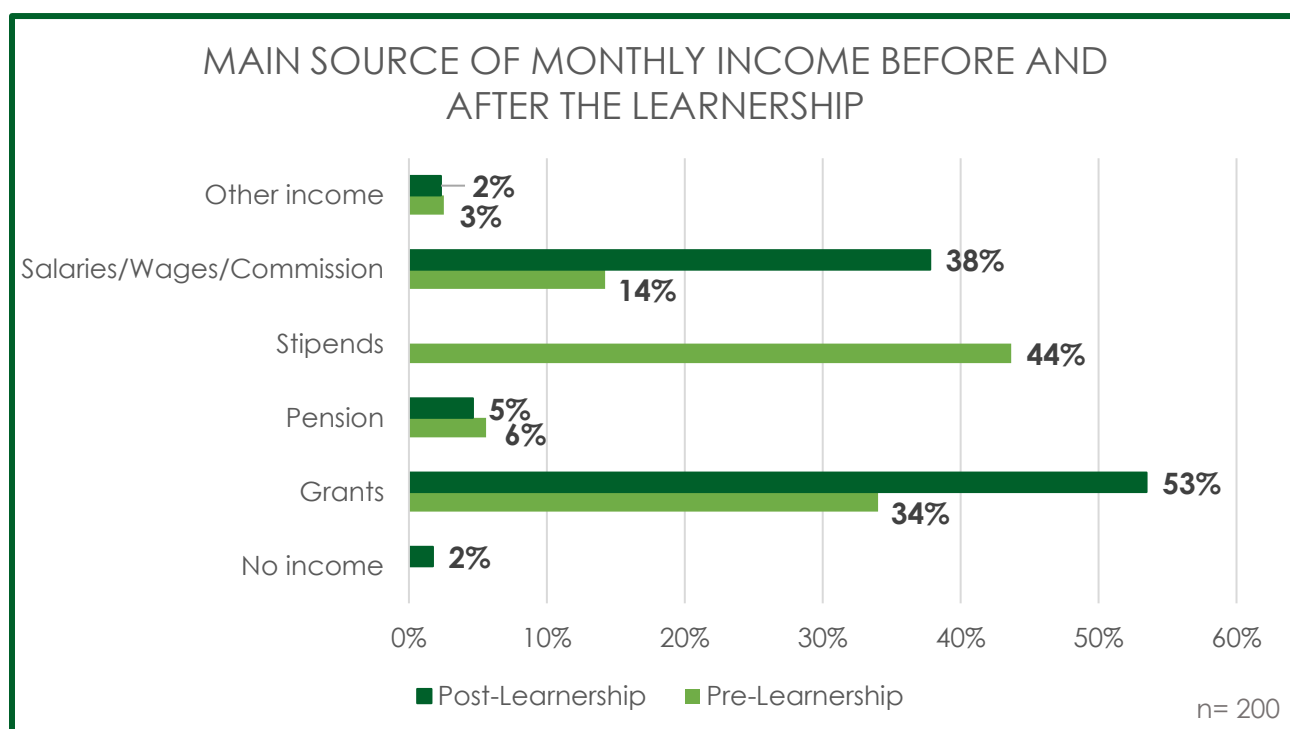


Figure 14: The primary source of monthly income before and after the learnership

The graph above shows that the primary source of monthly income pre-learnership was **stipends (43%)** and **grants (34%)**. **Salaries and commission** followed at only **14%**. After the learnership, however, this number (salaries and commission) **raised to 38%**, followed closely **by grants at 46%**. A significant positive impact is seen herein, as the number of households whose monthly income came from salaries/wages or commissions increased by 24% after the learnership. This indicates an overall increase in stable income due to the Rural Areas Learnership.

The household's gross monthly income was analysed, and it was noted that the most common income range per household was between **R3 201 – R6 400 at 48%**. This number **dropped post-learnership to 32%** of households earning between R3 201 – R6 400 and 36% earning between R1 601 – R3 200. The median monthly household income rose from **R829 to R1237**, which indicates a positive impact of the learnership in the overall income of households. Perhaps by providing a means for opportunity on the part of the beneficiaries ,thus, an increase in income.

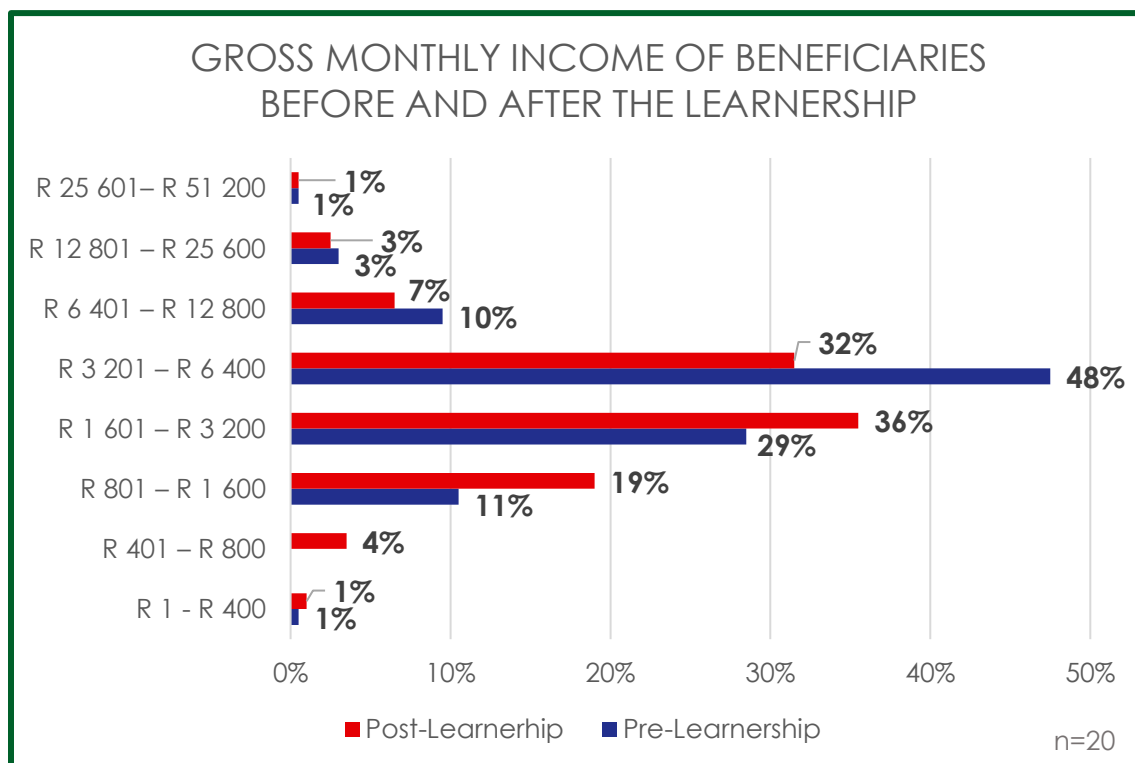


Figure 15: Gross monthly income of households before and after the learnership

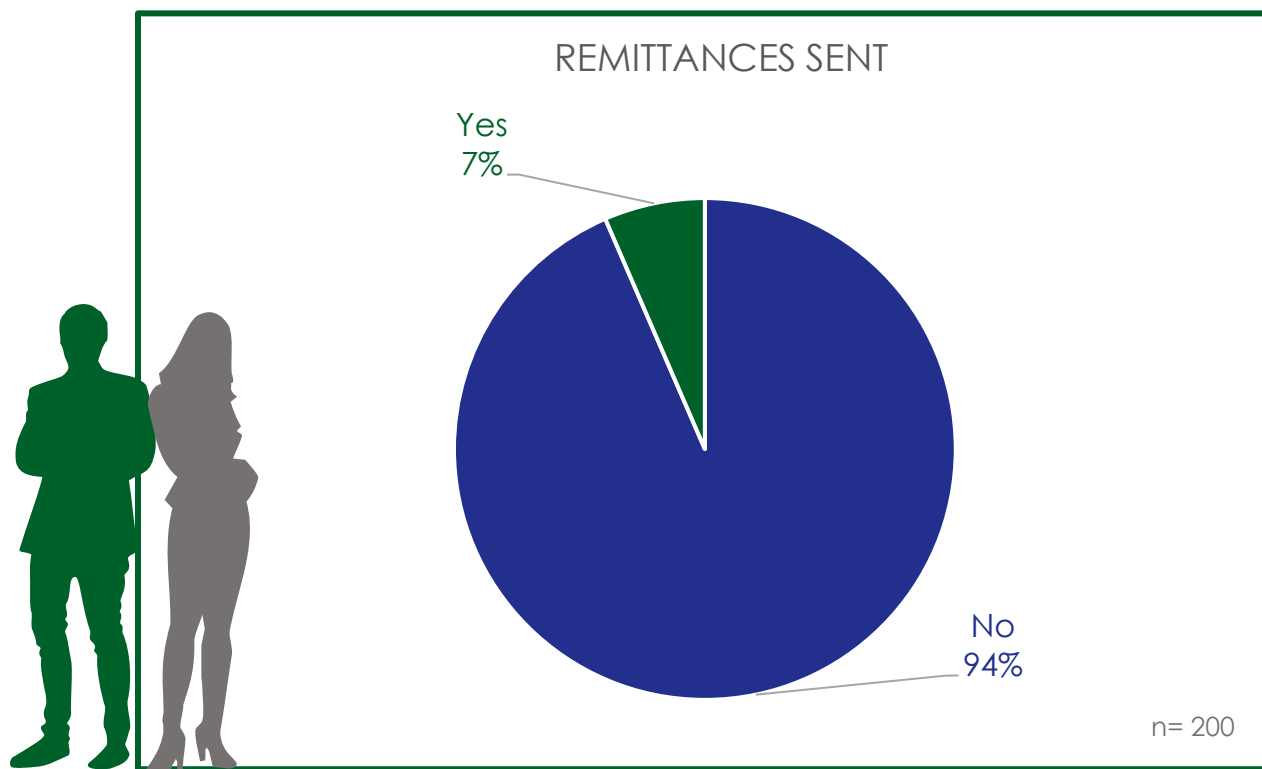


Figure 16: Remittances sent by beneficiaries.

Lastly, to ascertain the broader impact of the Rural Areas Learnership on the communities of the beneficiaries and the surrounding economy, the beneficiaries were asked whether they sent remittances to family and friends. Only **7%** of beneficiaries noted that they send remittances, and the **median amount herein was R500**. This shows a somewhat positive impact in the broader community and economy due to the learnership.

### **3.3. Effectiveness of the Rural Areas Learnership**

The effectiveness of the Rural Areas Learnership can be understood in terms of the outputs, outcomes, and key achievements of the project. In order to achieve this, an understanding of the goals of the project must be confirmed. Herein the study analyses the extent to which the project achieved the goals and strategic objectives laid out by the W&RSETA SSP, the NSDS III and the project goals outlined at the outset of the project.

#### **3.2.1. Skills and Qualifications provided in the Rural Areas Learnership**

One of the main goals in the project documents and stipulated by the SAQA website outline was to provide beneficiaries with a Wholesale and Retail NQF Level 3 Informal Small Business Qualification. The project reports and the beneficiary database provided by W&RSETA outline **457 beneficiaries who have achieved this qualification**, and two are yet to do so (listed on the database as 'enrolled'). This culminates in a total of **99% success** in attaining a qualification which is a powerful output from the project overall.

#### **3.2.2. Skills landscape attributes to the SMME Environment**

Another goal for the Rural Areas Learnership is to **create a skills landscape which attributes to the SMME environment**, particularly in smaller, rural areas in Mpumalanga, and contributes to the local economy herein. There was a definite consensus in interviews and focus group discussions that the local economy within the areas of the project has benefitted from the Rural Areas Learnership. This is due at the time of the project's implementation. Additionally, evidence from the survey shows that several small businesses started either during or after the project based on the skills learned, which are currently running and thus contributing to the local economy.

As seen in the graphs above, when asked whether the Rural Areas Learnership has **prepared them to start and run a small business**, **92%** of beneficiaries said 'yes'. Additionally, **68%** of beneficiaries said that the learnership **provided them with more career opportunities** in the future. In interviews and focus group discussions with beneficiaries and mentors/facilitators of the project, it came out that this learnership has done a lot in preparing individuals to start and run their small businesses. The feedback gained from all stakeholders, W&RSETA included, was very positive. Particularly in terms of the project's beneficiaries, they noted that the project prepared beneficiaries very well for their business ventures.

#### **3.2.3. Beneficiary Confidence and Self-esteem**

The project also aimed to **uplift the beneficiaries regarding self-confidence and self-esteem**. The goal of the project herein was to help the beneficiaries grow by learning skills pertaining not only to practical business skills, concepts and knowledge but also in terms of interpersonal, communication and professional conduct skills. It has been reported in interviews with training providers, mentors, facilitators, and beneficiaries alike that the Rural Areas Learnership has

positively affected the beneficiaries in ways aside from simply employment and skills growth. The stakeholders who were in contact with the beneficiaries throughout the programme noted the growth of the beneficiaries in self-esteem, confidence, and professional conduct from the commencement of the project to its closure. They also noted the enjoyment and engagement the beneficiaries showed throughout the project. This was also confirmed by the beneficiaries themselves, through the survey provided by them. They noted the skills they learnt and their self-confidence. A significant portion of the beneficiaries highlighted skills such as communication and aspects of personal growth and conduct, such as respect for themselves and others, time management and problem-solving skills.

### 3.2.4. Skills Training in the Rural Areas Learnership

Another broader goal of the project was to **contribute towards training and upskilling individuals with skills necessary for the Wholesale and Retail industry and the SMME environment** (W&RSETA, 2019). This is to provide the knowledge and means to perform well within employment or start and run a business, with the ultimate goal of economic inclusion and independence on the part of the beneficiaries. In this regard, the beneficiaries were asked whether or not the project taught them about the Wholesale and Retail sector and whether they felt the skills they learnt had prepared them for the workplace. Regarding being prepared for the workplace and providing beneficiaries with the skills to perform well in the workplace, the survey data notes that **88% of beneficiaries felt that the learnership had taught them how to adapt to different situations.**

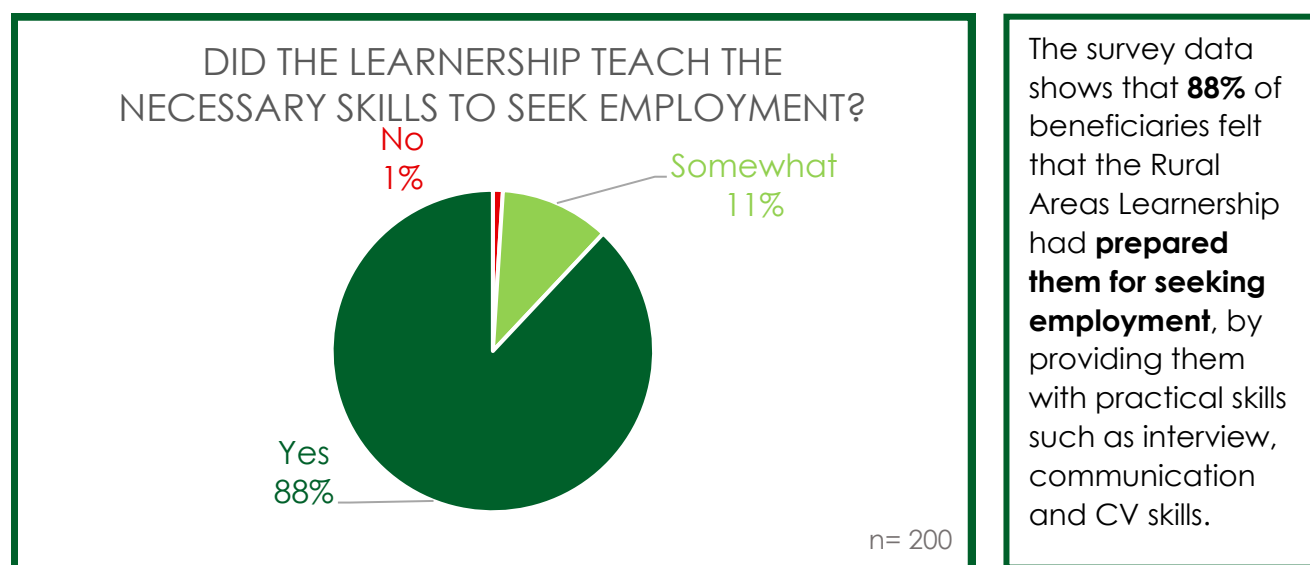


Figure 17: Necessary skills for seeking employment.

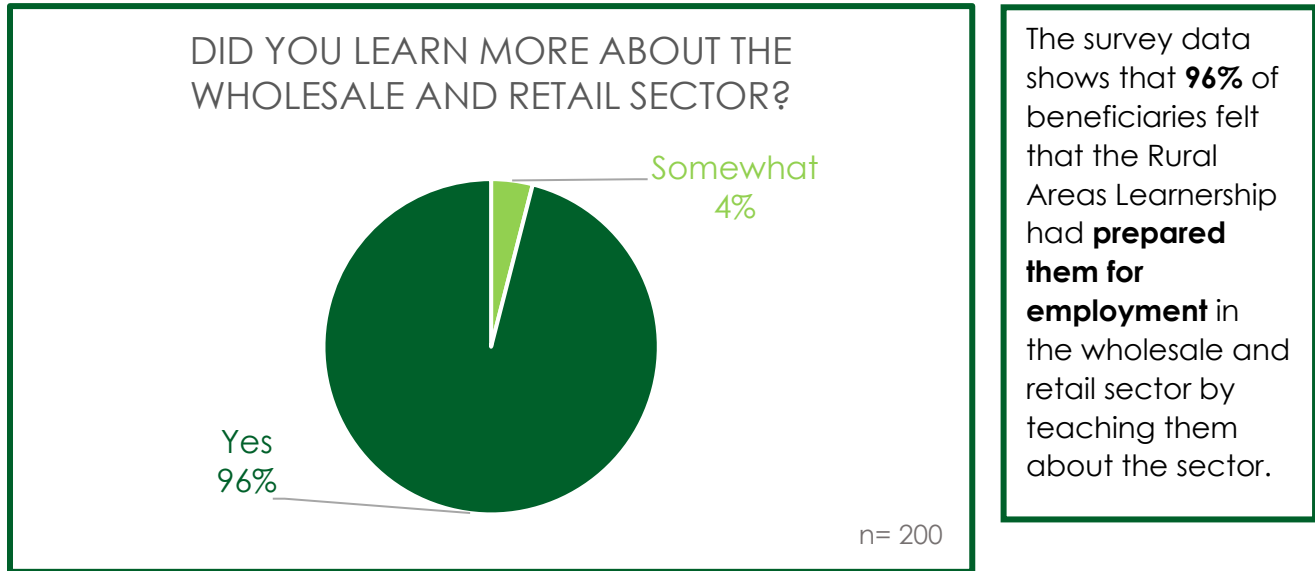


Figure 18: Have you learnt more about the W&R sector?

The study has investigated the effectiveness of the Rural Areas Learnership based on the goals set out for the project upon its inception. The sub-section to follow will consider the effectiveness of the study based on the current status of beneficiaries. This will provide an understanding of how effective the project was in helping beneficiaries seek and secure employment by considering where they are on their current journey.

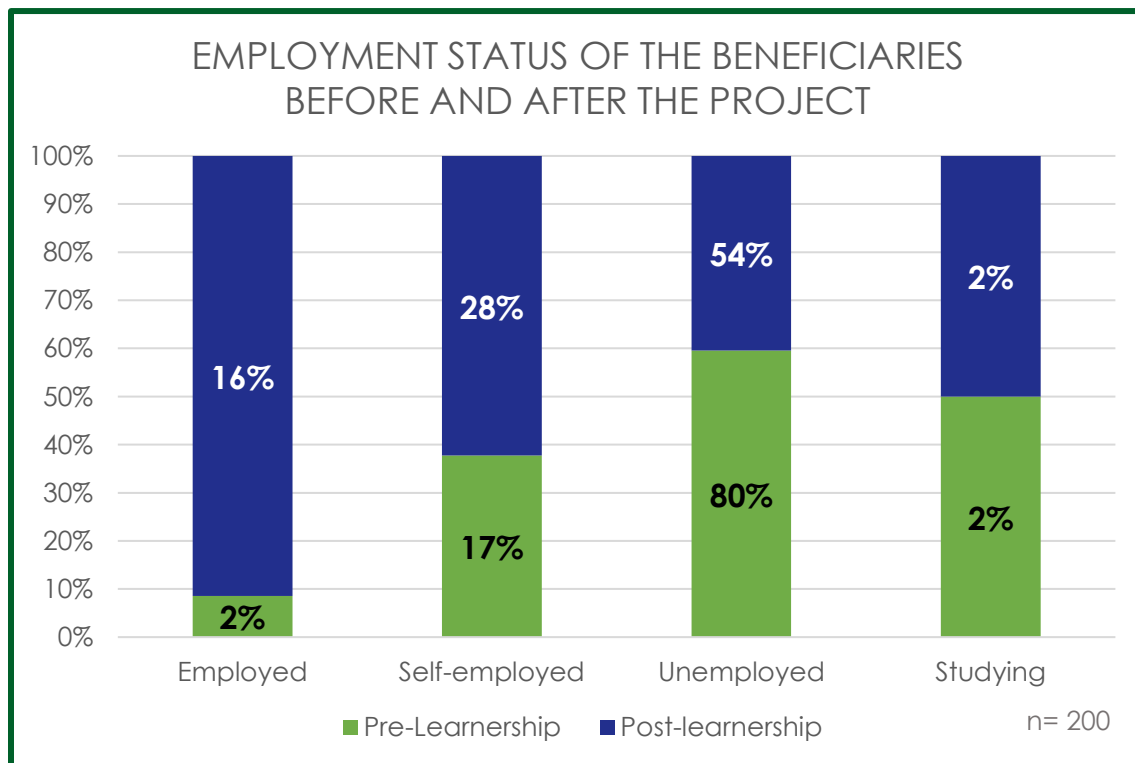


Figure 19: Employment status of the beneficiaries



### 3.2.5. Employed

In considering the effectiveness of the Rural Areas Learnership, it is essential to understand the effects of the project on all of the beneficiary's post-project. As stated, the results and percentages being reported in this report are based on the tracer results. To begin, if we project the results of the tracer onto the wider population, 125 people found jobs (from a total of 31% of tracer results). Considering the margin of error laid out for this study (8.2%) this means that anywhere between 115 and 135 individuals found jobs. In terms of work within the wholesale and retail sector, it can be noted that anywhere between 92 and 108 people are working there.

With employed beneficiaries, it is essential to note that out of the total number of beneficiaries who completed the survey, **32 are currently employed**. Very notably, **28% are self-employed**. Both groups have **risen since before the learnership by 14% and 11%, respectively**.

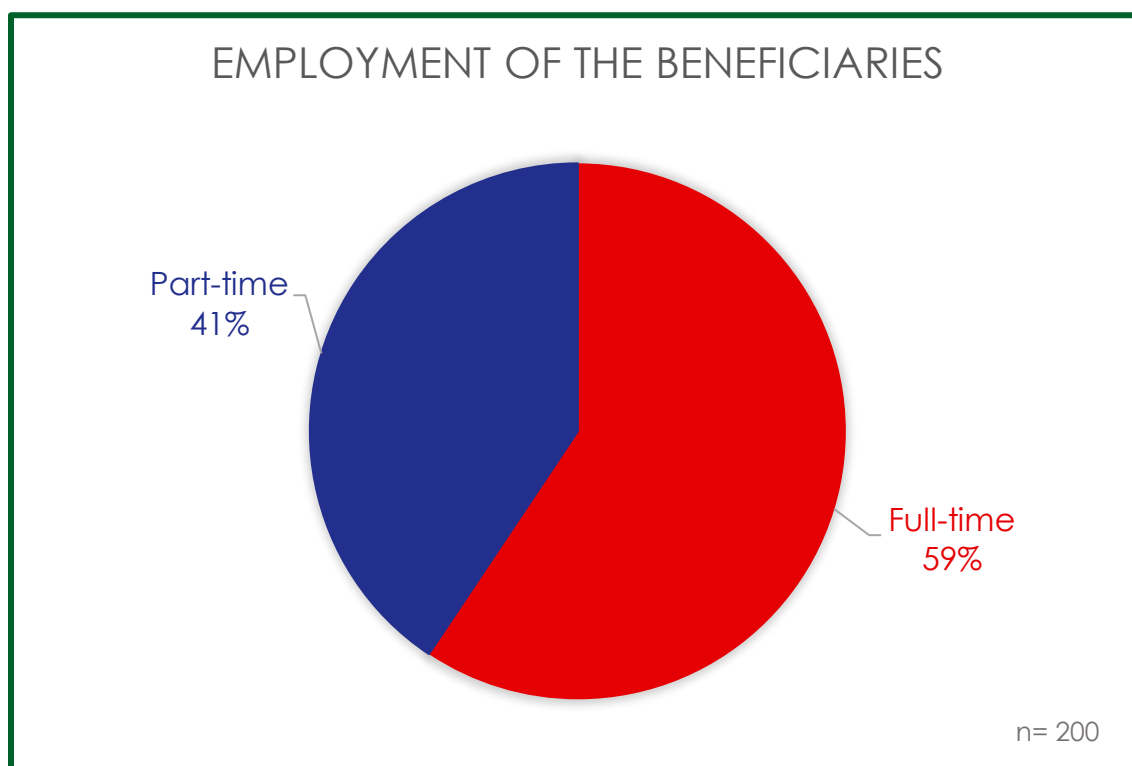


Figure 20: Employment of the beneficiaries

As stated, most beneficiaries were unemployed for over a year before finding employment. The primary way most beneficiaries found their current work was through **social media (37%)** and going from place to place, handing in CVs and **asking for work (30%)**. This speaks to the effectiveness of the learnership regarding creating well-skilled individuals who have the potential to be hired into the workforce, and providing employment opportunities for beneficiaries. The project also effectively provided income for beneficiaries, as can be seen in the number of employed and self-employed beneficiaries post-learnership.

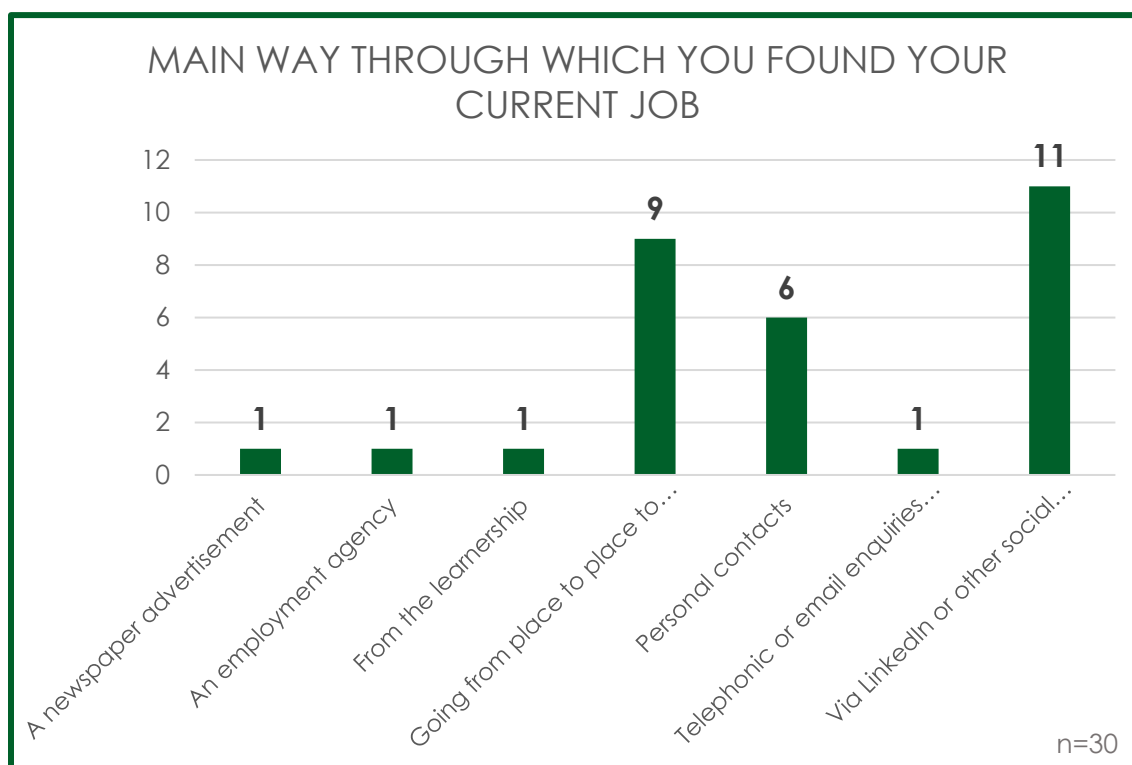


Figure 21: Main way through which beneficiaries found their current job.

Furthermore, **44%** of the employed beneficiaries reported that the skills they learned in the learnership were **somewhat related to their work**, and **69%** of beneficiaries noted that they have been able to **apply the skills they learnt** through the Rural Areas Learnership to the work that they do. This implies that the learnership taught the skills required to be productive and knowledgeable in a business or workplace context and that the skills taught aligned with industry needs. This has been reiterated in interviews with different stakeholders, who noted that the skills highlighted in the Rural Areas Learnership are curated and aligned with what is required in the industry. This shows that the learnership has effectively provided the necessary skills to seek, secure and thrive in employment or self-employment for the beneficiaries.

### 3.2.6. Self-employed

From the survey data, it has been noted that **56 beneficiaries who completed the survey are currently self-employed**. The main reasons for self-employment after the learnership can be mainly linked to not being able to find a job or personal preferences such as having an entrepreneurial spirit and preferring to work in an area of interest. Of the total self-employed beneficiaries, **24 stated that they had started their businesses as part of the learnership**. Of those that had not started their business as a part of the learnership, **15 indicated that they had started after the learnership** with the skills they acquired. When asked whether or not their business was in the **wholesale and retail sector**, **84% said 'yes'**.

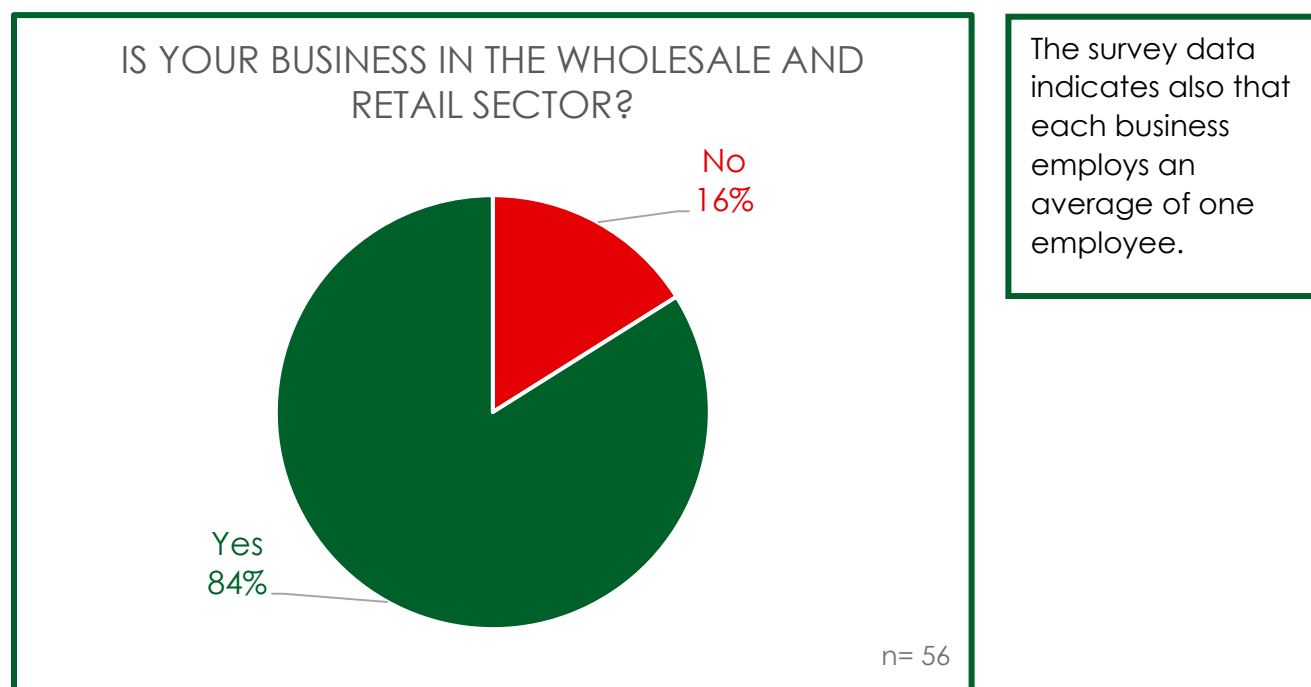


Figure 22: Business is the wholesale and retail sectors.

Basic information was provided by the business owners regarding the businesses being run, namely the registration status of the businesses (CIPC, VAT and Income Tax), as seen in the graph below. An indication of the gross monthly income of the businesses has also been provided. The gross monthly income of the beneficiaries varies. However, **34% of businesses earn between R801 – R1 601, closely followed by R1 602 – R3 200 and then R401 – R800**. The median gross monthly income for the businesses is **R694**. This indicates that the businesses are entrepreneurial endeavours and are resulting in the growth and economic inclusion of the beneficiaries of the Rural Areas Learnership. The fact that these businesses are bringing in income to individuals and the local economy indicates the wider positive social and economic impact of the Rural Areas Learnership.

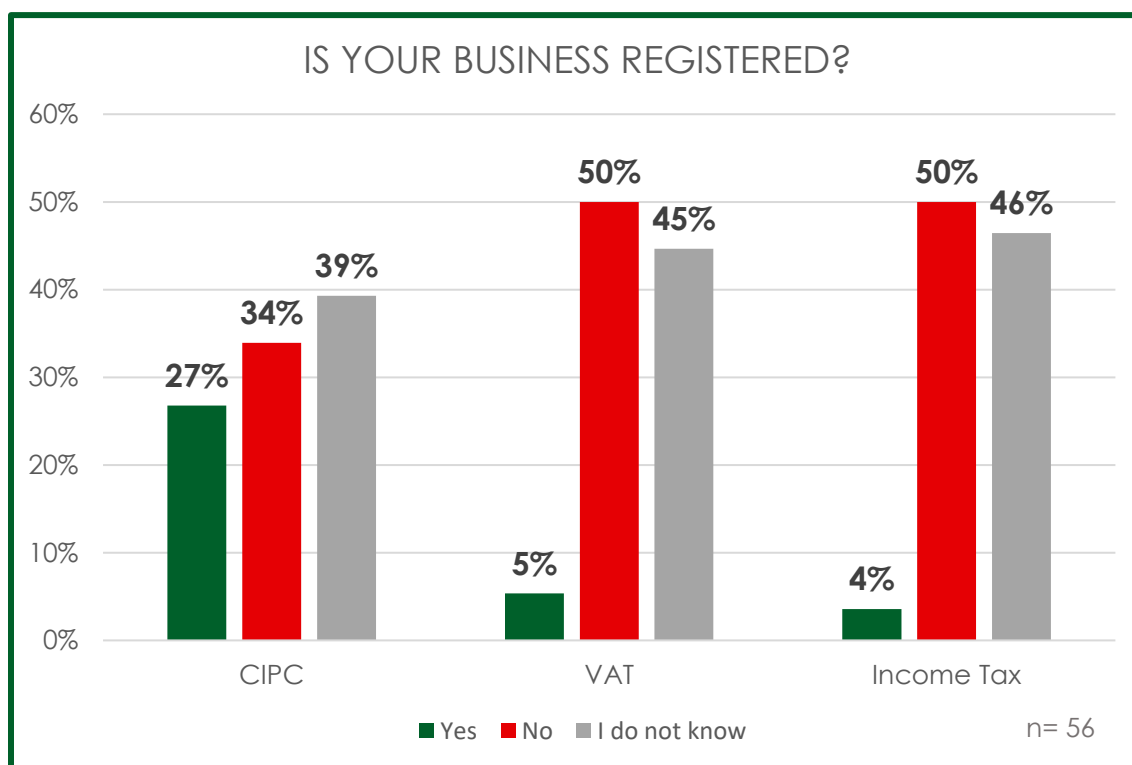
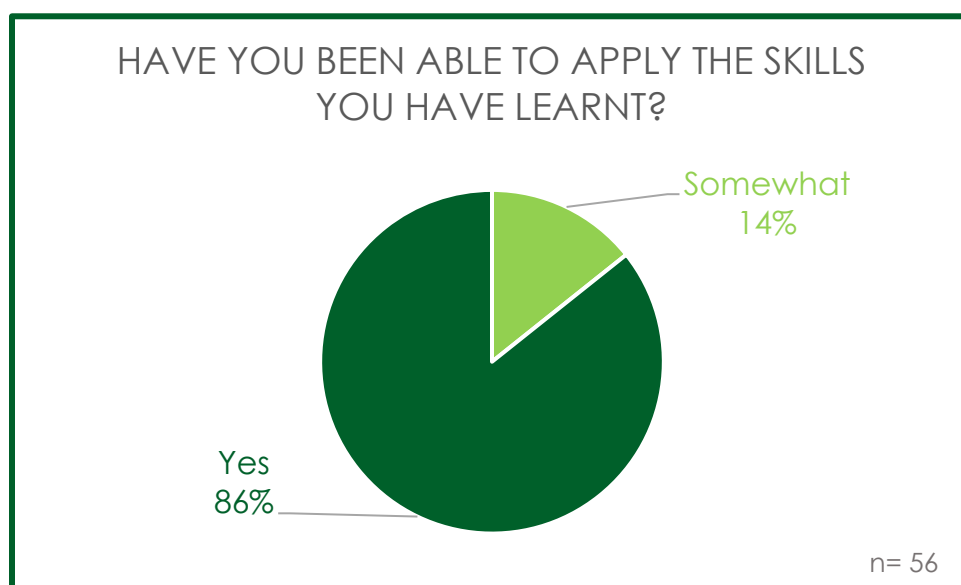


Figure 23: Registration of business

Notably, **93% of beneficiaries feel that the Rural Areas Learnership has prepared them to start and run their small businesses** in terms of skills, knowledge and confidence. Moreover, **32%** of the beneficiaries said **their career expectations were met** after the learnership.



When self-employed beneficiaries were asked whether they have **been able to apply the skills they have learnt** to their current business and work, **86%** of them responded with 'yes'.

Figure 24: Application of skills learnt.

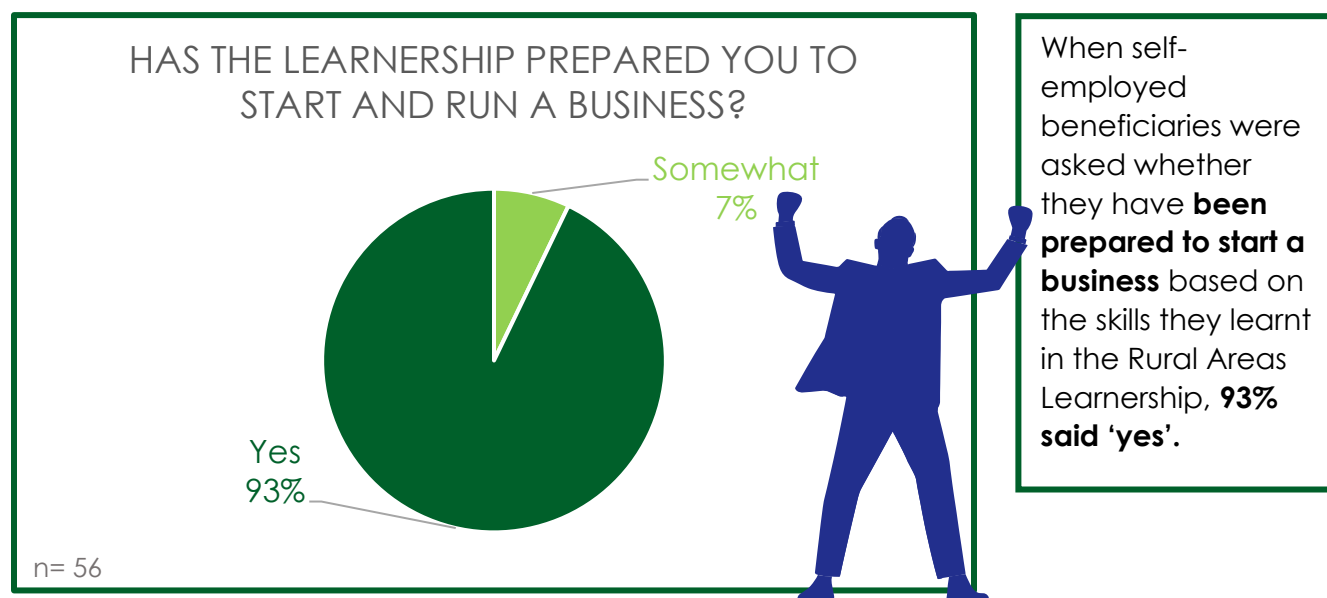


Figure 25: Prepared to start a business.

### 3.2.7. Unemployed

Unfortunately, the largest group of beneficiaries regarding employment status are unemployed. There are several reasons herein. The graph below indicates the main three (3) reasons for this as being a **lack of employment opportunities (73%)**, **businesses closed down (9%)** and **not having a high enough qualification level (9%)**.

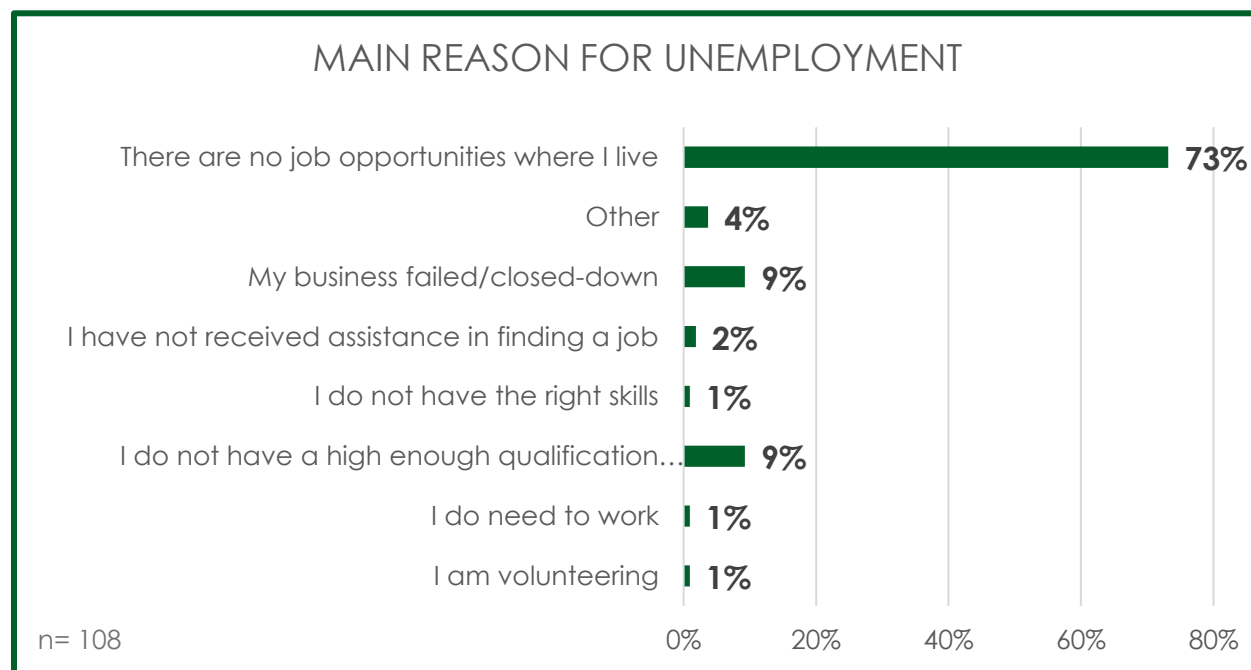


Figure 26: Reasons for unemployment

All (**100%**) of the total beneficiaries **actively seek employment**. There are several ways in which the beneficiaries are approaching this—the most common way is going from place to place and enquiring.

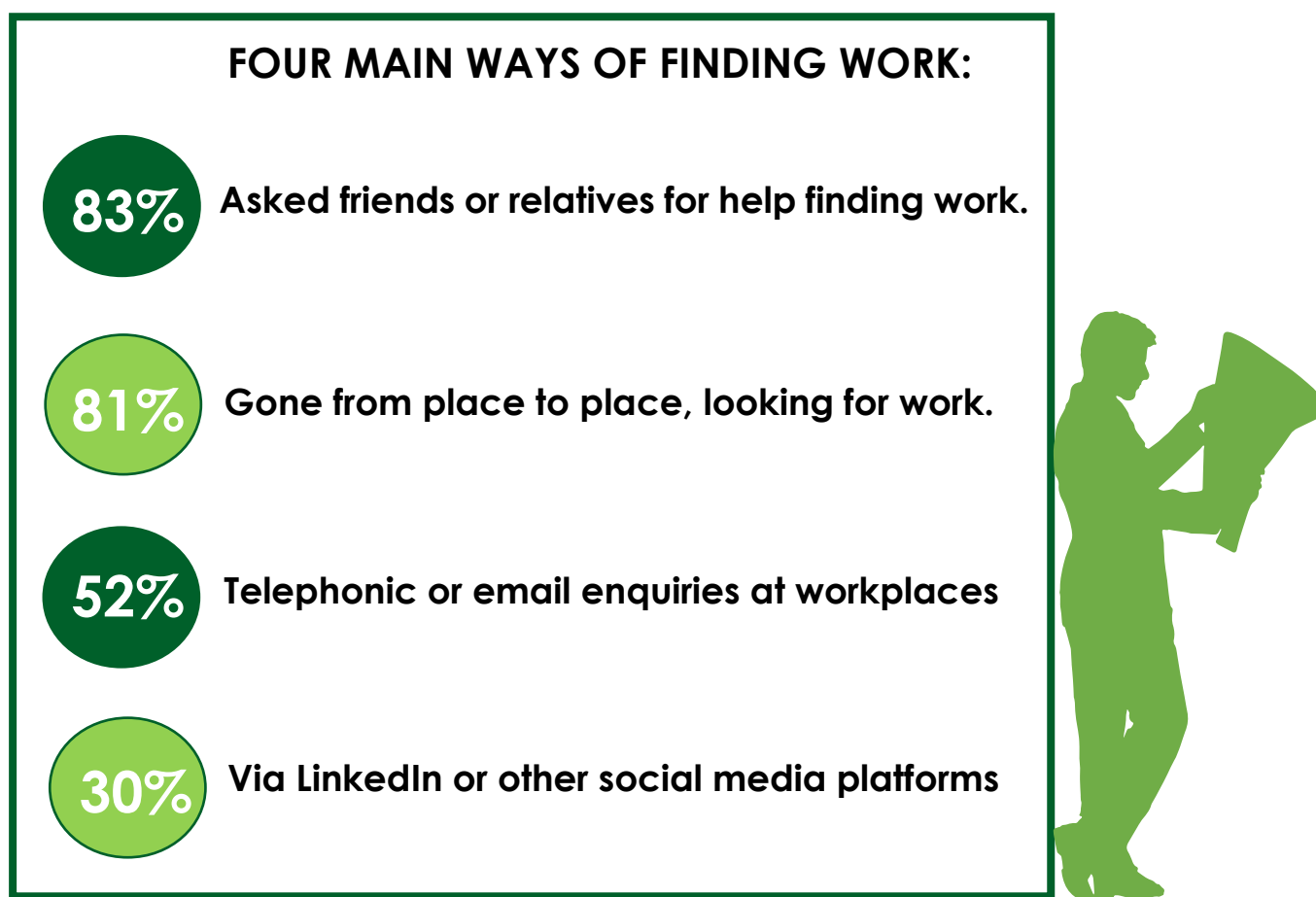


Figure 27: Main ways of finding employment.

### 3.2.8. Studying

There are five beneficiaries herein who completed the telephonic or online survey. Of the beneficiaries who are currently completing a qualification, all are studying full-time. The last group of beneficiaries, post-learnership, are those pursuing further qualifications. Of these four respondents, three study at a TVET College and one at a university. Another notable aspect is that all are studying something **outside of the Wholesale and retail sector**.

## 3.4. Efficiency

This chapter contains the assessment of the efficiency of Rural Areas Learnership by examining the resources spent on the project against the outputs and benefits that have been derived from these.

### 3.4.1. Funding instances, throughput, and achievements

Efficiency, according to the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria (Rogers, 2014, p. 7), is “a measure of how economically resources/inputs (funds, expertise, time, equipment etc.) are converted into results”. For this evaluation, and in line with the TOC recreated for the Rural Areas Learnership,

the primary inputs considered were the total expenditure per the learner databases supplied to the team.

The analysis of the efficiency of the Rural Areas Learnership was therefore conducted using the following data sources:

- **Input:** The input is the total expenditure for the project. The data were derived from the **learner database**.
- **Activity:** The activity refers to funding the learning programmes the beneficiaries underwent. **The database informed of beneficiaries** provided by the W&RSETA.
- **Output:** The output refers to the beneficiaries who completed the learning programmes.
- **Outcomes:** The outcomes refer to the beneficiaries who found employment (self-employment) after the programme and those who found employment (self-employment) within the wholesale and retail sector.

The following table sets out the expenditure and unit cost as per the indicators set out above:

Table 3: Total expenditure and unit cost

Indicator	Total
Actual expenditure (Input)	R24 786 000
Unit cost per learner (Activity)	R54 000
Unit cost per completed learning programme (output)	R54 236
Unit cost per employed/self-employed beneficiary (outcome)	R195 597
Unit cost per employed beneficiary in W&R Sector (outcome)	R331 010

This table indicates the project's relative cost in terms of activities, inputs and outcomes. The total unit cost per learner is R54 000 per learner. This means that the total cost to put each learner through the project was R54 000. Analysing further, the unit cost per learner who completed the project by achieving the relevant number of credits (120) was R54 236. This cost has increased due to learner drop-offs or incompletions, although only two learners did not complete the course, which is a very positive outcome. Considering the cost per learner employed as a result of the programme, the unit cost came out to R195 597 per learner. This is calculated with the number of currently employed learners, based on the information gathered. Lastly, the unit cost per learner currently employed in the wholesale and retail sector was R331 010.

The table below shows the activity-to-output **ratio**, and the actual expenditure per activity:

Table 4: Output ratio and actual expenditure



Indicator	Total
<b>Activity achieved.</b> (Total number of learners enrolled)	459
<b>Output achieved.</b> (Number of learners that completed the programme)	457
<b>Activity to output ratio</b>	<b>1: 0.99</b>
<b>Outcome achieved.</b> (Number of learners who found employment post-programme)	127
<b>Activity to outcome ratio (employed)</b>	<b>1: 0.28</b>
<b>Outcome achieved.</b> (Number of learners who found employment in the W&R Sector, post-programme)	73
<b>Activity to outcome ratio (employed in W&amp;R Sector)</b>	<b>1: 0.16</b>

This table indicates the output ratio of the project concerning the overall expenditure, inputs and activities involved. The activity-to-output ratio is positive and indicates that for every person who was funded in the Rural Areas Learnership, 99% completed and received a qualification. This is a very positive outcome. Furthermore, the activity-to-outcome ratio indicates the number of currently employed beneficiaries and is somewhat less optimistic. This ratio shows that for each beneficiary funded, only 28% are currently employed after the closure of the project. Lastly, a consideration of the wholesale and retail sector specifically was performed. In this capacity, only 16% are currently employed within the wholesale and retail sector for every beneficiary who was funded. This is also not a very favourable ratio and indicates that the project outputs were not as strong as at the initial outset of the project.

### 3.4.2. Strengths and challenges of the Rural Areas Learnership

Various data collection sources reported several strengths and positive practices throughout the project. The table below provides a summary of aspects listed by stakeholders that worked well upon the inception of the project and throughout its facilitation, followed by a review and strengths from their perspective'.

Table 5: Strengths of the Rural Areas Learnership

Stakeholder	Best Practice
Training providers	Stakeholder meetings Open communication Quality assurance W&RSETA engagement Adequate resources
Beneficiaries	Quality Assurance Positive relationships Regular stipends

W&RSETA	Strategic partners Open communication Cooperation with various departments
Mentors and facilitators.	Quality assurance Open communication

The stakeholders indicated numerous practices involved in the Rural Areas Learnership, which positively impact their roles and responsibilities and the project. For example, as indicated in the table above, the training providers all said **they** had positive relationships with **the various stakeholders and W&RSETA**. In the interviews held with training providers, all noted that the relationship between themselves and W&RSETA was characterised by **open communication**. The mentors and facilitators confirmed this and noted the adequate **quality assurance** by W&RSETA. According to training providers, W&RSETA was very hands-on regarding monthly reports and communication with the training providers.

This was echoed by W&RSETA. It was also indicated that W&RSETA was involved in and tried to start the project with **stakeholder meetings**. These meetings outlined the current state of the programme, best practices and any challenges, including approaching them and ensuring all role players were up to date from the outset. This indicates that W&RSETA successfully briefed the training providers for the project ahead and explained their roles and responsibilities. All stakeholders involved were positive, and was outlined as a strength in the Rural Areas Learnership.

Open **communication was a key strength with the partners**. Such partners included various key departments involved in the project to curate and run a well-planned project, and one widely available. Stakeholders involved herein were the department of public infrastructure, which aided in the understanding of the province, according to W&RSETA, to facilitate a project applicable to the area in which it was set. The department also played a pivotal role in providing public places such as libraries where the training could occur. Another department was the department of education, which aided in identifying the areas where projects such as these were needed. Another key partner is the community, specifically community churches and community leaders, who also successfully facilitated the project's rollout. All of these were highlighted as vital partners for W&RSETA, which enabled a successful project. This indicates that a strength of the project was involving various stakeholders from its inception to curate well-planned and widely available skills training.

The open and successful communication between these key players was a vital aspect of the project, according to W&RSETA in interviews. The **open communication streams between training providers, beneficiaries' community players, and traditional authorities were also a significant strength of this project**, as highlighted by training providers. It was stated herein that the open communication and encouragement provided by the traditional leaders and councils towards the beneficiaries and the training providers was vital in preventing drop-offs throughout the project.. This contributed to yet another strength of the project: the learners' dedication to the project and work it entailed.

#### 3.4.2.1. Mentors, facilitators, and beneficiaries

Regarding mentors and facilitators, the positive practices outlined in interviews highlighted the **relationships between themselves and the beneficiaries**. This is noted to have been a positive practice. The care and attention paid to the beneficiaries by the mentors and facilitators helped limit the number of drop-offs in the programme and engage the beneficiaries in the skills training.

The support provided by mentors and facilitators as real business owners and, therefore, knowledgeable partners in the beneficiaries' learning helped beneficiaries run their businesses successfully during the learnership. This was also mentioned in the survey by the beneficiaries themselves, as many beneficiaries noted positive relationships with lecturers and the constant support they received as positive aspects of the learnership. Due in large part to this, the beneficiaries mentioned that they had learnt much about the retail industry and that the skills training provided by the Rural Areas Learnership taught them about the skills necessary to thrive in the retail and wholesale environment, specifically as small business owners. Furthermore, the beneficiaries requested further support from the mentors and facilitators after the learnership closed due to its value.



Additionally, the beneficiaries noted receiving stipends and a qualification as a strength of the project as it bolstered the local economy and provided employment.

#### 3.4.2.2. Beneficiaries

Another strength of the learnership for beneficiaries, as highlighted in the survey and interview data, is the regularity of the stipends received. The graph below shows that **98%** of beneficiaries said they regularly received their stipends, and that as little as 12% only received them occasionally. This is reiterated by the focus group data, which indicated regular receiving of stipends as a positive aspect of the project overall. Additionally, 95% of beneficiaries received their certificates after the completion of the learnership; a positive aspect of the project. This is because receiving certificates after the learnership helps in their search for employment by providing certified proof of a completed qualification, which works heavily in the beneficiaries' favour herein.

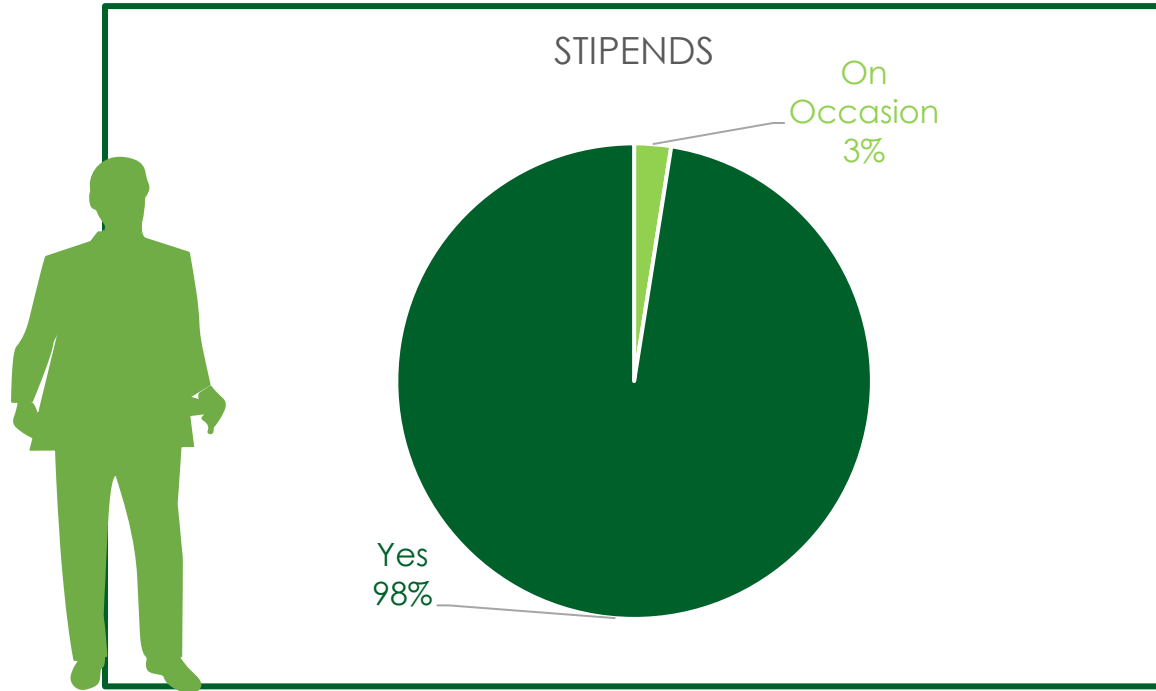


Figure 28: Stipends received by beneficiaries.

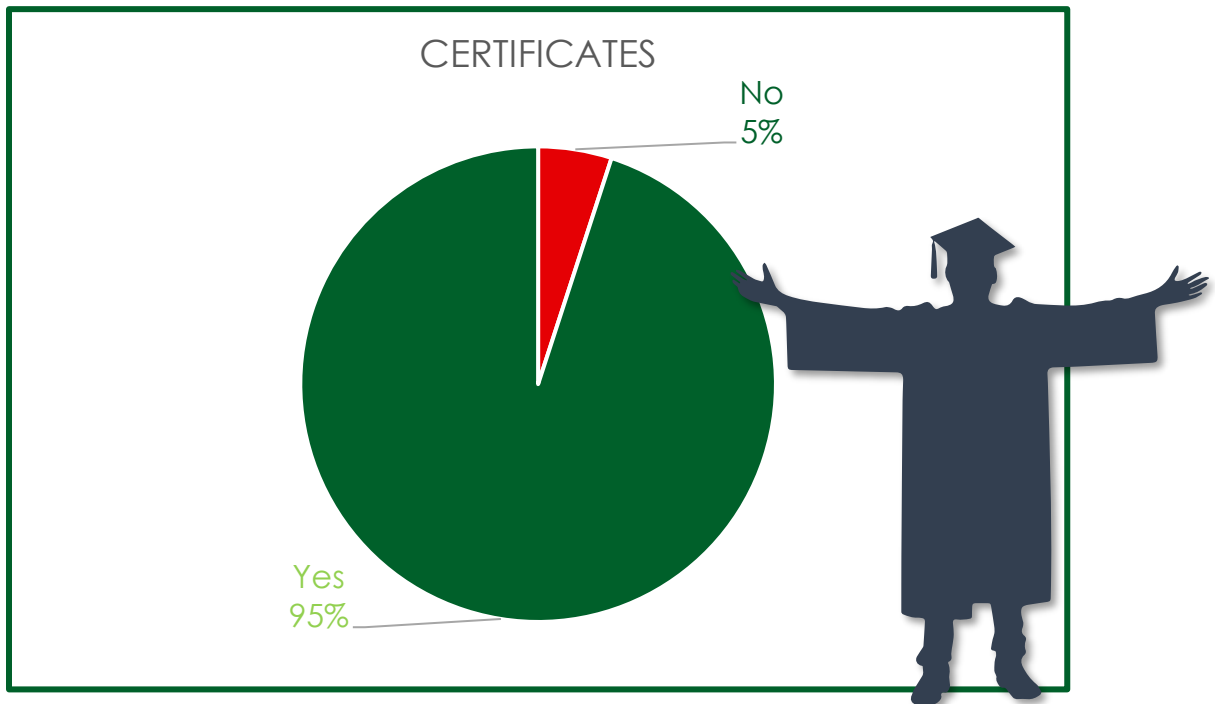


Figure 29: Certificates received by beneficiaries.

### 3.4.3. Challenges of the Rural Areas Learnership

Along with the best practices, a few challenges were experienced throughout the project.

Table 6: Challenges of the Rural Areas Learnership

Stakeholder	Challenges
Training providers	Previous knowledge and training Time delays in the contract phase The duration of the project was insufficient.
Beneficiaries	Certificates Ambiguity regarding the future Lack of post-project support Transport Stipends were insufficient. Lack of resources Inadequate attention was paid to discussing the challenges of running a small business in a rural context. Not fully informed as to the nature or subject matter of the project initially

#### 3.4.3.1. Training Providers

The training providers facilitators and mentors have noted several challenges in terms of the previous **levels of knowledge of the beneficiaries before the learnership**. It was noted in interviews that the beneficiaries' numeracy and literacy skills of the beneficiaries before starting the learnership were limited, making it challenging to begin the training.

Another challenge experienced by training providers was **turnaround periods at the initial stages of the project**, explicitly discussing, understanding and finalising the **contract**. It was reported that this stage took slightly longer than ideal, although the project ran smoothly afterwards.

#### 3.4.3.2. Mentors, facilitators and beneficiaries

The beneficiaries and facilitators both noted **the need for further mentorship for beneficiaries after completing the project**. This is concerning the fact that beneficiaries feel that they are unsure of how to operate their businesses without the help of a mentor, especially so soon after the completion of the project. This sentiment was reiterated by the facilitators of the project, who noted the need for more time with the beneficiaries to ensure their business ventures thrive. It was also suggested that the project's duration should be extended to allow the beneficiaries to gain enough mentorship and experience to fully absorb the skills being taught and translate them to their businesses.

Additional challenges for beneficiaries throughout the project included a lack of resources such as comfortable classrooms and Wi-Fi/data, which made it difficult to learn and absorb the skills training on occasion or challenging to get work done, which required internet. Not receiving a

graduation ceremony after the project was received negatively by some beneficiaries who felt that upon the outset of the project, a graduation ceremony was promised.

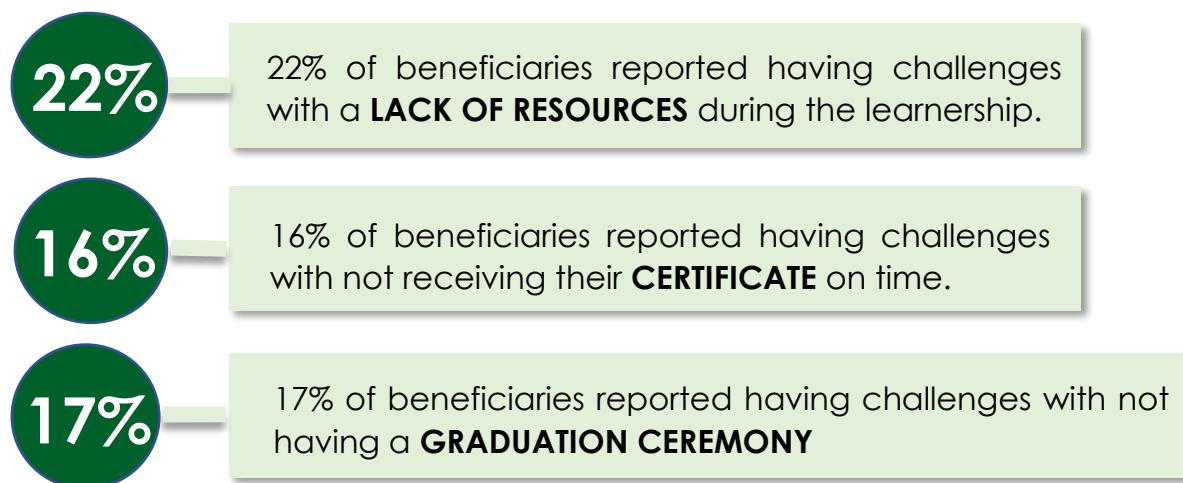


Figure 30: Challenges of the Rural Areas Learnership

An additional challenge experienced by beneficiaries, and training providers was that **certificates** have not yet been issued to numerous learners. This is a challenge because it prevents beneficiaries from finding stable employment due to a lack of legitimate and certified documentation proving the completion of a qualification. Training providers mentioned that this posed a challenge, as beneficiaries requested certificates from them long after the closure of the project, and they could not help.

Beneficiaries mentioned that the **stipends they received were not adequate** in providing everything needed. This included support not only for themselves and their family but covering the startup, additional business costs and data to complete the work they had.

Another challenge expressed by the beneficiaries lies at the project's outset. It was noted that the beneficiaries were **not entirely informed as to what the project was, and so were unprepared for the learnership to a large extent**. Upon its outset, the ambiguous description of the project made it challenging for the learners to engage with the project in the beginning.

#### 3.4.4. Success factors

Overall, it can be surmised through the data collected, discussions with various Rural Areas Learnership stakeholders that the project was an overall success. The feelings and responses to the project have been overwhelmingly positive, with very few stakeholders reporting that it was not a beneficial experience. When asked whether Rural Areas Learnership should be **provided to additional beneficiaries**, all the stakeholders (training providers, mentors and facilitators, W&RSETA stakeholders and beneficiaries) most individuals said yes, and in terms of the survey data, **100%** of the beneficiaries said yes. Additionally, when asked whether **the Rural Areas Learnership should be rolled out in other provinces**, all except 10 (90%) individuals said yes.

Overall; Rural Areas Learnership has resulted in qualifications for 459 vulnerable individuals. What is notable herein, is the positive reputation of the project from all stakeholders. The beneficiaries (88%) of the project feel that they have been equipped with the necessary skills to seek and

secure employment. Although some of the beneficiaries are currently unemployed, this is not necessarily due to lack of skills. Additionally, many beneficiaries feel that the project helped them grow in other areas, such as self-esteem and confidence and are grateful for the project in this regard. They noted that they feel ready to embark professionally in this regard.

There was a resounding agreement that beneficiaries would like to go back and further this qualification or complete a similar one again. The project has overall, succeeded in the goals laid out for it.



## Section 4: Key Research Findings and Recommendations

### 4.1. Key Research Findings

#### 4.1.1. The alignment and achievement of transformation and strategic mandates NSDSIII

##### 1. Increasing access to occupationally directed programmes.

The Rural Areas Learnership has provided 459 individuals with the opportunity to participate in an occupational programme and to gain a qualification. This project has also provided 457 individuals with an occupational qualification, the NQF Level 3 National Certificate: Informal and Small Business Practice Qualification.

##### 2. Expanding the public TVET system for sector, local, regional, and national needs requirements.

The Rural Areas Learnership has increased the scope of the public TVET system by engaging rural communities and individuals in occupational training and skills development. This has been performed with the skills needs of rural communities.

##### 3. Encouraging more efficient and effective use of workplace skills development.

The project curated an innovative and unique way of incorporating workplace skills development into the skills training by providing a platform for beneficiaries to start, register and manage their small businesses. This allows beneficiaries in this situation to learn they, too, have a stake in the outcome of the work they put in. It also provides an opportunity for the beneficiaries and the local economy to benefit from the workplace experience directly after the learnership by becoming securely self-employed. This indicates that 28% of beneficiaries are currently operating small businesses.

##### 4. Encouraging and assisting small enterprises, cooperatives and worker-initiated NGO and community training initiatives.

The rural areas' learnership has allowed 457 individuals to start and run their small businesses in rural areas. This has been achieved by providing relevant skills and mentorship to beneficiaries.

#### W&RSETA

##### 1. Establishing a skilled and competent workforce in the Wholesale and Retail sector.

The Rural Areas Learnership has provided 457 individuals with an occupational qualification, the NQF Level 3 National Certificate: Informal and Small Business Practice Qualification. This involves creating a skilled and competent workforce by teaching the necessary skills to work in the wholesale and retail. Due to this project, 96% of the respondents indicated that they learned more about the wholesale and retail industry through the learnership.

##### 2. A skilled, lively SMME and cooperative sector.

92% of beneficiaries feel equipped to start and run their own businesses within the wholesale and retail sector. The number of self-employed beneficiaries has increased from 17% to 28% since the end of the project. This indicates that the Rural Areas Learnership has adequately prepared beneficiaries to contribute to a skilled and lively SMME sector.

#### **4.1.2. Impact of the Rural Areas Learnership on beneficiaries**

The impact of the Rural Areas Learnership on beneficiaries can be understood in terms of the following:

- ➔ The learnership has positively impacted beneficiaries by providing 457 beneficiaries with an NQF Level 3 National Certificate: Informal and Small Business Practice Qualification.
- ➔ The project increased the ability of the beneficiaries to seek and acquire stable employment. **68% of beneficiaries said they have increased career opportunities**, and **92% of beneficiaries feel prepared to start and run a small business** after completing the learnership.
- ➔ The project has provided an opportunity for the beneficiaries to find employment, as the number of **self-employed beneficiaries has increased from 17% to 28%** since the end of the project. Additionally, the number of **employed beneficiaries has increased from 2% to 16%**.
- ➔ The Rural Areas Learnership provided a means for **28% of beneficiaries to start their businesses** through the project (24 beneficiaries) or after the project, based on the skills obtained (15 beneficiaries).
- ➔ The project has provided increased income for several beneficiaries as 50% of employed beneficiaries now earn between R3 201 – R6 400, and 13% earn between R6 401 – R12 800 monthly, before deductions. These increased monthly incomes for beneficiaries indicate the value of the qualification and experience achieved through the project for employers.
- ➔ The overall household income of the beneficiaries has also increased to **32% of households earning between R 3 201 – R 6 400** monthly before deductions. This indicates the broader positive impact the Rural Areas Learnership has had on beneficiaries and broader communities' economies.
- ➔ The learnership has six positively impacted beneficiaries in terms of skills development as most beneficiaries were satisfied with the project. Only six noted that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Most beneficiaries noted that the training is current, and in line with what is necessary to start and run a small business. This indicates that a vast majority of the beneficiaries are satisfied with the skills taught in the project, the project as a whole and that the skills taught are relevant and essential.
- ➔ Overall, the programme appears to have improved the skills and knowledge of beneficiaries in the sector, with **96% of the respondents indicating that they learned more about the wholesale and retail industry** through the learnership.
- ➔ Most respondents also found personal value, growth and development through the Rural Areas Learnership.
- ➔ Several beneficiaries indicated the lack of post-programme communication and guidance, which they noted would have been beneficial to themselves and their business ventures.

- Some beneficiaries noted that the stipends were too low to cover what was required from them. This included money to provide for themselves and family and startup costs for their businesses.

#### 4.1.3. The achievement of project objectives in the implementation of the project, including outputs

The achievement of project objectives will be analysed by relating the outcomes and outputs of the project to the initial goals laid out.

The Rural Areas Learnership's goal was to encourage beneficiaries to use the knowledge acquired through the learnership and the qualification in their own small or informal business operations or potentially translate this knowledge and experience into ,more significant, or more formal business contexts elsewhere. The project allowed beneficiaries to understand the retail space, its operations and take part in customer service tasks by starting and maintaining their small businesses. This is indicated in the project data, as **92% of beneficiaries feel equipped to start and run their own businesses**.

Another goal of the project was to grow the local economies of rural areas by encouraging beneficiaries to become long-term employers or employees within the economy and the Wholesale and Retail sector. The broader positive impacts of the project are seen in that of the **28% self-employed beneficiaries, 84% of businesses are in the wholesale and retail sector**, and local economies. Local economies are positively impacted by the income generated by new local businesses within rural areas.

The Rural Areas Learnership aimed to encourage beneficiaries to venture into the SMME environment and begin their businesses or potentially grow their businesses with the skills and knowledge gained through the learnership; this means that it was a goal of the project to grow the SMME environment. As stated, self-employed individuals have risen from **17% to 28% since the learnership ended**.

In this vein, the project aimed to facilitate skills development interventions which teach and encourage long-term, sustainable business operations within the sector. The learnership has taught **93% of beneficiaries how to start and run a business**. Notably, **24 beneficiaries had started their businesses as part of the project**, which closed in 2019. This means these businesses have been in operation for approximately five years.

Lastly, it was a goal of the Rural Areas Learnership to increase the beneficiaries' confidence in both their business ventures and themselves. Overall, the beneficiaries reported having learnt many skills which have helped them grow. Many feel confident in starting business ventures.

#### 4.1.4. The key strengths and challenges of the project

- The key strengths of the Rural Areas Learnership

The different stakeholders involved in this project outlined the strengths and best practices, which made the project positive herein. The table below summarises the aspects listed by stakeholders that were positive throughout the project.

Table 7: Key strengths of the Rural Areas Learnership

Stakeholder	Strength of project
Training Providers	Positive relationships between the training providers and W&RSETA. W&RSETA offers adequate support to training providers.
W&RSETA and Partners	Align various role-players at the project's implementation phase to allow all to be aligned and aware of their roles and responsibilities.
W&RSETA and Training Providers	Open communication was provided to the training providers on the project status throughout.
W&RSETA and Training Providers	The vital and informative implementation phase of the project.
W&RSETA	W&RSETA provided adequate quality assurance to the project.
Training Providers, Traditional leaders/authorities, and Beneficiaries	Open communication between traditional leaders, authorities, and beneficiaries kept beneficiaries on track and prevented drop-offs.
Beneficiaries and Mentors/Facilitators	Positive relationships between the beneficiaries and the mentors/facilitators helped beneficiaries throughout the project and prevented drop-offs.
Beneficiaries and Training Providers	Limited drop-offs due to dedicated learners who were engaged in the training.
Beneficiaries	Stipends were received on time and regularly.

#### • 5.1.4.2. The key challenges of the Rural Areas Learnership

The different stakeholders involved in this project outlined the challenges they experienced throughout the project. The table below summarises the aspects listed by stakeholders that were obstacles throughout the project's run.

Table 8: Key weaknesses of the Rural Areas Learnership

Stakeholders	The challenge of the project
W&RSETA and Training Providers	The project's duration was insufficient for the beneficiaries to fully absorb and translate the skills training and mentorship

	to their business ventures, causing many to fail within the first 18 months.
W&RSETA and Training Providers	The administrative tasks in the contract stage of the project (in terms of which training providers were appointed and the subsequent information) was not expressed in an adequate time frame. This caused delays in these processes.
Training Providers and Beneficiaries	The numeracy and literacy skills of the beneficiaries are not always adequate at the outset of the project, making the training challenging to conduct.
Training Providers and Beneficiaries	Inadequate attention was paid by mentors, facilitators and training providers to discussing the challenges of running a small business in a rural context, as many beneficiaries felt ill-prepared herein.
Training Providers, W&RSETA and Beneficiaries	The beneficiaries were not fully informed about the project nature or subject matter initially. This caused slight confusion and unpreparedness on the part of the beneficiaries.
Beneficiaries	Transport difficulties as the training locations were often far from the beneficiaries' residence. This incurred additional costs on the part of the beneficiaries.
Beneficiaries	Lack of resources to perform adequately by beneficiaries. Examples include insufficient computers, lack of Wi-Fi/data provided and stuffy/small learning spaces.
Beneficiaries	The stipends received by the beneficiaries were not adequate to cover all the relevant expenses, such as personal support, family support, data and business costs which all came out of the stipend.
Beneficiaries	Lack of support after the closure of the project in terms of business mentoring.

## 4.2. Recommendations



W&RSETA is urged to keep **accurate, up-to-date, and ongoing records** of beneficiaries. This ensures that future impact studies can be conducted effectively and efficiently. Suggestions for how to achieve this, include the use of a social media platform such as Facebook or WhatsApp. A group of beneficiaries can keep current with their contact details (contact numbers as well as email addresses) as well as providing a platform through which to contact the beneficiaries in the future, for future studies or with updates for employment opportunities.



W&RSETA is urged to **conduct workplace mentoring training sessions**. The aim of these sessions should be to guide mentors and supervisors on their roles and responsibilities, orientate them on the programme and provide guidelines regarding the required training for beneficiaries based on the goals of the project.



W&RSETA is urged to **lengthen the running period of the Rural Areas Learnership** as it is not long enough for the beneficiaries to absorb the training and mentorship, as well as apply it to their business ventures. It has been suggested that the project be conducted over two years, in which one year is only business mentorship, to ensure successful businesses.



More attention should be paid by mentors, facilitators, and training providers to **discussing the challenges of running a small business in a rural context specifically**, throughout the project. This is because many beneficiaries felt ill-prepared to run their own business alone so soon after the project ended.



W&RSETA is urged to be **more proactive** in terms of adhering to deadlines in the project allocation, and contract phase of the project. This is to not lose time or cause administrative errors in the outset of the project.



W&RSETA is urged to ensure that **beneficiaries are fully aware** of what is required in the project and are well informed about what the project covers. So that the beneficiaries are fully prepared when starting the skills training.



W&RSETA and training providers should ensure that there are **constant follow-ups with beneficiaries** during the project and allow them to raise concerns or pose questions.



W&RSETA and training providers should also provide **post-programme support** to help beneficiaries with challenges or obstacles in their businesses after the project.



W&RSETA should **consider raising the stipend** amount if the stipend is meant to provide for additional business-related resources such as stock or stall rental as well as for personal means.



W&RSETA and training providers should ensure that there are **adequate and comfortable spaces** within which training is provided. This is to ensure that beneficiaries can learn comfortably.



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