



Western Cape
Government
FOR YOU



Evaluation of the Witzenberg PALS Initiative

Final Report

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Policy Summary

Successful land reform is key to the economic, social, and political stability of South Africa. Despite efforts to address land reform since 1994, progress has been sluggish. In response, private-led initiatives, such as the Witzenberg Partners in Agri Land Solution (PALS), are viewed as a vehicle for more inclusive agriculture and land reform. PALS works towards establishing and supporting new-era commercial farmers. This work is guided by the PALS framework and is delivered through a range of services to land reform beneficiaries. This evaluation focused on the 23 current PALS projects to assess the design, implementation, and outcomes of Witzenberg PALS. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to collect and analyse the data.

The evaluation found the Witzenberg PALS initiative to be a relevant intervention. Its design is informed by the wider policy landscape as well as past challenges in the country. The evaluation found the PALS framework to be flexible and adaptable, a useful component given the diversity of projects involved. At its core, PALS focuses on partnerships and uses local knowledge and networks to its advantage. Therefore, it is an instructive model of a decentralised, multi-stakeholder land reform intervention.

Emerging farmers' attitudes towards the various PALS support offerings were generally positive. PALS was rated positively in its legal support and advice offering and is seen to play the role of supporting partners well. It also plays an important role in guiding the selection of beneficiaries and has assisted, where possible, in liaising with the government in efforts to access enablers. Underpinning much of this work is the trust that PALS helps build between partners, how it shapes relationships, and, ultimately, the success of projects. The evidence further showed the presence of several success factors that are deemed essential for successful land reform. The evaluation noted the presence and role of access to land, capital, and markets, as well as complementary mentorship, training, and skill development. The PALS framework and experiences from the ground suggest these components are generally well-considered in PALS projects, with PALS' role shaped by the needs and context of each project.

Witzenberg PALS has implemented 23 projects out of the 80+ projects originally envisioned in the region. The data suggest that among these projects, key objectives and outcomes are being reached. This includes the emergence of black commercial farmers and landowners, contributing towards a more inclusive agricultural sector. Additionally, there is a growing number of independent emerging farmers evident in PALS projects, experiencing increased levels of self-confidence and greater self-worth. As a result, the data suggest there are more employment opportunities and direct beneficiaries, resulting in higher incomes and quality of life. These positive findings about the outcomes of PALS are further supported by PALS projects' performance against DoA's 39 indicators of success in land reform projects, albeit with caveats about data quality and completeness. In reflecting on the PALS framework, PALS can be said to boast a range of unique components. This ranges from built-in market access mechanisms to a holistic service offering via the PALS centre and "one-stop shop. Furthermore, the intimate collaboration and partnership between commercial partners and emerging partners is a powerful aspect of this private-led land reform initiative.

Despite these successes, several significant challenges have been raised. PALS has been constrained by limited organisational funding and capacity. Challenges in establishing new farm projects and securing buy-in from both commercial farmers and government entities have been documented. For emerging farmers, barriers to entry into commercial farming, as well as access to finance, have been challenging. More broadly, changing climates, theft and security, logistics, deteriorating infrastructure, market volatility, and labour issues have been cited as significant challenges to the sector at large. Overall, the context in which the intervention is located is a challenging one.

Key recommendations for PALS include implementing a stronger M&E system, enhancing communication efforts, and clarifying categories in which potential and current projects fit. There are further recommendations around enhancing training, mentorship, and beneficiary selection, as well as standardising key processes and experiences. For the provincial government, recommendations include stronger liaison and coordination with PALS. For DALRRD, it is recommended that PALS be used

to pilot a decentralised land reform approach. The national government should also work to improve land reform projects' access to critical enablers and incentivize commercial farmers to participate in land reform initiatives such as PALS.

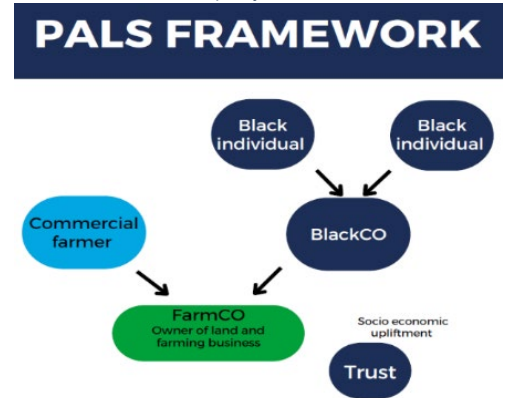


Executive Summary

In South Africa, successful land reform is key to the economic, social, and political stability of the country. Despite a range of efforts to address land reform since 1994, progress has been slowed and constrained by significant challenges. In response, initiatives driven by the private sector, like the Witzenberg Partners in Agri Land Solution (PALS) initiative, have emerged, providing an alternative avenue for achieving more inclusive agricultural development and successful land reform.

PALS seeks to collaborate with local farmers and role players to facilitate the establishment and ongoing support of farm companies. These companies are typically joint ventures between a small group of emerging farmers and an established commercial partner. The commercial partner assumes the role of mentor, assisting the emerging partner(s) with skill transfer and support (usually including resources) as the farm company matures. The foundation of this initiative rests on sound legal and business principles that govern the partnership and business structure. PALS's efforts are driven by its strategic objective to establish new-era commercial farmers in South Africa, as outlined in the PALS framework. This framework serves as the guiding document for implementing PALS projects, forming the core of the organisation's activities.

Ownership framework for a typical PALS project



This evaluation sought to interrogate the design, implementation, and outcomes of PALS. To do this, a theory-based and utilisation-focused evaluation approach was deployed. The design was non-experimental and focused on the 23 current PALS projects. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to collect and analyse the data. Primary data collection consisted mainly of a survey of emerging farmers and interviews with emerging farmers, commercial partners, PALS staff, and broader stakeholders.

The evaluation found the Witzenberg PALS initiative to be a relevant and coherent intervention. Its design is informed by the wider policy landscape and takes into account obstacles encountered in past land reform efforts. Findings revealed that the initiative has the potential to play an important role in commercial-oriented land reform. PALS mobilises and partners with multiple stakeholders, with the aim of establishing land reform projects in the region and beyond. Using local expertise, networks, and partnerships with local commercial entities, projects are well positioned to establish themselves in the local agricultural landscape. The decentralised, multi-stakeholder approach that PALS embodies is a model worthy of consideration in the context of other agricultural areas of the country. Indeed, the flexible and adaptable nature of the PALS framework, as evidenced by the significant diversity of PALS projects, bodes well for its adoption in other contexts.

The evaluation further finds a range of factors that are critical to the establishment and sustainability of land reform projects. In light of these factors, PALS plays a pivotal role, often working behind the scenes to facilitate the integration of these factors into new projects. The evaluation acknowledges the presence and importance of secure access to land, capital, and markets. Broadly speaking, PALS projects are shown, through varying mechanisms, to have secure access to land. Although fundamental for farmers embarking on the agricultural journey, secure access to land is not the sole component of successful land reform.

In complementing land access, the evaluation highlights the important role that financial capital, as a key component of post-settlement support, plays in project development. In this regard, PALS projects, by and large, have been able to source capital from a variety of sources. Frequently, funding originates from commercial partners, who have been shown to be a key pillar for financial support for new projects. Additionally, private financial institutions, as well as the public sector, notably CASP, have played a notable role in financing and offering material support to new projects. With that said, gaining

access to affordable finance is arguably the most significant obstacle amongst emerging commercial farmers. Despite the advantageous position of PALS projects in securing financial support through the mentioned channels, financing, particularly for expansion, remains a source of concern.

Outside of land and capital, market access has often been a concern for new land reform projects. However, this is not typically the case for PALS projects, as they can leverage market arrangements and structures through linkages with the commercial partner. Once again, this dynamic within PALS projects highlights the critical role that the commercial partner plays in driving private-led land reform.

Access to land, capital, and markets are essential to any land reform project. However, they alone cannot guarantee the success of new projects. Ongoing mentorship and training are widely viewed as pivotal components of any agricultural transformation project. In the context of new agriculture entrants lacking agricultural, business, legal, and financial skills and experience, such offerings provide the necessary skills transfer, exchange, and development. With regards to mentorship, the commercial entity, through the mentorship agreement, provides ongoing support to new projects, often assisting with the technical elements of agriculture. This again underlines how important the commercial partner is to the land reform project in PALS. In complementing mentorship, PALS offers training opportunities to emerging farmers, with the goal of enhancing the legal, business, and financial capacity of participants. In light of this, emerging farmers (83%) felt that PALS aided in the development of said skills and knowledge. As such, these elements feature strongly in the PALS model and were found to be highly appreciated by emerging farmers.

To further capacitate emerging farmers, the evaluation found that PALS assumes a number of supplementary support roles, depending on the needs of the projects. For example, PALS offers a range of legal and business support outside of formal training. Given the complexity of tasks such as drafting business and legal documents and agreements, PALS is viewed positively for its ability to design and communicate clear and usable documents. This enables PALS to provide ad hoc support to fledgling projects when needed.

| Farmers' perspectives on service offerings | |
|--|------|
| Overall PALS support | 83% |
| Training | 92% |
| Mentorship | 83% |
| Legal and business advice | 100% |
| Farming, business, and legal knowledge and skill development | 83% |
| Trust and confidence building | 83% |

Getting the selection of beneficiaries right is fundamental to any land reform project. Through a list of suggested selection criteria, PALS seeks to guide this process in the establishment of new projects. It is the prerogative of the commercial partner to choose the FarmCO beneficiaries based on a flexible weighing of the suggested criteria. Many commercial partners weigh a pre-existing relationship heavily in making the selection. The agency given to the commercial partner within a flexible framework is a notable characteristic of PALS as a private sector-driven model and seems to contribute to success (see further discussion below).

Although PALS projects benefit from at least some private resources (some combination of land, finance, other inputs, mentoring, and support), like all land reform projects, they depend on government for key "enablers". The evaluation underscored the essential role that the government plays in this regard in unlocking and expediting land reform in South Africa. Concerted efforts have been made by PALS to engage with the relevant government entities to facilitate and streamline access to a range of critical enablers for FarmCOs. While there have been successes, there are also significant challenges. As such, there are strong appeals for the government, at various levels, to create a more enabling environment for private and public-led land reform. This includes formally acknowledging contributions to land reform, streamlining application processes and policies, and enhancing bureaucratic efficiency and effectiveness.

Given the interaction of the above-mentioned components in the PALS model, in most projects, there was evidence of trusting relationships enabling productive business partnerships. This was often based on long histories between partners. The presence of trust is partially the result of careful beneficiary selection, often based on strong ties between parties. Additionally, PALS was shown to aid in building

trust through several mechanisms, including clear shareholder agreements, open and sincere conversations, and PALS functioning as a neutral third party when tensions arise.

Witzenberg PALS has implemented 23 projects out of the 80+ projects originally envisioned in the region. The data suggest that among these projects, several stated objectives and outcomes are being reached. PALS has supported the emergence of black commercial farmers and landowners in the area through the establishment of over 20 farm projects. There has also been an increase in black land ownership in the region: black farmers own outright 2139 hectares of land and an additional 6520 hectares of land in joint ventures with commercial partners. Combined, these 8654 hectares of land, as well as a 26% stake in an additional 6389 hectares of land, should be recognised as significant in terms of land access and ownership gains. The majority of this land was transferred without any public purchase or donation,¹ demonstrating the potential of the PALS model to leverage private resources for land reform. Additionally, the data indicates increased employment opportunities and direct beneficiaries, resulting in higher incomes and an improved quality of life. These positive findings are further supported by PALS projects' performance against DoA's 39 indicators of success in land reform projects, albeit with caveats about data quality and completeness.

As emerging farmers in PALS projects gain skills, knowledge, and experience, there is evidence of them becoming increasingly independent farmers. Collected data suggests that aspects of empowerment, including greater confidence, self-worth, and decision-making ability, are taking hold among emerging farmers. However, there remain, to varying degrees, elements of dependence on the commercial partner. Such dependence is expected given the length of time required for new project maturation. Moreover, projects, while in various stages of maturity, tend to have strong foundations in terms of access to markets, mentorship, and land through access and/or ownership. Such fundamentals make the chances of commercial success much higher.

Despite these successes, there have been noteworthy challenges faced by Witzenberg PALS, emerging farmers, as well as the sector at large. PALS has been constrained by limited organisational funding and capacity. Issues establishing new farm enterprises, the lack of buy-in from a greater number of commercial farmers, an insufficient enabling environment, and the scarcity of robust public sector partnerships have all been cited as additional challenges to the organisation. For emerging farmers, barriers to entry into commercial farming and access to finance remain challenges. More broadly, changing climates, theft and security, logistics, deteriorating infrastructure, market volatility, and labour issues have been cited as significant challenges to the sector at large. Overall, the context in which the intervention is located is a challenging one.

In conclusion, Witzenberg PALS is unique and holds the potential to leverage private resources for land reform across the country on an unprecedented scale. The evaluation has largely confirmed the programme's claims: this model is highly relevant to pressing national policy and development priorities. As such, the PALS initiative, while still having room for improvement (see below), should be viewed as a good model for private sector-led land reform in South Africa. It makes sense that those with a mandate for land reform or an inclusive agricultural economy should engage with this initiative. Strengthening two key systems outside of the direct control of PALS - that of government services and support; and that of private finance - could unlock latent potential in existing and potential projects.

The recommendations for the PALS framework include refinement of the theory of change, implementing a stronger M&E system, enhancing communication efforts, and clarifying categories in which potential and current projects fit. There are further recommendations around enhancing training, mentorship, and beneficiary selection, as well as standardising key processes and experiences. For the provincial government, recommendations include better liaising and cooperating with PALS

¹ A minority (6 out of 23) are former LRAD projects in the process of being restructured, and in two exceptions, the project accesses land by other means involving the state.

(provincial). For DALRRD, it is recommended that PALS act as a model or pilot for a decentralised land reform approach. Moreover, concerted efforts are needed to improve access to critical enablers and incentivize land reform contributions from commercial partners.



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List of abbreviations

| | |
|---------|---|
| AAMP | Agriculture and Agroprocessing Master Plan |
| AGRI WC | Agriculture Western Cape |
| ABP | Area based plans |
| ANC | African National Congress |
| BlackCO | Black Farming Company |
| CASP | Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme |
| DOA | Department of Agriculture |
| DPME | Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation |
| DRDLR | Department of Rural Development and Land Reform |
| DWS | Department of Water and Sanitation |
| FarmCO | Farming Company |
| FNB | First National Bank |
| KBOS | Koue Bokkeveld Training Centre |
| LRAD | Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development |
| M&E | Monitoring & Evaluation |
| PALS | Partners in Agri Land Solutions |
| PLRO | Provincial Land Reform Office |
| PR | Public Relations |
| NDP | National Development Plan |
| NPC | National Planning Commission |
| NPC | Non-Profit Corporation |
| PLAS | Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy |
| SLAG | Settlement and Land Acquisition Grant |
| SLLDP | State Land Lease and Disposal Policy |
| STATSA | Statistics South Africa |

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1 Introduction and background

1.1 Background to the evaluation

In South Africa, successful land reform is key to the economic, social, and political stability of the country. Access to agricultural land on the part of aspirant farmers, some of whom were previously dispossessed of land based on race, is an area of substantial public interest. This is stated clearly in the National Development Plan Vision 2030 (NDP) with land reform argued to be important in achieving democratic and equitable land allocation and use across race, gender, and class (NPC 2013: 140). Moreover, land reform has significant potential to contribute towards a dynamic, growing, and employment-creating agricultural sector (NPC 2013: 226). Considering provincial and departmental mandates and strategies, the Western Cape Department of Agriculture seeks to better understand the design, implementation, and outcomes of private sector-led land reform initiatives.

The Partners in Agri Land Solutions (PALS) initiative is conceived as a private-led land reform alternative. The initiative seeks to address key issues related to equity in the farming sector by opening opportunities for aspiring, but previously disadvantaged, farmers. The PALS initiative seeks to build partnerships between commercial producers and emerging farmers, in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. The PALS framework differs from most land reform models in that it is private sector-led and emphasises business principles, legal structures, mentorship, and training of previously disadvantaged farmers.

1.2 Background to Witzenberg PALS

A decentralised and collaborative land reform approach is a key aspect of the NDP's vision of inclusive and collaborative land reform. The NDP envisages a decentralised approach in which local actors, via district land committees, support and implement a decentralised land reform approach. Furthermore, the NDP's vision for land reform caters to a greater scope for the private sector to complement state land reform programmes. The argument is that the state alone cannot shoulder the responsibility for land reform and that private sector partnerships, like PALS, provide alternative pathways for the historically disadvantaged to access land, production support, markets, expertise, and technology.

As a private sector-led initiative, Witzenberg PALS was established in 2014 by local commercial agricultural producers in Witzenberg, Western Cape. The Witzenberg PALS initiative supports land reform through several interrelated mechanisms and aims to "create an enabling environment to implement innovative land reform and inclusive agricultural growth that supports social harmony." In striving towards this objective, the PALS framework combines a clear, formal structure with intensive support and facilitation of business opportunities. Beneficiaries are said to be "selected by using transparent objective criteria agreed to by the participating farm workers and the strategic partner" (SA PALS, 2018). This evaluation focuses on the 23 currently active Witzenberg PALS projects (as opposed to the larger set of potential and former projects). These are all in primary agriculture, although the framework is not restricted to this sub-sector of agriculture.

1.3 Structure of the report

Section 1 of this report provides a background to the evaluation and introduces Witzenberg PALS and the associated framework as the evaluand. Section 2 provides a summary of the approach, design, methodology, and limitations of the evaluation. Section 3 presents a description of the Witzenberg PALS initiative, including its history, design, characteristics, arrangements, and areas of work. Section 4 presents the major findings of this evaluation. Section 5 concludes the evaluation and is followed by recommendations in Section 6.

2 Methodology

2.1 Approach

In line with the National Evaluation Policy Framework (NEPF) (DPME, 2019), this evaluation employed a theory-based, participatory, and utilisation-focused approach. Where possible, the evaluation sought to apply a systems approach by locating Witzenberg PALS within its economic, social, and policy systems.

2.2 Design

The TOR called for a design, implementation, and outcomes evaluation. The specific questions (key evaluation questions – KEQs) that the evaluation sought to answer are as follows:

-
- a) Has a viable and proven ‘theory of change’ been determined, to guide implementation of the PALS Programme?
-
- b) To what extent has the intervention achieved its own stated targets and objectives?
-
- c) What challenges have had to be faced in developing the PALS initiative, and what further challenges are likely, although not yet identified?
-
- d) What are the perspectives of emerging farmers regarding the support that the PALS Programme is providing?
-
- e) What challenges to the sustainability of farming operations are being experienced by the beneficiaries of the Programme?
-
- f) What other challenging contextual factors are influencing the Programme, and how can they be mitigated or enhanced in the interest of better outcomes?
-
- g) What are the attitudes of emerging farmers in respect of the support provided by PALS, and in respect of prospects for their future farming success?
-
- h) What if any aspects of the PALS Programme should be improved, in the interest of improving outcomes of the Programme?
-
- i) What critical success factors can be identified to ensure successful implementation and outcomes of the PALS initiative?
-
- j) How successful are farmers measured according to a range of criteria?
-

Given the nature of these questions, the evaluation team proposed, and executed, the following research design:

- A mixed-methods (qualitative and quantitative) approach.
- Literature and documentation review.
- Theory of change review.
- Primary data collection: qualitative (farm visits, individual and group interviews, interviews with key stakeholders) and quantitative (questionnaire with project shareholders).
- Secondary data analysis, where applicable, of documents, literature, and project data.

The evaluation team spent two weeks in the Witzenberg region, visiting and interviewing shareholders and commercial partners. As illustrated in [Annexure 8.2](#), 18 of the 23 PALS projects (referred to as FarmCOs; see explanation below) were visited. 10 FarmCOs were located in the Ceres area, 7 in the Koue Bokkeveld, and 1 in the Piketberg area. As per Table 1, 38 stakeholders were interviewed in 25 sessions; 24 were emerging farmer shareholders at 14 of the FarmCOs, and 12 were commercial partners from 10 FarmCOs. A further two stakeholders were interviewed.¹ Additionally, 13 semi-structured interviews with non-farm stakeholders were undertaken. As per Table 2, these included sessions with PALS representatives, local and provincial governments, and private and non-profit collaborators. These were all held on virtual platforms.

In total, some 55 stakeholders were engaged in the research process through qualitative interviews. Quantitative data was collected from 15 FarmCOs using a structured survey.² The questionnaire included questions about PALS and its impact, as well as several key DoA outcome indicators that were deemed relevant for this evaluation. Of the 38 interviews conducted, 66% were conducted in English, 26% in Afrikaans, and 5% in isiXhosa. The evaluation team transcribed qualitative data and analysed the data using NVivo. Quantitative data was collected using Kobo toolbox and analysed using Microsoft Excel. The quantitative findings were used, in conjunction with the qualitative findings, to elucidate nuanced answers to the evaluation questions. In addition, a dataset of the 23 PALS projects was supplied by the PALS office ([see Annexure 8.2](#)). In terms of reporting, all interviewed stakeholders have been anonymized to safeguard identities. Each interviewee was assigned a unique code that links quotes and examples to the specific interviewee. To provide context to the quotes, interviewees are

categorised as either emerging farmers, commercial farmers, sector stakeholders, PALS representatives, or government officials.

Table 1: List of FarmCO stakeholders

| Type | Stakeholders | Sessions |
|------------------------------------|--------------|-----------|
| Emerging Shareholders | 24 | 14 |
| Commercial Partners | 12 | 12 |
| Stakeholder (General) ³ | 2 | 2 |
| Total | 38 | 25 |

Table 2: List of additional stakeholders

| Type | Stakeholders | Sessions |
|---|--------------|-----------|
| PALS Board Members | 2 | 2 |
| PALS Staff | 4 | 4 |
| PALS consultants | 1 | 1 |
| Hortgro officials | 3 | 2 |
| DoA officials | 2 | 1 |
| Agri Western Cape (Agri WC) officials | 2 | 1 |
| Witzenberg Municipality | 1 | 1 |
| Koue Bokkeveld Training Centre (KBOS) officials | 2 | 1 |
| Total | 17 | 13 |

2.3 Limitations

Any evaluation is subject to limitations, and these should be kept in mind when engaging with the findings.

1. The evaluation focused on the Witzenberg PALS initiative, operating in the Western Cape. The findings do not necessarily apply to SA PALS or PALS branches in the Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga.
2. The evaluation focused on the list of 23 projects supplied by Witzenberg PALS. As per the Terms of Reference, and confirmed in discussions with the steering committee, the evaluation was not required to evaluate former PALS or prospective PALS projects. While such inquiries may have added useful insights to the evaluation, the scope and mandate of the evaluation, as well as time constraints, meant these entities were not considered as part of the sample.
3. While the fieldwork team reached out to all 23 projects via phone and email, 18 of the 23 farm companies could be visited during the fieldwork period. The tight project timetable, impending harvest season, scheduling clashes, and unavailability of some shareholders meant that the fieldwork team was unable to visit and interview all projects. Reasons for lack of participation are as follows: 1 representative declined to participate, 1 representative felt she was not in a position to comment on PALS (only recently became a shareholder), 2 representatives were occupied and suggested we contact them again in January (falls outside the data collection period), and 1 representative asked for the questions to be emailed (this was done but no reply received).
4. Land reform is a complex field of study, and the work that PALS does is extensive. Given this, and in light of the short time frames for this evaluation, the evaluation questions guided the areas of emphasis, and not all areas of the PALS intervention were investigated in equal depth. For example, limited time and attention were paid to the communications and public relations role of PALS, even though it was one of the organisation's key strategic goals. The findings on these aspects of the initiative should be regarded as more tentative.
5. The evaluation team could not delve into a great deal of detail about the 39 land reform indicators set by the WC DoA. Given the methodology that is used to collect this information for WC DoA land reform projects, the evaluation did not have the required time to collect the data in the same rigorous way. Nevertheless, information on the most pertinent indicators was sourced and incorporated into the analysis. This was sourced partially from fieldwork as well as from Witzenberg PALS data.

3 Programme description: Witzenberg PALS

3.1 History

The idea for a new approach to land reform can be traced to the late 1990s and early 2000s. In light of the perceived failings of previous land reform endeavours, new thinking around private sector-led land reform was sought. Violent protests and strike action in De Doorns and surrounding towns in 2012 highlighted the urgent need for more inclusive land reform. It is in this context that the Witzenberg PALS initiative was launched.

3.2 Problem Statement and rationale for PALS⁴

Since 1994, various land reform initiatives have attempted to remedy the unequal distribution of land, wealth, and prosperity among different racial groups. Flagship land reform projects, including the Settlement and Land Acquisition Grant (SLAG), the Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development (LRAD) grant, and the Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy (PLAS), have been implemented to attempt to address land reform. However, numerous challenges and setbacks have limited the progress of these efforts. Based on lessons learned from past land reform efforts, the PALS initiative sought to design and implement an alternative land reform model.

As highlighted in the literature and document review, one of the fundamental constraints to agricultural development and transformation is limited government capacity and coordination at national, provincial, and municipal levels (Sihlobo and Qobo, 2021: 10). The need for private-public partnerships and joint ventures has been proposed in myriad policy documents and evaluations as a land reform solution (James and Woodhouse, 2015; Mahlati et al, 2019:85; NPC, 2013:11; Qobo et al, 2022:13). The PALS initiative works towards establishing partnerships amongst multiple stakeholders as a mechanism for implementing successful land reform.⁵ The emphasis of such efforts concerns the decentralisation of land reform, a perspective that features throughout much of the literature. It also speaks closely to the NDP's idea of a 'workable and pragmatic' land reform model and the need for a decentralised land reform process (NPC, 2013).

Previous land reform projects, having favoured large groups of beneficiaries, have encountered challenges such as limited transformation and financial returns (Lahiff, 2007). Characterised by widespread conflict and low productivity, these early efforts, involving large beneficiary groups co-purchasing farmland parcels, often led to contention and suboptimal outcomes (Ibid). Consequently, calls have been made for more appropriately designed structures for black commercial shareholders. Evaluative findings support this point by emphasising that successful projects have typically been those with fewer beneficiaries (DPME, 2013b). The challenges associated with large and unwieldy beneficiary groups have compelled PALS to prioritise small groups of farmers (Kriel, 2018). Moreover, previous land reform initiatives have often been hamstrung because of poor beneficiary selection processes (Republic of South Africa, 2017). In this regard, PALS seeks to be more rigorous, objective, and transparent in beneficiary selection through the introduction of objective criteria.

Lastly, land reform efforts have typically been handicapped by poor post-settlement support (DPME 2013a; DPME 2013b; Mahlathi, 2019; Van der Brink, 2009:208). Weak post-settlement support, both in terms of material support and skills transfer, highlights the need for more focused and appropriate support for targeted beneficiaries. In the PALS framework, efforts are baked into the framework to strengthen this support. For example, the inclusion of local commercial farmers as mentors and strategic partners is recognised as an important mechanism in post-settlement support.

3.3 Strategic goals of PALS

In light of the perceived failures of past and current land reform initiatives, PALS has the mandate to *"promote land reform and development through cooperation and partnership formation between new era and established commercial farmers per region, based on the PALS framework, enabling economic growth, job creation, food security, social harmony, and conservation of natural resources."* (SA PALS, 2022b: 3). In light of this mission, the following strategic goals have been developed to guide the work of Witzenberg PALS (SA PALS, 2022b:9):

1. Establishing individual new-era commercial farmers in South Africa in line with the principles of the PALS framework, while benefiting a larger group of employees through socio-economic upliftment.
2. Consulting inclusively with communities and all stakeholders to improve trust and social cohesion.
3. Extending the initiative to all regions and districts of South Africa as well as other agri-related industries or value chain enterprises.
4. Establishing and managing the PALS centres as "one-stop shops" and good corporate governance structures.
5. Investing in and offering unique and practical training and mentorship.

6. Coordinate continuous marketing and public relations actions to build the credibility of the PALS brand.

PALS' strategic goals were designed with the recommendations in Chapter 6 of the NDP Vision 2030 in mind (NPC, 2013:206-207). As discussed earlier, the initiative's objectives are understood to align with the NDP's land reform vision as a vehicle for economic and employment growth, economic transformation, as well as black empowerment and ownership (SA PALS, 2018:14).⁶

3.4 PALS framework

Holding these strategic goals closely, the PALS framework seeks to guide the establishment of sustainable land reform enterprises (SA PALS, 2019:1). According to PALS documentation (SA PALS, 2019:3; SA PALS, 2022a; SA PALS, 2022b; SA PALS, 2023a), the framework consists of the following seven components: More details of the framework can be found in the literature and document review.

1. In terms of structuring the entity, a company is the chosen type of enterprise.
2. The existence of an executable and bankable business plan for the new FarmCO.
3. A compulsory mentorship agreement between the commercial farmer and the shareholders, complemented by PALS training for the new BlackCO and FarmCO.
4. The shareholder's agreement contains a right of first refusal and other terms and conditions that protect and preserve the property and business for land reform purposes.
5. Adherence to the 'skin in the game' principle. The principles of fairness and reciprocity guide interactions and collaborations with and between partners.
6. The framework also includes the establishment of social-economic benefits for the employees, which is to be achieved through a discretionary employee trust.
7. The presence of critical success factors includes access to land (title deed or long-term lease), access to capital for development and inputs, access to markets for inputs and produce, skills, mentorship, support, networks, a dispute resolution mechanism, and an exit strategy.^{7 8}

The primary responsibility for implementing the PALS framework lies with the PALS Centre. This centre, as unpacked in the literature and document review, acts as the central node and "one-stop shop" for PALS activities. The PALS Centre has a range of key functions, many of which speak to implementing the PALS framework and contributing towards the development of new FarmCOs. The PALS Centre offers a range of support services to enterprises, including the delivery of training and mentorship, building partnerships and pairings, securing enablers for investment, enhancing communications/public relations, and strengthening community development. The degree to which the PALS centre has been effective in delivering said functions is unpacked in more detail in Section 4 of this evaluation.

3.5 Enablers

As per the document and literature review, enablers are seen as important mechanisms for land reform. For PALS, the government is envisioned to play a facilitative role and create an enabling environment for entrepreneurship and private sector investments. With that in mind, several important enablers have been identified. A combination of enablers is often required when new FarmCOs are implemented. The specific enablers required are determined by the exact needs of each FarmCO. With that being said, the following enablers feature prominently:⁹

- Water licenses: Permits for the use and storage of water by land reform projects will ensure that water is used effectively by agricultural sectors with the highest potential for growth and employment.
- Finance: Blended finance and other public sector financial instruments are seen as essential in offering affordable financing to emerging farmers. Given the barriers to entry into commercial farming, emerging farmers need affordable financing mechanisms to set them up for success.
- Subdivisions: The process for approval of subdivisions for land reform purposes should be prioritised and expedited for land reform.
- Electricity: Eskom's capacity constraints in the agricultural sector can be addressed by agricultural businesses that invest in solar energy and donate surplus energy to the national grid. Support and

incentives for these agricultural businesses are required from the government to expedite this process and ensure sufficient energy is needed for agricultural activities.

PALS' role in securing said enablers varies as per the needs of the new and prospective FarmCOs. As is discussed in further sections of this report, PALS can offer indirect support to FarmCOs such as advice, support, and experience. Alternatively, PALS can play a direct role in securing said enablers and is also said to work at the public relations and advocacy level to shape policy.

3.6 Characteristics of PALS projects

This section provides a brief overview of the key characteristics of the PALS projects. For more detailed overview of the PALS project's, see, for example, recent research by Abdoll (2024). Witzenberg PALS collaborates with 23 FarmCOs, with 20 situated in the Witzenberg Municipality and the remaining 3 in neighbouring municipalities. According to Figure 1, the most predominant agricultural products amongst these FarmCOs are pome fruits (57%), stone fruits (22%), and vegetables.

(26%) and livestock (17%). Overall, 82% of the FarmCOs are engaged in fruit production. Given the concentration on fruit production, the majority of the 23 FarmCOs fall within labour-intensive agriculture. This type of agriculture, according to the NDP, holds substantial potential for economic growth and employment creation (NPC, 2013: 222).

Typically, a standardised ownership structure, as illustrated by Figure 2, characterises the PALS FarmCOs. In such structures, a BlackCO is typically formed by one or more emerging shareholders. This BlackCO partners with a commercial farmer and establishes a new FarmCO. In practice, however, the structural and shareholding configurations vary based on the unique history, requirements, and contexts of each FarmCO.

In unpacking the 23 PALS FarmCOs, it is understood that:

- 15 FarmCOs are projects in which the BlackCO and commercial farmers have established a new FarmCO,
- 6 are former LRAD projects that have or are being restructured using the PALS framework.
- 2 are community-based projects whereby land is leased from the Witzenberg Municipality (Farm 13) and the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform, and Rural Development (DALRRD). e.g., 12.

In terms of ownership, the BlackCO is the majority shareholder in 18 of the 23 FarmCOs. In 5 of the 23 FarmCOs, the BlackCO is the minority shareholder in the FarmCO; in two of these FarmCOs, the BlackCO has partial ownership (26%) of an already established commercial farming business (equity share scheme). In terms of lifespan, the majority of the FarmCOs were established between 2014 and 2020. A handful of FarmCOs were established in the early 2000s as part of LRAD.

In terms of beneficiaries, one can conservatively estimate that, through a combination of individual or employee shareholders (employee trust beneficiaries), there are around 772 beneficiaries in the 23 FarmCOs. Here, beneficiaries are considered individuals who directly benefit from the FarmCOs.¹⁰ The exact configuration varies depending on the specific shareholding arrangements of each FarmCO:

- In some instances, the BlackCO is owned outright by less than 10 individuals, e.g., Farm 7.
- In other instances, individual(s), as well as an employee trust are the owners of the BlackCO, e.g., Farm 15, Farm 8.

Figure 1: Profile of farming commodities (N = 23)

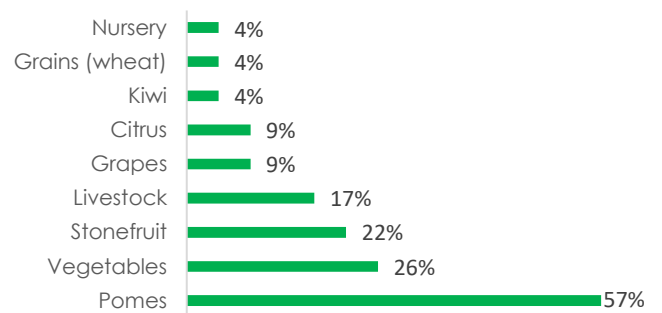
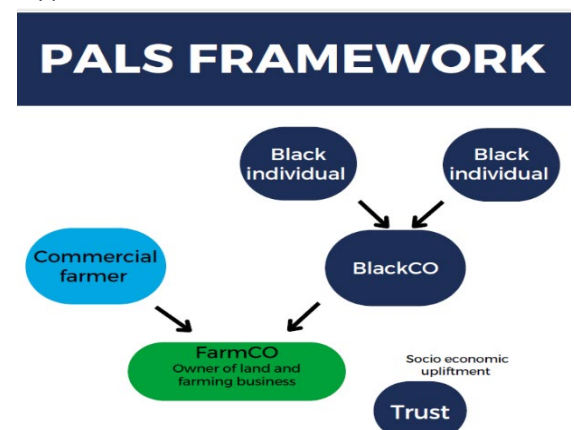


Figure 2: Ownership framework for a typical PALS FarmCO



- In other instances, usually former LRAD schemes, the employee trust outright owns the BlackCO, e.g., Farm 17, Farm 14.

In terms of employee trusts, more half of the 23 FarmCOs incorporate such trusts into their structures. Typically, the employee trust functions as a partial owner of the BlackCO. However, the exact configuration of ownership varies per FarmCO. In some instances, the employee trust is a direct shareholder in the FarmCO. In other cases, the employee trust is the sole owner of the BlackCO.

In terms of land use, the 23 FarmCOs operate across 15,114 hectares of land. Evidence collected from 18 of the 23 FarmCOs suggests that roughly 11% of owned or leased land is under cultivation.¹¹ This seemingly low land utilisation can be attributed to various factors, such as the non-arable nature of some land, e.g., mountainsides. For potential arable and productive land, constraints like insufficient water, challenges in securing water licensing, and a lack of capital for production expansion were cited as reasons for land underutilisation. In all instances, emerging farmers have expressed intentions to increase cultivation and production in the future.

| Ownership breakdown (N = 23) | % | Hectares |
|---|-----|----------|
| BlackCO owns the land | 26% | 2139ha |
| FarmCO owns the land | 52% | 6520ha |
| Leasing from private or govt | 13% | 69ha |
| Employee trust owns a share of a commercial company (equity share scheme) | 9% | 6389ha |

Table 3: Profile of land ownership

In terms of land ownership, Table 3 provides a breakdown of BlackCOs owning land in 6 FarmCOs (2139 hectares of land). In an additional 12 FarmCOs, the FarmCO owns the land, equating to 6515 hectares of land. In a few instances, land is leased by the FarmCO from either government or

private landholders (69 hectares). In the two remaining FarmCOs, the employee trust has a 26% stake in the commercial companies and, arguably, owns 26% of the land (1661 hectares).

4 Findings

This section is structured broadly in line with the Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs). Whilst all questions have been addressed, some sub-sections address two or more closely related questions.

4.1 Programme design (KEQ A)

4.1.1 Programme design

What are the alternative routes to land reform other than state land reform programmes? PALS, as a framework and initiative, provides an example of an alternative route through which emerging farmers can access land, capital, and markets. A significant finding of this evaluation is that PALS has an important role to play in commercial-based land reform. However, it cannot address all aspects of what is envisaged as part of a broad land reform process.

"There can't be one size fits all in land reform. I mean, there are different models. The PALS one can be one of many models, but it's a different model. And I think, the support that they're giving to those beneficiaries, we can't underestimate that. Their business deals or networks are key to those projects. I mean, they have networks that we don't have, that the beneficiaries don't have, or they can influence other networks like financial institutions, and you name it, input suppliers and whatever to come to the table" (Government Official 2)

Overall, the evaluation suggests that the design of PALS is relevant and coherent. Much work has been undertaken to design a framework that can address land reform issues, primarily in the context of commercial agriculture in South Africa. PALS can therefore be said to be a good model for resource-poor and emerging black farmers seeking to enter the commercial farming sector.

The "P" in PALS stands for partners. It is clear that PALS plays a strong role in convening, partnering, and facilitating relationships to foster company development and land reform. The facilitator role is often possible because PALS, being a local player, has intimate knowledge of the local environment and has a well-developed local network. Respondents noted how such relations are important in opening the right doors:

"PALS plays a big role. They don't give you money, they knock on doors for you where you can get help and you get the help that you need...PALS goes to places and helps where they can." (Farm 12 - Emerging Farmer 1)

Case Studies

In playing the partnership role, PALS brings potential partners together. In the case of Farm 13, PALS played a critical role in facilitating the leasing of municipal land to the FarmCOs. This represents an example of bringing local government and the community together to make land available for black-owned FarmCOs. The case of Farm 5 is an example in which PALS brought together partners to start a joint nursery venture. In this case, PALS facilitated the establishment of the FarmCOs between the concerned parties.

The local role of Witzenberg PALS provides a working example of a decentralised approach to land reform. This approach conjures images of the NPC's decentralised land reform vision. Said vision advocates for the establishment of district land committees comprising local agricultural landowners, key stakeholders such as commercial banks, agribusiness, and various government departments (NPC, 2013). While PALS takes this approach, it has not always been successful in securing buy-in and getting all parties to the table. This is unpacked in Section 4.4 of the report.

"The networking that they've got. I think they can bring a lot of people together to make a success of these projects.... I think if that can happen PALS is going to grow, they are going to do a great job because they've got the expertise they know exactly where some farms are for sale. And their knowledge - they work with a farmer, so they've got a lot of agriculture knowledge." (Farm 17 - Commercial Partner)

From the evaluation, PALS's intimate knowledge of the local landscape is one aspect that sets PALS apart from government efforts. This "closeness" to local agricultural communities fosters connections, networks, and trust, providing the framework for locally-driven land reform efforts. While there have been public sector attempts to decentralise land reform, notably through the establishment of district-level committees, these attempts, for various reasons, have largely been a failure (Hart and Bank, 2018).

Being private-led, PALS can mobilise and partner with multiple stakeholders. Local commercial farmers, for example, play a significant role in PALS-based land reform, notably through mentorship, financing, and marketing support. In partnering with multiple stakeholders, including the private sector, PALS is well-positioned to mobilise privately owned resources, land, and capital for land reform. As one government official explained it:

"You have one commercial partner with at least a family or less than a family of black farmers and they go into a business or joint venture arrangement. That's where PALS is playing a huge role and that again, we (government) don't have the financial strength that some of these commercial partners have. And that's why it's the space where PALS is, and we are not in that space... we just don't have that amount of money. So we are glad for the black farmer that through the PALS initiative, they can be connected to commercial, you know strong businesspeople and there's nothing wrong with it." (Government official 2)

This mobilisation is evident in several FarmCOs that have been supported by commercial partners.¹² The role and inclusion of commercial, mostly white, farmers in PALS-based land reform efforts speak closely to the NDP's land reform visions. In this vision, white commercial farmers and organised industry bodies are viewed as significant contributors to the success of black farmers. Contributions are said to include mentorships, value chain integration, preferential procurement, and meaningful skill development. As is presented in this report, many of these potential contributions are baked into the PALS model of land reform, with commercial farmers and industry playing a vital role.

Another important evaluative finding relates to the flexibility and adaptability of the PALS framework. Many of the evaluated FarmCOs possessed unique characteristics and structures. The framework, however, can adapt to the particular composition and nature of the FarmCO. As such, it can be said that the principles of the framework are customisable so that FarmCOs can adapt it to suit their needs, provided the key tenets of the framework are adhered to.

Lastly, it is evident that the design of the PALS framework is based on the failures and constraints of early land reform efforts. It is widely accepted, both from the literature and from stakeholder engagements, that LRAD, for example, was a largely unsuccessful intervention. The “rent a crowd” critique was often invoked when reflecting on LRAD with criticism of large, often unruly, groups of beneficiaries. In learning from this, the PALS framework strongly advocates for the selection of manageable and small groups of beneficiaries. There are economic, accountability, e.g., skin in the game principles, and manageability reasons for having small groups of beneficiaries involved in the new FarmCO.

“I think PALS may have learned from all the mistakes because the LRAD scheme didn't always work well. In our district, the few LRAD schemes that are significant are where there are partnerships with a commercial farm and a BEE farm. In the other places, there are very few left where it was 100% BEE.” (Farm 11 - Commercial Partner)

4.1.2 Comments on the theory of change (ToC)

While an implicit ToC has been evident throughout much of the documentation around PALS, an explicit conceptualisation, and development, of the organisation's ToC has only recently been produced as part of the Job Fund's formative review. Given this recent development, the degree to which this ToC is used to guide implementation is unknown and likely not well institutionalised.

While the document itself is fairly novel, the mechanisms underpinning this ToC have long been in place. Much of the theory behind the intervention has been referenced in documentation and discussions with various stakeholders. Moreover, evidence from the literature, document review, and fieldwork suggests that the ToC is a viable articulation of the programme. Indeed, the ToC touches on key aspects of the programme, including the core activities and outcomes.

With that being said, the ToC should be treated as a living document. As such, it needs to be reflected upon regularly and updated when required. As the organisation learns, so should the ToC be refined to reflect these learnings. Moreover, given the complex context in which the PALS intervention is located, emphasis should be placed on mapping key assumptions and risks surrounding the intervention. At each stage in the causal theory, there are some important assumptions and significant risks that should be explicitly mapped, e.g., what assumptions and risks are there around the enablers? Is it assumed that water licenses will be easy to obtain?

The current ToC is presented linearly and does not consider how other intervening factors may shape the intervention's outcomes and impact. Understanding how the larger political economy impacts and shapes the prospects for land reform in Witzenberg and the outcomes of the PALS initiative is important to the intervention. While the intervention may function perfectly well, factors outside PALS's control may pose risks to new FarmCOs. For example, if the ports fail to transport produce to international markets, emerging FarmCOs will falter, resulting in job losses and business failure. While outside the control of PALS, accounting for these risks and assumptions is useful in thoroughly understanding the system in which the intervention resides.

Lastly, it was found that embedded formal monitoring & evaluation (M&E) systems are largely absent from Witzenberg PALS. Such systems can be used to track, monitor, learn, and refine interventions and should be built into the PALS implementation framework. Such systems will become more important as PALS scales up and strong systems and metrics are needed to manage, monitor, and evaluate projects.

4.2 Success factors for PALS-based land reform (KEQ D, G, I)

This section unpacks the perspective of emerging farmers and commercial partners on how PALS is implemented and how the initiative supports enterprise development. In doing so, it uncovers and explains key factors for successful land reform, providing an overview of why they are important, what role PALS plays, and what challenges are apparent.

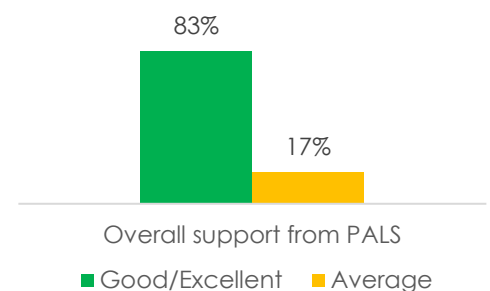
Firstly, it is evident from interviews that PALS holds different meanings for various stakeholders. Indeed, PALS assumes diverse roles in their interactions with new and prospective FarmCOs. In some cases, they play a pivotal role in establishing new FarmCOs and are responsible for bringing partners together, e.g., Farm 5. In other instances, their primary function is to provide legal and business support and advice;

someone to assist in navigating business decisions. The specific role of PALS in FarmCO development will largely depend on the unique needs and specificities of the FarmCO.

Similarly, it is understood that the role of PALS is not simply about allocating land to new FarmCOs. Rather, PALS is a partner in land reform and offers a range of support services. Their reference to the PALS centre being a “one-stop shop” is therefore a pragmatic reflection of how they are viewed as a port of call for participating emerging farmers. In light of the many hats that PALS wears, it has been successful in providing some benefit to each FarmCO. With that in mind, emerging farmers paint a positive picture of the PALS initiative, with 83% of respondents considering the overall support from PALS to be good or excellent (Figure 3). None of the emerging farmers engaged in this evaluation selected one of the more negative response options. The interviews with these same farmers demonstrated the diverse ways in which PALS has earned these positive ratings with each FarmCO.¹³

“I happened to be, a few months back now, at a talk held by the Western Cape Department of Agriculture, and there I met some of the other black empowerment farmers, and I listened to the problems they face, which are not at PALS. I sat there and I listened, and all I could say to myself was we are really fortunate. Because those people are struggling, and it sounds to me like they have been in farming for a while, they are still struggling with water rights, they are still struggling to get financing, they are still struggling to get decent infrastructures and things like that.” (Farm 1 - Emerging Farmer)

Figure 3: Emerging farmer perspectives on overall PALS



4.2.1 Access to land

The PALS framework highlights the need for secure land tenure through a lease or title deed. At its most basic level, land reform concerns the transfer of land to previously disadvantaged people. This is certainly a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for successful land reform. PALS, therefore, works with each FarmCO to secure access to land as one of its fundamentals. There are numerous pathways through which land can be transferred to new FarmCOs and BlackCOs.

- Land donated by commercial partners to the new FarmCO or BlackCO. Typically, this occurs when farm workers or managers are selected to be the shareholder partners, e.g., Farm 15.
- The commercial partner purchases the land on behalf of the new FarmCO, effectively through a low or no-interest loan, e.g., Farm 7.
- Land owned by a commercial partner is sold to the new FarmCO with the expense added to the new FarmCO's account, e.g., Farm 4.
- Lease agreements between the municipality or commercial partner and the FarmCO, e.g., Farm 13.

Insecure land access: The notable exception to secure land access is at Farm 12. This FarmCO currently operates on a state-owned (PLAS) farm in Ceres. The FarmCO, originally set up as a cooperative, had a 3-year lease for the land, starting in 2014. This lease soon expired without a new lease materialising. Since its expiration, the FarmCO has continued to operate without a lease on the farm. However, the lack of a formal lease, and secure land tenure leaves the FarmCO in a precarious situation with the FarmCO struggling to secure financing and develop partnerships or mentorship arrangements. They are, in essence, stuck in limbo without land security.

4.2.2 Access to capital

Access to capital is an important factor for successful land reform, especially in the capital-intensive fruit sector. Indeed, new orchards can cost upwards of R500,000 per hectare. Depending on the cultivar, the orchard requires several years to reach full production maturity. This results in a significant income lag for new FarmCOs as they wait for orchard maturation. Meanwhile, FarmCOs need to absorb operational costs and likely capital costs with little to no income, presenting a challenge to such entities that can struggle to access finance.

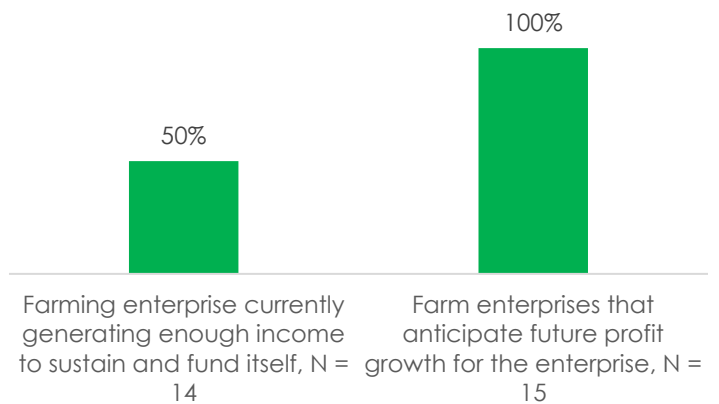
“You plant a tree and only in year 5 are you looking for production.” (Farm 1 - Commercial Partner 2)

Emerging farmers are thus unlikely to make significant income and profits in their first few years of operation. Figure 4 illustrates this, as 50% of interviewed FarmCOs do not currently generate enough income to fund the business. Looking to the future, however, 100% of interviewees expected future company profitability.

How then do new FarmCOs fund themselves in this challenging incubation period? In answering this, around 73% (11 of the 15 FarmCOs) received or are receiving financial support from one or more sources (refer to Figure 5). In 9 of the 11 receiving FarmCOs (82%), support is considered sufficient, despite some interviewees suggesting significant challenges in accessing capital.

"In the beginning, it was difficult because I relied on (commercial partner) to do everything, and all the money they put in in the first 3-4 years went into the account (a loan with no interest) from (commercial partner). The loan was very nice, and it helped me a lot to get a commercial partner who is reliable and trustworthy with a sense of humanity." (Farm 7 - Emerging Farmer)

Figure 4: FarmCO views on current and future financial position

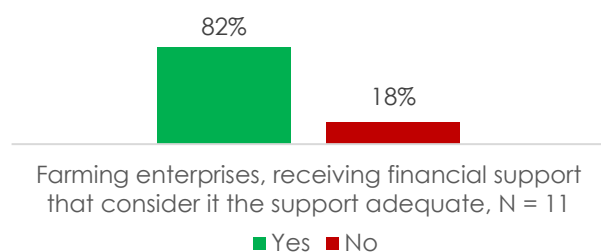


In terms of sources of funding, the evaluation found that, in many of the visited FarmCOs, the commercial partner plays a pivotal role. This is especially the case in the incubation years of the new FarmCOs.¹⁴ Findings further suggest that the specific "funding" role of the commercial entity varies as per the needs of the new FarmCO. The following scenarios highlight some of these roles:

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Scenario 1 | The commercial partner provides affordable loans to the FarmCO for the purchase of land, capital, and operating expenditures, e.g., Farm 7. |
| Scenario 2 | The partner provides grants to the FarmCO, effectively gifting these land, capital or operational expenditures to the new FarmCO, e.g., Farm 15. |
| Scenario 3 | A combination of loans from the commercial partner as well as private sector investment is provided to the FarmCO, e.g., Farm 4. |

While commercial partners have assisted FarmCOs, there is typically a limit to which funds can be allocated. This is especially the case in an increasingly tough economic climate where weather variability, input costs, logistical issues (road and harbour) and energy supply are prevalent. It is therefore not always feasible for commercial partners to financially support the FarmCOs.

Figure 5: Emerging farmers that consider financial support sufficient



Findings further suggest that private financial institutions play a significant role in the FarmCO financing. While such institutions do support FarmCOs, it can be challenging to access this support as FarmCOs often lack the equity to reassure lenders. Indeed, the assessed risk of the FarmCO is often deemed too high for private lending institutions. Similarly, there are concerns that such financing, while an option, comes with risk, notably issues saddling new FarmCOs with large debt.

Lastly, evaluative findings highlight the role of public sector programmes in supporting new FarmCOs. Of note, the Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme (CASP) has been shown to assist FarmCOs with needed capital inputs. Findings show that several FarmCOs have benefited from CASP funding through such investments, e.g., Farm 1, Farm 8, Farm 7, Farm 3, Farm 6, and Farm 14. Furthermore, FarmCOs implementing the PALS framework are considered prime candidates for CASP funding, aligning with CASP eligibility requirements such as a robust business plan, mentorship agreements, and collaboration with commercial partners. However, it was mentioned that the process of securing CASP

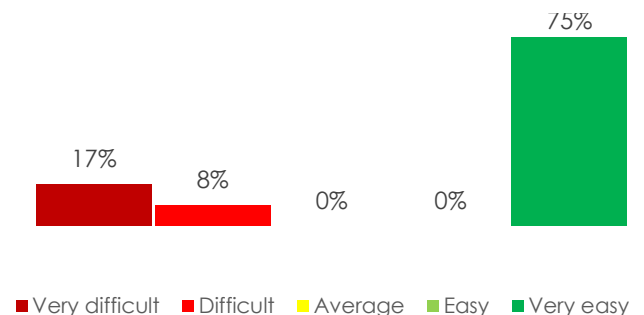
Imagine the following scenario: "I was the production manager or a farm worker. Today, I own a farm. I don't have any access to finance. That is because I don't have any security or collateral. I don't have a proper track record. So I'm left out. The grants (CASP) take a while because when you apply until the day that the money flows or when you start the planning process and by the time the money flows is somewhere between 12 to 18 months. So you sit with a very intensive industry (fruit), but that's management and capital intensive and you lack in both so that's most in most cases where they fall flat." (Sector Stakeholder 3)

funding can be protracted. With that being said, some concerns were raised during the interviews. There was mention that the process to obtain CASP funding can be lengthy. Moreover, one interviewee was critical of the quality of services procured through the CASP mechanism; and another questioned whether, by operating through an implementation agent, the DoA has become too far removed from on-the-ground realities.

As things stand, access to capital constraints impact several FarmCOs. In responses, findings highlight the role of PALS. In seeking to address financing issues, PALS attempts to form partnerships to unlock funding for FarmCOs. For example, PALS has developed strategic partnerships with FNB and Nedbank; these partnerships arguably lay the foundation for closer ties and relations between banks and FarmCOs. PALS has also said it has engaged extensively with the Landbank, amongst others, in attempts to streamline and access the blended finance mechanism. Through expressions of

frustration from PALS staff, as well as utterances from emerging and commercial partners, accessing Landbank's blended finance, while offering so much promise, has proven elusive.

Figure 6: Emerging farmers' perspectives on ease of market access (N = 12)



4.2.3 Access to markets

As noted throughout much of the literature, including the NDP and AAMP, support for market access is critical for any emerging FarmCO (DPME, 2013b). Within the PALS framework, market agreements are incorporated into the wider set of formal agreements between the FarmCO shareholders. As a result, the majority of interviewed FarmCOs (75%) consider access markets, through the commercial partners' existing marketing structures, to be straightforward (Figure 6).

Typically, FarmCOs access the transport, packhouse, cold storage, and marketing agreements of their commercial partner, e.g., Farm 8, Farm 7, Farm 1, and Farm 6. New FarmCOs find this arrangement convenient and cost-effective and appear confident that it will remain in place. They, therefore, see little value in sourcing new markets or investing in their marketing outlets. With that being said, some emerging farmers envision a stronger role for PALS in facilitating market access, e.g., Farm 13, Farm 16.¹⁵ Farm 5, for example, expressed hope that PALS will, as a facilitator and networker, be able to open some doors for their burgeoning nursery business to link the nursery with potential clients for commercial fruit saplings.

4.2.4 Access to mentorship

Mentorship and training are critical success factors in the trajectory of emerging farmers. This is supported in the wider literature and features strongly in the design of PALS, as well as in feedback from the ground. Mentorship has been described as the golden thread, along with training and partnerships to establish commercial black farmers. In the PALS framework, a formal mentorship agreement is mandatory to ensure embedded skills transfer.

The nature of the mentorship relationship varies depending on the needs of each relationship. However, findings suggest that it tends to encompass technical knowledge and, to a lesser degree, business and finance mentoring, e.g., Farm 18, Farm 6. This relationship is deemed essential for new FarmCOs to get off on the right foot and maintain and build trust and openness in the business relationship.

"I think without the mentorship we would have made a lot more mistakes. Because first of all, not all of us have that skilled background of a tertiary education... As I said at the

beginning, running a farm is like running a business, and we don't have that background. We would have made a lot more mistakes, and we wouldn't have gotten there without their help and guidance." (Farm 4 - Emerging Farmer)

In reflecting on the quality of mentorship, 83% consider the mentorship from commercial farmers to be good or excellent, suggesting emerging farmers find value in such arrangements (refer to Figure 7). However, mentorship, by its very nature, tends to contain unequal power dynamics. When a racial component is added to the mix, such dynamics can be exacerbated. Indeed, there have been a handful of reported instances where mentoring relations were viewed somewhat negatively. Here, the mentee-mentor did not always see eye-to-eye, noticeably in the early stages of the relationship. In such cases, most often where a history between the mentor and mentee was absent, power dynamics, fuelled by likely suspicion and mistrust, have manifested. In one case, it was expressed that the relationship was one of giving instructions and not mentorship. The findings, however, show that these initial strained relationships tend to be lessened over time as the relationship matures and strengthens.

"It was bad in the beginning. If you start working with people and they're not treating, you the way you want to be treated...We now have a very nice relationship. He started asking me how my wife was, asked about my kids during school...So the relationship is growing and nice to see we achieved something humane at the end of the day...I think we are a team because we all have to speak the same language." (Farm 7 - Emerging Farmer)

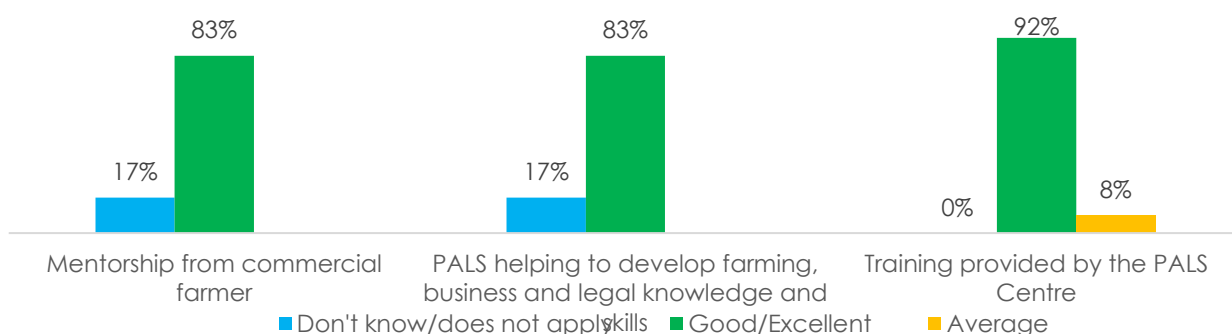
Interviewees raised further concerns regarding mentorship. One stakeholder, for instance, suggested that the mentorship agreement may be overly ambitious, unrealistic, and in need of adjustment. In practice, the stakeholder noted that the agreed-upon terms are not rigorously adhered to. The impetus for mentorship is the strength of the partnership, including the fact that the mentor has a commercial stake in the success of the enterprise and a personal investment in the mentee. The evaluation team did not investigate this further, but it suggests that there is room for refinement of the written mentorship agreement to give better guidance to what happens in practice.

4.2.5 Access to training

Skills development through training is another key success factor of PALS's implementation and likelihood of impact. In the FarmCOs, this is partially delivered through mentorship relationships as well as through PALS-led training. PALS is actively involved in providing training for shareholders around contracts, finances, leadership, and business, either internally or in partnership with external stakeholders. This is structured into a list of introductory and "next level" courses that it appears to offer regularly. Other courses are offered on a more ad hoc basis, depending on opportunities created by partners and funding providers. This training is delivered, in part, by PALS directly to stakeholders. In addition, ad hoc training is offered by external entities, e.g., AECL and KBOS on complementary topics, e.g., marketing.

In assessing satisfaction with the training, most respondents (92%) considered the PALS training to be good or excellent. Likewise, 83% view the role of PALS in developing farming, business, and legal knowledge and skills as good or excellent (refer to Figure 7).

Figure 7: Emerging farmers' perspectives PALS support on training and mentorship (N = 12)



"I am quite happy about the training; people learn a lot. You always hear things from people one way or another, and then when you first watch someone or see someone teach it at a course, it's very nice because then you understand it better." (Farm 15 - Emerging Farmer)

Certainly, there is room for improvement with regards to training. Certain stakeholders recognised the necessity for targeted and needs-based training as opposed to training shaped by funders, e.g., AECI and Nedbank. Additional suggestions concern the need for more training, even if it is simply a matter of bringing emerging farmers together to discuss issues and share their experiences. Overall, there is some evidence of a standardised PALS training curriculum covering the following topics:

- Director, shareholder and trustee training
- Leadership training & youth
- Mentorship and coaching

Figure 8 : PALS Selection Criteria

- Years of service
- Being a true farmer
- Seniority
- Finances (budgets)
- Management principles
- Production skills/experience
- Marketing skills
- Communication skills
- Leadership
- Organisational skills

However, it is not clear whether the current approach to facilitating training in PALS optimally serves participants in terms of sequencing and predictability, subject matter covered, and the diverse needs of members (including mentors). The evaluation did not study this in adequate depth to make a conclusive judgement, but it notes the seeming lack of formal articulation of PALS's training approach and rationale, leaving room for improvement.

4.2.6 Beneficiary selection

Of critical importance to any land reform initiative is the selection of beneficiaries. The failure of previous land reform attempts has often been laid at the doorstep of beneficiary selection, both in terms of quality and quantity. An important characteristic of PALS as a private sector-driven model is the prerogative of the commercial partner to choose the FarmCO beneficiaries. While PALS provides a suggested list of objective criteria (Refer to figure 8) for beneficiary selection, commercial partners are ostensibly not beholden to such suggestions when decisions are being made. In practice, there appears to be flexibility and variation in how the commercial partner weighs certain criteria. The findings suggest that individuals already known to the commercial partner are preferred. In such cases, trust has been built up over time, and a certain familiarity exists between the parties. This is justifiable given that the parties concerned become business partners who take personal financial risks with each other.

"When the project started, there were a lot of people working for the commercial partner and then they saw that the guys who bring the most to the table, and the longest working here and the most reliable are the six of us. We were identified and we were approached, and they sat down with us." (Farm 3 – Emerging Farmer 1)

With that being said, and given the variety of models found with the PALS FarmCOs, four "scenarios" highlight varying beneficiary selections in PALS:

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Scenario 1 | The commercial partner chooses the beneficiary(s), generally employees. 50% of FarmCOs fall into this scenario, and common criteria for selection include connection to the commercial entity, history of employment, clean track record, knowledge and experience (usually someone who is in a management position), trustworthiness, and reliability. |
| Scenario 2 | Two businesspeople establish a company (one happens to be black and the other white) and approach PALS for advice and support, e.g., Farm 7. The parties are generally aware of each other through, for example, past business dealings and see an opportunity to partner together. |
| Scenario 3 | PALS links commercial partners and beneficiaries. Here the commercial partner or emerging partner approaches PALS intending to start a company, e.g., Farm 8 and Farm 5. Consideration is then made as to whether there are potential projects and partners. Potential partners are identified and introduced to scope out the extent to which there is potential for partnership. |
| Scenario 4 | Large groups, using LRAD and their own contributions, have purchased a farm or shares in an entity e.g., Farm 14, Farm 11. While having undergone restructuring, often using the PALS framework, such entities tend to consist of larger groups of beneficiaries. Besides Farm 10 and Farm 19, both of which are minority shareholders in a large commercial venture, FarmCOs have partnered with a commercial entity. While the characteristics and structure of these FarmCOs |

| | |
|--|--|
| | differ, the role of the commercial partner is generally strong, e.g., mentorship and market access agreements. |
|--|--|

Other state-driven or potentially non-profit models should complement this distinctive selection of beneficiaries. This is necessary to extend land reform opportunities to a broader population that may have potential but lacks the specific relationship with a commercial farmer upon which the PALS model typically relies. In this way, the PALS approach requires certain design characteristics that distinguish it from government-led land reform initiatives; ideally, they should complement each other, leveraging their respective strengths in different sectors.

4.2.7 Solid legal foundations and legal advice

Establishing solid legal foundations, supported by user-friendly agreements, is crucial for the success of FarmCOs within the PALS framework. Ensuring clarity and simplicity in these agreements is important, particularly as emerging farmers may not have prior experience engaging with such documents. Providing training on such documents is a critical feature of PALS's service offering.

Yet, doing so and getting assistance to structure the company requires effort on the part of PALS. As such, it is understood that such services are not pro bono, with new FarmCOs expected to pay for them. While this has been said to be relatively expensive, structuring your company correctly is essential, and, like paid-for water, tax, or sub-division services, legal and contractual fees are required. Indeed, one shareholder noted how the service was expensive but worth it. For PALS, secure funding is needed for said services so that the financial burden for new FarmCOs is lessened and they are not deterred from accessing these essential aspects of enterprise development.

Where questions arise or agreements and documentation are not clear, having access to legal, business, and financial advice and support is important. While mentors often cater to the technical concerns of emerging partners, readily available support in legal, business, and financial advice is available via the PALS office. Evidence suggests that PALS acts as a key resource to discuss legal and business issues. Examples were shared of PALS's support when a shareholder wanted to leave and where there needed to be a redistribution of employee benefits. One interviewee simply said that they can reach out to PALS whenever they are unsure of something. As such, 100% of the surveyed farmers considered the legal and business advice provided by PALS to be good or excellent.

"I can speak easily to them. I can speak with PALS staff X to assist me. PALS staff, in the law aspect, can say, how can you help me? How to approach this?" (Farm 14 - Emerging Farmer)

4.2.8 Other enablers

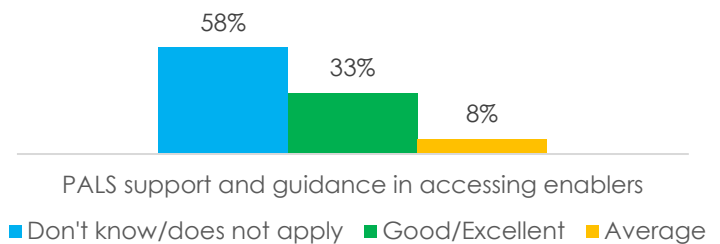
Government enablers can impede or facilitate the establishment of a new FarmCO. As such, their importance and the overall role of government are absolutely essential to unlocking land reform in South Africa. However, unlocking enablers is not always straightforward and may require a significant amount of time. At a high level, and according to collected data, PALS has, in some way, assisted and supported around 1/3 of interviewed FarmCOs in unlocking government enablers (see Figure 9). Feedback on this support has been positive, with PALS recognised for its role as a connector or facilitator. PALS is perceived to possess the expertise and experience necessary for advising, guiding, and unlocking government enablers.

"So it's very important to have PALS in our corner because if you want to apply, you're supposed to go to different departments, but what PALS would do, it will bring them to you and say, here are those people that you needed to apply to help you with that e.g., water if you apply for a licence you will take maybe five to six years without PALS. They organise the relevant people who are working in the department." (Farm 2 - Emerging Farmer 1)

In this context, stakeholders have acknowledged that the connections and expertise provided by PALS can expedite the processes for new FarmCOs, e.g., Farm 1 and Farm 2. However, it is important to note that while PALS can facilitate and expedite these processes, they cannot guarantee success. Indeed, a lot depends on external factors beyond the control of PALS. Moreover, some individuals have raised questions about the extent of PALS' current influence over such procedures and their capacity to expedite them. These seemingly conflicting viewpoints likely stem from stakeholders possessing diverse perspectives, experiences, and frustrations concerning these enabling processes and the role that PALS effectively plays.

In alignment with the Theory of Change (ToC), government enablers, although crucial, also pose a significant risk to the success of emerging FarmCOs. The evaluative findings indicate that this risk, coupled with the lack of progress in accessing enablers, has been a source of substantial frustration and challenge for both PALS and the development of new FarmCOs. Certainly, there is a perception that obtaining enablers is considerably more challenging than initially anticipated.¹⁶ This challenge, as future sections of this report indicate, is acknowledged as a significant contributor to the inability of numerous PALS projects to get off the ground.

Figure 9: Emerging farmers' perspectives on PALS support in accessing enablers (N =12)



Given this situation, there have been some strong appeals for the government, at various levels, to create a more enabling environment for land reform beyond its programmes. This includes suggestions for the formalisation of recognition of contributions to land reform, e.g., tax incentives or BEEE scores for participating commercial partners. Moreover, some suggested that cutting onerous red tape and reducing bureaucratic inefficiencies are needed to streamline access to government services. Lastly, several proposals have been presented on how to achieve this goal, notably through the authentic establishment of district land reform committees. By doing so, government services can be quickly activated as per the needs of emerging farms.

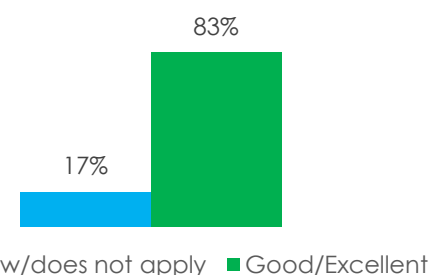
4.2.9 Trust

Although trust is listed as the last of these critical factors, it is perhaps the single most important indicator to predict a successful FarmCO. Mistrust is viewed as rife in agriculture, ostensibly between commercial farmers, public institutions, farm workers, and the wider community. Centuries of segregation and exploitation have instilled deep-seated scepticism and mistrust within and among communities of people.

"I think PALS at that point was trying its level best to make inroads to break down, you know, the historical mistrust...Whether it be at community level, grassroots community level in Ceres and surrounding areas as well as in engagements at various levels of government." (Farm 8 - Emerging Farmer)

From documents and discussions, it is evident that PALS understands the importance of prioritising the establishment of trust. This is achieved through mechanisms such as clear shareholder agreements, open and sincere conversations, and functioning as a neutral third party. According to 83% of interviewees, PALS's role in building trust and confidence among beneficiaries is perceived to be good or excellent (refer to Figure 10).

Figure 10: Emerging farmers' perspectives on PALS support in building trust (N =12)



"I think with PALS as the third party and having those difficult conversations from the beginning, it takes away the smoke and mirrors and addresses the potential mistrust that could be especially from the beneficiary side saying." (PALS representative 3)

4.2.10 Role of the commercial partners

As alluded to in much of this section, emerging FarmCOs are, to varying degrees, dependent on the commercial partner for a range of aforementioned support mechanisms. It was further found that FarmCOs may depend on commercial partners for equipment, machinery, office and finance services, infrastructure, and labour, e.g., Farm 1, Farm 15, Farm 7, Farm 9. In many cases, the FarmCOs do not have their own labour and rely on the commercial partner, e.g., Farm 14, Farm 7. The presence of management agreements in many FarmCOs underscores the central role of the commercial partner in supporting and operating the FarmCO.¹⁷

"We (FarmCO) wouldn't have been in that position to access cultivars of peaches and nectarines if it wasn't for a partnership. Partners were giving us the administrative and

financial support that we needed. Utilising their financial office, financial manager, payment processes, all the admin, spray records, audits for production compliance." (Farm 6 - Emerging Farmer)

It is crucial to acknowledge that dependence is an inherent feature of the "incubation period". Indeed, time is needed for emerging farmers to cultivate skills, knowledge, relationships, and production capabilities. The objective is not to maintain dependence among emerging farmers but to facilitate a gradual maturation process, leading to the emergence of independent black farmers. Moreover, given the intensive nature, both in terms of skills and capital, of the fruit industry, a substantial maturation period, often exceeding five years, is essential for emerging farmers. As PALS expands into other agricultural commodities with annual production cycles, it will be insightful to monitor whether emerging farmer independence can be expedited.

"So what you get at PALS is you will graduate from a probably weakish black farmer to a very strong black farmer, and eventually you can buy out because it's structured that way." (PALS representative 5)

4.3 Project Outcomes (KEQ B, J)

4.3.1 What has resulted from PALS?

What have PALS been able to achieve in the time they have been in existence? Has it achieved what it set out to, and what has been the impact on emerging farmers in the region? This section seeks to unpack these questions and analyse projects to assess the effectiveness of the intervention. The evaluation found PALS to be a strong advocate for land reform in South Africa. It has, over the years, lobbied and partnered with private and public stakeholders in its pursuit of alternative land reform.

"PALS can assist in addressing the structural parts of land reform...I see it (PALS) as just another voice, another input to government to focus on the challenges and requesting assistance... just to add another voice and another grouping of individuals that can put pressure on government and highlight these challenges." (Sector Stakeholder 6)

In this regard, PALS has built up a track record of engagement with various government institutions, including DALRRD, DWS, Western Cape DOA, and the Land Bank. PALS meets regularly with the Witzenberg Municipality to discuss issues and bottlenecks of importance and is increasingly treated as a commodity partner by the provincial DOA. Developing such relationships and getting support from the government is not without its challenges. To be sure, the situation that PALS operates in has been described as impossible, as it is very difficult to get any traction, notably with regards to government support and enablers.

Outside of government, PALS has developed some noteworthy relationships. For example, PALS has set up relations with private financial institutions as well as sector bodies such as Agri WC and Hortgro. At the local level, the role of Witzenberg PALS is significant. In light of the perceived failures of previous land reform attempts, many observers and beneficiaries consider PALS to be the only realistic vehicle for land reform.

"If you look at PALS you must look at the bigger picture. Our government, we all know, does not have the ability to bring about land redistribution. We need a vehicle to take this stuff from point A to point B. At this point in time, I think PALS is the only vehicle which is reliable to take us from A to B." (Farm 7 - Emerging Farmer)

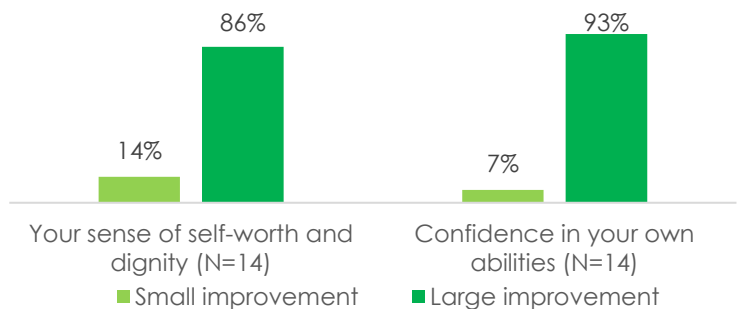
Given the challenging context in which PALS operates, some individuals closely associated with PALS have expressed somewhat negative views regarding its overall success. With less than half of the initial 80+ potential PALS projects implemented in the Witzenberg region, some argue that PALS has achieved only partial success.¹⁸ While it is an exaggeration given PALS' accomplishments over the past nine years, frustrations surrounding implementation are apparent. These challenges should be viewed in the context of factors such as a lack of government buy-in and fruitless efforts to unlock crucial government support and funding for project implementation.

That being acknowledged, adopting a nuanced perspective on the implemented projects allows for the recognition of many achievements. Overall, the data suggests that PALS has made agriculture more

inclusive in the region. The establishment of, and support of, the listed 23 FarmCOs has resulted in a larger pool of black commercial farmers in the region.¹⁹ While there is debate about what success looks like, it can be understood, at one level, through the lenses of land ownership and financial sustainability.

On the topic of land ownership, findings suggest noteworthy achievements with regards to black land ownership. Indeed, black farmers own outright 2139 hectares of land and an additional 6520 hectares of land in joint ventures with commercial partners. Combined, these 8654 hectares of land, as well as a 26% stake in an additional 6389 hectares of land, should be recognised as significant in terms of land access and ownership gains. In these projects, there are some 772 beneficiaries, including individual shareholders and larger employee trusts, who benefit, or are set to benefit, from the burgeoning success of these FarmCOs.²⁰

Figure 11: Emerging farmers' perspectives on soft skill improvements since starting the company



From an empowerment perspective, there is evidence to suggest that emerging farmers have expressed more confidence and self-worth since the establishment of the FarmCO, leading, in some cases, to a strengthened decision-making and ownership, e.g., Farm 14 and Farm 2. Figure 11 refers to this stronger sense of self-worth, dignity, and confidence since the FarmCO was established. Through activities such as ongoing training, emerging farmers are becoming increasingly confident and competent in their understanding. From a skill and capacitation point of view, interviewees felt increasingly skilled and sure-footed as a result of mentorship relationships and ongoing training.

But now it comes to that decision-making, how do you come to that decision, how is that decision made, what gives rise to that decision? These are the processes and things we didn't know, in which I now participate and where I see how the decisions are made. It is this type of stuff that PALS, and our commercial partner, have helped us with." (Farm 1 - Emerging Farmer)

With that being said and elaborated on in the previous section, FarmCOs typically remain dependent on the commercial partner. When considering these aspects alone, one should scrutinise the level of empowerment, independence, and ownership among emerging farmers. The reality, however, is that many FarmCOs are still relatively new and are only beginning to reach full productivity. The journey to independence takes many years and requires a certain degree of support and guidance.

"A good example- that is driving a car today. And tomorrow I expect you to drive a truck. I mean, there's a huge gap between the two. It will take time to drive a truck as good as you've driven your car." (Government official 2)

The evaluation further found that the prospects for independent black farms and farmers are likely in many of the FarmCOs. There are excellent examples of new FarmCOs becoming more independent, e.g., Farm 2, Farm 7, Farm 6, and Farm 14. More mature farmers were suggested to be nearing a position in which they could become mentors to new FarmCOs. For less mature FarmCO, almost all the shareholders express trust and a positive expectation of their increasing independence, based on what they have experienced so far in the FarmCO, and their relationship with the commercial partners and PALS.

Marketing independence: Relying on the commercial partner's marketing structures and branding is beneficial to emerging FarmCOs for several reasons. However, there are instances e.g., Farm 6 where the emerging farmer has matured to the point where they will be releasing their marketing branding. For this farm, this is a huge achievement and demonstrates signs of real company maturity.

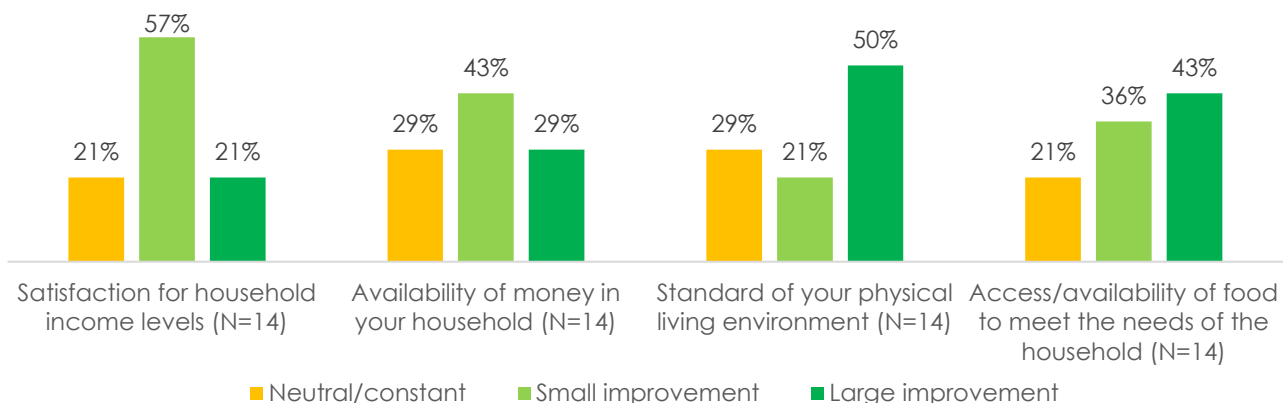
From an employment point of view, results are mixed. While employment has certainly been created in some new FarmCOs, e.g., Farm 2, it requires a nuanced view to fully understand employment dynamics at these new FarmCOs. Firstly, and as discussed, many FarmCOs rely on commercial partner employees for labour, at key times of the year. While these emerging FarmCOs are not creating direct employment,

they are likely stimulating the current labour force. This is particularly important as there is a distinction between permanent and part-time or casual employment.

"It has empowered us for the new business relationships as we have employed from 5 people to 68 people, and in peak season to 120.... We have our pick during seasons and that's a big deal when more people are hired. They all get good salaries; we give above minimum wage each week." (Farm 6 - Emerging Farmer)

Lastly, the findings suggest there have been improvements in shareholder income levels and quality of life, including improvements in satisfaction with household incomes, availability of household income, standard of physical living environment, and food security (refer to Figure 12).²¹ The evidence suggests there have been notable gains in the more material outcomes of PALS.

Figure 12: Emerging farmers' perspectives on "quality of life" improvements

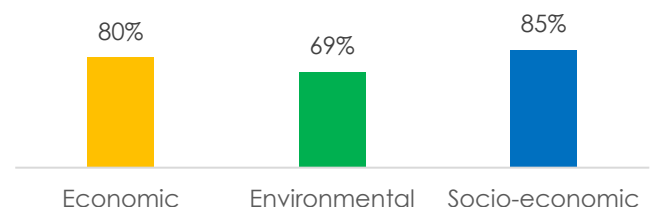


These improvements are not only restricted to shareholders, but, in some instances, benefits are channelled through employee trusts. Profits from FarmCOs, where applicable, are occasionally distributed through annual dividends, reinvested back into the FarmCO for farm development and expansion, and, in some cases, allocated to socio-economic support, often through educational bursaries. However, it is important to note that while employee trusts have been created, not all farms are currently profitable, making it difficult for financial proceeds to filter to employee trusts, e.g., Farm 3, Farm 8. It was often said that the architecture was in place so that when the FarmCO begins turning a profit, employees will directly benefit through the mechanisms aforementioned.

4.3.2 The DOA's indicators for successful land reform

In complementing the initial outcome findings of PALS, the evaluation team sought to deploy, where possible, the DOA's outcome indicator framework for successful land reform. This framework hinges on a list of 39 indicators, divided into three dimensions, namely, the economic, environmental, and socio-economic dimensions of success. Overall, data from 15 evaluated FarmCOs was used in this analysis, with the evaluation team collecting and sourcing data for 26 of the 39 success indicators, as outlined in Table 4.

Figure 13: Three dimensions of successful land reform



Overall, the data paints a positive picture of the 15 FarmCOs. As indicated in Figure 13, the FarmCOs scored highest in the socio-economic dimensions, with an average score of 85%. Similarly, economic dimensions also scored highly (80%) with environmental dimensions the weakest (69%). In unpacking Table 5, the data suggests all 15 FarmCOs are either "highly successful" (87%) or "succeeding" (13%) in light of the 26 indicators used for this analysis. Overall, none of the evaluated FarmCOs were "failing" or "Challenged". These nascent findings do support the general findings of this evaluation, further suggesting that the evaluated FarmCOs are well-established and primed for success.

Overall, whilst results from the 26 indicators appear impressive at first glance, these results need to be treated with caution. Firstly, as shown in Table 5, the evaluation team did not intend to, or was able to,

collect data for all 39 indicators; some indicators were deemed too complex to attempt to unpack within and scope of this evaluation.

Secondly, data collection for the 26 indicators is likely to differ significantly from previous departmental land reform evaluations. To be sure, the evaluation team's interpretation of the indicators, and therefore the data that comprises these indicators, differ significantly from previous evaluations of land reform. As such, it is not advised to make direct comparisons between these findings and other land reform evaluations.

Table 4: Total vs Actual Indicators

| | Total Indicators in the framework | Indicators sourced in this evaluation |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Economic | 22 | 14 |
| Environmental | 5 | 5 |
| Socio-economic | 12 | 7 |
| Total | 39 | 26 |

Thirdly, the analysis of the data will likely differ from previous land reform evaluations. While the evaluation team attempted to use the methodology outlined in previous land reform evaluations, e.g., coding of 0-2 for each indicator, it is strongly suspected that the analysis of the data differs from other land reform evaluation analyses.

Fourthly, the omission of data for the 13 excluded indicators will, in all likelihood, skew the data and results, presenting only a partial picture of the success of these land reform FarmCOs. Given the likely complexity of these omitted indicators, the picture painted here may be more positive than if all indicators were included.

Table 5: Overview of successful land reform

| Category | Environmental | Socio-economic | Economic | Total |
|-------------------|---------------|----------------|----------|-------|
| Highly successful | 40% | 79% | 87% | 87% |
| Succeeding | 47% | 7% | 13% | 13% |
| Challenged | 13% | 14% | 0% | 0% |
| Failing | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| Total | 100% | 93% | 100% | 100% |

4.4 Challenges, resilience and sustainability (KEQ C,E,F)

In speaking to the evaluation questions, this section unpacks some of the key challenges that PALS, as an initiative, has faced, some of the most significant challenges that emerging farmers face, and the key contextual factors that influence PALS, land reform, and agriculture more generally.

4.4.1 Challenge in developing the PALS initiative

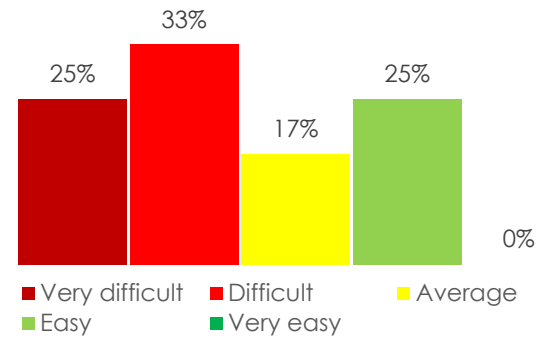
Since the inception of PALS, organisation funding and subsequent limited capacity have been challenging for the initiative. The current funding model of PALS is reliant on annual contributions (R25,000 per annum) from members as well as financial contributions from strategic partners in the amount of R150,000 e.g., FNB and Nedbank. Since early 2023, funding concerns have been somewhat mitigated with the injection of funding from the Jobs Fund. This funding has enabled PALS to increase its staff complement. However, and like many non-revenue generating entities, funding will be a perennial issue, especially if national economic conditions continue to decline, e.g., diminished public purse and increasing competition for corporate social investment (CSI). Finding ways to secure funding in this climate will be a challenge for PALS moving forward, especially as the initiative scales up. Demonstrating and communicating the organisation's impact, through publications such as the Perspective quarterly magazine, are mechanisms through which funding can be secured. Here, strengthened M&E systems can provide the means to better showcase the impact on the ground of PALS.

Secondly, PALS has implemented less than half of its listed projects, suggesting that the establishment of new FarmCOs is a challenge. Indeed, and as outlined in Figure 14, more than half of new FarmCOs found the process of setting up the business to be difficult or very difficult. Challenges in securing necessary government enablers or accessing suitable finance have meant potential FarmCOs have not gotten off the ground. It must be acknowledged that factors essential to the establishment of FarmCOs are out of the control of PALS.

"So the frustration was that in some instances with water use licenses, some of the projects, I think, got scrapped or lost interest because it took so long, and nothing happened. And you really have to have perseverance." (PALS representative 6)

Thirdly, securing buy-in from commercial partners has been a highlighted challenge, despite the fact that PALS is farmer-led. For some, the challenge for PALS is to get *"the commercial partners to the table and make use of the PALS initiative."* Indeed, some suggest there is a "wait and see" attitude amongst commercial partners; they may be interested in PALS as a model for successful land reform but are hesitant to get involved and opt to see how emerging FarmCOs fare before investing themselves. To be fair, not all commercial farmers have the means or aptitude, both financial and otherwise, to invest in land reform projects. Indeed, as unpacked in the literature review, 18 710 micro farms with an annual income below R1 million constituted almost half of the 40,000 farms in the commercial agricultural industry. This is especially true given the volatile nature of the agricultural political-environmental economy and the poor economic outlook in the country.

Figure 14: Setting up a farming enterprise? (N=12)



Fourthly, and as unpacked in previous sections, trust remains a perennial challenge not only in the agricultural sector but also in the work that PALS undertakes. Indeed, PALS has operated in a landscape of mistrust, notably with government departments and institutions, where it is attempting to build bridges and strengthen relations with mixed experiences.

"The mistrust is still there, especially in some circles and spheres of national government officials. I think you've been existing for seven-eight years. It is still there. You still have people asking themselves what's in it for the white farmers?" (PALS representative 7)

The evident lack of trust has clearly been a source of frustration for PALS, necessitating constant efforts to address the same questions and concerns, even after nine years of existence. Moreover, this prevailing sense of mistrust has damaged potential partnerships between the public sector and PALS. Yes, there has been noteworthy "recognition" of PALS from the top brass of national and provincial governments. There are also several examples of specific partnerships with spheres of government, e.g., Jobs Fund (Treasury), WC DoA informal partnering, and previous relations with the Witzenberg Municipality.²² However, despite these specific instances, tangible partnerships between PALS and national departments, amongst others, are lacking. Historically, PALS has struggled with the constant need to overcome issues of mistrust, despite years of attempts to engage and partner with the public sector in meaningful ways.

"PALS would have done much better if private sector, local government, provincial government and national government worked closer together to see how we can develop this model together and cast aside the suspicions that we have. They were looking at PALS with suspicion they almost made you feel guilty: Who is selling out who? Who is going to benefit? Is it a genuine thing? Instead of coming on board and saying we don't agree with this. How do we fix it? Let's all get around this table and sort it out." (Government official 3)

4.4.2 Contextual challenges and sustainability of emerging FarmCOs

Contextually, emerging and established FarmCOs are confronted with numerous challenges to their success and sustainability. This section unpacks some of the most prominent challenges. The findings indicate that there are substantial barriers to entry for emerging farmers looking to enter commercial agriculture, especially within the capital-intensive fruit sector. The cost of developing orchards can be prohibitive for new entrants, and the initial years of orchard development can be financially challenging due to low income generation. This financial burden is further compounded by substantial input and operational requirements during the developmental period.²³ The significant funding required for both the initial establishment and ongoing maintenance of an orchard, until such time as it becomes

productive, poses a considerable obstacle for new farmers attempting to enter the industry. Overall, the barriers to entry into the fruit sector are notably high, as expressed by one stakeholder:

"If you have to choose a sector to do land, don't choose commercial fruit. It's just about impossible. Market access is so complicated. Then the long-term capital outlay you need is ridiculous. You've just got your things going, your fruit is just producing nicely when the market decides they don't like the variety anymore. You haven't made any money yet. It's a ridiculous industry for land reform." (Sector Stakeholder 5)

Aligned closely to high barriers to entry are challenges in accessing finance to support capital and operational expenditure. The challenge for emerging farmers, often without adequate leverage, is accessing affordable financing and servicing the subsequent debt on those loans. Private banks are said to often not be prepared to take the risk of funding a new venture, despite the venture having all the critical success factors in place.

Moreover, accessing public sector financing for emerging farmer support is constrained in several ways. Constraints range from limited annual budgets for land redistribution efforts (through PLAS) and support programmes such as CASP. Budget constraints curtail the extent to which the public sector can, itself, facilitate land reform and agricultural development, given the current fiscal constraints in the public sector.

Given the financial constraints of emerging farmers' entry the agricultural sector, affordable financing mechanisms such as blended finance have been widely promoted. Initially, there were high expectations for the Land Bank's blended finance as a means of financing emerging FarmCOs. However, the findings indicate significant issues concerning the bank's capacity to implement this mechanism, along with suggestions of institutional mistrust and policy contradictions.

Changing weather and climate conditions pose an additional challenge both presently and in the future. The adverse effects of climate events such as frost, hail, untimely rain, and excessive heat are widely acknowledged as significant risks to productivity and profitability. These events are expected to become more severe as the planet warms up, leading to increasingly unstable climatic conditions. The hinterland of the Western Cape, in particular, is identified as particularly vulnerable to these changes.

Similarly, access to and availability of water are major causes of concern among interviewees. While most interviewed FarmCOs stated that they currently had sufficient water availability, this is not always the case should FarmCOs seek to expand production. Such concerns are supported by recent evaluative research (Hitchert, 2020), which identified water as the most critical issue affecting agriculture and agro-processing in the Western Cape. Access to water is influenced not only by climatic conditions but also by government regulations. Acquiring new water rights for production expansion, as previously discussed, is not always a straightforward process and requires both time and resources.

Furthermore, attention was paid to the growing issues of theft and security. Many of the FarmCOs are located close to towns and communities. This proximity to population groups makes them particularly vulnerable to theft, not only of produce but of infrastructure as well, e.g., Farm 18, Farm 2, and Farm 11. In response, FarmCOs are compelled to hire extra security, night and day, to protect their produce.

Despite mitigation efforts, electricity remains a consistent source of concern among farmers. In a highly mechanised industry, unreliable energy can be detrimental to the production cycle. For example, in the hot summer months, power-dependent irrigation systems may fail, jeopardising orchard production. Only 20% (N = 15) of the FarmCOs engaged have some form of renewable energy, while the majority continue to rely on ESKOM for power. The evidence suggests that alternative forms of power generation are progressively gaining prominence in farming operations.

A well-documented risk, highlighted in the media, is the logistical challenge faced by harbours across the country, including the Cape Town harbour, in meeting export demand. This is especially worrisome for the fruit sector, which is heavily reliant on exports. The 2023-2024 export season, in particular, has been poor for fruit exporters, notably as a result of operational and equipment failures at harbours. This is notably distressing for emerging FarmCOs; one can imagine the frustration of an emerging farmer who

has finally reached peak production, only to face difficulties in getting their produce to the international market.

Labour issues and farm worker rights are perennial issues in agriculture and are of particular interest in this area. In interviews, stakeholders made mention of the challenge of sourcing “good” labour. There appears to be a preference for hiring migrant labour from other parts of the country, typically the Eastern Cape, over local labour. Furthermore, stakeholders have raised concern about a shortage of housing for employees and the difficulties associated with removing non-working farm dwellers, particularly those considered negative influences on the property.

Market dynamics and volatility were occasionally cited as significant risks for farming. Farmers find themselves at the mercy of international affairs and developments. These developments have important upstream and downstream repercussions on a FarmCO, e.g., the war in Ukraine has important impacts on input prices. Prices are contingent on a range of factors that largely rest outside the control of the farm, but which can have substantial implications. Other noteworthy challenges that were alluded to in the fieldwork spoke to the difficult legislative requirements and regulations, agricultural practice issues like soil, pests, disease, housing, and the lack of youth involvement in agriculture. Overall, FarmCOs, both established and emerging, face a range of structural and contextual challenges that, in the short and long term, could have potentially negative effects.

5 Conclusion

The PALS initiative, as implemented in the Witzenberg region, is unique and holds the potential to leverage private resources for land reform across the country, at a scale that has not been seen to date. The evaluation has largely confirmed the programme's claims: based on the reviewed literature and programme results, this model is highly relevant to pressing national policy and development priorities.

Almost a decade after its establishment, there is enough evidence to conclude that the PALS initiative is undertaking critically important work in the land reform space. Based on a sound design and framework, the Witzenberg PALS initiative has helped to establish more than 20 FarmCOs and has contributed towards developing successful black commercial farmers in the region. This includes a, not insignificant, transfer of agricultural land into black ownership, but it does not stop there. The FarmCOs, while in various stages of maturity, tend to have strong foundations in terms of access to markets, mentorship, and land through access and/or ownership. Such fundamentals make the chances of commercial success much higher.

Although Witzenberg PALS is selective and firm about certain fundamentals being in place from the outset, it is not just a matter of “picking winners” that would have succeeded regardless. The evidence presented in this report suggests that projects have a better structural and interpersonal foundation; and that they benefit from a wide range of support and capacity development that they would be unlikely to have accessed from the existing public and private programmes available outside of PALS. Although no concrete evidence is presented here, it may be possible, in a few years, to demonstrate that the examples of successful PALS projects are increasing the interest and willingness of new would-be partners to participate (beyond those who would have been interested in the absence of PALS).

There are conflicting definitions of success for land reform in South Africa, but the evaluated Witzenberg PALS projects perform well across most of these definitions. Across the evaluated portfolio of projects, different types of success are more evident: transferring land to black ownership; more inclusive economic benefits; developing capacity; fostering trust and cohesion across historic divides; etc. With caveats about the methodology employed, the evaluated projects also score very well against the indicators of success proposed by DoA. As such, the PALS initiative, while still having room for improvement, should be viewed as a good model for private sector-led land reform in South Africa.

With that being said, PALS relies on government services and support. Challenges to accessing these constrain its progress. This is not unique to PALS projects; it applies across land reform and other projects, but the PALS experience shows that even with experienced, focused support from a “one-stop shop”, there are barriers that cannot be easily overcome or result in debilitating delays. National policies and

plans around incentives, recognition, decentralised land reform planning, and other facilitatory mechanisms that have not yet been implemented well, further undermine efforts.

Similarly, in a climate of increasing economic malaise, access to finance for existing and new FarmCOs remains a notable challenge. The much-touted blended finance, often viewed as a panacea for emerging farmers' financial needs, has not materialised as expected. Understanding and planning for these contextual challenges, in light of the PALS intervention, will only enhance the existing projects' implementation and effectiveness. Moreover, improving the finance offering available to them will unblock latent resources and energy from those whose projects are currently unable to proceed due to a lack of finance.

In light of the above, it is appropriate that a national SA PALS has been established and new offices have been established in a few regions. There is a notable contrast between the evidence that PALS can make a significant contribution regionally and nationally and the extent of support and collaboration that it has secured thus far, especially in the public sector. The reasons have not been explored in depth in this report, but it makes little sense for those with a mandate for land reform or an inclusive agricultural economy to remain disengaged from this initiative.

PALS needs to refine or consolidate its model in terms of components such as beneficiary selection, training, and other elements of empowerment. It needs to resolve organisational challenges around resourcing and capacity as well as strengthen its self-assessment and communication capacity. Even as it does so, there is sufficient evidence of its current and potential impact, that public and private sector stakeholders should learn from its first decade for their practices; and should consider working with PALS where appropriate towards shared objectives.

6 Recommendations and areas of improvement (KEQ H)

The recommendations have been grouped into common thematic areas, providing recommendations to the PALS initiative, DoA and the national government departments. For a full unpacking of each recommendation, see [Annexure 8.1](#).

6.1 PALS framework and design

Recommendation 1: Continue pursuing a national presence and scale. Given the national relevance and unique potential of the PALS framework as implemented in the Witzenberg area, SA PALS should set its ambitions for implementing the programme across South Africa. The SA PALS Board should continue to advocate for the initiative among land reform and agriculture role players nationally.

Recommendation 2: Communication strategy. The initiative can easily be misunderstood simply because it is unique and encompasses a diversity of projects; the challenge is compounded in a hotly contested political and policy environment. SA PALS should secure the resources needed and work with communication experts to implement a sophisticated communication strategy.

Recommendation 3: ToC refinement. There is scope to strengthen the accompanying narrative and refine the language and wording of the ToC diagram. This includes correcting spelling and editing certain phrases to increase coherence and understanding, notably for external readers.

Recommendation 4: Systems mapping, assumptions, and risks. While the ToC offers a snapshot of PALS as an organisation and its activities, it is shallow in its articulation of the intervention within the broader systems that it is situated in. PALS, with stakeholders who can offer perspectives and challenge assumptions, should undertake a system mapping exercise. The current and future characteristics of these systems must be better articulated as risks, assumptions, and contributing factors.

Recommendation 5: Monitoring and Evaluation systems, and reporting. PALS should develop stronger monitoring and evaluation systems. Witzenberg PALS should refine definitions of components and results as well as develop key indicators and monitoring processes to track the extent to which stated outputs and short-term outcomes are being reached.

Recommendation 6: Clarify a PALS project maturity framework. PALS should explicitly categorise projects so that it avoids confusion in external communication about its project portfolio. A framework is needed

to distinguish between former, current, and potential or preparatory phase projects. Current projects may be further classified as to the extent of maturity. The simplified typology, as suggested by Abdoll (2024, 130) serves as a potential example of this maturity framework.

6.2 PALS implementation & tracking

Recommendation 7: Training. While PALS-based training is highly regarded by stakeholders, there appears to be a need for a clearer training strategy and to address the expressed need for more focused and needs-based training.

Recommendation 8: Standardisation of processes. It is recommended that PALS' various processes and procedures be better documented and standardised.

Recommendation 9: Enabler experiences. There is great potential to document PALS knowledge, experience, and guidance in accessing enablers. This could be baked into the "one-stop-shop" manual explanations on how best to apply for a particular enabler.

Recommendation 10: Beneficiary selection. At minimum, PALS must document and justify its current flexible approach. It should also share examples of what this looks like in practice, using a case study approach.

Recommendation 11: Enabler fee integration. To reduce the barriers to starting and/or growing land reform initiatives, PALS should devise strategies to reduce the costs of applying for and accessing certain enablers.

Recommendation 12: Mentorship review. Witzenberg PALS should, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, review the mentorship agreement and the means by which it supports mentorship within the model.

6.3 Western Cape Department of Agriculture (DoA)

Recommendation 13: Formalise a partnership with Witzenberg PALS. The DoA should, as part of its mandate for supporting black farmers and sectoral transformation, formalise a partnership with Witzenberg PALS.

Recommendation 14: Communicate clearly about Witzenberg PALS. Aided by this evaluation and the mechanism recommended above, key officials in the DoA should gain a clear understanding of (Witzenberg) PALS.

6.4 National government

Recommendation 15: Pilot a district land reform implementation plan. DALRRD should take up the opportunity presented by PALS and its existing footprint and capacity in the Witzenberg district area to pilot the district land reform implementation plan that was recommended in the High-Level Panel report commissioned by former president Motlanthe (Republic of South Africa, 2017).

Recommendation 16: Support access to enablers at the national level. DALRRD should leverage its convening power to facilitate problem solving between Witzenberg PALS and the public sector entities with a mandate for enablers (notably water rights, subdivision, and land rights) in land reform projects (including its own departmental units as appropriate).

Recommendation 17: Plan for a national evaluation of PALS. DALRRD should plan for an evaluation of PALS nationally in its strategic plan for the period 2024-2029.

Recommendation 18: Undertake feasibility studies on recognition and incentives. This is a two-fold recommendation. (1) National Treasury should lead a process (possibly a feasibility study) on providing tax and/or BBBEE incentives to commercial farmers who contribute to land reform based on certain criteria. (2) DALRRD should lead a process on providing recognition and protection to commercial farmers who contribute to land reform, in line with the NDP.

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