



**EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF A SOUTH AFRICAN
COMMUNITY INVOLVED IN A CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE**

by

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The exact wording of the title of the dissertation as appearing on the copies submitted for examination:

Exploring the lived experiences of a South African community involved in a corporate sustainability initiative

I declare that the above dissertation is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the dissertation to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.



Signature

30 January 2023

Date

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Research can be a lonely journey, but the support of my community carried me over the finish line.

- To my Creator, without You, I'm like a storm with no end, tossed by the wind and sea. I have prayed for strength on endless occasions, and like God, who promised never to leave me or forsake me, you renewed me each time. I have lacked nothing, and I have seen You opening doors before I even open my mouth. What words would be sufficient praise? My life is all I have to offer.
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ABSTRACT

Often considered an integral part of successful business operations, corporate sustainability has come a long way from its inception as a reactive obligation. Companies demonstrate their commitment to corporate sustainability by investing billions of Rands towards sustainability initiatives and broadcasting the impact of the investments through integrated reports and corporate websites. However, there are stakeholders' voices that remain largely unheard. The current study aimed to explore the lived experiences of a community involved in a company's sustainability initiative by conducting semi structured interviews, observations, and a focus group session as part of a qualitative case study research. Key findings revealed experiences of 'community and company collaboration', 'improved quality of life', 'security in the relationship' and 'sustainable community development'. The findings clarify the relationship between the company and the community stakeholder from the community's perspective by amplifying the voice of the community to inform the sustainability practices and strategies of corporates.

SETSOPOLWA

Ka ge gantši e bonwa bjalo ka karolo ye bohlokwa ya mešomo ya kgwebo ye e atlegilego, tšwetšopele ya go ya go ile ya dikhamphani ke kgale go tloga mola e hlongwago bjalo ka tlamego ya phetolo ya seemo. Dikhamphani di laetša boikgafo bja tšona go tšwetšopele ya go ya go ile ya dikhamphani ka go beeletša dipilione tša Diranta go masolo a tšwetšopele ya go ya go ile le go phatlalatša seabe sa dipeeletšo tše ka go diriša dipego tše di kopantšwego le diwepsaete tša dikhamphani. Le ge go le bjale, go na le maikutlo a batšeakarolo ao a dulago a sa theeletšwe. Dinyakišišo tše di ikemišeditše go lekola maitemogelo a bophelo a setšhaba seo se kgathago tema ka lesolong la tšwetšopele ya go ya go ile ya dikhamphani ka go dira dipoledišano tše dipotšišo tša tšona di bulegilego di nyakago maikutlo a bao ba botšišwago dipotšišo, ditekodišišo, le kopano le sehlopha sa nepišo bjalo ka karolo ya dinyakišišo tša boleng ka ga seemo. Dikutollo tše bohlokwa di utollotše maitemogelo a 'tirišano magareng ga setšhaba le dikhamphani', 'boleng bja bophelo bjo bo kaonafetšego',

'tšhireletšego ka kamanong ye' le 'tlhabollo ya setšhaba ya go ya go ile'. Dikutollo di hlatholla kamano magareng ga khamphani le batšeakarolo ba setšhabeng go ya ka maikutlo a setšhaba ka go oketša maikutlo a setšhaba go laola ditiro tša tšwetšopele ya go ya go ile le mekgwa ya dikhamphani.

ISIFINQO

Ngokuvamile okubhekwa njengengxenye ebalulekile yemisebenzi yebhizinisi ephumelelayo, ukuzinza kwebhizinisi sekuhambe ibanga elide kusukela ekusungulweni kwayo njengesibopho esisebenzayo. Izinkampani zikhombisa ukuzibophezela kwazo ekusimameni kwebhizinisi ngokutshala izigidigidi zamaRandi ezinhlelweni zokusimama nokusabalalisa umthelela wokutshalwa kwezimali ngemibiko edidiyelwe namawebhusayithi ezinkampani. Nokho, imibono eyethulwa ngaba babambiqhaza kodwa eshaywa indiva. Ucwangingo lwamanje luhloselwe ukuhlola izimpilo zabantu eziphilwe umphakathi obambe iqhaza ohlelweni lokusimama kwenkampani ngokwenza izinhlolekhono, ukubhekwa, kanye neseshini yeqembu okugxilwe kuyo njengengxenye yocwangingo lwendaba esezingeni eliphezulu. Okutholwe okubalulekile kwembula okuhlangenwe nakho okuthi 'ukubambisana komphakathi nenkampani', 'izinga lempilo elithuthukisiwe', 'ukuphepha ebudlelwaneni' kanye 'nokuthuthukiswa komphakathi okusimeme'. Okutholakele kucacisa ubudlelwano phakathi kwenkampani nabathintekayo bomphakathi ngokombono womphakathi ngokukhulisa izwi lomphakathi ukwazisa izinqubo zokusimama namasu ezinkampani.

Key words: corporate sustainability, community based organisation, community, lived experience, stakeholder relations, stakeholder feedback, sustainability initiative, sustainability embeddedness, sustainability reporting, community development

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Definition
ANC	African National Congress
BBBEE	Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CSI	Corporate Social Investment
ESG	Environmental Social Governance
GAP	Good Agricultural Practices
GRI	Global Reporting Initiative
JSE	Johannesburg Stock Exchange
KZN	Kwa-Zulu Natal
MOU	Memorandum Of Understanding
NDA	Non-Disclosure Agreement
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PR	Public Relations
RBV	Resource-Based View
SASSA	South African Social Security Agency
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
SRI	Socially Responsible investment
UN	United Nations
UNISA	University of South Africa
UNGC	United Nations Global Compact

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

The key terms used in the current study are defined below:

Term	Definition
Bluwashing	A criticism towards companies that associate themselves with CSR bodies, such as UNGC to, use this association to garner a positive public image without any real implementation of the sustainability principles (Schembera, 2018)
Community-based organisation	Synonymous with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations refer to independent, non-profit organisations that provide social, economic and/or environment support to the communities in which they are based (Smit, 2001)
Corporate social investment	A term representing a double-barrel benefit for companies and society to conduct business ethically (Kloppers, 2014). However, this term is categorised as being an add-on business function that is aligned with philanthropy and not sustainability (Mueller-Hirth, 2016)
Corporate social responsibility	A concept where companies voluntarily conduct business in a socially and environmentally responsible manner, in addition to making a positive addition to the society and environment
Corporate sustainability	A company's commitment towards sustainability through providing value to the stakeholders and ensuring synergy between the company strategy, operations and social commitment from a holistic, long-term perspective (Aras & Crowther, 2009; Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010; Arevalo & Aravind, 2017)
Greenwashing	The act of presenting a socially and environmentally responsible image to the public with little to no real effort towards social and environmental responsibility (Hinson & Ndhlovu, 2011; Freeman & Dmytriyev, 2017)

Integrated reports	Annual company reports that link the financial and nonfinancial company operations by presenting a holistic view of the company in relation to the corporate strategy, economic performance, social development, and environmental impact and how these elements are embedded throughout the company (Le Roux & Pretorius, 2019; Corvino, Doni & Martini, 2020)
Local GAP certification	An agricultural certification to promote food safety and security through practices that address environmental, economic, and social sustainability (Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, 2016)
Packhouses	A building to clean and pack crops prior to distribution
Smallholder farmers	Small-scale farmers that focus on subsistence farming but may tap into commerce when there is excess
Stakeholder relations	The relationship between the company and its stakeholder
Sustainability adoption	The progression of incorporating corporate sustainability practices in the company from a reactive orientation to true embeddedness (Valente, 2015)
Sustainable Development Goals	A set of goals established by the United Nations to address socioeconomic issues (UNDP, 2021)
Sustainability initiatives	Projects undertaken by companies as part of the practical manifestation of a company's commitment towards corporate sustainability

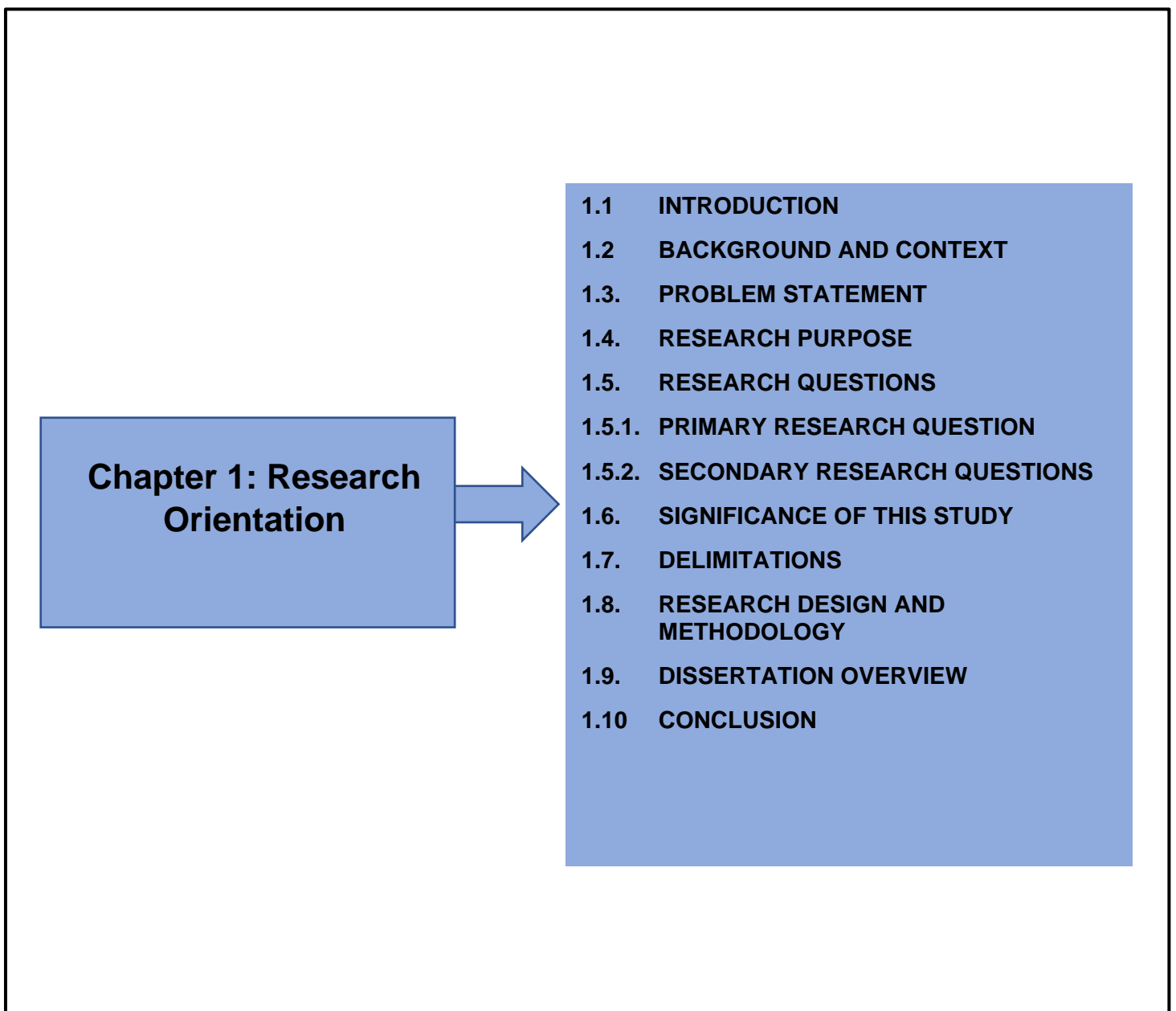


Figure 1. 1: Structure of Chapter 1

Source: Own adaptation

Figure 1.1 illustrates the structure of Chapter 1

CHAPTER 1: RESEARCH ORIENTATION

1.1. INTRODUCTION

In the business world, corporations invest millions in corporate sustainability through social and environmental initiatives each year. Integrated reports highlight the impact of these investments and in turn lead to financial and nonfinancial benefits for the company (Bonini & Swartz, 2014; Bardos, Ertugrul & Gao, 2020; Islam, Islam, Pitafi, Xiaobei, Rehmani, Irfan & Mubarak, 2021). However, the voices of the stakeholders involved in sustainability initiatives are largely unheard. The current study sets out to explore the lived experiences of a community that is involved in such sustainability initiatives.

In this chapter, the current study is introduced by discussing the background and context while the research problem statement and research purpose are presented. Subsequently, the research questions that have informed the current study are outlined. The academic and industry significance of the study is discussed, followed by the delimitations. The research design and methodology are presented, and the chapter concludes with an overview of the dissertation. The structure of Chapter 1 is illustrated in Figure 1.1.

1.2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Today, corporate sustainability and social responsibility have evolved from a 'nice-to-have' to a core business practice. Both intrinsic and extrinsic corporate sustainability drivers have motivated companies towards sustainability embeddedness (Shah & Arjoon, 2015). Companies have been motivated by reactionary drivers such as legislation to undertake sustainability initiatives (Lozano, 2015). However, proactive drivers such as the desire to be perceived as a sustainable company and a desire to build relationships with stakeholders have motivated companies to embed sustainability into company strategy, governance, culture, value and operations (Shah & Arjoon, 2015; Lozano, 2015; Mueller-Hirth, 2016).

According to Shah and Arjoon (2015), companies desire to feel connected to their stakeholders and have sense of belonging in the community. However, sustainability embeddedness cannot be maintained only by the desire to feel connected to stakeholders but should include strategic, cultural, operational and governance changes that demonstrate the company's commitment to operating in a sustainable manner (Dyllick & Muff, 2015; Le Roux & Pretorius, 2016; Hafizyar & Dheyaaldin, 2019).

Over the years, a growing body of literature has developed on sustainability, including various definitions of corporate sustainability and its related terminology. The concepts of corporate social investment, corporate social responsibility, and corporate sustainability are often used interchangeably. Although these terms are related, their definition and use are highly dependent on the context and organisational structure under which they are used (van Marrewijk, 2003; Montiel, 2008; Bansal & Song, 2017; Sheehy & Farneti, 2021). At their core, these terms point towards companies conducting business humanely and ethically (van Marrewijk, 2003), but for this study, the term *corporate sustainability* was used. This term best describes the type of company strategy, goals, and structure applicable to the current study context. Corporate sustainability represents a more long-term view of the company, with an integrated and holistic approach towards social and ecological issues and allows for the development of a deeper engagement and relationship between the company and the community stakeholder (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010; Le Roux & Pretorius, 2016; Baines, 2016). Company leaders have an important role in developing and maintaining stakeholder relationships. Stakeholders expect management to play a proactive role in creating corporate culture and policies that prioritises social, environmental, and economic value as part of the core operations of the company (Pless & Maak, 2011). Responsible management highlights that ethical decision-making stems from responsible leadership before it can permeate through a company. This concept shifts the conversation from a broad scope of corporate sustainability towards a more individualised view where company managers embody sustainability through the values they uphold (Nonet, Kassel & Meijs, 2016; Laasch, 2018). It is, therefore, the need to understand such relational engagements between the company and the community that informed the current study.

However, there is criticism surrounding corporate sustainability pertaining to whether it is as effective as reported by companies or simply used as a tool to gain accolades that are accompanied by a favourable corporate reputation and competitive advantage that leads to economic benefits (Frankental, 2001; Drews, 2010; Cheong, Sinnakkannu & Ramasamy, 2017; Taylor, Vithayathil & Yim, 2018). Are communities truly experiencing a mutually beneficial relationship with the company through its sustainability initiatives? Uncovering answers by engaging actual communities involved in corporate sustainability initiatives and community organisations tasked with facilitating sustainability initiatives may lead to a better understanding of the stakeholder relationship from the perspective of the community.

1.3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Corporate sustainability has evolved into a core requirement for business operations in South Africa. Companies are no longer solely responsible for their immediate stakeholders but must demonstrate sustainability embeddedness by integrating societal and environmental responsibility with economic performance. (Klettner, Clarke & Boersma, 2014; Le Roux & Pretorius, 2016). However, critics have shed light on the asymmetric relationship between companies and community stakeholders in regard to sustainability initiatives and suggest that corporate sustainability initiatives are being used as instruments of public relations (Hinson & Ndhlovu, 2011; Cai, Jo & Pan, 2011; Ramlall, 2012). Companies are criticised for emphasising grand sustainability initiatives through their reports and subsequently gaining a positive reputation without the knowledge of whether that translates to a positive experience for the communities (Cheong et al., 2017). This criticism is supported by the single-sided nature of integrated reports that are compiled by corporate communication experts while excluding the voices and experiences of the communities that are involved in corporate sustainability initiatives (Taylor et al., 2018). This further perpetuates the disproportionate relationship between the company and the community due to the lack of information on the community's experience of the company's sustainability initiatives (Hinson & Ndhlovu, 2011).

More than a decade ago, Drews (2010) highlighted that a knowledge gap exists in the lived experiences of communities involved in corporate sustainability initiatives, which

raises the question: What does the community have to say about the corporate sustainability initiative? It appears that much is still to be done to respond to this gap, as limited studies have explored corporate sustainability initiatives from the perspective of communities (Jones & Harrison, 2018). Recent calls for research that explores the content and nature of the relationships between the company and the community have been made (Wenzel, Trittin-Ulbrich, Edinger-Schons, Castello & de Bakker, 2021).

The current study responded to the calls to better understand the nature and content of the relationship between the company, community organisation and the community through the perceptions and lived experiences of a community involved in a corporate sustainability initiative. The findings from this study offer knowledge on how the relationship between the company and the community involved in the sustainability initiative influences the impact of the sustainability initiative on the community. The findings amplify the experience of the community to inform the strategic practices of corporates. Thus, the problem that this research set out to explore is the relational experience between the company, community organisation and the community from the perspective of the community.

1.4. RESEARCH PURPOSE

By responding to the calls for a better understanding of the nature and content of the relationship between the company, community organisation and the community, the current study explored the lived experience of a community and the community organisation involved in a corporate sustainability initiative by understanding the community's perception of its involvement in implementing sustainability initiatives, as well as the effect thereof. In addition, the relationship was explored through the community's lens. Their voice was amplified in the recommendations proposed to the company, fellow researchers, and the community discussed in Chapter 5.

1.5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were aimed at extracting rich, contextual details of the community's experience to produce a relevant qualitative research study.

1.5.1. Primary research question

What are the lived experiences of the community members involved in a company's sustainability initiative?

1.5.2. Secondary research questions

1. How does a community experience its involvement in a sustainability initiative?
2. How is the community affected by the sustainability initiative?
3. How does the community experience the relationship with the company?
4. What recommendations can be made to companies regarding their corporate sustainability initiative based on the lived experiences of the community?

1.6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CURRENT STUDY

Although corporate sustainability is an integral part of the corporate landscape, there is still limited academic research conducted to explore the context and nature of the relationship between companies and communities, more specifically, exploring the relationship from the community's perspective (Drews, 2010; Jones & Harrison, 2018; Wenzel et al., 2021). Furthermore, there is an underrepresentation of corporate sustainability research in the African context. Authors Fredericksz (2015), Skinner and Mersham (2016) and Memela (2020) highlight the vast availability of corporate sustainability research in developed countries while directly contrasting this with the scarce availability of similar research in developing countries such as South Africa.

South Africa's corporate sustainability landscape is unique from other international landscapes (Hamann, Agbazue, Kapelus & Hein, 2005; Hinson & Ndhlovu, 2011; Skinner & Mersham, 2016), which presents an opportunity for research on sustainability initiatives that speak directly to the South African context. The current study illustrates academic significance by diving into a topic that has not been extensively explored and therefore contributes to a body of literature and knowledge.

The current study holds industry significance for strategic business management by providing managers with insight into the perceptions of a group of stakeholders. Managers can use the findings to inform corporate strategies that can be specifically tailored to satisfy stakeholder expectations. This can lead to successful sustainability initiatives that are reflected through improved stakeholder relations, along with improved sustainable competitive advantage (Freeman & Dmytriiev, 2017).

1.7. DELIMITATIONS

The current study was conducted within the research design of a single case study. The research setting of the study was a foundation that was established as part of a retail company's commitment towards providing social and humanitarian relief. This commitment is evident through the values and operations aligned with the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The participants of the current study were employees from a recognised community-based organisation, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that has partnered with the case company to promote sustainable community development in the form of agricultural sustainability initiatives funded by the case company. Only employees who fulfilled the inclusion criteria (outlined in section 3.8.) were considered for participation. The research findings can not be generalised but may be transferrable to other organisations in different contexts.

1.8. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

To obtain detailed, contextual data, the current study adopted a qualitative research approach with a phenomenology research strategy. The single case study research was used to explore the lived experiences of a particular community involved in the sustainability initiative of a foundation linked to a South African retail giant that is committed to embedding sustainability practices in the company. Nonprobability purposive sampling was used to identify participants who fulfilled the study's inclusion criteria and could provide rich insight into the experience of being involved in the sustainability initiative.

Data were gathered by conducting in-depth, semistructured serial interviews, observations and a focus group. The first round of interviews was conducted electronically. In contrast, the second round, along with the observations and a focus group, was conducted in the community's natural environment in Kwa-Zulu Natal. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. These recordings were used as part of the data analysis using the qualitative data analysis programme ATLAS.ti to create codes and subsequently develop themes and findings from this research.

Figure 1.2. illustrates the full picture of the research process and is later expanded in on in Figure 3.3, which highlights the data gathering, data analysis and findings presentation process.

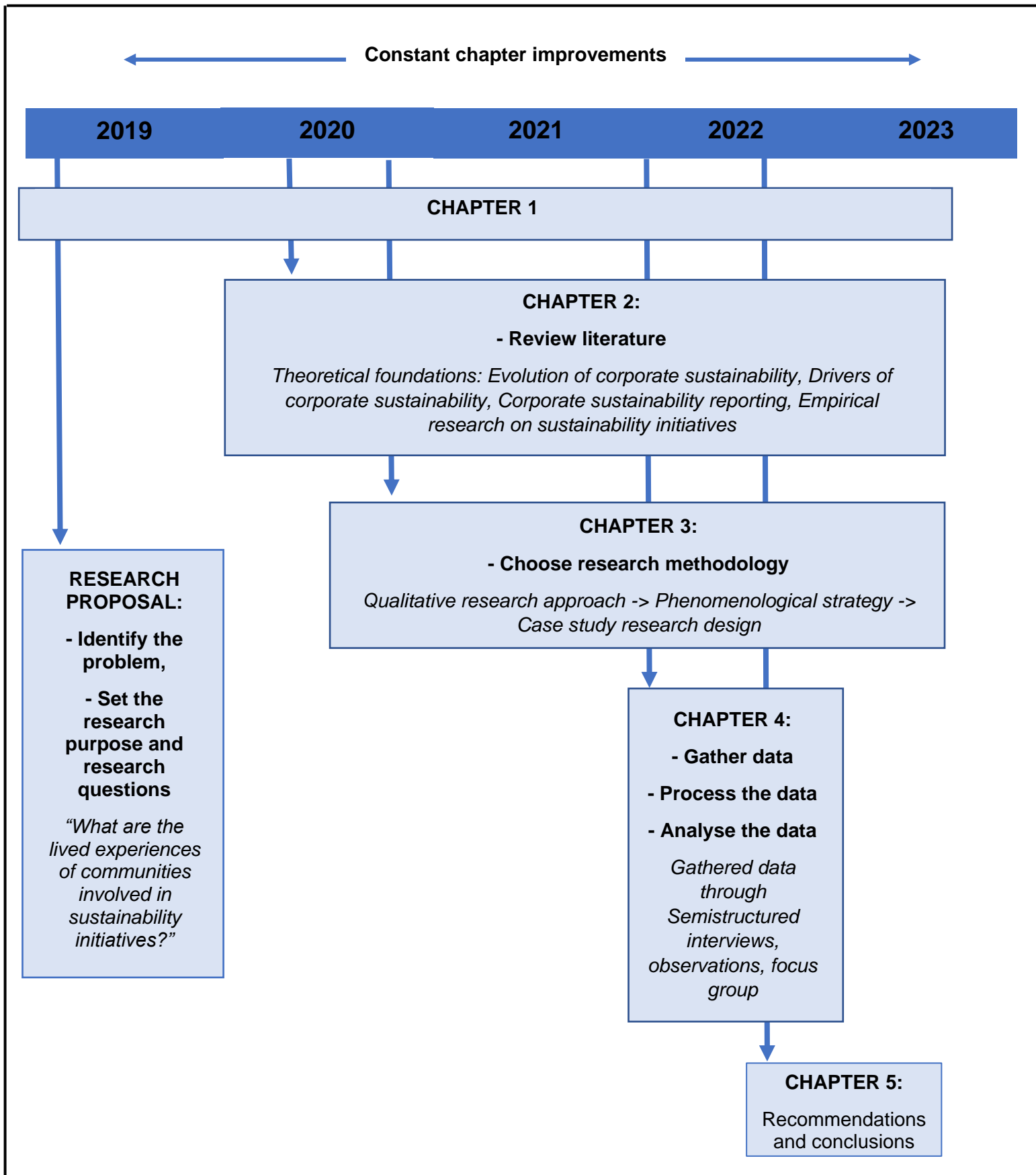


Figure 1. 2: The research process

Source: Own compilation

1.9. DISSERTATION OVERVIEW

The current dissertation is structured as follows:

Chapter 1 presents the Research Orientation. The current study is introduced by providing the background and research context, research problem statement, research purpose, research questions, the significance of the study, delimitations and research design and methodology.

Chapter 2 presents the Literature Review. Existing literature on the concepts related to the current study is reviewed, including the definitions of corporate sustainability, a global overview of corporate sustainability and the subsequent zooming back into the South African context. The internal and external drivers of corporate sustainability are discussed. The development of corporate sustainability reporting and the criticisms thereof are presented. The literature review concludes with a review of the corporate sustainability context of sustainability initiatives.

Chapter 3 details the Research Design to explore the research problem and questions. Qualitative research is discussed as the appropriate research and is accompanied by phenomenology as the research design. A single case study is presented as the research design while describing the selected case company. Nonprobability purposive sampling is discussed as the method of participant selection, followed by a discussion of the data-gathering process. Thematic analysis is presented as the data analysis method, and the chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations to the study and how trustworthiness has been ensured in the current study.

Chapter 4 presents the Data Analysis and Findings. An in-depth presentation of the data-gathering process from the participants and the subsequent analysis of the gathered data is presented. The themes and subthemes and the corresponding findings revealed from the data are outlined in this chapter.

This dissertation concludes with Chapter 5, where the Conclusions and Recommendations of the current study are presented. The researcher provides personal reflections and the overall research conclusion. Figure 1.3 presents the structure of the dissertation.

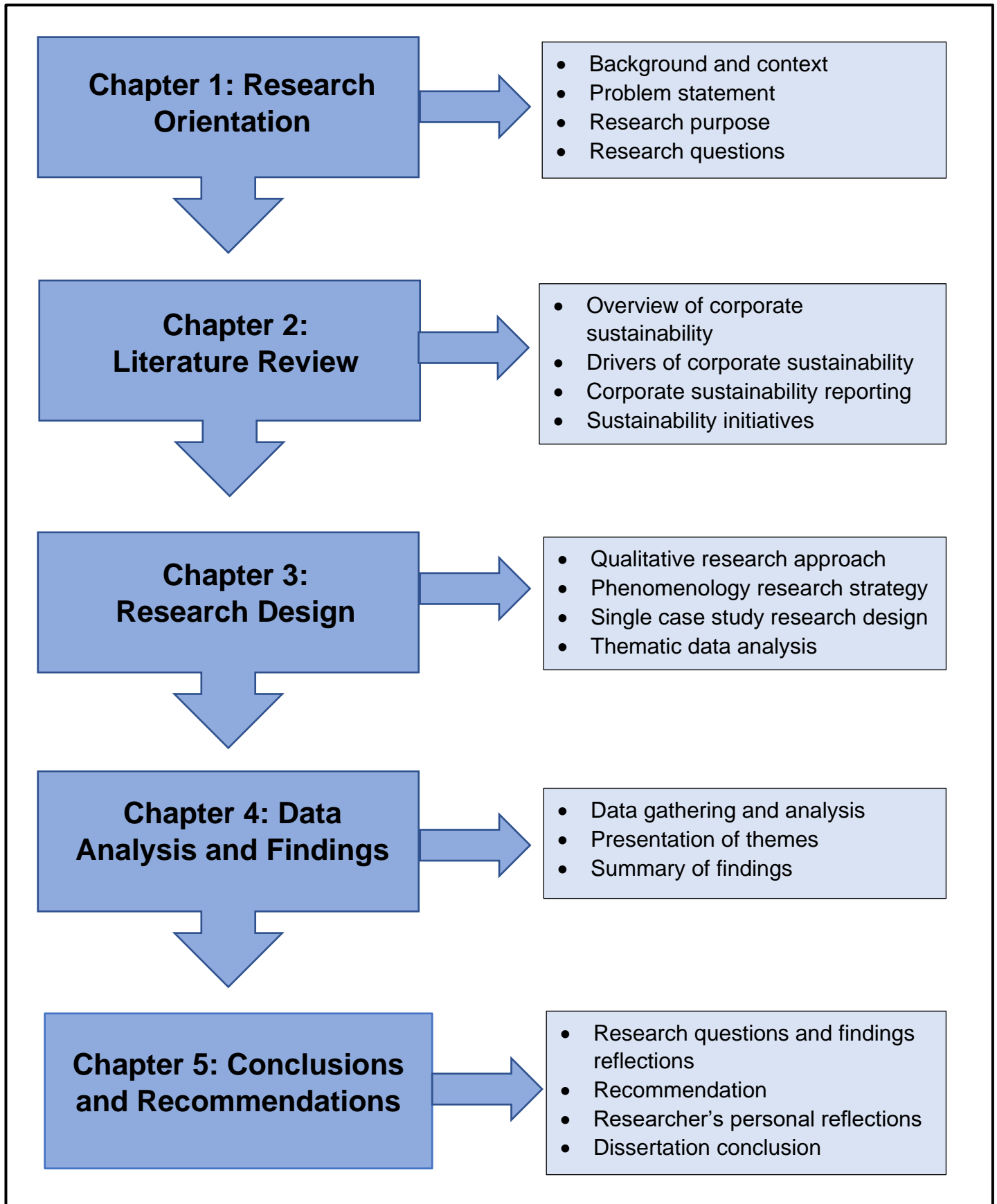


Figure 1. 3: The structure of the dissertation

Source: Own compilation

1.10. CONCLUSION

Chapter 1 introduced the current study by providing the background and research context as well as presenting the problem statement. The purpose and research questions were presented, along with the significance of the study and its delimitations. An overview of the research design and methodology used to gather data, along with how the data were analysed, was presented.

Chapter 2 will provide the literature review of the concepts related to the current study. A definition of corporate sustainability will be presented while discussing the global overview of corporate sustainability and then zooming back into the reactive history of corporate sustainability in the South African context. The evolution of corporate sustainability towards a proactive orientation and true embeddedness is discussed. Subsequently, socially responsible investment, corporate reputation, stakeholder relations and sustainable competitive advantage are explored as drivers of corporate sustainability. The development of integrated reports in South Africa as well as the criticisms surrounding sustainability reporting, are discussed. Chapter 2 concludes by presenting literature on sustainability initiatives in the corporate sustainability context while highlighting the knowledge gap the current study aims to fill.

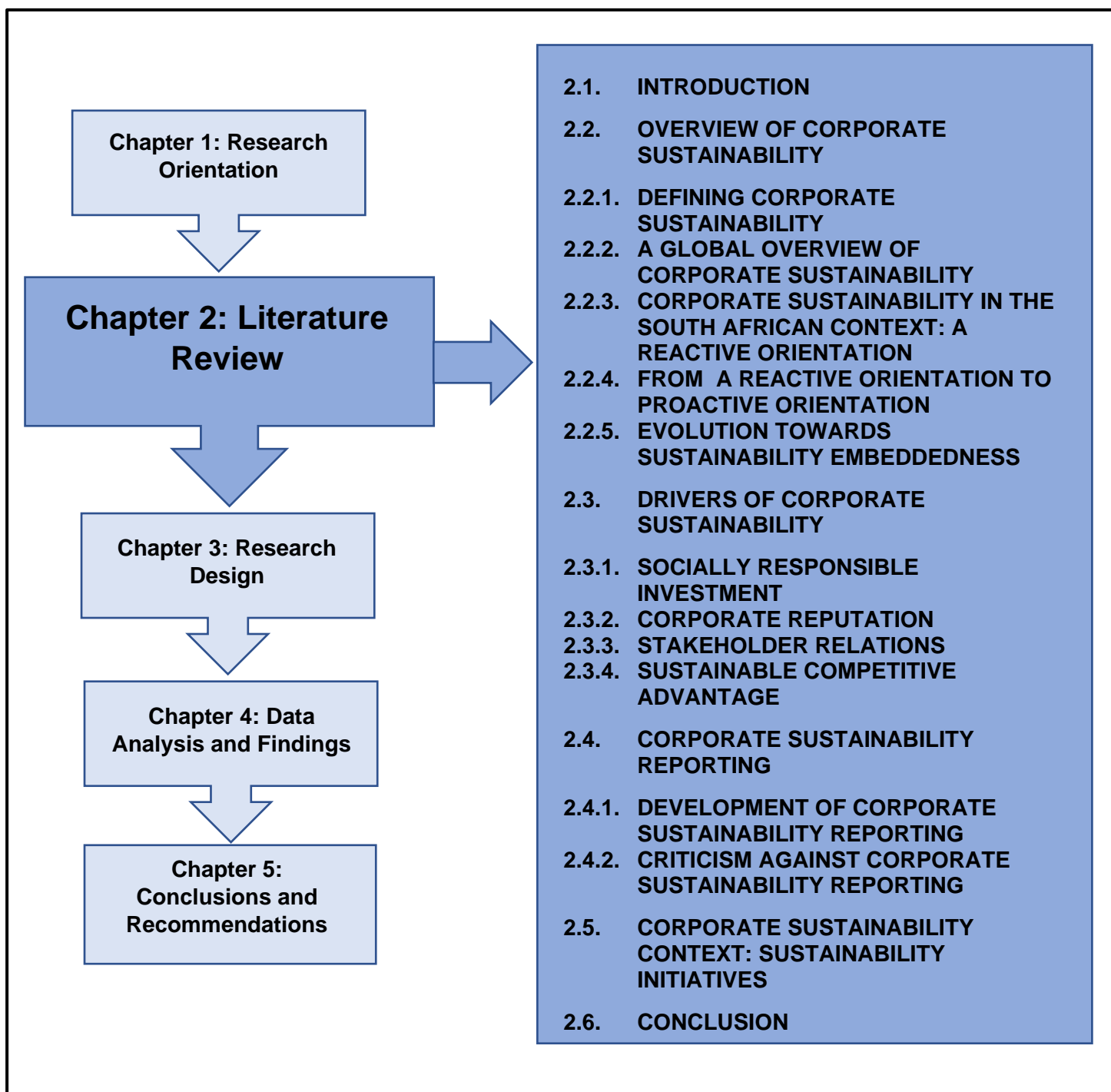


Figure 2. 1: Structure of Chapter 2

Source: Own adaptation

Figure 2.1 illustrates the structure of Chapter 2 and its position in the dissertation.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION

To better understand the lived experiences of a community involved in a company's sustainability initiative, a review of the relevant literature was conducted and is presented in Chapter 2. A definition for corporate sustainability is provided, and related terms such as corporate social responsibility and corporate social investment are discussed. To give a better context for the current study, a global overview of corporate sustainability is offered, followed by a discussion of corporate sustainability in the South African context. The literature review discusses literature linked to the role of companies in alleviating socioeconomic issues as part of the history of corporate sustainability in South Africa. The shift away from a reactive corporate sustainability approach towards a more proactive orientation, as well as the evolution towards sustainability embeddedness, is discussed. In addition, the development of integrated reporting and the criticism against corporate sustainability reporting are explored. Chapter 2 concludes with an exploration of the literature surrounding sustainability initiatives as a confirmation of the knowledge gap in understanding the experiences of communities involved in corporate sustainability initiatives.

2.2. OVERVIEW OF CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY

This section provides a definition of corporate sustainability in the current study context. Furthermore, the literature review explores the global history and development of corporate sustainability and is drawn back to corporate sustainability in the contemporary South African context.

2.2.1. Defining corporate sustainability

Since the inception of the business, companies' social involvement has developed, evolved, and been redefined (van Marrewijk, 2003: 96; Swarnapali, 2017). While concepts such as corporate social investment, corporate social responsibility, and corporate sustainability have been used interchangeably, there are academic arguments that assert that the concepts are related yet different (Montiel, 2008; Montiel & Delgado-Ceballos, 2014; Bansal & Song, 2017; Bergman, Bergman &

Berger, 2017; Ashrafi, Adams, Walker & Magnan, 2018; Sheehy & Farneti, 2021). Arevalo and Aravind (2017) confirm that on a broad scale, the point of the concept towards the same *modus operandi*: companies conducting business in an ethical and humane manner, out of their own accord, beyond what is required by law.

The large array of concepts and terms for social responsibility can prove an advantage in that users can tailor the definition and set of approaches for specific contexts in which companies operate. According to Baumgartner and Ebner (2010), corporate sustainability is defined as a company's sustainability initiatives that are formed from a holistic, long-term perspective of the company. Aras and Crowther (2009) and Arevalo and Aravind (2017) confirm this definition by adding that corporate sustainability aims to provide value to the company's stakeholders by embedding sustainability into the company's policies and operations, which reflects the company's desire to ensure synergy between the core business functions and the social initiatives. In addition, corporate sustainability has also been described as a commitment by a company to improve and foster sustainable development in the society in which it operates through voluntary business practices and the contribution of corporate resources (Mueller-Hirth, 2016). Bhattacharya, Korschun and Sen (2009) assert that a company is socially responsible to the extent that resources such as finances and labour are dedicated towards improving the social welfare of its stakeholders.

A company is part of a wide social, environmental, and economic system, and each factor greatly influences the other; therefore, companies must be conscious of this in their operation (Aras & Crowther, 2009). Corporate sustainability activities form part of a company's actions towards integrating sustainable business operations into the economic, environmental, and social operations in the short, medium and long term (Aras & Crowther, 2009; Lozano, 2015; Swarnapali, 2017).

Essentially, corporate sustainability is a company's efforts to meet its corporate needs and goals while meeting the needs of all other stakeholders (employees, shareholders, suppliers, customers, communities, government) in the present and having the ability to sustain momentum for the future (van Marrewijk, 2003; Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010; Montiel & Delgado-Ceballos, 2014; Thakhathi, 2016; Sanchez-Planelles, Segarra-Ona & Peiro-Signes, 2020). This encompasses activities that are part of a company's

efforts towards embedding sustainable business operations into strategy (Le Roux & Pretorius, 2016; Sharafizad, Redmond & Parker, 2022). In this literature review, the terms corporate social responsibility (CSR) and corporate sustainability may be used interchangeably depending on the context and the literature cited.

2.2.2. A global overview of corporate sustainability

Corporate sustainability initiatives may differ from country to country and company to company, but global standards govern corporate sustainability. These standards hold companies accountable for their actions even beyond their direct control, such as the actions of suppliers, shareholders, and distributors (Arevalo & Aravind, 2017).

The global corporate sustainability community consists of the world's largest financial bodies, such as the World Bank, and major stock exchange institutions, such as the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, London Stock Exchange, and New York Stock Exchange (Ramlall, 2012; Rosenblum, Cain, Niles, Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz, 2014). With more research being conducted on the topic of corporate sustainability, there has been an emergence of community-based organisations - widely referred to as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), academic institutions and business leaders making significant epistemic contributions to the topic of corporate sustainability. These stakeholders have become a critical part of developing, implementing, and upholding global social responsibility standards and practices (Schembera, 2018; Sanchez-Planelles, et al., 2021). According to Cervi and Ginesta (2007), community organisations have the responsibility of 'middleman' in administering the relationship between the company and the community, particularly regarding sustainability initiatives.

Since the early 2010s, companies have begun committing to global standards of corporate sustainability in the form of principles, certification, and reporting standards such as the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) and Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) (Lozano, 2015). The UNGC and GRI have been described as frameworks that encourage the voluntary integration of the UN's inclusivity and sustainability principles as part of the company's social development goals (Kell, 2012; Schembera, 2018). These social accountability initiatives are formulated for companies committed to aligning their business functions with globally accepted principles regarding anti-

corruption, labour relations, environmental issues and human rights (Rasche, 2009; Arevalo & Aravind, 2017).

The GRI and the UNGC can be likened to 2 sides of the same coin in that their policies focus on the constant improvement and learning of corporate sustainability (Shnayder, van Rijnsoever & Hekkert, 2015). The GRI serves as the practical side of the coin that facilitates open and discretionary communication in line with the UNGC principles (Arevalo & Aravind, 2017; Lavigne-Delville & Weinreich, n.d.)

However, the UNGC has been criticised for its heavy reliance on voluntary disclosure, a lack of clear principles and the consequent difficulty in tracking the actual impact of implementing these principles. This critique is accompanied by the criticism that companies with bad reputations can easily associate themselves with the UNGC to improve their image without any real positive impact on the community or the environment (Rasche, 2009; Schembera, 2018; Brown, Clark & Buono, 2018). In an attempt to counter the criticisms above, the UNGC, in collaboration with the GRI, aimed to improve the sustainability accountability structure by instituting a three-level measurement of implementation of the UNGC principles named the “Differentiation Programme” (IAS Plus, 2011; Lavigne-Delville & Weinreich, n.d.). Empirical research conducted by Schembera (2018) asserts that companies that joined the UNGC after implementing the differentiation programme in 2011 demonstrate improved implementation of the UNGC principles. The author further suggests that the differentiation in principle implementation may be a motivating factor for companies that desire recognition for their high CSR performance in alignment with the UNGC standards (Schembera, 2018).

In 2015, the UN developed the SDGs as a universal call to address socioeconomic issues such as poverty and hunger by 2030 (UNDP, 2021). According to Vildåsen, Keitsch and Fet (2017), the UN’s SDGs are projected to become the main framework for sustainable development. The 17 SDGs are as follows: no poverty; zero hunger; good health and wellbeing; quality education; gender equality; clean water and sanitation; affordable and clean energy; decent work and economic growth; industry, innovation and infrastructure; reduced inequalities; sustainable cities and communities; responsible consumption and production; climate action; life below

water; life on land; peace, justice and strong institutions; and partnerships for the goals (United Nations, 2021).

Poverty and unemployment are prevalent socioeconomic issues in South Africa, and their side effects are hunger and food insecurity, which were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to StatsSA, in 2020, 23.6% of South Africans were affected by moderate food insecurity, and almost 14.9% were affected by severe food insecurity (StatsSA, 2022). Ending hunger as well as achieving food security, improving nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture is the mandate of zero hunger and responsible consumption and production SDG (United Nations, 2021). Socioeconomic issues such as poverty and unemployment may have a negative effect on companies due to factors such as decreased buying power from the community (Kirby, 2014). It is mutually beneficial for companies to address societal issues in the communities in which they operate. Socioeconomic issues as a driver for corporate sustainability are discussed later in the study.

Different orientations exist in sustainability orientation, namely, reactive orientation, proactive orientation and sustainability embeddedness. These orientations depict the development of corporate sustainability adoption (Valente, 2015). All 3 orientations are discussed in the following sections.

2.2.3. Corporate sustainability in the South African context: a reactive orientation

Valente (2015) describes reactive orientation as extraneous sustainability orientation, where the company undertakes philanthropic initiatives that have no effect on strategy, governance or management. Reactive companies focus on complying with the legislation by approaching sustainability as an add-on function, motivated by the legislation or investor pressure (Cheong et al., 2017). However, companies that stakeholders perceive as purely reactive may face criticisms of promoting the self-interest of being disingenuous (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore & Hill, 2005).

Corporate sustainability in the South African business environment was born from companies reactively responding to the post-apartheid legislation. At the inception of democracy, the ruling party since 1994, the African National Congress (ANC), was met with expectations and pressure to exact measurable change in the socioeconomic arena by tackling prominent issues such as poverty, inequality, and high unemployment rates and providing basic needs such as housing. This resulted in

legislation targeted at increasing the involvement of corporate South Africa in the social and environmental arena (Hamann & Acutt, 2003; Fig, 2005). The post-apartheid government instituted laws and legislation that would aid in intensifying social responsibility involvement among local and international companies operating in South Africa, such as the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) Act 53 of 2003 (Babarinde, 2009; Hinson & Ndhlovu, 2011; Ramlall, 2012; Kloppers, 2014; Skinner & Mersham, 2016).

BBBEE compliance is measurable using a BBBEE scorecard, which calculates the company's level of compliance in spending a percentage of payroll on skills development, socioeconomic development and enterprise development (Arya & Bassi, 2011). However, the BBBEE scorecard has raised criticism around the intentions of companies that perceive themselves as socially responsible by providing evidence of high BBBEE scores. King Report III warns that BBBEE could easily be used as an illusion for CSR but misses the mark of sustainability by acting as a "box-ticking compliance" to access a positive public image and a range of government funding and grants (Institute of Directors in Southern Africa, 2009; Kloppers, 2014; Skinner & Mersham, 2016; Shai, Molefiyana & Quinot, 2019). This points to the age-old criticism that companies use corporate sustainability for self-advancing reasons more than for the benefit of the stakeholder. The criticisms against corporate sustainability reporting are discussed later in the chapter.

Due to the negative perception of companies' role in the social landscape during apartheid, the integration of corporate sustainability in South Africa was criticised. Authors Fig (2005) and Mueller-Hirth (2016) highlight the negative actions of companies during apartheid that promoted the socioeconomic issues that the post-apartheid legislation aimed to rectify and argue that under the apartheid regime, companies played a part in endorsing racial discrimination, segregation, and inequality. It was therefore determined that companies should contribute towards developing their communities in which they benefit from and earn revenue (Institute of Directors in Southern Africa, 2009; Babarinde, 2009).

In the early 1990s, during the first introductions of CSR in South Africa, the concept of "responsibility" was met with disgruntlement by South African companies (Skinner & Mersham, 2016). Companies were wary about supporting the apartheid policies and

opted for the concept of “corporate social investment” (CSI). This concept presented a double-barrel benefit for companies and society (Kloppers, 2014). However, this reactive and compliance response by companies towards CSI was criticised for being an add-on business function with no real impact on the company policy and core business (Hamann et al., 2005; Mueller-Hirth, 2016). Francis and Webster (2019) highlighted that companies were aware that with a new government in place, there would be compliance requirements for actions aimed towards righting the wrongs of apartheid, some of which companies played a role in, which resulted in a rush to implement CSI initiatives. The criticism of CSI was due to its disingenuous nature in an attempt to pacify government and society as opposed to a true desire to operate sustainably (Kloppers, 2014).

CSR in the South African context is weaved with the responsibilities outlined in the Bill of Rights, which includes issues relating to human rights, social capital, the environment and health and safety (Kirby, 2014). The principles of The King Report on Corporate Governance were combined with The Constitution to produce clear conditions for CSR formulation and implementation through the legislation (Kirby, 2014). The King Reports on Corporate Governance (King I, King II, King III and King IV) are a collection of non-legislative principles and practices that guide companies on good corporate governance and have acted as an important set of guidelines in the development of corporate sustainability (Dube, 2016). Furthermore, companies were pressured to implement social and environmental responsibilities when the principles outlined in the King Reports were made a listing requirement at the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) (Le Roux, 2010; Ramlall, 2012; Rampersad, 2017).

A prominent factor that makes the corporate sustainability landscape of South Africa so unique is the large income and wealth inequality that exists in the country due to apartheid. Although inequality is not a strictly South African socioeconomic issue, the gap between the rich and the poor in South Africa is exceptionally wide, mainly among racial groups (Babarinde, 2009; Ramlall, 2012; BusinessTech, 2020). South African companies were therefore compelled to evaluate and improve business practices in terms of environmental and socioeconomic issues, health, labour relations and governance (Hinson & Ndhlovu, 2011: 335). Socioeconomic issues as a driver of reactionary sustainability are discussed in the following section.

2.2.3.1. Socioeconomic issues as a reaction orientation driver in the South African context

Socioeconomics is the science that links economic activity to social progression by expounding on how one affects the other (Peil & van Staveren, 2009; CFI Team, 2021). Although South Africa has shown immense economic growth, after 28 years of democracy, the country is still grappling with socioeconomic issues such as high relative and absolute poverty, inequality, high levels of unemployment, food insecurity, crime, safety, and the decline of quality education (Mueller-Hirth, 2016). These socioeconomic issues make it increasingly difficult to attract the necessary foreign investments to boost the economy and make it difficult for local businesses to operate (Kirby, 2014).

One such socioeconomic issue is poverty, which affects 55.5% of adults who are unable to earn an income to satisfy the bare minimum of food for survival (Gous, 2018; Buheji, da Costa Cunha, Beka, Mavric, do Carmo de Souza, da Costa Silva, Hanafi & Yein, 2020). Along with high poverty rates, as discussed earlier in the chapter, South Africa has been ranked as the most unequal country in the world, according to a report by the World Bank that analysed the country's progression between 2006 and 2015 (Sulla & Zikhali, 2018). A more recent report by the World Bank on income inequality in South Africa further highlights that the wealthiest 10% controls almost 70% of South Africa's resources (Stoltz, 2022). Van der Berg (2011) and Mueller-Hirth (2016) assert that the proceeds of economic growth have been historically distributed among racial lines. This is still evident through the disparity of the average black and white household incomes. Inequality has been largely attributed to low wages and high unemployment rates (Futshane, 2021; Naidoo, 2021).

The hard lockdown to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic that was imposed in South Africa in March 2020 resulted in a loss of income for many South Africans, especially those who did not have the luxury of working from home or being categorised as essential workers (Futshane, 2021). The unemployment rate in South Africa therefore rose to record highs of 35,3 as of Quarter 4 of 2021 (StatsSA, 2022). COVID-19 further highlighted wealth inequality, where those who were well off were able to meet their basic needs and those who were on the poorer side of the spectrum suffered greatly through the economic implications of the pandemic (Carroll, 2021; Futshane, 2021).

Conventionally, the role of minimising the negative effects of socioeconomic issues and empowering communities was perceived as the government's responsibility, with the assistance of community-based organisations (Choto et al., 2020). However, the shift towards social responsibility that largely includes companies has introduced a partnership between government, companies and community-based organisations (Hamann & Acutt, 2003; Babarinde, 2009; Ramlall, 2012; Mueller-Hirth, 2016). Cervi and Ginesta (2007) emphasise that this partnership is important for administering impactful corporate sustainability initiatives by sharing knowledge and resources among the three stakeholders. Partnerships with companies are also beneficial to the government because the private sector has access to resources and capabilities that can be used by the government for public relief, resulting in improved progress towards environmental and social advancement (Rampersad, 2017; Johnston, Amaeshi & Osuji, 2021). Ultimately, the government has an important role in defining, measuring and interrogating the corporate sustainability agenda for a reactive company and has thus assumed the role of the 'watchdog' (Ramlall, 2012; Mueller-Hirth, 2016).

Companies' heavy involvement in the social landscape through corporate sustainability efforts has not gone without reproach. Some authors argue that companies should strictly focus on business and that their involvement in the social sphere may distract from their core mission (making profits) and may even distract the government from fulfilling its core responsibilities (Hamann & Acutt, 2003). Well known economist Milton Friedman argued that businesses bear no social responsibility as individuals in society do but are rather responsible for contributing to the economy without compromising the law and ethical expectations (Friedman, 1970). Freeman and Dmytriyev (2017) reverberate the arguments made by authors who believe that the main purpose of a company is to make profits, and any additional functions such as CSR, social investments, and essentially corporate sustainability, are taking away profits from the shareholders. These 'champions of the free market' argue that companies have no role in alleviating socioeconomic issues (Friedman, 1970; Freeman & Dmytriyev, 2017). Another criticism is that companies have been guilty of perpetrating much of the social and environmental destruction through exploitation and pollution (Freeman & Dmytriyev, 2017); therefore, it is perceived as a paradox to cite the perpetrator as an ally in alleviating the issues.

Legislation is only one part of the corporate sustainability story. Cervi and Ginesta (2007) highlight that legislation can only necessitate companies towards performative philanthropy for the sake of compiling reports, but it cannot inspire companies to integrate sustainable practice into the ethos of the company. The following section discusses the move from reactive orientation towards proactive orientation.

2.2.4. From a reactive orientation to a proactive orientation

As companies became aware of the importance of corporate sustainability, they began taking a more proactive approach by moving towards building relationships with stakeholders (Institute of Directors in Southern Africa, 2009; Mueller-Hirth, 2016). Valente (2015) describes the second orientation of sustainability adoption as an emergent sustainability orientation. This is when companies have a rudimentary understanding of the strategic relevance of sustainability but have not yet incorporated it into their corporate strategy. The conversation around proactive corporate sustainability still includes a significant focus on how the company can improve its value by increasing profits and decreasing costs by implementing corporate sustainability initiatives and essentially improving the company's value (Dyllick & Muff, 2015; Cheong et al., 2017).

Although it can be argued that the responsibility of alleviating socioeconomic issues should rest with the government, companies and community-based organisations have a vital role to play in the development and improvement of the countries in which they operate (Juggernath, Rampersad & Reddy, 2011). A country grappling with socioeconomic issues such as poverty, inequality and high unemployment does not make for a good business environment, as most of the population would struggle participate in economic exchange with the company (Kirby, 2014). When companies proactively participate in the social arena, they stand to gain an improved reputation and relationship with stakeholders (more specifically, societal stakeholders such as communities) (Lozano, 2015). The view of corporate sustainability has therefore shifted from the narrow view of charity and philanthropy to a broader view of company-society relations, where the company takes on the role of alleviating societal and environmental challenges through corporate sustainability initiatives (Ismail, 2009; Mueller-Hirth, 2016; Choto, Iwu & Tengeh, 2020). This can often be achieved through community organisations that serve as intermediaries, such as NGOs (Cervi & Ginesta, 2007; Mueller-Hirth, 2016).

Hine and Preuss (2009) highlight that the relevance of corporate sustainability changes depends on the stakeholder consulted. Shareholders believe that companies should purely act from a profit perspective, while other stakeholders, such as communities, believe that a company's economic activity is tied to social and environmental responsibilities (Hine & Preuss, 2009). However, with the increased realisation that societal and environmental sustainability is beneficial for the company's economic performance, more authors have embraced an integrated view of corporate sustainability (Valente, 2015; Chang, 2015).

Supporters of corporate sustainability maintain the argument that since companies are a part of the community and gain their profits from society, there is a core responsibility to plant back into the community to avoid being perceived as an exploitative entity (Babarinde, 2009). Companies utilise natural resources such as land, minerals and human resources to operate successfully and have the responsibility to replenish the resources used and alleviate the socioeconomic issues faced by community members (Francis & Webster, 2019). Although Carroll (2021) recognises that companies must function at their economic optimum, the author also argues for the interrelatedness of economic responsibility and social responsibility. Paine (2020) corroborates Carroll's stance by highlighting that large-scale social issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic have an effect on a company's stakeholders, which in turn affects the company's economics and, therefore, cannot be ignored. In situations like this, the company's participation in alleviating the effects of socioeconomic issues is no longer an option but a requirement.

Companies that have evolved towards sustainability embeddedness have a responsibility to shift the perspective from a hierarchical implementation of corporate responsibilities towards an integrated view where society, economics, the environment and governance are prioritised equally. The following section discusses the evolution towards sustainability embeddedness.

2.2.5. Evolution towards sustainability embeddedness

Sustainability embeddedness is another part of the sustainability adoption transition where a company fully integrates societal and environmental sustainability practices into the fabric of the organisation's strategy and operations (Valente, 2015; Le Roux & Pretorius, 2016). Principle 1.2 in The King Report III advocates for sustainability

embeddedness by highlighting the importance of viewing social, environmental and economic activities as a holistic and cohesive part of the company's strategy and operations. The King Committee emphasised that paying close attention to social and environmental activities at the same level of importance as prioritising profits is good business and guarantees sustainable development for the company and society (Institute of Directors in Southern Africa, 2009). This view of corporate sustainability has continued to spread in the corporate landscape and has led to adopting sustainability embeddedness.

According to Le Roux and Pretorius (2016), successful sustainability adoption largely depends on a company's management and policies that encourage a culture of sustainability embeddedness. Although the focus has shifted from responsible management to responsible companies, 'normal' managers still wield considerable influence on corporate sustainability by emphasising an individualised commitment towards addressing social issues (Laasch, 2018). Responsible managers are committed to ethical environmental and social sustainability over the long term and spearhead the integration of this commitment throughout the organisational strategy, goals, mission, vision, values, leadership, culture, beliefs and daily activities (Valente, 2015; Le Roux & Pretorius, 2016; Nonet et al., 2016). This view is supported by authors Vildåsen, Keitsch and Fet (2017), who highlight that for sustainability to be truly viable, companies need to adopt a holistic approach towards thriving in the present while preserving the future of the environment and society as a whole. Sustainability embeddedness is evident when a company graduates from simply decreasing the negative impacts of its operation towards creating a positive impact on society and the environment (Le Roux & Pretorius, 2019). Dyllick and Muff (2015) further emphasise that the mark of a company that has embedded sustainability is visible through the company's operations, strategies and management and not simply through specific sustainability initiatives.

A stumbling block towards successful sustainability embeddedness is the prevalence of the traditional business-case approach to sustainability, where companies believe that corporate sustainability (*people and planet*) can only be deeply considered if it can relate back to *profits* (Kurucz, Colbert & Wheeler, 2008). An alternative to this approach is the modern, adjusted 'business case for CSR', also known as the integrated view, where the factors of the triple bottom line are balanced and

considered equally (Kurucz et al., 2008; Le Roux & Pretorius, 2016), as illustrated in Figure 2.2. Sharafizad, Redmond and Craig (2022) support the integrated view approach by highlighting the interrelatedness of companies and the social environment in which they operate, meaning that the wellbeing of the company's secondary stakeholders has an effect on its economic sustainability.

The shift towards a more active social and environmental role has been discussed in the previous sections as part of the evolution of corporate sustainability in the South African context. The evolution towards sustainability embeddedness clearly illustrates the interrelatedness between society, the environment and successful business operation, where the relationship between the community and the company is mutually beneficial (Kurucz et al., 2008; Sharafizad et al., 2022).

Figure 2.2. illustrates the interrelatedness of the triple bottom line according to the business case for corporate sustainability.

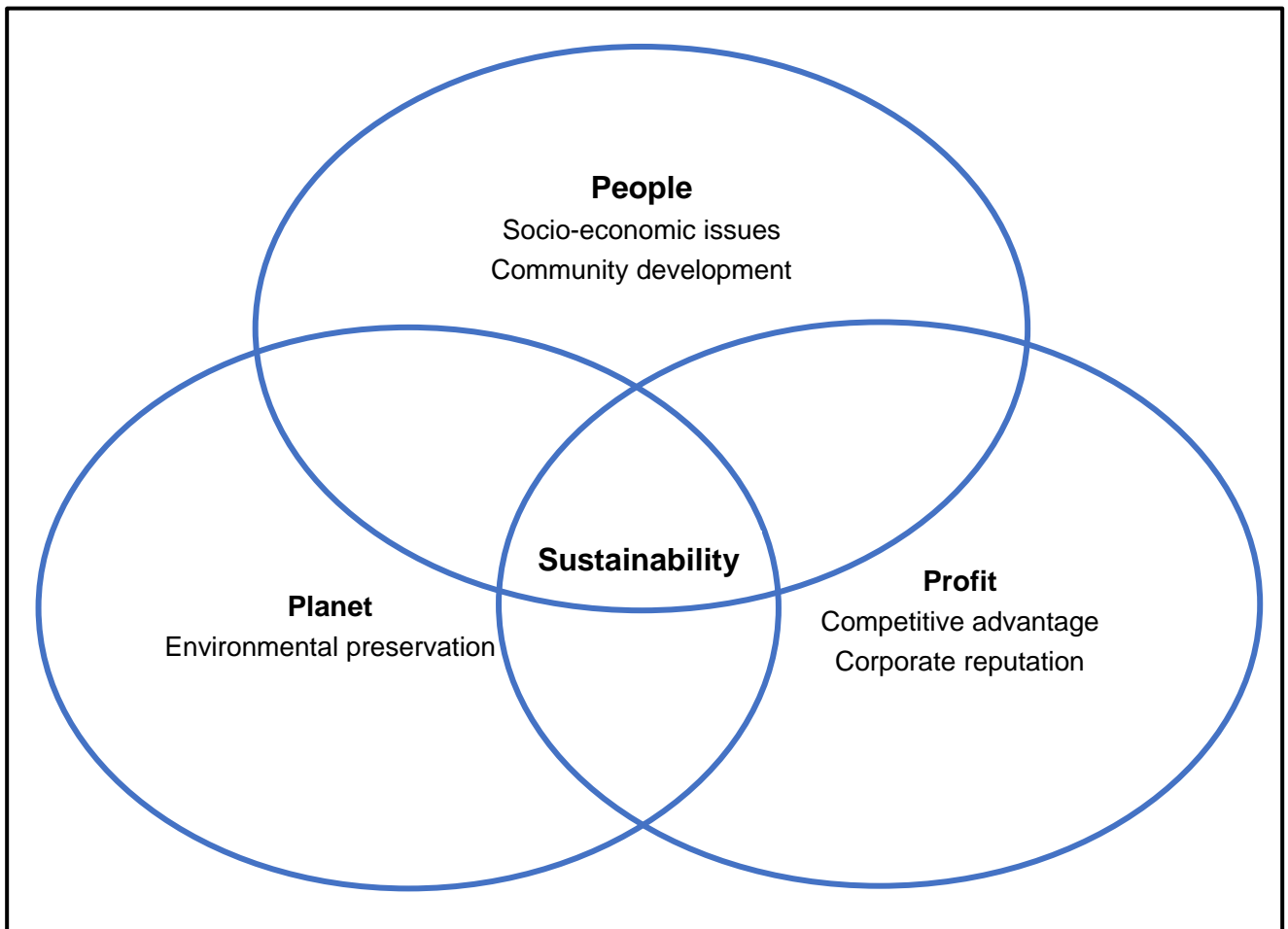


Figure 2. 2: The integrated approach of sustainability embeddedness in relation to the current study

Source: Own compilation adapted from (Hafizyar & Dheyaaldin, 2019: 2)

Figure 2.2. illustrates the integrated approach of sustainability embeddedness that prioritises economic, environmental and social sustainability in an interrelated manner.

Corporate sustainability can be experienced as mutually beneficial between companies and the public interest when there is an evolution from add-on philanthropy to an embedded commitment to social development (Chang, 2015; Testa, Todaro, Gusmerotti, Frey, 2020). The following section discusses the internal and external drivers of corporate sustainability.

2.3. DRIVERS OF CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY

Companies are motivated by an array of internal and external drivers to embed corporate sustainability as a core business function, more than an independent initiative or project but creating synergy between corporate sustainability and all other business functions (Klettner, Clarke & Boersma, 2014; Shah & Arjoon, 2015). These include the desire to be perceived as an autonomous, ethical, and original organisation with the corporate competence to conduct business with sustainability (Shah & Arjoon, 2015; Lozano, 2015; Mueller-Hirth, 2016). Specific drivers of corporate sustainability include the development of competitive advantage, protection of the company reputation, improvement of stakeholder relations and maintenance of a sustainable competitive advantage (Lozano, 2015; Shah & Arjoon, 2015).

2.3.1. Socially responsible investment

The growing prevalence of sustainability adoption has had a significant influence on the corporate sustainability legislative landscape as well. Companies utilise corporate sustainability as an opportunity for innovation that can result in profit maximisation (Chang, 2015; Daneshpour & Takala, 2016). This is evident through the increasing focus on socially responsible investments (SRI). SRI is a marriage between the company's environmental and social impact and its economic performance. It recognises the link between social responsibility, environmental awareness, good governance and sustainable economic performance (Sciarelli, Cosimato & Landi, 2021).

A company's SRI performance is evaluated using an ESG (Environmental Social Governance) rating. Rating agencies such as the MCSI ESG Research compare companies' long-term ESG activities to their potential risks and opportunities (MSCI, 2022; Lev, 2022). ESG metrics are calculated based on thirty-five (35) key issues across the 3 ESG pillars, as illustrated in Table 2.1, and based on these calculations, companies are then rated a score of AAA at best and CCC at worst (MSCI, 2022). These scores provide an indication of a company's long-term potential based on how it manages its risk in comparison to other companies in the same industry (MSCI, 2022). In addition, ESG ratings promote transparency and highlight the legitimacy of companies' nonfinancial involvement in the macroenvironment (Sciarelli et al., 2021). According to Lev (2022), a company's unfavourable ESG scores have a positive

correlation to high poverty rates in the community in which it operates, meaning that companies that do not prioritise sustainable community development in the society that they operate in may be causing more socioeconomic damage than intended.

3 Pillars	10 Themes	35 ESG Key Issues
Environment	Climate Change	Carbon Emissions Financing Environmental Impact Product Carbon Footprint Climate Change Vulnerability
	Natural Capital	Water Stress Raw Material Sourcing Biodiversity and Land Use
	Pollution and Waste	Toxic Emissions and Waste Electronic Waste Packaging Material and Waste
	Environmental Opportunities	Opportunities in Clean Tech Opportunities in Green Building Opportunities in Renewable Energy
Social	Human Capital	Labour Management Human Capital Development Health and Safety Supply Chain Labour Standards
	Product Liability	Product Safety and Quality Privacy and Data Security Chemical Safety Responsibility Investment Consumer Financial Protection Health and Demographic Risk
	Stakeholder Opposition	Controversial Sourcing Community Relations
	Social Opportunities	Access to Communication Access to Health Care Access to Finance Opportunities in Nutrition and Health

Governance	Corporate Governance	Ownership and Control Pay Board Accounting
	Corporate Behaviour	Business Ethics Tax Transparency

Table 2. 1: MSCI ESG key issues rating metrics

Source: (MSCI, 2022: 4)

Shareholders are increasingly considering ESG scores when responsibly investing, driving companies to aim for better ratings by embedding ESG components into corporate strategies (Cheong et al., 2017; Lev, 2022). ESG metrics are evidence of the rapid evolution towards creating sustainable economic, social and environmental development by embedding responsible investment as part of corporate strategies (Sciarelli et al., 2021). The increasing inclusion of ESG metrics as a measuring tool for investors has been exacerbated by the demand for increased sustainability initiative disclosures from investment regulators such as stock exchanges. As a result, broad and vast ESG themes allow companies to tailor their agendas according to specific business activities as well as stakeholder needs and the risks and opportunities that are presented (Larcker, Tayan & Watts, 2022). Stakeholders such as investors are no longer solely interested in the company's products and services but have an interest in the company's ESG profile (Antolin-Lopez et al., 2016; Dravis, 2020). Corvino et al. (2020) highlighted that there is still a gap in South African companies' reporting of nonfinancial activities, which may hinder local companies from obtaining global investors. The evolution towards sustainability embeddedness has driven companies towards becoming a more active integration of environmental and social functions as part of the core business functions and has realised the benefit thereof (Viviers & Els, 2017).

2.3.2. Corporate reputation

As sustainability embeddedness is becoming more prevalent, this has increased the public's expectations. In the early days of CSR adoption, companies were only expected to adhere to the minimum regulatory requirements (Valente, 2015).

However, in the current business environment, ESG-focused business operations are an expected norm (Le Roux & Pretorius, 2016), and companies that do not meet corporate sustainability expectations are at risk of gaining a negative corporate reputation. This can have a negative impact on companies' economic performance, as more investors are considering a company's ESG rating as a reflection of the company's sustainability reputation (Alsayegh, Rahman & Homayoun, 2020; Lev, 2022).

Corporate reputation can also be split into 3 categories: negative, neutral and positive (Miller, Eden & Li, 2020). Companies that do not comply with corporate sustainability regulations gain a negative corporate sustainability reputation, while the public may have a neutral perception of a company that meets the minimum regulatory requirements and a positive perception of a company that goes above and beyond what is legally required (Miller et al., 2020). Although it is better to have a neutral reputation than a negative one, companies with a positive reputation enjoy accolades such as being listed as one of the best performing corporate sustainability companies. This positive publicity increases brand awareness, which can translate into an increase in investors and customers (Miller et al., 2020; Lev, 2022).

Authors Arevalo and Aravind (2017) have found that companies that have historically performed very well have a higher chance of being able to afford corporate sustainability initiatives and thus being able to afford to act socially responsibly. However, Kantabutra (2019: 2) asserts that corporate sustainability is the responsibility of every company, even small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and further states that "no company, big or small, can afford to ignore environmental issues in today's world".

The resource-based view (RBV) highlights that companies must dedicate resources and capabilities to corporate sustainability initiatives, and although this leads to higher expenditure for the company, the higher costs spent on successful sustainability initiatives may lead to gaining valuable intangibles such as sustainable corporate reputation (Bardos, et al., 2020). Therefore, the performance of an organisation has an impact on the financial and reputational benefits that a company can incur, leading to a give-and-take relationship between financial performance and social performance.

Companies dedicate a significant number of resources towards corporate sustainability initiatives, and it has been uncovered that they believe that their engagement will inspire favour from their stakeholders (Bhattacharya et al., 2009). This belief is supported by research that confirms that companies that engage in CSR initiatives experience higher financial and nonfinancial returns, such as a good corporate reputation, employee retention, good stakeholder relations, customer loyalty, higher profits and attracting investors, compared to companies that do not (Ksiezak, 2016). An example of this in the South African context is that companies that comply with legislation that is purposed to increase CSR participation, such as BBBEE, have an advantage when applying for government funding (Shai et al., 2019). King Report III highlights that companies that look beyond economic gain and undertake social and environmental initiatives to create sustainable development gain a favourable reputation (Institute of Directors in Southern Africa, 2009).

A good corporate reputation drives companies to go above and beyond what they are required to do by law (Klettner et al., 2014). Due to the highly publicised nature of corporate sustainability initiatives, good initiatives gain a positive reputation through the positive impact on stakeholders, but in the same way, poorly executed initiatives can attract criticism and a bad reputation (Hamann & Acutt, 2003; Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Shnayder et al., 2015).

2.3.3. Stakeholder relations

For a company to be successful in its operations, it is important that the company has identified and understands its stakeholders. Stakeholders are “groups or individuals who have effects on, or are affected by, the objectives of an organisation” (Cai, Jo & Pan, 2011; Shnayder, van Rijnsoever & Hekkert, 2015: 5). Stakeholders are influenced by the company and hold power to influence the company (Shnayder et al., 2015: 5; Bridoux & Stoelhorst, 2022).

After embedding corporate sustainability as part of integral business functions, stakeholder relations take a dynamic form. Company stakeholders such as customers, the government, investors, and communities are no longer concerned simply about the company’s products and services but have an invested interest in the company’s corporate sustainability profile (Antolin-Lopez, Delgado-Ceballos & Montiel., 2016).

Stakeholder needs cannot be satisfied by a one-size-fits-all approach. Different stakeholder groups have different needs and interests, and this can also be broken down to the individuals in the stakeholder groups, whose needs can become more specified (Bhattacharya et al., 2009; Paine, 2020).

Stakeholder theory is the idea that for a company to have long-term sustainability in an industry, it needs to have good relations with its stakeholders, which include customers, employees, suppliers, investors (from the industry structure) and communities, government, and activist groups (from the socio-political structure) (Klettner, Clarke & Boersma, 2014). This theory deems all stakeholders equally important to the company's success and stresses the importance of maintaining a good relationship between the company and the community in which it operates (Freeman & Dmytriyev, 2017; Cheong et al., 2017; Goyal, 2020). In stakeholder theory, these relationships come in the form of supplier partnerships (company-supplier relationship), buyer partnerships (company-customer relationship), lateral partnerships (company-government, company-community partnership) and internal partnerships (company-employee relationships) (Bhattacharya et al., 2009; Klettner et al., 2014). However, Banerjee (2008) theorises that the perceived attempt to understand individual stakeholder needs may serve as a false illusion that covers the company's true intent of regulating stakeholders. Therefore, stakeholder theory may be a disingenuous way to create a positive public image (Freeman, Phillips & Sisodia, 2018).

According to Alexander, Miesing and Parsons (2013) and Cheong et al. (2017), the relationship between the company and the stakeholder is dependent on the value that the stakeholder has derived from past interactions and future prospects of continuous value. Miller et al. (2020) corroborate this view by reiterating that corporate sustainability activities reflect the company's values and concern towards stakeholder needs, which can lead to closer stakeholder relations. Stakeholders make a positive correlation with a company that goes above and beyond the legal corporate sustainability requirements and thus gains a high corporate sustainability reputation that interprets corporate sustainability activities as a genuine concern towards stakeholder needs (Cheong et al., 2017; Miller et al., 2020)

The relationship between a company and its stakeholders is based on reciprocity, a give-and-take relationship where one needs the other to grow, develop and benefit (Bhattacharya et al., 2009; Alexander et al., 2013). For a company to experience the value of corporate sustainability, stakeholders must derive value from sustainability initiatives (Cheong et al., 2017).

Stakeholders that have experienced a pleasant exchange with the company may desire to reciprocate in support based on their desire to maintain a relationship with the company in the future (Alexander et al., 2013). When a stakeholder trusts the company and is committed, he or she instinctively supports the company and its initiatives and objectives, while those with a negative experience or perception of the company do not share these sentiments (Shnayder et al., 2015). In the context of corporate sustainability initiatives, the quality of the relationship in the experience of the stakeholder influences the attitude of the stakeholder towards the initiative (Bhattacharya et al., 2009). A company's relationship with the stakeholder goes beyond one moment, event or initiative but is a constant relationship that is influenced by the experiences and influences future perceived benefit (Shnayder et al., 2015).

Corporate sustainability initiatives are effective to the extent they have developed a strong relationship between the company and the community. Communities form a relational bond with a company based on their perception of shared values and the extent to which the company addresses and satisfies their specific needs (Miller et al., 2020). Companies, however, face a challenge in understanding how to improve the relationship with this stakeholder through their initiatives because what might be a great benefit to one stakeholder might hold no value to the next and could even be disadvantageous to another (Bhattacharya et al., 2009).

There is a clear distinction between corporate sustainability objectives and the perceptions that communities may hold about corporate sustainability initiatives. Perceptions of an initiative can vary widely from community to community and from individual to individual in the same community (Klettner et al., 2014). Evaluations of the corporate sustainability initiative are influenced largely by the individual experience of the initiative. Communities measure the objective against the experience, and stakeholders are sensitive to corporate sustainability initiatives where the experience does not meet the expectations set by the objectives (Bhattacharya et al., 2009).

At the center of community-company relations and the value that is placed by the community on a corporate sustainability initiative are the benefits that are attached to the initiative from the community's perspective and experience (Bhattacharya et al., 2009). The benefits that the community derives are in the form of functional benefits, psychosocial benefits and values (Miller et al., 2020).

Sustainable stakeholder relations require a great deal of understanding and knowledge of the perception and expectations of the stakeholder group. Communities can withdraw support from initiatives that they perceive as failing and inversely fully support activities that they deem successful, thus making it important for a company to maintain a good line of communication and monitoring of stakeholder relationships (Bourne, 2009). Engagement with the community includes understanding the key players and how best to satisfy expectations. Feedback on the work and activities that involve stakeholders is of utmost importance, despite being sporadically explored by companies. Great value lies in direct communication from stakeholders, harvesting personal living experiences to determine if sustainability initiatives are succeeding in their visions (Bourne, 2009; Hörisch, Schaltegger & Windolph, 2015).

2.3.4. Sustainable competitive advantage

Throughout the years, the company perspective has developed as an economic theory on the possible adoption of corporate sustainability implementation in organisations. In this perspective, corporate sustainability initiatives are perceived as part of the company's social awareness initiatives (Arevalo & Aravind, 2017). Lazarenko, Garafonova, Marhasova and Grigashkina (2021) suggest that sustainability initiatives should be aligned to a company's sustainability goals to be mutually beneficial to the company and the stakeholders. Companies participating in corporate sustainability initiatives perceive sustainability as an extra attribute to the company profile that their competitor does not possess and thus as a form of competitive advantage and differentiation in the market, which is especially true if they go above and beyond the legislative requirements (Miller et al., 2020).

Companies undertake corporate sustainability initiatives because they anticipate that there will be benefits from these initiatives, such as a competitive advantage in the market (Ksiezak, 2016). The benefits include a higher turnover in profit due to reputational gains and customer loyalty. Companies can also retain brilliant employees

and powerful suppliers, which gives them some power in negotiating and influencing market prices. From the companies' perspective, the benefits of a sustainable competitive advantage outweigh the cost of initiatives (Arevalo & Aravind, 2017).

By creating value for the stakeholders through corporate sustainability, companies can amass competitive advantage in the industry, allowing a company to have a solid footing in the industry over longer periods. Although there will always be a need for constant innovation, a company that has gained a sustainable competitive advantage will always have an edge in knowledge, skills and advantage over its competition (Lubit, 2001; Lazarenko et al., 2021).

Whether internal or external, sustainability drivers greatly influence a company's sustainability initiatives and promote sustainability adoption. Stakeholder relations play a critical part in tailoring initiatives that address the specific needs of each stakeholder. As the literature suggests, it is mutually beneficial for companies to establish a good relationship with the community (Freeman & Dmytriiev, 2017; Testa et al., 2020). From this relationship, companies can enjoy a sustainable reputation along with a sustainable competitive advantage. Exploring the community's experience in a sustainability initiative may be useful in establishing this relationship.

The following section explores the development of corporate sustainability reporting and its criticisms.

2.4. CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY REPORTING

This section of the literature review will explore the history and development of corporate sustainability reporting while interrogating the limitations and criticism of the reports. As cited by Lozano (2015), Sieberhuner and Arnold (2007) argue that for a company to be fully sustainable, there is a need for organisational changes, including sustainability reporting schemes. Sustainability reporting is a powerful means of communicating a company's commitment to embedding the social, economic and environmental needs of its stakeholders into its business operations – whether this has brought a positive or negative impact (GRI, n.d.).

2.4.1. Development of corporate sustainability reporting

Companies are responsible for publishing relevant, timely, accurate and understandable reports highlighting their operations and the impact that these operations have had on the environment, society and stakeholders (Clayton, Rogerson & Rampedi, 2015). King III outlines that corporate sustainability initiatives should produce clear, tangible and *reportable* results (Institute of Directors in Southern Africa, 2009). Furthermore, reports promote transparency and assist in holding the company accountable regarding its operations (Clayton et al., 2015).

Throughout the years, company reports have developed from financial reporting to environmental reports, CSR reports and sustainability reports (Aras & Crowther, 2009) and have more recently developed into integrated reports. The evolution of reports took place at the same pace as the evolution of social responsibility in the business arena. The first reporting requirements were that of financial reports due to companies mainly focusing on profits over all else (Clayton et al., 2015). Later, as the business evolved and companies were expected to do more than just make profits, they were also expected to participate in the social arena by taking care of employees and communities; thus, social reporting was established (Klettner et al., 2014). After social reporting, the environmentally friendly era began. Companies are now expected to be environmentally conscious in reducing negative environmental impacts and to conduct business in a way that preserves the environment in which they operate (Landrum & Ohsowski, 2018). After the triple bottom line was introduced into business jargon, sustainability soon followed. Companies had a new responsibility of balancing between people, profit and the planet (Klettner et al., 2014). This meant that how companies reported on their operations had to reflect this, so sustainability reporting was born.

The main concern with sustainability reports is the failure to make the connection between sustainability principles and the core strategy of the company (Clayton, Rogerson & Rampedi, 2015). Sustainability reports later developed into integrated reports. Integrated reports link the nonfinancial operations of organisations, such as corporate sustainability, to the overall strategy and finances of organisations, communicating with stakeholders and the community a more holistic view of company operations in the present and for the future (Clayton et al., 2015; Corvino et al., 2020). Integrated reports have been credited with transforming a company's approach to

strategic management by combining the company's financial statements with its social and environmental initiatives, to portray the company's strategy, sustainability performance and governance to the reader (Klettner et al., 2014; Le Roux & Pretorius, 2019). The reports portray a cohesive and balanced overview of the economic performance, social development, and environmental impact of a company and how these principles are embedded throughout the company (Le Roux & Pretorius, 2019; Corvino et al., 2020)

South Africa has made impressive strides in terms of reporting. Since 2010, companies listed on the JSE have been required to submit integrated reports as part of the requirements for listing (Clayton et al., 2015). In an empirical study on the relationship between integrated reports and corporate environmental performance in South Africa, Omran, Zaid and Dwekat (2020) assert that integrated reports have a positive influence on the integration of sustainability practices in a company's strategy. A large part of the credit for an effective reporting system in South Africa is due to South Africa's political history, as well as the post-apartheid legislation and corporate governance principles and practices.

Integrated reporting is also useful in stakeholder management, reputation building, and sensemaking for stakeholders and companies (Landrum & Ohsowski, 2018). This can provide a clear indication of what the company has done and how much work there is still to be done by companies to fully embed sustainability in their business strategies and practices (Klettner et al., 2014). Sustainability goes beyond one-time projects in communities or better remunerations for employees but must be embedded in all business systems, either by trimming (i.e., preliminary activities that are harmful to any stakeholder) or patching (i.e., embedding corporate sustainability into the core business functions) (Klettner et al., 2014; Valente, 2015). This is clearly communicated in the integrated report. Policies such as the UNGC facilitate a global culture of transparent, honest and accurate disclosure on companies' sustainability and the successes (or downfalls) of their initiatives (Arevalo & Aravind, 2017).

2.4.2. Criticism against corporate sustainability reporting

Corporate sustainability and its reporting have not been without criticism. Critics have argued that corporate sustainability is simply a tool used to gain favour and a good reputation with the public. Companies have been criticised for using corporate

sustainability initiatives to draw attention from their transgressions and malpractices with a false sense of giving back (Blowfield, 2004; Babarinde, 2009; Coster, Dahlin & Isaksson, 2020). Corporate sustainability is perceived as being more focused on grandiose public gestures that could lead to a positive reputational gain than the impact of the initiatives on communities (Blowfield, 2004; Cheong, Sinnakkannu & Ramasamy, 2017).

Due to the lack of corporate sustainability embeddedness, some companies have shown limited to corporate sustainability initiatives and have been found to begin good initiatives but not see them to completion (Cheong et al., 2017). On the other hand, some companies become stuck at the 'extraneous sustainability orientation' and the 'emergent sustainability orientation' stage and do not transition towards corporate sustainability embeddedness (Valente, 2015). The transition would require a company to integrate sustainability practices into the company's culture, functions and processes (Le Roux & Pretorius, 2016). Rim and Song (2017) suggest that companies are associated with that which is mostly communicated by the company, from the company. A company that has embedded sustainability in its operations has communicated this through branding, media and integrated reports and is less likely to be criticised for using sustainability purely for reputational gain (Rim & Song, 2017). When corporate sustainability is an add-on and not fully embedded, the company functions, goals, culture and essential initiatives reflect the lack of commitment to sustainability, and this is evident in the disproportionate relationship between the company and the community (Le Roux & Pretorius, 2016).

Although there are systems put in place to facilitate corporate sustainability reporting and promote accountability and transparency, there is still criticism and concern about what companies are doing in terms of social responsibility. Some may ask if the voluntary initiatives and mandatory reports are a true representation of the company's social responsibility or a form of window dressing (Klettner et al., 2014; Cheong et al., 2017).

There has been an increased uptake of corporate sustainability in South Africa, and company reports increase the confidence of stakeholders in the company (Shnayder et al., 2015), but Hinson and Ndhlovu (2011) highlight the gap that still exists between reporting and practice. The authors purport that greenwashing – the act of presenting

a socially and environmentally responsible image with little real change – is still a present practice in companies (Hinson & Ndhlovu, 2011; Freeman & Dmytryiev, 2017). The same critique exists for companies that associate themselves with CSR bodies such as UNGC in the hopes that their proximate association with the social accountability initiatives will yield favour with the general public without any real implementation of the principles – this is referred to as bluewashing (Schembera, 2018: 786). Rim and Song (2017) mention that companies are particularly believed to be greenwashing when there is an abundant amount spent on advertising the good more than that which is spent on actually doing good in their corporate sustainability initiatives.

According to Frankental (2001), the development of CSR carries ulterior motives. The author highlights that companies are motivated by the benefits incurred from corporate responsibility initiatives and have used the initiatives as a PR tool. Blowfield (2004) reiterates the same point and criticises companies for being concerned with the reputational gain that sustainability initiatives bring about more than the initiatives themselves and their impact on stakeholders. However, more recent authors have a different perspective on the matter. Nwagbara and Reid (2013) argue that although CSR is plagued with criticism, its integration as a core business function through sustainability has caused companies to conduct the implemented initiatives in better ways. Omran et al. (2020) and Corvino et al. (2020) corroborate this view by highlighting empirical research that has revealed that the compulsory nature of integrated reporting has a positive effect on the company's integrated thinking of social, environmental and economic functions. Companies are advised to commission a new form of business strategy that will produce more productivity and less criticism. This is achievable by embracing corporate sustainability as a core business function (Nwagbara & Reid, 2013).

Hamann and Acutt (2003) emphasise that these reports should focus on realistic, accurate social and environmental performance measurements such as tangible standards and targets as well as monitoring agreements. The integration of ESG ratings provides a wider and more transparent view of the nonfinancial operations of companies. Furthermore, the industry-based rating system provides a clearer picture of how the company fares in comparison to its peers (MSCI, 2022; Sciarelli et al., 2021)

Critics have suggested that corporate sustainability initiatives are being used as an instrument of public relations (PR) (Cai et al., 2011; Ramlall, 2012) and have critiqued that the single-sided nature of integrated reports excludes the voices and experiences of communities that are supposedly benefiting from and involved in these sustainability initiatives (Taylor, Vithayathil & Yim, 2018).

The criticisms against corporate sustainability reporting are rooted in the disproportionate relationship where companies can control the narrative regarding corporate sustainability initiatives. However, the rise of social media has created an opportunity for a “two-sided message” conversation (Rim & Song, 2017: 384), where the voices of communities can be heard and the company no longer has a monopoly over its image through corporate reports.

When attitudes about corporate sustainability change from corporate sustainability add-on to corporate sustainability embeddedness, this can lead to company culture changes that ensure that corporate sustainability initiatives are conducted and reported on in a way that demonstrates a more proportionate relationship between the company and the community (Lozano, 2015).

The following section will discuss sustainability initiatives as the concept of the current study.

2.5. CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY CONTEXT: SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES

Corporate sustainability has been established as a core business philosophy. Integrating ESG issues into the corporate function is no longer an add-on function but has become a critical part of evaluating a company’s monetary and nonfinancial value. (Dwivedi, Agrawal, Jha, Gastaldi, Paul & D’Adamo, 2021; Haanaes & Olync, 2022). Sustainability initiatives are a practical manifestation of a company’s commitment to embedding sustainable business practices. These are specific and measurable goals that translate into projects that are reported on, usually guided by the UN SDGs (UNDP, 2021).

According to a research study conducted on the challenges to sustainability initiatives in value chain flexibility (Dwivedi, Agrawal, Jha, Gastaldi, Paul & D'Adamo, 2021), inadequate communication among suppliers was identified as one of the challenges in implementing sustainability initiatives. The findings of the research reveal that insufficient communication results in incorrect implementation, which consequently diminishes the value of the sustainability initiative to stakeholders, including the community. Brunton, Eweje and Taskin (2017) corroborate that inconsistent communication about sustainability initiatives from internal stakeholders to the community may cause reputational and credibility losses for companies.

With the challenge of insufficient communication between the company and community, Daneshpour and Takala (2016: 1205) state that “there is a lack of attention to stakeholder satisfaction”, even among the vast array of impact assessment tools and reports. Raub and Martin-Rios (2019) corroborate Daneshpour and Takala’s (2016) claim by highlighting the challenge of implementing impactful sustainability initiatives from the broad SDG goals. Improved stakeholder relations and collaboration are offered as solutions to tailoring sustainability initiatives that are purposed to serve stakeholders’ needs. The authors further assert that there is a benefit in “developing proactive relationships between the company and its respective stakeholders to promote sustainability initiatives” (Raub & Martin-Rios, 2019: 2433).

In a justification for increased exploration of the lived experiences of stakeholders in sustainability initiatives, Hörisch, Schaltegger and Windolph (2015) conducted empirical research on whether stakeholder feedback can improve sustainability initiatives and decrease criticism against the initiatives. The findings confirmed that companies that incorporated stakeholder feedback experienced an improvement in their sustainability initiatives. Stakeholder feedback, and specific criticisms, acted as motivating factors towards improvement and innovation in sustainability initiatives. Furthermore, sustainability reporting was revealed as not effective towards the stakeholder’s perception of the company, as it is perceived as relaying information without any interaction. According to the research, stakeholders who are involved in a sustainability initiatives, such as communities, require a more active role. Wanner and Probstl-Haider (2019) support this view by highlighting that stakeholders experience a heightened sense of being involved in sustainability initiatives when they are included in planning and decision-making. Involving stakeholders in implementing sustainability

initiatives results in improved sustainability strategies and impacts along a broadened understanding of the specific needs across different stakeholder groups. In an empirical study on the barriers to stakeholder involvement in the tourism industry in Southeast Europe, Wanner and Probstl-Haider (2019) found that incorporating specific stakeholder needs when implementing sustainability initiatives resulted in sustainable and impactful strategies. Through conducting empirical research on the community's perception of a community-based initiative, Chu, Chan, Stewart, Zhou, Leung, Wan, Lam (2017) uncovered rich information regarding the community's experience with sustainability initiatives and further asserted that this information is useful stakeholder feedback that can inform future sustainability initiatives.

In an empirical study conducted to explore the lived experience of a community regarding their involvement in a community-based education programme, Linda, Mtshali and Engelbrecht (2013), uncovered that the community experienced feelings of unmet expectations due to limited communication with the case organisation, the University Nursing School. It was further discovered that this negatively affected the relationship between the case organisation and the community and resulted in a strained partnership. To remedy the negative effects of insufficient communication, the authors recommended consistent opportunities to share ideas, expectations and feedback on initiatives. In a research study on the lived experience of stakeholders who were involved in implementing a new curriculum at an inner-city school, Aguas (2020) reiterates that communication is an integral part of implementing a new initiative. The researcher uncovered that the ability for stakeholders to openly express expectations and perceptions on the implementation of the new initiative resulted in decreased resistance and increased support of the initiative. Research findings indicated that the successful implementation of the new initiative was dependent on both organisational and personal inspirations. In addition, effective communication fostered a personal and professional relationship that reduced frustrations and uncertainty (Aguas, 2020).

Table 2.2 illustrates the summary of themes and findings regarding sustainability initiatives from the literature.

Theme	Studies/Year	Research Context	Main findings
Stakeholder involvement	Raub and Martin-Rios (2019)	Desktop research on the hospitality industry	Research findings indicate a misalignment between the SDGs and the actual sustainability initiatives implemented. The authors suggest “issue-focused stakeholder theory” as a solution to understanding specific stakeholder needs and the appropriate sustainability initiatives
	Wanner and Probstl-Haider, (2019)	The tourism industry in Southeast Europe	Research findings indicated that operation implementation barriers were avoidable by establishing specified yet transferable strategies that were informed by the stakeholder’s needs
Stakeholder relationship	Linda, Mtshali and Engelbrecht (2013)	University nursing school in Durban, South Africa	Research findings revealed that communication and time are instrumental in building and maintaining a healthy partnership between stakeholders and ultimately sustaining community-based projects
	Aguas (2015)	An urban public school in a northern city in Colombia, South America	Research findings indicate that the successful implementation of a new curriculum is dependent on both institutional and personal motivations from stakeholders; in addition, effective communication foster personal and professional

			relationship that reduce frustrations and uncertainty
	Dwivedi, Agrawal, Jha, Gastaldi, Paul and D'Adamo (2021)	Manufacturing industries in India's Capital Region	Research findings indicate that, among 12 other challenges to sustainability initiatives in the context of value chain flexibility, inadequate communication was at the highest level
	Brunton, Eweje and Taskin, (2017)	New Zealand organisations	Research findings indicated effective communication of sustainability initiatives might be influential towards the (internal) commitment to CSR
Stakeholder experience	Hörisch, Schaltegger and Windolph (2015)	Large companies across Germany	Research findings indicate that the exploration of the stakeholder experience in a sustainability initiative positively impacts the company's sustainability performance
	Chu, Chan, Stewart, Zhou, Leung, Wan, Lam (2017)	The public health sector in Hong Kong	Research findings revealed that feedback on a community's experience in a sustainability initiative is critical to understanding the needs and limitations of communities and may be useful when implementing new initiatives

Table 2. 2: A summary of themes and findings of sustainability initiatives from the literature

Source: Own compilation

Scrutiny of the literature confirms a missing voice from stakeholders involved in sustainability initiatives (Daneshpour & Takala, 2016). Hörisch et al. (2015) confirm that stakeholder feedback may be useful in implementing and improving sustainability initiatives. This is further supported by authors who highlight that for a company to implement successful and impactful sustainability initiatives, there need to be good

stakeholder relations that create an opportunity for collaboration towards tailoring sustainability initiatives (Daneshpour & Takala, 2016; Brunton et al., 2017; Dwivedi et al., 2021). Thus, there is a need for empirical research that aims to better understand the relationship between the community and the company through sustainability initiatives and from the community's perspective.

2.6. CONCLUSION

Chapter 2 presented a literature review on corporate sustainability and related concepts. A definition of corporate sustainability was provided in the context of the current study, adapted from published literature. An overview of corporate sustainability from a global perspective was discussed. This discussion subsequently zoomed into the South African context with a discussion of reactive orientation as the inception of CSR in South Africa and socioeconomic issues as a driver thereof. Proactive orientation and sustainability embeddedness were presented in the context of sustainability adoption. Socially responsible investment, corporate reputation, stakeholder relations and sustainable competitive advantage were discussed as drivers of corporate sustainability.

The development of sustainability reporting and its single-sided approach that fuels criticisms of corporate sustainability and corporate sustainability reporting as a tool for PR, greenwashing, bluewashing and window dressing were discussed.

After reviewing the literature, it is evident that there is a gap in knowledge of the experiences of community stakeholders that are involved in sustainability initiatives. As discussed in section 2.4.1, the main tool for communicating on corporate sustainability initiatives, integrated reports, does not amplify the voices of communities. There is a knowledge gap in how the community experiences their involvement in corporate sustainability initiatives, how they are affected by the sustainability initiatives, how they experience the relationship with the company and what recommendations the community would put forth regarding corporate sustainability initiatives. This study therefore aims to explore the stakeholder relationship between the company, the community organisation and the community, through the perspective of the community. The experiences of the community provide

insight into the impact of the sustainability initiative on sustainable community development.

Chapter 3 will discuss the research methodology adopted in the current study.

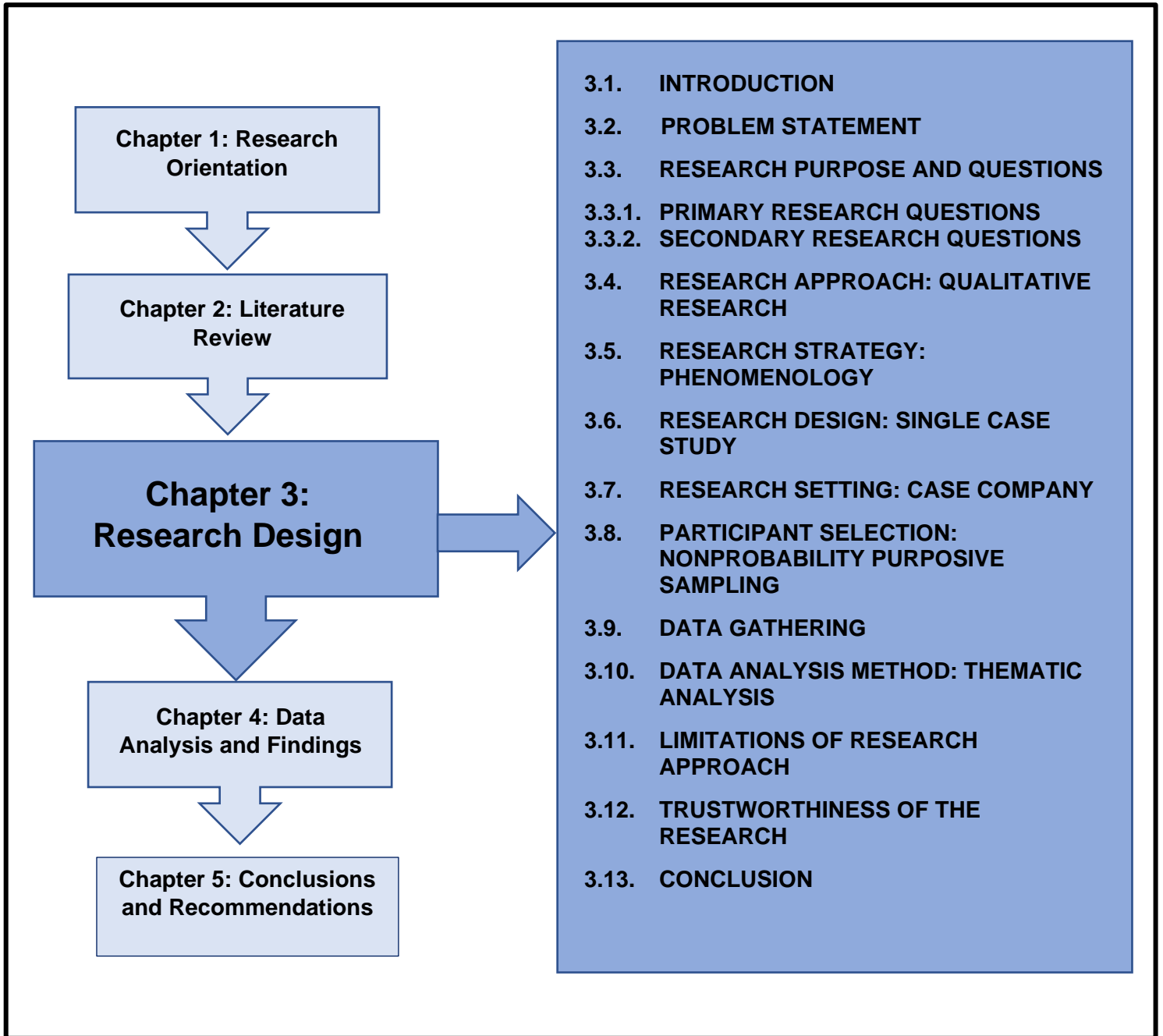


Figure 3. 1: Structure of Chapter 3

Source: Own adaptation

Figure 3.1 illustrates the structure of Chapter 3 and its position in the dissertation.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the methodology adopted in the current study. The research purpose, problem statement and research questions outlined in Chapter 1 are revisited and affirmed against the research design for the study. Qualitative research and phenomenology are offered as the appropriate research design and research strategy, respectively. The use of a single case study is justified as a useful tool for gathering rich data within the research context. The participant selection process is reported on, in addition to outlining the details of how data were gathered and analysed. The limitations of phenomenology are also discussed, as well as how trustworthiness was ensured in the current study. The structure of Chapter 3 is illustrated in Figure 3.1.

3.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The prevalence of sustainability embeddedness requires companies to no longer be responsible towards immediate stakeholders such as customers and employees but to account for broader stakeholders and demonstrate interrelatedness between economic performance, society and the environment (Kurucz et al., 2008; Klettner et al., 2014; Le Roux & Pretorius, 2016). However, critics have suggested that there is an asymmetrical relationship between the community stakeholder and the company, and that corporate sustainability initiatives are being used as an instrument of PR (Hinson & Ndhlovu, 2011; Cai, Jo & Pan, 2011; Ramlall, 2012; Schembera, 2018). Companies are criticised for excluding the voices and experiences of communities in integrated reports, but solely focusing on the positive reputational gain from sustainability initiatives without translating that to a positive impact on the communities (Cheong et al., 2017; Taylor, Vithayathil & Yim, 2018).

As stated by Cervi and Ginesta (2007), sustainability initiatives cannot be implemented by companies in isolation. Community-based organisations such as NGOs play a critical role as intermediaries between the company and the community. However, there is a gap in the knowledge of the perceptions and lived experiences of stakeholders, such as communities and community-based organisation that have

been a part of sustainability initiatives, which has resulted in calls for research that explores the content and nature of relationships between the company and the community (Drews, 2010; Hörisch et al., 2015; Daneshpour & Takala, 2016; Jones & Harrison, 2018; Wenzel, 2021). The current study responded to these calls by exploring the lived experience of a community that is involved in a company's sustainability initiative. The findings of this study offer insight into how the community that is involved in a company's sustainability initiative experiences the relationship with the company, while offering recommendations for managers to improve stakeholder relations and inform sustainable strategic practices. Thus, the problem that this research set out to explore is the relational experience between the company and the community from the perspective of the community.

3.3. RESEARCH PURPOSE AND QUESTIONS

The purpose of the current study was to amplify the voices of the community by exploring their lived experiences of a sustainability initiative. The objective of the current study was to provide an understanding of the nature of the relationship between the company and the community through the perspectives of community members who are involved in the sustainability initiative.

The purpose of the study was realised by utilising the following primary and secondary research questions.

3.3.1. Primary research question

What are the lived experiences of the community members involved in a company's sustainability initiative?

3.3.2. Secondary research questions

1. How does a community experience its involvement in a sustainability initiative?
2. How is the community affected by the sustainability initiative?
3. How does the community experience the relationship with the company?
4. What recommendations can be made to companies regarding their corporate sustainability initiative based on the lived experiences of the community?

A qualitative research approach was used to gather information-rich and meaningful data on the lived experience of the community members. The current study set out to contribute to the body of knowledge on corporate sustainability from the stakeholder's

lens and thus aimed to derive deeper meaning and understanding directly from the community. The next section will focus on the qualitative approach and highlight its appropriateness in satisfying this aim.

3.4. RESEARCH APPROACH: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

To obtain rich accounts of the lived experiences of community members, the current study adopted a qualitative research approach. The origins of qualitative research stemmed from the desire for researchers to record reliable, valid and objective experiences in the field (Onwuegbuzie, Leech & Collins, 2010). Qualitative research is a research approach that studies people and things in their natural setting to understand and interpret the natural ways in which the things or people operate or occur (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Through the adoption of qualitative research, the researcher studied a corporate sustainability initiative as it occurred within a community and recorded, analysed and interpreted the first-hand data from the participants who directly experienced the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation's community development initiatives.

Qualitative research is grounded in theory and interpretations, determining the research problem and directing the study (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This research methodology was suitable for understanding and exploring the lived experience of the community involved in Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation's corporate sustainability initiative in rich detail and in a holistic manner (Khan, 2014). A phenomenological research strategy was used to guide the research to obtain rich data on the lived experiences of individuals in the community is explored.

3.5. RESEARCH STRATEGY: PHENOMENOLOGY

Phenomenology was used to gather, uncover, and explore the deep, personal lived experiences of the community members who were involved in Ackerman Pick n Pay's sustainability initiative (Starks & Trinidad, 2007; Williams, 2021). These perspectives, experiences, and reactions of the community members were explored through

interviews, participant observations, and a focus group (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Yatsen, 2021).

The researcher benefitted from employing phenomenology by gathering subjective, first-hand information about the participant's experiences of what the sustainability initiative means for them and how they feel about their involvement and the relationship with the case company (Detmer, 2013). The access to rich, contextual, first-hand information eliminated the need for a large sample group because 7 individuals were able to unearth a wealth of experience, knowledge, and concepts (Starks & Trinidad, 2007; Sim, Saunders, Waterfield & Kingstone, 2018). As guided by Harrison et al. (2017), by adopting the phenomenological research approach, the study was not constrained by a need for large population sizes meant to produce objective generalisations. Rather, the phenomenological approach adopted in the current study allowed an opportunity for the research to be guided by the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 as well as the research question and subquestions (Harrison et al., 2017).

As alluded to above, a phenomenological approach was used to explore societal assumptions about corporate sustainability initiatives from the perspective of the community. This was done by using a single case study approach to explore a single community that was involved in Ackerman Pick n Pay's sustainability initiative.

3.6. RESEARCH DESIGN: SINGLE CASE STUDY RESEARCH

For the current study, single case study research was a useful research design in the researcher's exploration of the unfiltered lived experiences of a community involved in the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation's sustainability initiatives (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Harrison, Birks, Franklin & Mills, 2017). The case study research design was not implemented to analyse the lived experience but rather to explore it (Gustafsson, 2017). Therefore, the criticism of single case studies as ineffective in creating universal laws is rejected because the objective of the current study is not to find universal laws but to gain a deep understanding of the lived experience of a community (Mariotto et al., 2014; Harrison et al., 2017; Hoorani, Nair & Gibbert, 2019). Through its ability to produce rich, descriptive, and contextual data, the single case study research design

was the most appropriate, as it exposed the researcher to a deeper understanding and exploration of the community's perception of sustainability initiatives (Ponelis, 2015; Gustafsson, 2017). The inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined in section 3.8 were adhered to; therefore, a holistic and extensive understanding of the lived experience was uncovered (Padilla-Diaz, 2015; Gaya & Smith, 2016; Harrison et al., 2017; Gammelgaard, 2017).

3.7. RESEARCH SETTING: CASE COMPANY

A single case study design was used to explore a sustainability initiative of a company through the lens of the community members involved in the initiative. The case company for the current study is Pick n Pay through the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation. Yin (2014) highlights 5 reasons to use a single case study, namely, a critical case, an unusual case, a common case, a revelatory case or a longitudinal case. The Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation sustainability initiative explored in the current study represents a revelatory case. A revelatory case allows the researcher to explore and uncover new knowledge on an established phenomenon. This rationale is appropriate because the research was conducted on a previously underexplored topic (Yin, 2014) – the lived experience of communities involved in sustainability initiatives – as established in Chapter 2.

Pick n Pay is a South African retail business founded in 1967 when Raymond Ackerman purchased four Pick n Pay stores in Cape Town. Pick n Pay stores have expanded to 5 countries in Africa, namely, Namibia, Botswana, Zambia, Swaziland, and Lesotho. Pick n Pay provides its customers with quality food, groceries, and general merchandise products (Pick n Pay , 2018). The retail giant is committed to bringing value to all its stakeholders and plays a key role in the economic and social development of Southern Africa. Along with providing high-quality products, Pick n Pay is committed to providing economic opportunities to the communities they serve, as well as environmental sustainability where they operate, which aligns with its sustainability strategy (Pick n Pay , 2018).

In honour of thirty years of Pick n Pay's operation, Raymond and Wendy Ackerman established The Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation in 1997. The Ackerman Pick n Pay

Foundation was established as a commitment to dedicate a portion of the funds generated from Pick n Pay for humanitarian purposes (Chiotamisi, n.d.). Over two decades later, philanthropic efforts evolved into an integral part of Pick n Pay's strategy. Ackerman Chairman, Gareth Ackerman, emphasised that "Our sustainability strategy is linked to our business strategy" (Pick n Pay, 2019: 2). Pick n Pay has emphasised their dedication to sustainability embeddedness by integrating the ESG principles into their corporate values, along with aligning its operations to the UN SDGs: *zero hunger, responsible consumption and production, and decent work and economic growth* (Pick n Pay, 2022). In addition, Pick n Pay has made public commitments towards sustainability through its integrated reports that outline the company's sustainability initiatives (Pick n Pay, 2022).

As part of the company's SDGs, the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation has partnered with local community-based organisations and NGOs to address food security by developing rural and urban community gardens, as well as converting some of the community gardens into training gardens (Pick n Pay, 2019). This partnership is instrumental in sharing knowledge, resources and education (Cervi & Ginesta, 2007). Community gardens help feed the community and allow for the sale of surplus produce (Pick n Pay, 2021). The current study focused on one of the partners of the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation's community garden sustainability initiative, Siyazisiza Trust, and the community beneficiary. Siyazisiza Trust is a non-profit, community-based organisation that supports community farmers with the aim of improving livelihoods, increasing food security, and building sustainable communities (Siyazisiza, 2022).

Pick n Pay has integrated the above corporate sustainability development goals into the company's operation and published reports on the impact of the corporate sustainability initiative. The Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation represents a revelatory case due to the extended years it has established its sustainability initiative with Siyazisiza Trust (established in 2017). Therefore, the researcher had sufficient access to first-hand descriptive data. Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation provided the ideal context for obtaining rich data to explore the lived experience of a community involved in its sustainability initiative.

3.8. PARTICIPANT SELECTION: NONPROBABILITY PURPOSIVE

SAMPLING

Nonprobability purposive sampling was used to identify participants who could relay first-hand experiences of the sustainability initiatives. The participants formed part of the community-based organisation, Siyazisiza Trust. These participants therefore had immense in-depth knowledge about the initiative through their direct and frequent contact with the community members and the case company, as they were tasked with administrating and monitoring the implementation of the sustainability initiatives (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan & Hoagwood, 2015; Padilla-Diaz, 2015).

Table 3.1 indicates the inclusion and exclusion criteria that were used to identify and select participants.

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria	Case company context
The sustainability initiative in the community has been active for 3+ years	The sustainability initiative in the community has been active for less than 3 years	The current study will be focusing the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation's partnership with Siyazisiza Trust in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). The Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation has a partnership with Siyazisiza Trust to establish and support community gardens in KZN since 2017
Residents of a community that has been involved in the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation's sustainability initiative	Not residents of a community that has been involved in Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation's sustainability initiative	The Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation's KZN community gardens, through the community-based organisation Siyazisiza Trust, beneficiaries comprise of local community members who are not qualified farmers but due to their upbringings in the rural areas, have developed farming skills
18 years and older	Younger than 18 years old	No minors are involved, all participants are 18 years and older
Willingness to participate in the current study	Unwillingness to participate in the current study	The participants participated voluntarily and signed consent forms

Table 3. 1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Source: Own compilation

The Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation acted as the gatekeeper to the community and exercised formal authority by granting the researcher permission to access the community (Groenewald, 2004). The researcher was granted access to the community organisation and the community on the condition that a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) is entered into. The NDA prohibits the researcher from disclosing any trade secrets of the case company, among other agreements. The signed NDA is attached as Appendix A. Subsequent to gaining access to the community, the researcher established contact with the contact person from the community-based organisation.

According to literature and past phenomenology research, the appropriate sample size is 2-25 participants before reaching saturation - this is when the participants provide no new experiences of the phenomenon (Groenewald, 2004; Starks and Trinidad, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Sim, Saunders, Waterfield & Kingstone, 2018). As a single case study design, the current study focused on participants that met the inclusion and exclusion criteria rather than large population sizes. The pool of potential participants comprised 10 employees.

First contact was made with the potential participants via electronic mail (email) on 02 February 2022. In the email, the researcher introduced herself and the current study as well as sharing the participant information sheet (Appendix B) and the informed consent form (Appendix C). The potential participants were invited to participate by completing the informed consent form and reverting to the researcher to confirm their interest in participating in the current study.

The following section describes the data-gathering techniques that were used.

3.9. DATA GATHERING

The University of South Africa Research Ethics Policy and associated application for ethical clearance processes were adhered to, and ethical approval was granted prior to gathering the data (Appendix D). In addition, the researcher was granted subsequent permission to conduct in-person interviews and a focus group session, as well as observe the research site (Appendix E).

The researcher conducted in-depth, semistructured interviews that outlined the topics in the current study but allowed room for the participant's response to lead the direction

(Stuckey, 2013). The interview questions were derived from the primary and secondary research questions and from related literature on the topic. The interview guide consisted of 19 questions (Appendix F). The ease of using the semistructured interview guide was tested by conducting a mock interview with a relative and, based on the feedback, the original 19 questions were not amended. However, during the initial two interviews with participants, it was noted that some questions elicited similar responses and therefore some of the questions were merged. Additionally, questions were rephrased once there was a clearer context of the community garden initiative structure and operation, and therefore ended up with 16 interview questions. The final interview guide is included in Appendix G.

After making first contact with the potential participants, five (5) signed informed consent forms were received over the course of 17 weeks. The informed consent forms confirmed that participation was voluntary and that the participants did not receive any incentives for participating in the study. Data gathering commenced on 22 February 2022. Interviews were conducted on 22 February 2022, 23 February 2022, and 1 April 2022, and two interviews were conducted on 2 June 2022. The interviews were conducted using the online platform Google Meet and were recorded with the participants' consent.

Although prompts were used to delve deeper into a participant's responses, an effort was made to avoid leading questions to reduce bias or contamination of the data. The interviews were conducted in English, and accommodations such as vernacular reiterations were made where necessary to foster a full understanding of the questions. Confidentiality of the participant's identities was ensured by using pseudonyms in the interview transcripts and the research findings report.

Triangulation of different methodologies, serial interviews, observations and focus groups, was useful for creating confirmability and credibility and developing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe & Neville, 2014).

Serial interviews

To delve deeper into the experiences and to add rigour to the study, the researcher conducted serial interviews with 4 participants to make up a total of 11 interviews between 7 participants (Padilla-Diaz 2015; Read, 2018). Serial interviews were used

as a powerful tool to establish and rapport with participants, resulting in more authentic and insightful answers. The first interview was intensely planned out, and the researcher made use of a set of leading questions (Annexure E) on the assumption that the data could be conveyed in an easy and upfront way to understand, but this is not always the case when gathering data on complex phenomenological data on lived experiences (Read, 2018). Therefore, conducting a second interview allowed the researcher to leverage the rapport from the first interview to probe further and gain deeper insight into the participants' experience of the corporate sustainability initiative.

Serial interviews provided an opportunity to confirm the topics arising from the former interviews from different angles. There was also an opportunity to triangulate the information provided against other participants, which allows for greater confirmability of the data, along with assessing the data's credibility in case of contradictions. In the serial interviews, member checking was used to validate the legitimacy of the data with the other participants by asking similar questions derived from early themes (Treharne & Riggs, 2014).

To fully benefit from the second interview, the questions from the interview guide were rephrased in varying ways, including using the early themes that arose from the interim interpretation of the data gathered in the first interviews.

The four serial interviews were conducted in person at Siyazisiza Trust, located at Zululand Argi Support Centre, R102, Obanjen, in KZN. The interviews were conducted based on the participant's availability on 01 August 2022 and 02 August 2022, and 2 additional interviews were conducted on 03 August 2022. In addition to the four serial interviews, the researcher recruited and engaged 2 new participants who were also interviewed in person. These interviews were conducted on 01 August 2022 and 04 August 2022, respectively.

Additionally, the opportunity for in-person serial interviews was leveraged to make more specific observations of the participant's body language as well as how they interact with the environment and the phenomenon being researched (Read, 2018).

Observations and field notes

Observations are a commonly used tool in phenomenological research for gaining an understanding of the community's lived experience beyond what was expressed through the interviews (Busetto, Wick & Gumbinger, 2020). The researcher conducted

the interviews as a nonparticipant and observed the community from an outsider's point of view due to the researcher's non-affiliation with the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation as not to affect the environment (Creswell, 2014; Busetto et al., 2020)

Field notes are a critical part of observations. Detailed notes of the participants being observed in their natural setting were taken while simultaneously paying closer attention to factors that aligned with the research questions (Busetto et al., 2020). These included how training was being conducted on the community farms, the impact of the community garden initiative on the community members, and the interactions between the community members and management. Post-observation included transcribing the field notes as well as reflecting on the researcher's personal thoughts, feelings, impressions, and experience in the field (Creswell, 2014; Busetto et al., 2020).

An advantage to conducting observations is that the researcher benefitted from gaining a deeper understanding of the lived experiences by being present in the participant's natural environment and subsequently pairing verbal and nonverbal communication to enhance the meaning of the data (Busetto et al., 2020). In addition, the researcher discovered new themes not present in the interviews through nonverbal indicators such as body language and the participant's interaction with the community and the community gardens.

Focus group session

A focus group session was conducted to confirm the data gathered from the semistructured interviews and the observations. The focus group session was conducted with 3 participants who had previously been interviewed and was subject to the availability of the participants (Rabie, 2004). The organisation and facilitation of the focus group session were arranged by the researcher, and an effort was made to remain neutral throughout the focus group session (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2010; Flynn, Albrecht & Scott, 2018). This setting allowed for member checking as well as testing the confirmability of the early themes that emerged from the interviews. The collective opinions and experiences of the group aided in enriching and better contextualising the data (Dilshad & Latif, 2013).

3.10. DATA ANALYSIS METHOD: THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Data analysis is used to interpret raw data into themes and subthemes that represent findings leading to a deep understanding of the phenomenon (Lester, Cho & Lochmiller, 2020). Patterns, themes and subthemes were derived from the data gathered through interviews, observations and the focus group session. Generalised statements were not made, but rather the lived experience of the community was uncovered and explored (Morosan, 2014). Inductive reasoning was used to make a link between the data and the research questions and consequently establish findings through the development of themes and subthemes (Thomas, 2016).

During thematic data analysis, a researcher is a vital tool in conceptualising and interpreting the data, as well as deriving themes, subthemes and codes (Nowell et al., 2017). Creswell (2013) recommends that researchers pen down their experiences when researching the phenomenon to 'bracket' their assumptions, biases and experiences and to prevent influencing the data and interpreting it from their personal lens. As an important research instrument, the researcher cannot be separated from the research process; therefore, the researcher needs to acknowledge their subjectivity as well as manage it by continuously reflecting on their preconceived notions to avoid creating a bias that will contaminate the data (Harrison et al., 2017; Galdas, 2017). The personal reflection notes made by the researcher were used for additional context and served as reminders of the realities during the actual data-gathering process. The reflection notes were shared with the supervisors to promote transparency. Bracketing will be discussed in greater detail under the limitations of the research approach.

The data derived from the observations were prepared in the form of extensive field notes. During the analysis phase, the researcher adhered to the responsibility of interpreting and transcribing the explicit information against the context found in the implicit information from observations – this is the body language, narration, and unsaid meanings (Padilla-Diaz, 2015).

The transcription application *Otter.ai* was used to transcribe the interview recordings. To verify the accuracy and correctness of the transcription, the researcher and an external transcriber examined and edited the transcriptions. To maintain the integrity of the data and the confidentiality of the participants, the external transcriber signed a

confidentiality agreement (Appendix H). The qualitative analysis software *Atlas.ti* was used to manage the documents and subsequently derive codes and categories from the gathered data. However, the researcher was ultimately responsible for ensuring the rigour and trustworthiness of the data (Nowell et al., 2017). The researcher went beyond describing the lived experience of the community involved in a company's sustainability initiative and interpreted the themes and subthemes derived from the data to understand the lived experience and answer the research questions for the study (Creswell, 2007).

According to Nowell, Norris, White and Moules (2017), it is necessary to clarify how data will be analysed to foster trustworthiness. Thematic analysis is a useful analysis method for "identifying, analysing, organising, describing and reporting themes found within a data set" (Nowell et al., 2017; Lochmiller, 2021). Figure 3.2 illustrates the phases of thematic analysis.

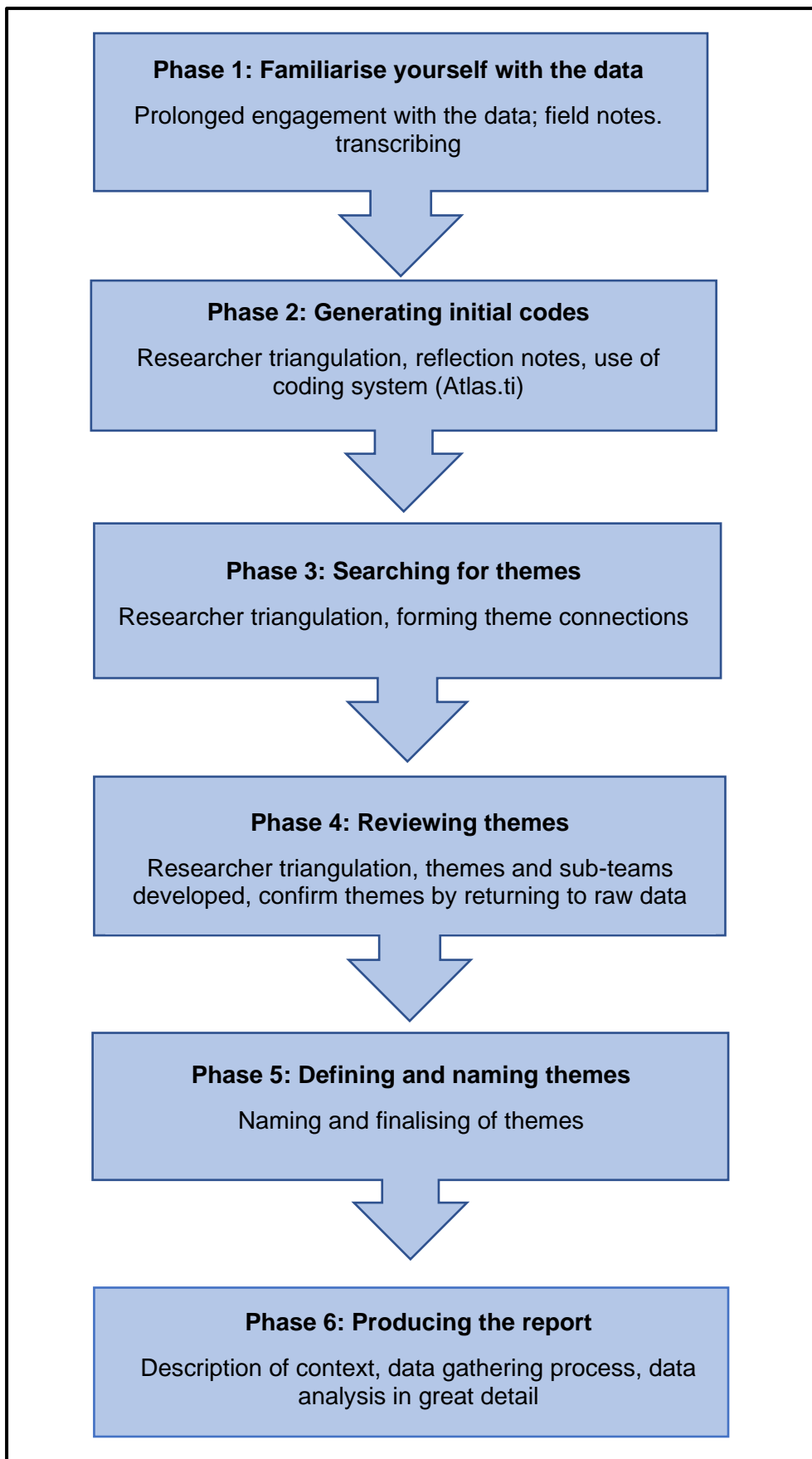


Figure 3. 2: Thematic analysis process

Source: Own compilation adapted from (Nowell et al., 2017:4)

During data analysis, the data were interpreted using an inductive approach by identifying common themes and ideas through writing and rewriting the common elements (codes and categories) derived from the gathered data (Thomas, 2006; Lochmiller, 2021). This exercise allowed the researcher to fully embody and express meaning regarding the lived experience being studied (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Phenomenological research is very personal, and each piece of data is unique. To ensure legitimacy, the researcher included direct quotes from the participants to ensure the confirmability of the commentary (Lester, 1999). The final report of results reflected the participant's true perspectives and experiences. The personal interpretations of the researcher are evident in the final write-up; however, these led to the description of the themes and findings (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Figure 3.3. illustrates the research process from the data gathering to the presentation of the recommendations and conclusions.

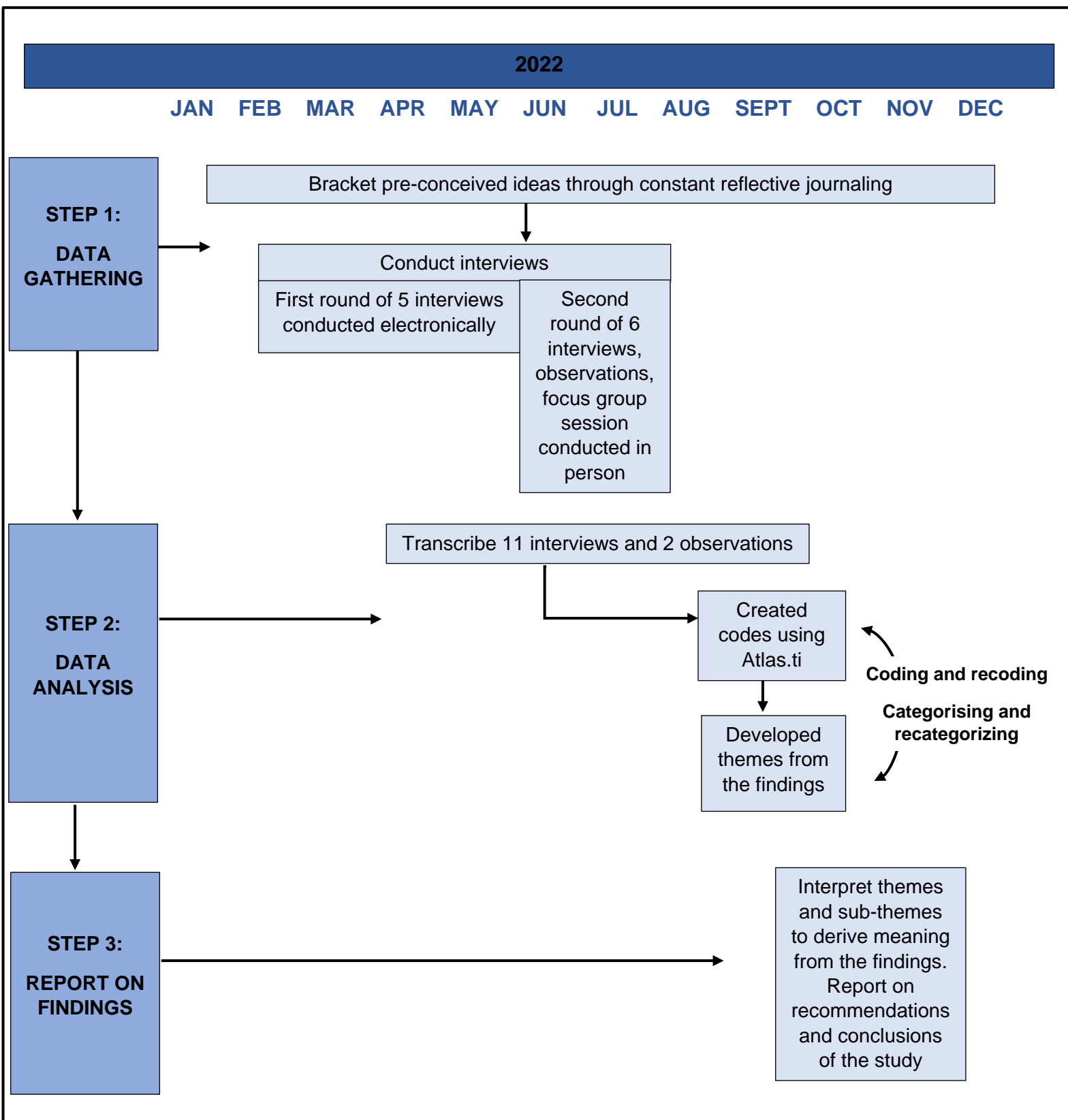


Figure 3. 3: The research process

Source: Own compilation adapted from (Bate, Stigler, Thompson, MacKinnon, Arora, Perry & Reddy, 2012: 201)

3.11. LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH APPROACH

In phenomenological research, significant importance is placed on personal knowledge and subjectivity. Phenomenological research requires the researcher to act as a tool of research and interpret the data and experiences of the participants (Groenewald, 2004). This can pose a limitation due to the human element of having assumptions, bias and preconceived notions (Shenton, 2004). In response to the duty to bracket the preconceptions and avoid 'cooking the data' or leading the interviews towards a direction that confirms personal bias, the researcher wrote down her preconceived notions and consistently reflected on them as a practice of enhancing awareness of the personal preconceived ideas (Groenewald, 2004; Chan, Fung & Chien, 2013). Reflection notes were used to interrogate the experiences and biases during the data gathering; in addition, the notes were shared with the supervisors.

To extract rich data, there is a need for drawn-out collaboration between the researcher and the participants, which could create time limitations (Reiter, Steward & Bruce, 2011). Time limitation occurred in the current study when one (1) of the participants from the first interviews could not conduct a second interview, resulting in four (4) serial interviews. However, the researcher mitigated time limitations to a larger extent by conducting a maximum of 2 interviews per participant. The interviews were set for 1 hour – 1 hour 30 minutes; however, some of the interviews were extended 2 hours. The researcher ensured that the participants were comfortable with the time requirements and made them aware that they could stop the interviews at any time.

A single case study design has been criticised for its limitations in creating generalisable 'laws' (Marrion et al., 2014), but the current study rejects this limitation, as the study seeks to explore and understand the experiences of a community living in a sustainability initiative rather than explain it. While the findings from the current study cannot be generalised, they are likely to be transferable to different organisations and contexts.

3.12. TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE RESEARCH

To ensure the trustworthiness of the research, the research was conducted in a credible, transferable, reliable and confirmable manner.

The credibility of the research ensures that the study is valid and explores what it intends to explore, and the findings should correspond with reality (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). Shenton (2004) outlines the measures of a credible qualitative research study and includes factors such as the adaptation of well-established research methods, tactics to ensure honesty from participants, extensive description of the phenomenon being studied and examining previous research findings. Participants submitted informed consent forms as assurance that those involved were doing so willingly and provided genuine data. Constant supervision from the study supervisors provided the researcher with a sounding board to test out the researcher's interpretation of the data as well as transparently share reflections (Shenton, 2004). Scrutiny of the literature and examining previous related research ensured that extensive details of the phenomenon under study were provided.

Transferability suggests the extent to which the research findings can be applied to another study or another situation. Lemon and Hayes (2020) suggest that to enable transferability, the researcher must give a detailed, rich, contextual description of the phenomenon and what the study is and is not. This assists the reader in making the transfer. The researcher ensured transferability by giving specific, rich, contextual details about the research study in the literature review chapter (Chapter 1) as well as the data gathering, analysis and findings chapter (Chapter 4). Additionally, the researcher has maintained records of the evidence during the current study and is able to access and present the procedures followed to support the transferability of the current study (Harrison et al., 2017).

Reliability is the extent to which the research findings can be trusted and remain consistent over time. Reliability is ensured if the results of the study can be replicated (Golafshani, 2003). To promote reliability, high accuracy was ensured in transcribing the interviews and the observations.

Confirmability is the concern for objectivity to ensure that the findings are valid and reliable as the participant's lived experiences and not a culmination of the researcher's bias (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). A key principle for confirmability is the extent to which

the researcher is transparent about her own preconceived notions and bias in the research report. Detailed reports of the research methods and findings also provide evidence of the authenticity of the study (Shenton, 2004). The researcher was wary not to compromise the structure for creativity while allowing creativity to exist in exploring and presenting the data (Jarzabkowski, Langley, & Nigam, 2021). For this study, the researcher was transparent about her predispositions regarding the study in the report. This included providing details regarding the research approach, data gathering and data analysis to ensure transparency and confirmability.

The authenticity of the research is based on whether the research represents a fair and true range of differing perspectives on the research topic (Treharne & Riggs, 2014). Authenticity was ensured by conducting member checking through the focus group session and by asking similar questions derived from early themes during the second interview. In the current study, the researcher ensured the authenticity of the research by being familiar with the interview transcriptions and cross-checking them with the interview and reflection notes.

3.13. CONCLUSION

Chapter 3 outlined the conceptual framework to be used to enable the researcher to effectively explore the lived experiences of a community involved in the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation's community garden initiative. The methodology adopted to satisfy the research purpose, a qualitative research approach with a phenomenological strategy, was discussed. Qualitative research was a suitable research approach because it helped facilitate research that obtained a deeper understanding of the community's lived experience. Furthermore, the phenomenological strategy enabled the researcher to obtain deep, personal and information-rich data from the participant's experience with the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation's sustainability initiative. The chapter concluded by discussing the limitations of phenomenological research and subsequently discussed how trustworthiness was ensured.

Chapter 4 outlines the data analysis process followed in the study and presents the four themes derived from the gathered data.

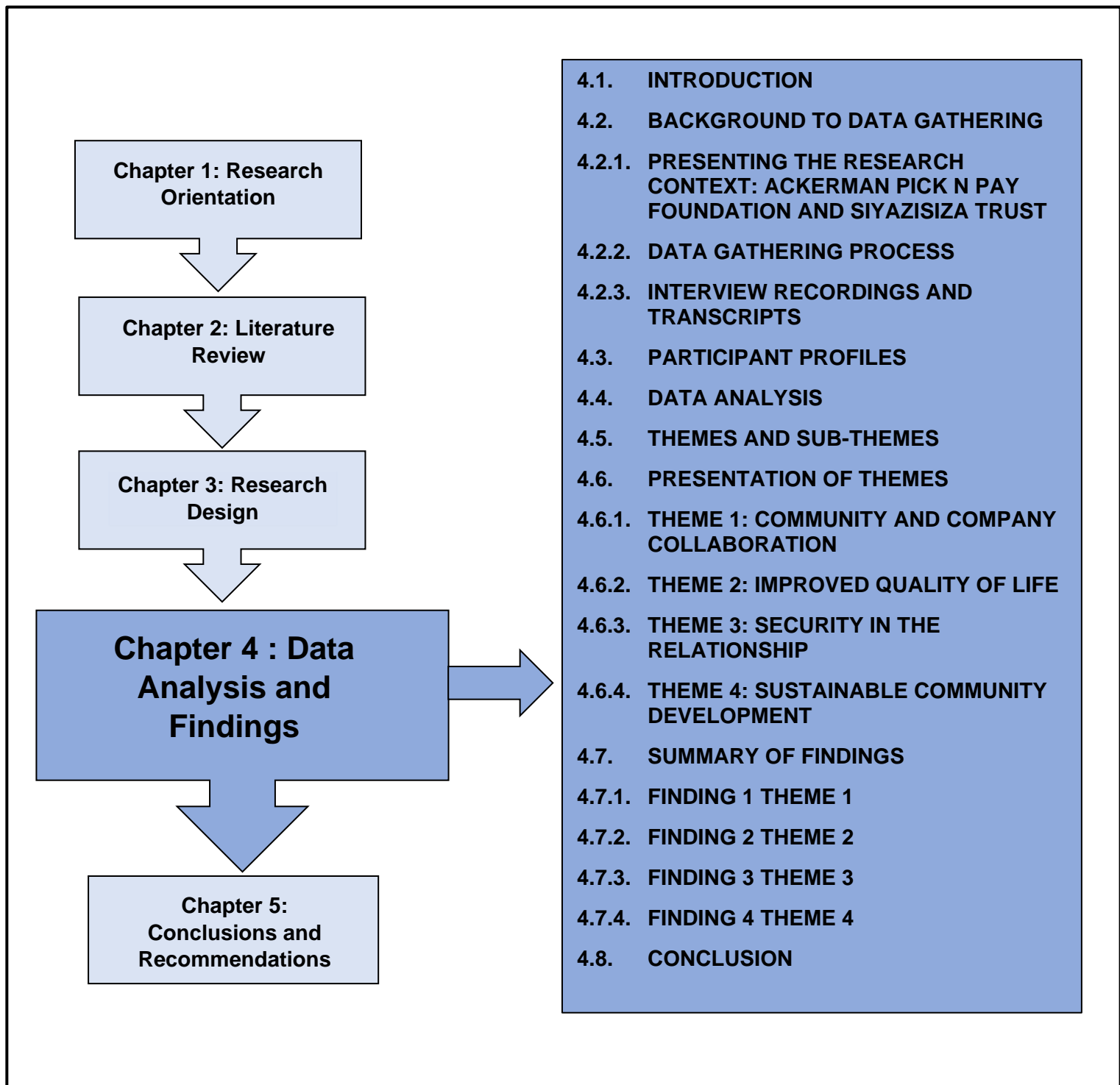


Figure 4. 1: Structure of Chapter 4

Source: Own adaptation

Figure 4.1 illustrates the structure of Chapter 4 and its position in the dissertation.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

Following Chapter 3, where the researcher discussed qualitative research as the appropriate research approach and phenomenology as the research strategy, this chapter reports on the analysis of the data gathered within a single case organisation and presents the findings of the current study. Chapter 4 offers the analysis of data gathered from participants and presents the themes and subthemes in a systematic manner so as to answer the primary and secondary research questions.

In this chapter, the researcher expands on Chapter 3 and describes how the data was gathered in greater detail, while presenting the participants' profiles and offering organisational context during the data gathering period. The structure of Chapter 4 is illustrated in Figure 4.1.

4.2. BACKGROUND TO DATA GATHERING AND ANALYSIS

To better understand the lived experiences of a community involved in a company's sustainability initiative, the researcher conducted qualitative research with a phenomenological strategy. This strategy allowed the researcher to gather extensive first-hand, descriptive, experiential data from participants (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Phenomenological research can be successfully conducted without large population sizes, as the purpose of a phenomenological study is to understand and not to confirm (McLaren & Durepos, 2021). Therefore, to make meaning of the lived experiences of a community involved in a sustainability initiative, a single case study research design was adopted, and detailed descriptions of the community's perceptions of the sustainability initiative were presented. The following section offers details on the selected case.

4.2.1. Presenting the research context: Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation and Siyazisiza Trust

As highlighted in Chapter 2, the successful implementation of sustainability initiatives is usually a partnership effort between the company and a community organisation such as an NGO. Section 3.7 offers the research setting by introducing the case company Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation and the community-based organisation, Siyazisiza Trust. The data were gathered over 7 months in 2022. The purpose of this section is to offer context-specific information during the time of data gathering that may have informed some of the responses by the participants.

At the time of the interviews, the national lockdown restrictions to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic were gradually adjusted from alert level 5, which was implemented at the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, to adjusted level 1 from 01 October 2021. Furthermore, the national state of disaster was lifted on 05 April 2022. Throughout the pandemic, farming was categorised under 'essential services', meaning that farming operations did not cease during any of the lockdown levels. However, farmers and farming activities were affected by rules pertaining to social distancing, wearing of personal protective equipment (PPE) and access to markets. Aligned with the theme of corporate sustainability, a recognised community-based organisation partnered with the case company to promote sustainable community development in the form of community garden initiatives was purposefully selected. The selected community organisation that this current study explored is the Siyazisiza Trust.

Siyazisiza Trust is a non-profit organisation that partners with smallholder farmers as well as agricultural initiatives with the aim of improving livelihoods, food security and the environment (Siyazisiza, 2022). Smallholder farmers are described as farmers operating on plots of land that are largely state-owned, primarily for personal consumption but allowing for the sale of excess crops (Department: Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, 2012). For the current study, the term 'smallholder farmers' represents the community members that have established and operated community gardens. The terms 'smallholder farmers' and 'community' may be used interchangeably. The smallholder farmers fully operate based on the agricultural cycle outlined in Figure 4.2.

The smallholder farmers completed the agricultural cycle from beginning to end during the gathering. The community conducts crop planning between January and February, followed by soil preparation in March. The crop inputs are purchased by the smallholder farmers in April and then subsequently planted. Monitoring of the crops takes place over 3 months, between April and June, followed by harvest in July. To end the cycle, the smallholder farmers harvested, processed and began selling fresh produce in August. All the proceeds from the sales are kept by the smallholder farmers. The money is reinvested in the next agricultural cycle, while the profit is split among the farmers.

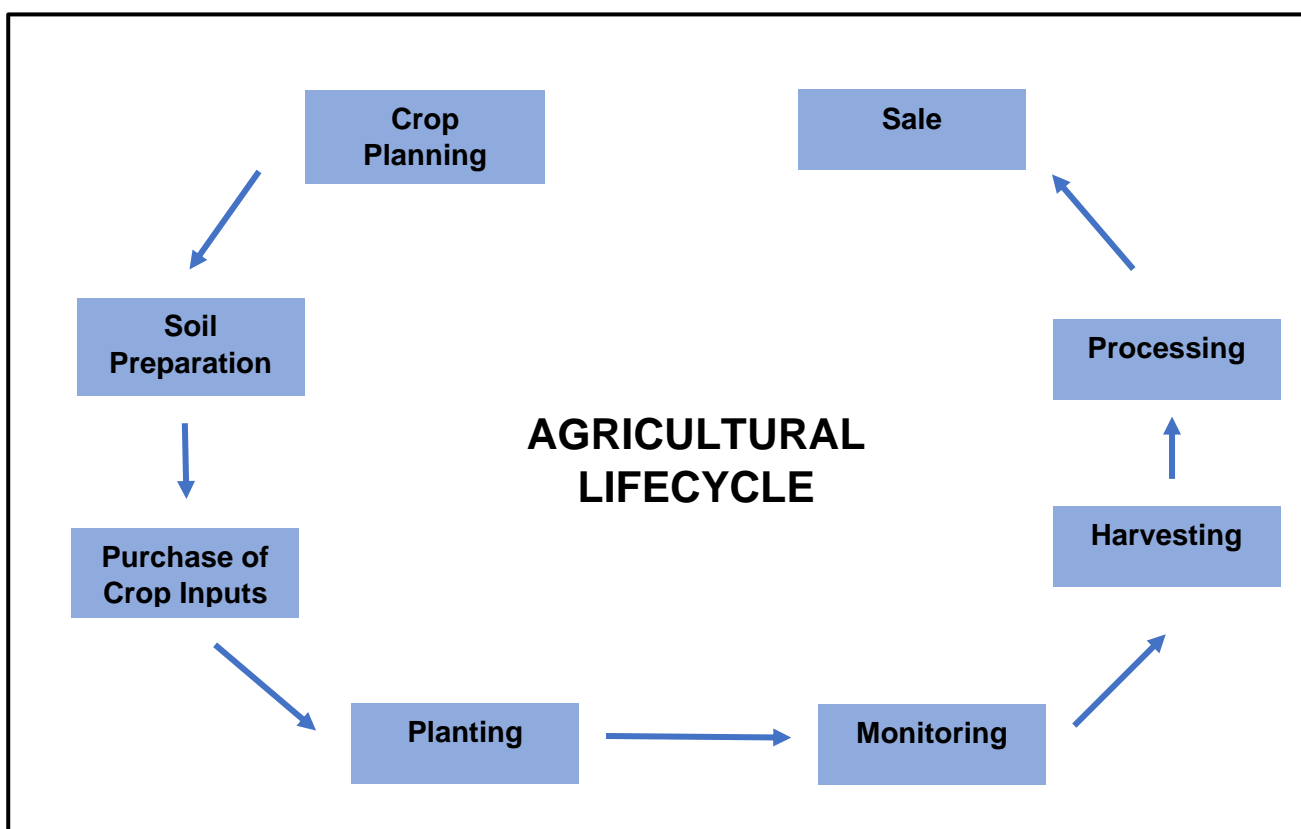


Figure 4. 2: The agriculture lifecycle

Source: Adapted from Cono Agriculture (n.d.)

The community-based organisation is one of the partners of Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation’s community sustainability development goals, in which the case company aims to satisfy its sustainable development goals. This is partly achieved by addressing food security through developing rural and urban community gardens (Pick n Pay , 2019). As part of Ackerman Pick n Pay’s SDG goals, they have partnered with local community organisations such as Siyazisiza Trust to address food security by

developing rural and urban community gardens, as well as converting some of the community gardens into training gardens (Pick n Pay , 2019).

The case company's partnership with the community-based organisation is based on a funding structure. Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation fully funds specific sustainability initiatives based on a funding proposal that has been developed by the community-based organisation subsequent to conducting a community needs analysis. The total funding amount is allocated at the start of the sustainability initiative. The funding structure typically covers all costs associated with the sustainability initiative. This includes building materials, salaries of the community-based organisation employees involved in the sustainability initiative, and training. Factors such as increased supplier prices and unanticipated needs are grounds for an adjustment of the original funding amount, which is communicated between the community-based organisation and Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation. These factors may be communicated as the need arises. The communication occurs initially in an informal manner (via email or telephone) between the CEO of the community-based organisation and the Head of Philanthropy at Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation. However, a formal proposal requesting the extension of the project scope is required to receive the additional funds. After the sustainability initiatives, the community-based organisation is responsible for compiling monitoring and evaluation reports of the sustainability initiative, which are shared with the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation. Monitoring and evaluation reports are compiled against the indicators set out in the funding proposal. The reports highlight the challenges faced while implementing sustainability initiatives and any future recommendations for upcoming sustainability initiatives. The funding lifecycle may range from 3 months to a year and is stipulated in the funding proposal.

With funding from the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation, Siyazisiza Trust has supported local community gardens through various sustainability initiatives, including building packhouses on the local gardens in addition to installing irrigation and funding the acquisition of 'Local GAP certification'. In addition to supporting Siyazisiza Trust, the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation has also funded packhouses and the local GAP certification with the aim of improving the produce processing process for the purpose of providing better products to the market and developing smallholder farmers into sustainable agri-entrepreneurs.

Siyazisiza Trust maintains a relationship with the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation and smallholder farmers as an intermediary, this position as the 'middleman' offers a direct link to the community members. As participants in the current study, the employees at Siyazisiza Trust offered a rich pool of first-hand information on the lived experiences of the community involved in the sustainability initiative, from both the perspective of the community-based organisation and the community. As explained earlier, funding flows from the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation to the smallholder farmers through Siyazisiza Trust. In the same way, stakeholder feedback on the sustainability initiative flows from the smallholder farmers to the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation through Siyazisiza Trust in the form of reports. Through funding from the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation, Siyazisiza has administered the building of 7 packhouses and acquired the local GAP certification for 2 community gardens. The relational link between the case company, the community-based organisation and the community is illustrated below in Figure 4.3. The study explored the lived experience of smallholder farmers as the community involved in sustainability initiatives.

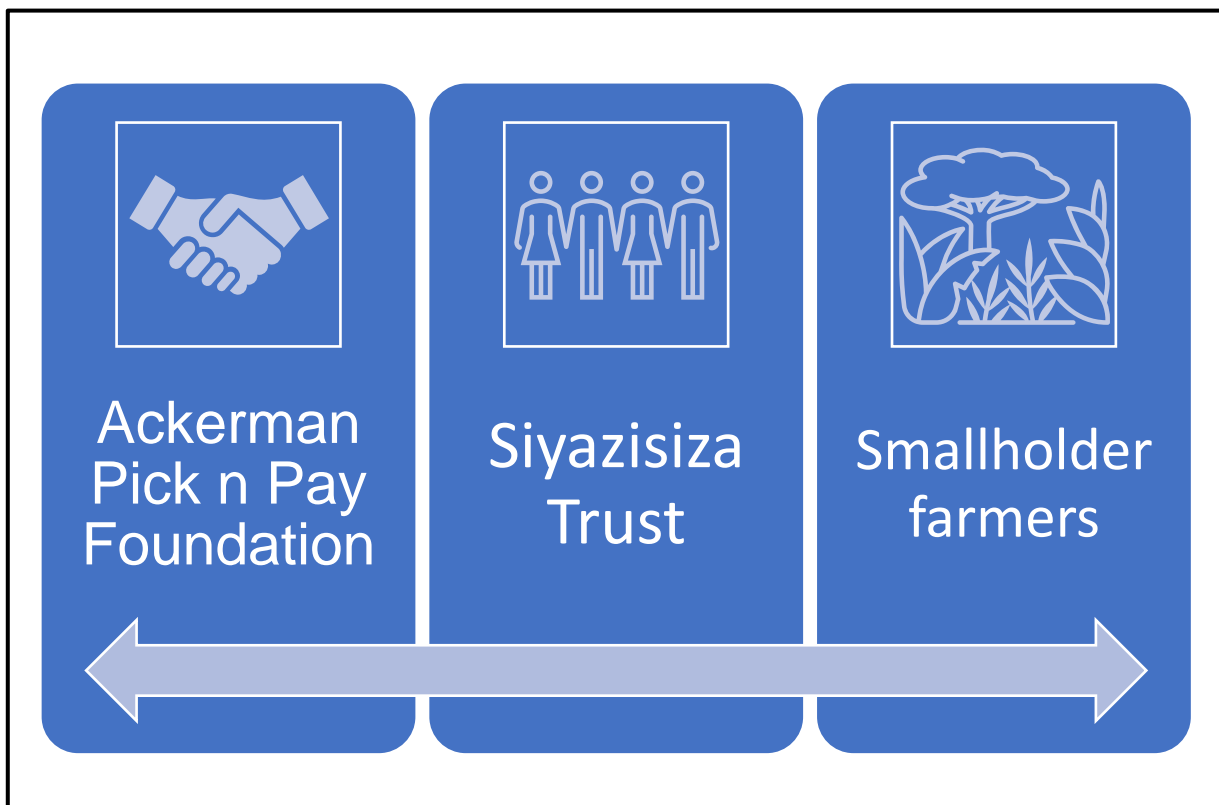


Figure 4. 3: The relational flow between the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation, Siyazisiza Trust and smallholder farmers

Source: Own compilation

In addition to the packhouses and local GAP certification sustainability initiatives, the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation has also partnered with Siyazisiza Trust as part of a COVID-19 response initiative by providing COVID-19 relief to smallholder farmers in the form of seeds, seedlings and PPE material.

As part of the overall mission to establish food security and increase income generation for smallholder farmers by growing local markets, Siyazisiza Trust focused on 3 goals: 1) Mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on food security and income generation for smallholder farmers and their surrounding communities, 2) Establish the building blocks for long-term recovery, and 3) Ensure that protocols and resources are available to guide smallholder farmers in safe farming and food production. To achieve these goals, Siyazisiza Trust strategised towards distributing supplies and inputs to the local communities. In addition, removing the field officers and focusing on remote-based support and building awareness and establishing safe working environments. Siyazisiza Trust further improved local capacity and supply and enhanced supply chains and food safety standards (Siyazisiza Trust, 2021). The efforts towards enhancing local food production proved necessary during the 2021 looting in the Kwa-Zulu Natal province. Following the arrest of former president Jacob Zuma, violent protests and looting erupted the country. KZN was amongst the provinces tremendously affected by the looting of stores and the ultimate decision to temporarily close most grocery stores (Drury, 2021). However, local community gardens were able to continue producing subsistence crops amidst the threat to food security. Siyazisiza Trust aims to achieve sustainable food security and income generation by partnering with Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation as well as other funders.

Table 4.1 offers a glossary for the specific words, phrases or descriptors used within the community.

Table 4.1. Glossary of case study-specific terms	
Terms	Interpretation
Mamas/Gogos	The smallholder farmers that operate at the community garden. The smallholder farmers mostly consist of older women from the community. The words 'Mamas' 'Gogos' and 'smallholder farmers' may be used interchangeably
Project	A community garden. The term 'project' is synonymous with 'farm' and may be used interchangeably
Initiative	A specific operation in the community garden, such as building packhouses. The term 'initiative' is synonymous with 'sustainability initiative' and may be used interchangeably
Packhouses	A structure built on the community garden, to process the harvested produce
Local GAP certification	An agricultural certification to promote food safety and security and a common requirement for participation in the formal market
Local market	Informal buying and selling market
Formal market	Formalised retail stores

Table 4. 1: Glossary of the case-specific terms

Source: Own compilation

The following section outlines the data gathering process.

4.2.2. Data gathering process

According to Gaya and Smith (2016), for single case study research to produce valuable data, the participants should meet the inclusion criteria of the research study. The inclusion criteria for the current study are outlined in Chapter 3. Based on the inclusion criteria, a pool of adult individuals employed at Siyazisiza Trust for over a year and had been involved in the community garden initiatives funded by the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation were purposely selected to participate in the current study. The interviews were conducted with Siyazisiza Trust as the intermediary between the community and the case company. The position of middleman ensures

that the employees have first-hand experience with sustainability initiatives through regular contact with the community and the case company. Contact with the Siyazisiza Trust was arranged through the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation Head of Philanthropy, whose position at the case company asserts her as the gatekeeper to the network that is involved in the case company's sustainability initiatives. The gatekeeper initiated the email introduction between the researcher and Siyazisiza Trust's CEO. Siyazisiza Trust's CEO subsequently linked the researcher to an employee at Siyazisiza Trust, who functioned as the contact person for the current study.

Figure 4.4 offers a diagrammatical depiction of the timelines of the data-gathering process. To begin the data-gathering process, the researcher held a briefing meeting with the Siyazisiza Trust contact person to discuss the expected way forwards and the researcher's inclusion criteria. The participant information sheet was shared with the contact person, who proceeded to distribute it among the employees at the community-based organisation as part of garnering interest to participate as well as introducing the researcher and the current study to the potential participants.

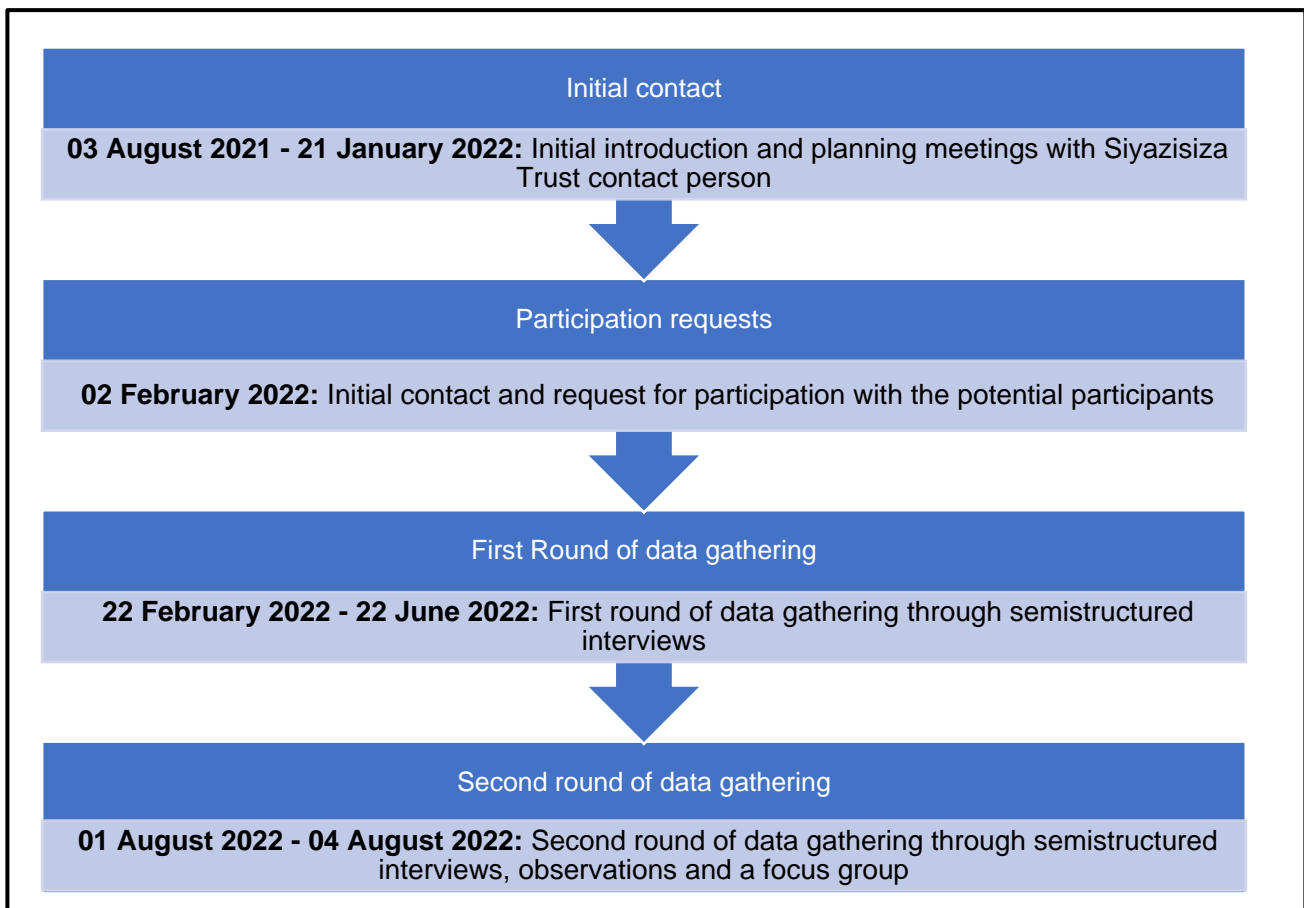


Figure 4. 4: Data gathering timeline

Source: Own compilation

Subsequent to disseminating the participant information sheet, the gatekeeper provided a list of 10 potential participants with whom electronic contact was initiated. The researcher introduced herself and the study and expressed interest in gaining participation from the participants for a 1–1.5 hour interview. The participants were made aware of a potential follow-up interview. The participant information sheet confirmed that the researcher had ethical clearance and further reiterated that the participants' identities would remain confidential. Participants did not receive any incentives for voluntarily participating in the current study.

The first round of data gathering was on 22 February 2022. Appendix F and Appendix G contain the original and the final interview guide, respectively. The second round of data gathering included serial interviews, observations and a focus group session and was conducted in person at the Siyazisiza offices, located at the Zululand Argi Support Centre, R102, Obanjen in KZN. The purpose of the serial interviews was to engage on the topics arising from the first round of interviews as a form of member checking.

The serial interviews were conducted in person in conjunction with the observations to add rigour and trustworthiness to the research. When conducting the serial interviews, the researcher obtained participation from two additional participants who had not been previously interviewed. The interviews were conducted with them between 01 to 04 August 2022 and were recorded with the consent of the participants. The observations were conducted on 01 August and 03 August 2022 when visiting the community gardens. During the observations, the community-based organisation and the community were observed with special attention to factors that aligned with the research questions. Observations were made to the infrastructure funded by the case company and its effect on the community, and food safety training sessions, in addition to observing nonverbal indicators such as body language during the second round of interviews. Implicit reactions communicated through body language were advantageous in supplementing the meaning of the explicit responses from the interview questions.

On the final day of the field visit, a focus group was conducted with three participants who had been previously interviewed during the first and second rounds. Appendix I contains the focus group prompts with the early themes that were completed by the participants. To verify emerging themes, the researcher presented the participants with the early themes and requested that they indicate their agreement or disagreement with each theme while including a note next to a theme they would like to discuss further. Subsequent to this exercise, the researcher facilitated a discussion around the responses, which created a shared understanding of the phenomenon of interest and investigation.

The shortest interview time frame in both the first and second rounds of interviews was 30 minutes, while the longest was 2 hours and 3 minutes. The total amount of minutes for all the interviews is 685 minutes, totalling 11 hours and 25 minutes.

[4.2.3. Interview recordings and transcripts](#)

Subsequent to receiving permission from the participants, the interviews were recorded. The audio files were saved on the researcher's personal laptop as well as Google Drive. The transcribing platform 'Otter.ai' was used to transcribe the audio files. To ensure accuracy, the researcher edited the digitally transcribed interviews. In addition, transcription services were acquired from a professional transcriber. The

transcriber signed a confidentiality agreement to keep the participants' information confidential (Appendix H). The 11 semistructured interviews amounted to 171 pages of transcribed data. The researcher manually transcribed the field notes from the observations. The observation transcriptions included informal conversations with the community members. The informal interviews took place during the observations and can be described as informal conversations. The transcriptions from the observations amounted to 4 pages of transcribed data.

4.3. PARTICIPANT PROFILES

To promote trustworthiness, the researcher presents the participants of the current study in this section. Nonprobability purposive sampling was used to identify the seven (7) participants using the inclusion and exclusion criteria set out in Chapter 3. The participants in the current study met the inclusion criteria. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity and ensure confidentiality as per the participant agreement, informed consent form and ethical requirements. The pseudonyms were selected based on the corresponding alphabetical order in which the first interviews were conducted. Interview number 1 = A, interview number 2 = B, etc. Furthermore, the researcher opted for indigenous vernacular names to reflect the South African context. The names have no specific gender pairing.

Participant Pseudonym	Interview session	Interview duration
Athandwe	Athandwe's first interview was conducted on 22 February 2022. Athandwe was receptive to the current study and offered meaningful contextual information on the structure at Siyazisiza Trust as well as how funding of initiatives works. As this was the first interview, the researcher could not immediately grasp some of the structural explanation, however Athandwe provided informative detail with examples	02:03:50

	Athandwe's second interview was conducted on 01 August 2022. This interview was conducted after the researcher received a tour of the Siyazisiza offices, which are located on a farm. This researcher and participant formed a good rapport, which created a relaxed environment. Athandwe expounds on the researcher's contextual knowledge with practical/insightful real-life examples of the smallholder farmers' lived experiences	01:17:56
Bongi	<p>Bongi's interview was conducted on 23 February 2022. Bongi's interview was challenging as she veered away from the question often. This was however helpful as it made the researcher consider factors that were not thought of before, such as other funders and being more cognisant of being specific to the participants that the current study focuses on projects strictly funded by Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation. However, it presented a challenge in terms of time as Bongi had to cut the interview shortly before the researcher could explore more topics</p> <p>Bongi's second interview was conducted on 03 August 2022. Due to the contextual knowledge that the researcher had gained from previous interviews, Bongi's second interview questions were aimed at uncovering the experience of the smallholder farmer's with a project that she spear-headed. This line of questioning was also influenced by other participant's suggestions to delve deeper in the "LOCAL GAP certification" initiative with Bongi. Bongi was very well-informed about this initiative and offered insightful and often 'witty' comments regarding the lived experience of communities involved in the sustainability initiatives</p>	<p>01:23:29</p> <p>49:42</p>
Celani	Celani's interview was conducted on 01 April 2022. Celani's interview has been previously scheduled for 23 February but he was unfortunately not able to attend due to no electricity at his workplace. Celani was then able to reschedule to interview to 01 April 2022. Celani communicated a desire to	44:18

	<p>conduct an interview shorter than the allocated 1 hour 30 minutes. This subconsciously put the researcher under strict time constraints and led to limited probing and, therefore, a shorter interview than the preceding interviews</p> <p>Celani's second interview was conducted on 02 August 2022. Celani presented as kind but stern, this might have been due to his many years at Siyazisiza Trust. Celani did not shy away from expressing any negative experiences from the sustainability initiative</p>	39:46
Dube	<p>Dube's interview was conducted on 02 June 2022. Dube's interview was delayed due to strikes in the area. This delay brought a lingering rush over the interview session. Dube's answers were short and straight to the point</p> <p>Dube's second interview was conducted on 03 August 2022. The researcher noticed that Dube integrated more vernacular (Zulu) words than the other participants. The interview was conducted towards the end of the workday, which might have contributed toward the 'tired' feel of the interview; however, the researcher was able to extract rich data from the interview</p>	39:03 30:03
Enhle	<p>Enhle's interview was conducted on 02 June 2022. Enhle was one of the first participants who expressed interest in participating in the current study using sending the researcher a signed copy of the consent form. However, he struggled to commit to an interview date and time due to his busy work schedule. The eventual interview was spontaneously organised by the gatekeeper</p> <p>Enhle was not available for a second interview due to scheduling conflicts</p>	45:36

Futhi	<p>Futhi's interview was conducted on 01 August 2022. Futhi expressed interest in participating in the current study subsequent to meeting the researcher in person. Futhi provided good context regarding the relationship between the community-based organisation and the case company. Futhi shed light on the complex dynamics that have caused the community-based organisation to venture into creating means of profit and the ways that this has reshaped the funding landscape. Futhi often expressed concepts with pictures and diagrams to paint a clearer picture for the researcher</p> <p>Futhi was not available for a second interview due to time constraints</p>	01:18:01
Gugu	<p>Gugu's interview was conducted on 04 August 2022. The interview was conducted on the researcher's last day on the site and had not been previously confirmed. However, the researcher had additional interview guides and could proceed with the interview. Gugu showed great passion for the smallholder farmers and demonstrated a meaningful relationship with them</p> <p>Gugu was not available for a second interview due to scheduling limitations</p>	01:12:37

Table 4. 2: Participant profile summary

Source: Own compilation

Table 4.2 offers the profile of each participant and a brief summary of the interview sessions. The researcher ensures confirmability by discussing their impressions from interviews. In addition, the table indicates the date and length of the interview. The following section outlines the data analysis process that was followed.

4.4. DATA ANALYSIS

The responses from 11 interviews and 2 sets of observations were coded and categorised using the qualitative analysis programme ATLAS.ti. The researcher used Saldaña's (2015) codes-to-theory model to derive the themes in two cycles. According to Saldaña (2015), "coding is a cyclical act" that requires constant coding and recoding, as well as categorising and recategorising. During the first cycle, 229 initial codes were created with 564 quotations. Descriptive coding and value coding were utilised. These codes were initially categorised into 27 categories.

The second cycle was performed manually. During the second cycle, two initial categories were refined by recategorisation into more suitable and relevant code groups. This recategorisation created six new categories, and one initial category collapsed. The researcher focused on data that contributed to answering the research questions. After the second cycle, there remained 26 categories from which the researcher derived four themes and 11 subthemes.

4.5. THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

The current study aimed to explore the lived experiences of a community involved in a sustainability initiative. This section presents the 4 main themes and their related subthemes that emerged from the data gathered through 11 interviews and 2 sets of observations. The themes and subthemes seek to answer each respective secondary research question. Figure 4.5 illustrates the four themes and their related subthemes in relation to the primary and secondary research questions from the perspective of the smallholder farmers, as relayed by the participants from Siyazisiza Trust. Each sub-theme is linked to the respective secondary questions.

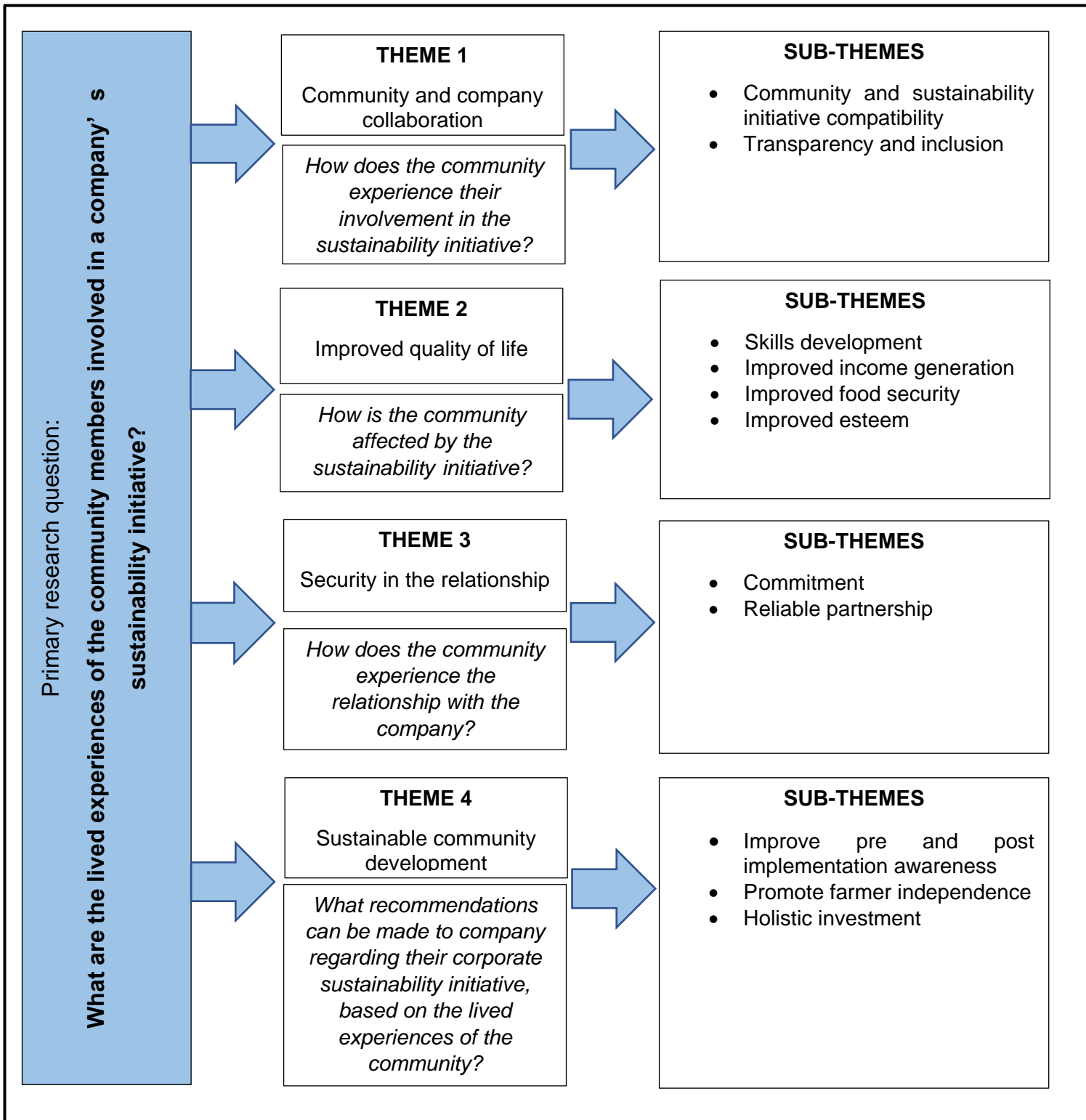


Figure 4. 5: The four themes and the related sub-themes linked to the primary and secondary research questions.

Source: Own compilation

Figure 4.5 illustrates the link between the secondary research questions and the four overarching themes, along with the related subthemes.

4.6. PRESENTATION OF THEMES

This section presents the research findings. Through data analysis and interpretation, 4 themes and 11 subthemes were identified. Table 4.3 illustrates the 4 themes, 11 subthemes and 26 categories that emerged from the current study. The categories were derived from 229 codes created from the data.

Themes	Subthemes	Categories	Number of codes
Community and company collaboration	Community and sustainability initiative compatibility	Project and initiative compatibility	12
	Transparency	Transparency and inclusion	2
		Clear expectations	2
Improved quality of life	Skills development	Business skills development	13
		Farming skills enhanced	9
	Improved income generation	Evolution into product development	5
		Participation in the formal market	11
		Formal market bias against smallholder farmers	7
		Opportunities for income generation	15
	Improved food security	Improved food quality	11
		Food availability	8
	Improved esteem	Farmer confidence	2
		Dignity	2
		Increased societal emphasis on farming	14

		Improved working environment	15
		Health and environmental impact	7
Security in the relationship	Commitment	Case company commitment	14
		The case company has knowledge of the agricultural field	1
	Reliable partnership	Case company trusts NGO	5
		Case company flexibility	4
		Open communication	3
Sustainable community development	Improve pre and post-implementation awareness	Improve reflection, reporting and learning	8
		Improve pre-implementation research	4
	Promote farmer independence	Graduating into independence	32
	Holistic investment	Initiatives expansion	6
		Shift in the funding landscape	2

Table 4. 3: Themes, subthemes, and categories

Source: Own compilation

4.6.1. Theme 1: Community and company collaboration

Secondary research question 1

How does the community experience their involvement in a sustainability initiative?

4.6.1.1. Community and sustainability initiative compatibility

It was revealed from the data that there was an emphasis on achieving compatibility between the community and the sustainability initiatives that would be implemented in the community garden. To establish whether compatibility exists, the community-based organisation consulted with the smallholder farmers to gauge their interest in

the sustainability initiatives as well as convey to them what would be expected from their side.

Athandwe explained the pre-implementation consultation process as follows:

“...you need to sit down with these people before you implement something as huge as GAP and ask them, ‘are you guys even keen on this?’ Give them an understanding of what it is and what it will require from their side so you have their full buy-in. Therefore, it doesn’t end up feeling like ‘this is your GAP and you put it on our shoulders’. Then, you can just run with it.” (Athandwe interview #2)

Celani’s statement supported Athandwe’s revelation on garnering support:

“What you do is if there is any development, any improvement, any new programme that the organisation will take to the farmers, you will meet with your community forum committee, and you will say ‘look there is a project, there is a programme, can you decide who the beneficiaries are and I will take that from you [the smallholder farmers]...” *“we came up with a strategy and where to get a buy-in from the forums.”* (Celani interview #2)

As revealed by Athandwe and Celani, consulting with the community allows for full buy-in of sustainability initiatives. Subsequently, a stronger buy-in from the community allows them to be part of the implementation process and take ownership of the sustainability initiative.

However, participants expressed that there is still a way to achieve seamless compatibility. The participants revealed a lack of compatibility between the community and sustainability initiative as a previously faced challenge. They revealed that there is some incompatibility between the local GAP certification initiative and some smallholder farmers. The incompatibility mostly exists because of the rigorous requirements from local GAP certification, such as record keeping. Some smallholder farmers cannot meet these requirements due to low literacy levels, which places them at risk of getting the certification revoked.

Bongi expressed the challenge of introducing record keeping as part of the local GAP certification requirements:

“However, I think the immediate impact that we did not anticipate was things like record keeping. I think our farmers, even your mamas from eMlanjeni (pseudonym) who are a business, do not keep records. You think to yourself, ‘but how do you run your business? How do you measure how much profit you are truly making?’ (Bongi interview #1)

Athandwe shared that some sustainability initiatives cannot work with certain smallholder farmers because of literacy challenges:

“Sometimes it works, but it takes us smashing our heads and realising that sometimes it does not work with certain people because of things like literacy” (Athandwe interview #1)

Data revealed that more extensive pre-implementation research and consultations would have assisted in identifying the incompatibility and therefore would have been avoided.

Athandwe expressed a need for the community-based organisation to conduct more community research before implementing initiatives:

“I think with any project that we get, it’s very good for us as an organisation to kind of have that initial desktop research...” (Athandwe interview #1)

“Even when you apply things like GAP, [consider] capacity levels of literacy, are they going to keep these records that are so intense, that GAP requires farmers to? No.” (Athandwe interview #2)

Futhi reiterated the importance of compatibility between the community and the sustainability initiative based on a needs analysis:

“...there is no use going to a garden out in the middle of Nongoma somewhere and say ‘Okay, we’re going to make you local GAP certified’, because who’s going to be your market? No one buys local GAP there. No retailer in that area is asking for local GAP’. (Futhi interview #1)

Participants expressed that conveying the importance of elements such as record keeping when implementing initiatives is still a challenge.

Bongi revealed that there is a gap in conveying the importance of systems and processes:

“What we’re having a challenge with, I think as an organisation, is just this realisation of just how much it’s going to take to upskill our farmers to keep records to make sure they understand the system. It’s no use to farmers if they do not understand what they’re doing so we will always play middleman” (Bongi interview #1)

Futhi explained that the community needs to connect with the value of keeping records:

“...also a lot of it comes down to questioning what it’s for. What is its value? Why keep records? Is it just to keep the NGO or extension officer happy?” (Futhi interview #1)

“...record keeping is a major issue and I think that a lot of it just comes back to people’s lack of understanding of the need for it. They do not see the value in it, basically that is what it comes down to” (Futhi interview # 1).

4.6.1.2. Transparency and inclusion

It was evident from the data that transparency in the initiative implementation process and clearly expressed expectations, roles and responsibilities contribute to a transparent and more inclusive experience for the community. The community establishes their involvement by signing a memorandum of understanding (MOU), cementing their commitment.

Athandwe explained the process and benefit of signing the MOU.

“...every time we start a project, it’s important for us to have initiation meetings with the farmers. We do not just start projects without sitting down with them and telling them ‘guys we’ve received funding for this. The project entails this and that.’ There is actually an MOU...we set up MOUs in place...where we sign and the farmer signs, just so we are clear that we’ve agreed to the objectives of the project.” (Athandwe interview #2)

Although the smallholder farmers largely interact with the community-based organisation as the middleman between the case company and the community, they are aware of the funding structure. There is transparency in the process of implementing initiatives.

In an informal interview with the smallholder farmers, the researcher observed that they were aware of the case company and its important role in sustainability initiatives. The smallholder farmers made mention of the COVID relief initiative called 'food in the ground', where the case company provided the farmers with seeds, seedlings, and PPE material:

"The mamas were actually aware of the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation as a funder because they mentioned that they received 'food in the ground from them', the seedlings" (Observations Garden #1)

4.6.2. Theme 2: Improved quality of life

Secondary research question 2

How is the community affected by the sustainability initiative?

4.6.2.1. Skills development

The data revealed that the community experienced an improvement in skills development. The community members have a history of farming, as this is usually the main source of their food, as stated by Athandwe below:

"Even before the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation came into the picture, these mamas had always had this garden because they've always seen it as beneficial in terms of putting food on the table for the kids at home and families at home. So we found them farming already." (Athandwe interview #1)

However, the participants revealed that the packhouses and local GAP certification initiative have contributed towards more scalable and sustainable farming skills.

Celani expressed that the initiative's impact is experienced by adding value to the knowledge that the community already possesses:

"...there is a basic knowledge that you find in your forefathers, so to make an impact, we need to add value on what is already known." (Celani interview #1)

The high standards from the local GAP certification initiative have imposed an expectation for better quality products and, in turn, more effective and sustainable farming practices. The participants shared that, through the training provided by this initiative, the communities have integrated farming practices that promote safe and

sustainable farming. This includes a more conscious awareness of pesticide management.

Futhi bore witness to improved farming practices:

“I’m seeing better farming practices, particularly in terms of sustainable farming. So seeing principles like mulching in place, and drip irrigation being used.”

(Futhi interview #1)

Gugu explained that increased knowledge of pesticide management is an important part of educating and empowering smallholder farmers because of the negative effects that come with harmful pesticides and chemicals. The increased education in pesticide management has resulted in less use of pesticides and increased use of organic, sustainable farming methods.

“...a big part of that is around the use, for example, of chemicals and how people work around food. However, certainly, the use of chemicals and pesticides. In addition, that is a huge issue for me personally because it’s something that your rural communities, black farmers particularly, are kind of left out of in terms of awareness creation, and information dissemination on the safe use of chemicals and pesticides” (Gugu interview #1).

The local GAP certification initiative has empowered the community to participate in the formal market, which established the community garden’s operations (as per the agricultural lifecycle in Figure 4.2) as legitimate business operations. The development of businesses requires a level of formalisation and business skills. The participants revealed that the community had difficulty producing fresh and clean crops due to not having a cleaning and packing space. The packhouses allowed the community to clean, pack and store the crops before taking them to market. This has formalised the community’s business because the products presented to the market is of a higher quality.

Bongi stated that the community had a challenge with properly preparing for market

“Farmers before would take the harvested produce and have it on the ground. Maybe they have got some black bags. In addition, I do not even know how

they would clean the produce before it goes to market. In addition, in fact, it was Ackerman Pick n Pay saying ‘something’s off here’” (Bongi interview #1)

Futhi expressed that there is an improvement in business operations such as record keeping:

“I’m seeing better attention in terms of record keeping happening. When I look at eMalunde (pseudonym) now, compared to three – four years ago, much better systems are in place.” (Futhi interview #1)

In addition, the participants revealed that the community did not have an accurate and consistent pricing system because they did not weigh the produce. The GAP certification process required community gardens to weigh the produce and keep accurate records. With this, community gardens have therefore gained credibility as a source for market-acceptable produce.

The community members expressed that the local GAP certification gave them a sense of credibility in the market:

“The farmers expressed to the researcher that the local GAP certification has had a big impact on them. They expressed that it gave them dignity and recognition from the formal market (the retail stores). The Local GAP certification asserts credibility. They further expressed that doors have been opened and they can now participate in the formal market.” (Observations Garden #2)

4.6.2.2. Improved income generation

Due to the improved farming skills and business skills, the data revealed that the community gardens experienced an improvement in the income generated from selling the produce. Prior to the packhouses and the GAP certification, the smallholder farmers were participating in the local market; however, the improved quality of crops has enabled them to participate in the formal market.

The participants shared that participating in the formal market has been challenging to some of the smallholder farmers due to the bias against them. The formal market demands high-quality, professionally packaged crops in addition to a high quantity.

Sometimes the smallholder farmers are not able to meet that demand, which puts a strain on the relationship with the formal market, as expressed by Dube below:

“...then they get asked ‘if we take your produce, for how long can you keep bringing produce to us?’ and then a person will say ‘maybe one season and then I have to wait a season’, and that is when they start losing business in terms of just going to the formal market on their own” (Dube interview #2)

Gugu expressed that selling in the formal market is a difficult task and that the community-based organisation has a pivotal role in maintaining the relationship between the smallholder farmer and the formal retail stores:

“...because I’m not convinced that having GAP makes them more marketable to an industry that is truly difficult to work with as is.... I think we [Siyazisiza Trust] are slightly better with maintaining a relationship with Boxer (a retailer) for an example. In addition, if we battle [with maintaining a relationship with the retailers], I do not know how it’s going to be like for our farmers to maintain and sustain that.” (Gugu interview #1)

Participants, however, saw an opportunity from the challenges in the formal market, as the smallholder farmers can rather aim to saturate the local market:

“However, my take is, only go to formal markets when you have saturated into local markets. Because your cheapest market is these guys [local market].” (Futhi interview #1)

“...if you deliver your cabbages to Boxer and if it’s not the right size or it’s not fresh enough, they’ll send it back and you’re stuck with a whole vehicle of things that you have got to take home. [Local market] is the cheapest market to supply, you do not have transport issues or anything like that.” (Futhi interview #1)

“...they end up saying ‘Okay, we know, because of the process, that we need to supply to the formal market, but we have more demand locally’ because the produce is modified. They are farming and they are local but now they have proven to be classier. So why should you want to go to town rather than to support these women now that they are proving to be classier and more stylish with the produce...” (Celani interview #2)

“...what we see is now that 10% of their sales are now Boxer and 90% are local community, which is the direction that you actually want to move in. Because when there is time like looting, and Boxer is not there anymore to buy from you, and you are only dependent on Boxer to buy from you, what are you going to do with all this food from your garden?” (Athandwe interview #1)

It was observed that although one of the community gardens was struggling to maintain the local GAP certification standards due to the literacy levels needed for record keeping, the community garden was still able to generate income because the smallholder farmers could supply to the local market:

“The reason why the mamas are not thriving with GAP is because of literacy levels needed for bookkeeping, but they are still able to supply to the local market” (Observations Garden #1)

Even with the challenges in the formal market, the packhouse and the local GAP certification have brought about a formalisation that has enabled smallholder farmers to increase their profit margins.

Futhi expressed that there has been a significant income increment for farmers subsequent to the sustainability initiatives:

“...I think that is probably where the biggest impact has been, definitely an income generation. In addition, you’ll see a lot of the gardens we go to, as much as we try and push and promote diversity, and there is certainly more diversity than there used to be, there is a lot of focus on cash crops; cash crops and livelihoods. In addition, you can speak to the ladies about the income that they have.” (Futhi interview #1)

4.6.2.3. Improved food security

It is evident from the data that the community has experienced an increase in food availability as well as improved food quality. Community gardens are producing an increased amount of high-quality and diverse crops, which increases food availability and enables them to feed their families as well as the surrounding community.

Futhi expressed the importance of food diversity:

“...what does a healthy diet comprise of? A whole range of different products...the key thing is diversity.” “...so do not just plant a field of cabbage, what do you like, some tomatoes? Put some tomatoes. You like spinach? You like pumpkin? You like maize and medicinal plants? Look at that. You want to get your gardens as diverse as possible. So get your starches in, your carbs. Get your leafy vegetables in place, get your protein, plant beans in the gardens as well.” (Futhi interview #1)

The local GAP certification has placed an important emphasis on food safety, traceability and improving food quality. The participants confirmed that the smallholder farmers are able to trace the crop process due to introducing record keeping to the community gardens. When individuals become sick after eating produce from community gardens, smallholder farmers can track the source of the ailment. In addition, food quality has improved with the proper use, and sometimes limitations, of pesticides. Community gardens are producing more organic produce.

Futhi emphasised the importance of food traceability:

“...so if someone ate your product and got sick, its almost impossible for – without record keeping – to see what happened in the lifetime of the product that resulted in that being unsafe and making people sick” (Futhi interview #1)

Dube expressed that there is an increase in food sovereignty and a move towards more organic produce:

“...I would say there has been a change in terms of food security and food sovereignty. I would say there has been a change because the food that this garden is producing is, I would say, 80% organic. We are more of an organic principled organisation rather than focusing on synthetic fertilisers and stuff like that, or pesticides” (Dube interview #1)

The participants shared that the improved food security was on full display during the July 2021 social unrest that was fuelled by protests and resulted in mass looting. Due to the closing of most retail stores, the local community did not have access to food and depended on the gardens, as expressed by Athandwe:

“...in KZN we even had an unrest issue, the social unrest in July, last year. During that time, the mamas were saying they were running out of food in the

garden. The food was being depleted because people were coming in and saying 'there is no food, people have looted the shops.' There was no food in the shops, and people were hungry. People came to the gardens to ask for onions, cabbages, and food. So that is when we realised that from a food perspective, this garden is having an impact not just on the garden members themselves, but even the community surrounding the garden was like 'please open your gates to us, we are pleading, we are hungry please feed us.'"
(Athandwe interview #1)

According to Gugu, the improvement in food security is emphasised for the local market as much as for the formal market:

"...around food safety and general food handling, I do not feel that there should be a differentiation between formal and informal markets. We shouldn't be sending bad food into the informal market because it's a very unregulated market" (Gugu interview #1)

4.6.2.4. Improved self-esteem

The data revealed that through the formalisation of community gardens, smallholder farmers have experienced improved self-esteem, pride and recognition from the local community. The crops from the community gardens involved in the sustainability initiatives have been regarded on the same level as produce from large-scale farmers, and in some instances, the local market has preferred to buy from the community garden instead of established retail chains.

Enhle explained that the smallholder farmers have received praise from the community due to the improved quality of their community garden and their crops:

"...because we know that when those old gogos go to the garden, there is a whole lot of praise being sung in the towns that we go to...when they [smallholder farmers] look at the garden from afar and they say 'I work at that garden' and the garden looks beautiful. They're [community garden] is so attractive and the food coming out of there is just so big and beautiful and fresh. So they have an impact even outside of the community, where the people producing the food get the respect they deserve." (Enhle interview #1)

Celani expresses that the local community has opted to buy their produce straight from the smallholder farmers:

“...now the community sees or saw that ‘okay, instead of going to Spar [retail store] and looking for the same product that is packaged nicely, I can go to these women and their gardens, because they have the same products that will be delivered to Spar (retailer).’ (Celani interview #2)

Farming has gained popularity in the local community, and more individuals have become interested in joining existing community gardens or starting their own gardens. Community gardens have previously been established and operated by older women; however, data revealed that since implementing the packhouse initiative and formalising some operations through local GAP certification, more young people have become interested in farming.

Athandwe expressed that the community garden has strategically started including younger people to ensure that the improved farming and business skills do not die with the older smallholder farmers:

“We try to make sure that there is at least one or two young people as well, just so that the knowledge stays with the farmers. When it’s just with the mamas only, sometimes the mamas do not truly understand. It’s better if there is a younger person who’s part of the project, part of them, and is going to stay with them...” (Athandwe interview #1)

Furthermore, there is an increased commitment to farming because smallholder farmers are no longer deterred by bad weather because they have shelter in the packhouse. In addition, the installation of ablutions through local GAP certification has increased participation in community gardens because smallholder farmers no longer avoid working in gardens because of the lack of proper ablutions.

Enhle explained that smallholder farmers are no longer deterred by bad weather but confidently show up to the garden due to the available shelter:

“A lot of farmers will see shoddy weather and say, ‘look, it’s probably going to rain in the next hour or two’ and decide not to go to the gardens, but farmers with at least some shelter in the garden will say ‘we’re going to go because at

least we know if it does rain, then we've got some temporary shelter where we could actually wait until the rain passes.” (Enhle interview #1)

The ablutions have added a sense of dignity and safety to the smallholder farmer's experience in the community garden, as expressed by Enhle:

“And you can start to think of what it is like to be an old lady, and you just have to relieve yourself in the middle of nowhere and some random males pass by. Therefore, it gives them a sense of security and privacy in the gardens. In addition, knowing that ‘even if I'm probably not that well, and I will need the loo every now and again, I could still go to the garden.” (Enhle interview #1)

4.6.3. Theme 3: Security in the relationship

Secondary research question 3

How does the community experience the relationship with the company?

4.6.3.1. Commitment

It was revealed from the data that the community experienced a committed relationship with the case company. According to Dube, Bongji, Celani and Futhi, the managers at the case company have portrayed their commitment to the sustainability initiatives by attending ceremonies to celebrate the completion of the packhouses and honouring others with such invitations:

“...to a point that they did come down because we were opening the workspace [packhouses]. It wasn't Siyazisiza opening the workspace, but it was the farmers wanting to thank Siyazisiza for the new workspace and Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation. In addition, if they did not care about the work they do, then they would not have accepted the invitation and actually honour the invitation by flying from Cape Town to KZN just for the farmers.” (Dube interview #1)

“...we actually even want to do a local GAP certification handover ceremony here at the farm. In addition, she [Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation manager] is very keen, she is keen to come and be here.” (Bongji interview #1)

“...and at some point they used to come and visit the gardens” (Celani interview #1)

“We used to get at least once or twice a year visits before COVID. At least twice a year they would come through and visit our work.” (Futhi interview #1)

The participants described the case company manager as invested in the smallholder farmers and the sustainability initiatives. This is evident through consistent communication and concern for how the sustainability initiative implementation is developing. In addition, the community-based organisation has a long-standing relationship with the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation, spanning over 10 years.

Dube expressed that the case company is readily available to support the community-based organisation:

“What I’d keep the same is the involvement of Pick n Pay, how they’re involved in terms of when the funding is about to end, they communicate and ask “is there anything else you need?” or if we need anything else, they’re here to support.” (Dube interview #1)

The data revealed that the case company’s commitment is expressed through its willingness to go the extra mile and see the development of the community garden from the grassroots level to a sustainable community garden. The case company implemented the packhouse initiative to introduce basic food safety and subsequently implemented the local GAP certification initiative as the next level in food safety through food traceability. In addition, Bonggi stated that the case company facilitated the smallholder farmer’s penetration into the formal market by establishing a supply agreement between the community garden and one of the case company’s retail chains:

“...going from the journey of packhouses and that people should not be sorting the produce on the ground, to moving up to actually getting us the food safety certification and rolling that out. To even give us – you know Boxer is the child of Pick n Pay? Therefore, we have a supply agreement with Boxer. In addition, it was natural because we have a funding relationship with Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation.” (Bonggi interview #1)

According to Enhle, there is a sense of relatability between the case company and the community-based organisation, which fosters open communication and understanding:

“So to talk of the relationship, whenever we would experience challenges, whenever we would experience delay, we would experienced a turn of events that are not in favour of the deliverables of the funder, Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation, they can relate to the agricultural development.” (Enhle interview #1)

4.6.3.2. Reliable partnership

Data revealed that the participants felt as though they could rely on the case company’s commitment and investment towards developing the community. Participants experienced a trust relationship with the case company that was evident through financial flexibility and freedom. Although the community-based organisation attempts to stick to the funds agreed upon in the initial proposal, some participants expressed that they can request additional funds if the need arises.

Athandwe stated that the case company is flexible to budget changes:

“With Pick n Pay, they can give you R500,000, we can come back and express that we haven’t finished with the packhouses and still need R100,000 in addition to the funding that we received, ‘is it possible for you guys to give us an additional R100,000 because maybe we under budgeted in terms of petrol for going to the field. Maybe we under budgeted because it’s human error to under budget.’” (Athandwe interview #1)

Gugu experienced the same openness and flexibility as the case company:

“Ackerman has been very open to suggestions, there is not a lot of bureaucracy and red tape.” (Gugu interview #1)

“And they have been one of those funders where they can truly be willing to work with you on something that comes up, consider it and discuss it. So I think the big thing for me under all of that is just a partnership.” (Gugu interview #1)

Athandwe reiterated that there is a long-standing relationship with the case company that is built on trust, evident through the case company’s willingness to continuously partner with the community-based organisation:

“There is nothing that we haven’t asked for from Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation. They are like people who catch you every time you are falling, your

last resort, or first resort actually. Those type of people who when you do not know where else to cry to, that you just call Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation, and they catch you. There is nothing that they haven't done. There is truly nothing.” (Athandwe interview #1)

4.6.4. Theme 4: Sustainable community development

Secondary research question 4

What recommendations can be made to companies regarding their corporate sustainability initiative based on the lived experiences of the community?

4.6.4.1. Improved pre- and post-implementation awareness

According to participants, there should be more extensive research before implementing initiatives as well as substantial reflection sessions. Although the community-based organisation and the case company conducted a needs analysis in alignment with the greater goal of sustainable community development, data revealed that it would be beneficial to consult with the community more often.

Enhle expressed that the community has its own wish list of needs, and it would be valuable to consider it when implementing new initiatives:

“...farmers end up being on the receiving end of community development initiatives, although it is usually not stuff that they wish for. They appreciate it, but when they sit down and talk and plan, they have things they would ultimately feel like they want more” (Enhle interview #1).

“...also then look into other elements of finding out – more than anything – what it is that farmers feel like they need assistance on...I know farmers have their wish list of things that they always want to be done.” (Enhle interview #1)

In addition to servicing the community's needs, the smallholder farmers' limitations must be considered when implementing sustainability initiatives and/or amending existing ones. Bongji relayed a story about a failed attempt to introduce card machines to community gardens. The community-based organisation perceived it as a good idea to introduce card machines to the community gardens as a means of allowing the local market to make purchases with their South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) cards. After implementing this new payment method and checking on how the smallholder farmers were adjusting to it, the community-based organisation soon

realised that the card machine was more of a challenge than a convenience for the smallholder farmers, as they had to get printing papers and even change their banks to gain access to the funds.

“And so we were introducing these card machines. In addition, I go to her [smallholder farmer], and I’m like ‘we’ve got these card machines’, but now these card machines are also a headache for me. First, there is no signal. Second, there is just no wealth. Third, the biggest thing was that she would have to change her bank. So they use Postbank on purpose and things like that. In addition, so it was just this whole big process, even then, eventually we came back from holidays and I see that this is not working. I’ve tried, I’m tired. In addition, she goes ‘yeah no, I felt so bad. I didn’t want to say it, but we truly do not want this.’ And I was like ‘well why didn’t you say?’ And I understand that it’s on the one hand thinking that now you won’t get any more funding and you won’t get any more support. However, realistically, it’s just not going to work for them.” (Bongi interview #2)

Athandwe suggested that the case company should incorporate a more extensive reflection and learning exercise as part of the post-implementation reporting system:

“After they received the report, should we then not be sitting down with them via Zoom if we have to, and reflecting and learning? So like me and you are chatting now, ‘so in the report you said that this initiative has had abcd impact on people, what does that mean for Siyazisiza? What does that mean for the community?’ And we discuss it and have a feedback session. ‘What does that mean for Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation?’” (Athandwe interview #1)

“It’s nice to read the report, but we should also sit down and discuss the report. In addition, we know that maybe a week or two after the report has been submitted, we scheduled a reflection session after that, just to kind of help both organisations, us [Siyazisiza Trust] and Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation, to frame what we have not done and what we are going to do moving forwards.” (Athandwe interview #1)

Celani echoed Athandwe’s sentiments by expressing that there is a missing element of organising regular debriefing sessions of the original plan at the beginning of the initiative:

“...where do you see them coming to say, ‘look, you said you would do 123, now we want to see it. We want to see it from where it started and where it is now, and where it will end.’ (Celani interview #1)

4.6.4.2. Promoting farmer independence

The data revealed that there is a longing to witness community gardens as sustainable and independent entities. However, there is still a challenge with graduating past the point of needing assistance.

Bongi highlighted that there are some community gardens that have been on the community-based organisation database since its inception:

“You have got farmers who have been at the organisation since the start of the organisation 37 years ago. In addition, you have got us as an organisation asking ourselves, ‘at which point, do they graduate and actually become self-sufficient?’ And how then realistic is it to say that we are developing the smallholder farmer if its development does not cease?” (Bongi interview #2)

Futhi expressed concern at the risk of creating a dependent relationship with the smallholder farmers:

“There is the negative impact of creating dependency, and it’s something that all NGOs tread quite carefully, because as soon as you become part of the mix, people can quite quickly become dependent on you. So the negative impact that you can have is that you create this false environment where you [smallholder farmers] have got this person [Siyazisiza Trust] who is giving you stuff all the time” (Futhi interview #1)

However, since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the community-based organisation has decreased its physical presence on the community gardens by removing the field officers. This has catapulted the smallholder farmers into independence.

Athandwe explained the new approach to mentoring smallholder farmers as follows:

“So COVID-19 kind of decreased our hands-on approach. In addition, we have kind of moved on to a more, like maybe check on them once a month approach.

As opposed to before, there was actually a field officer that was based in Nkandla that stayed there.” (Athandwe interview #1)

Athandwe, Bongi, Dube and Gugu expressed faith in some community gardens’ sustainability and independence. The smallholder farmer’s will and diligence were cited as the reason why their community gardens would survive in a case where the community-based organisation ceased to exist.

Bongi witnessed the community garden’s survival after the removal of field officers and cited this experience as the reason for her confidence in the smallholder farmer’s sustainability:

“They would survive. I say they would survive confidently because of sheer will, because they survived with literally 80% of the time taken away from them. It just was a shock to the system because they were obviously used to the field officers” Bongi interview #1

Dube expressed that smallholder farmers would survive purely because they have to will to:

“...the gardens would continue, they coming down is not something I see happening because of the desire and spirit of these ladies. I do not see the project collapsing if Siyazisiza were to move out.” (Dube interview #1)

Athandwe and Gugu expressed that smallholder farmers have graduated from requiring assistance for daily garden operations such as purchasing seeds. This small step towards independence has instilled confidence in their ability to self-sustain:

“...they do not ask for money from us or from Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation anymore. They asked for the initial money to buy the things when they started, but now they can maintain themselves. So the money that they get, the income that they get when they sell, they set some money aside to buy seed, and they split the profits. Now they are running as a business if I can put it in that way.” (Athandwe interview #1)

“What we’ve also seen is that when people have money, they buy seedlings, when they do not have any, they’ll propagate the seeds themselves. In addition, so generally, the gardens, I feel sustainability is pretty strong in terms of

supplying to market and being able to maintain that as a strong and ongoing relationship between garden and supplier (Gugu interview #1)

In addition to the graduation from requiring assistance for daily operations, the data revealed that there is an expectation for smallholder farmers to maintain sustainability initiatives after their initial implementation.

Athandwe expressed that the primary responsibility for maintaining the packhouses rests with the smallholder farmers:

“Well in terms of maintenance, obviously looking after it. Making sure it is clean, making sure you close the gates when you go into the packhouse so that cows do not go in and mess up. That is the kind of maintenance that needs to be done by the mamas on a day to day basis because it is right on their gardens”
“The mamas are maintaining the packhouse well.” (Athandwe interview #1)

Celani added that smallholder farmers have been able to involve the larger community (mainly their husbands and/or sons) in maintaining the packhouse:

“...you would go to a situation where you would say ‘okay, let’s get men even though they are not part of the garden, because you have a packhouse, can you then identify maybe your husbands or your sons or whoever can be of a helping hand so that when the tap leaks, at least those people can just come and fix the tap? Rather than calling us to drive all the way only to fix the tap.”
(Celani interview #2)

Although the data revealed a positive disposition towards the smallholder farmers graduating into independence, some participants expressed concern about whether it is even feasible to completely cut ties with the community gardens after community development initiatives, such as the local GAP certification. The data revealed that some concerns were raised when considering the historical context of South Africa as well as the inequality that still exists between racial and class groups. Bongji expressed that expecting smallholder farmers to be sustainable after only a few community development initiatives is ignorant and does not consider the historical context of South Africa:

“...where you are just looking at the historical context of our country...and we’re all trying to put everyone in one basket, and it’s for an initiative and we tried to

spit out these outputs and we get asked ‘when do you think the farmers will be sustainable?’, that is a very ignorant question in the first place because we just do not have that information” (Bongi interview #2)

Futhi echoes Bongi’s statement by highlighting that there is a need for systemic changes before smallholder farmers can properly graduate out of the care of established companies and community-based organisations:

“So if you’re going to talk about creating independence, and going off and graduating, what we need to truly look at is the whole system, because what are you graduating into?” (Futhi interview #1)

“There is a systemic change that needs to happen and until you have got that, you’ll never get proper graduation” (Futhi interview #1)

In addition, Gugu stated that there are personal relationships that are built with smallholder farmers, and it is therefore difficult to completely cut ties in the name of graduating them into self-sustainability and independence. Gugu experienced the relationship with the smallholder farmers as personal and reciprocal:

“I certainly do not see myself getting to a point where I say ‘well I’m now leaving you on your own’ because it’s a relationship that goes both ways. I think has built me and it has built them. In addition, it’s not something that I can see myself just walking away from, that is not how relationships work. It is not like ‘ok, that is it, do not call me again’ and then you are on your way” (Gugu interview #1)

4.6.4.3. Holistic investment

It was evident from the data that there is room for the case company to extend their scope of investment, either monetarily or in terms of the kind of initiatives that are being funded. Enhle reiterated an earlier expression that farmers could play a pivotal role in tailoring new initiatives according to their needs:

“I’d say what we have to change is to evolve with times and look into other programmes that would actually enable these farmers to be in a better position to contribute in the agricultural sector, beyond the infrastructure but also then look into other elements of finding out more than anything, what it is that farmers feel like they need assistance on...” (Enhle interview #1)

Celani expressed that a well-rounded approach to implementing sustainability initiatives would greatly benefit the community. He recommended that the case company build on the initiatives while developing specific community gardens from one level to another until they are self-sufficient. Celani recommends this approach instead of the previous approach of funding one or two initiatives and moving on:

“However, my idea is that funders just give money, and they do not give a mandate and say ‘this is how our money is going to work now, you said you have created packhouses, now what’s the second phase of the packhouses? I want these people to have billboards. Now that we’ve built packhouses, and the packhouse is known for fresh food, can we take it further? I want billboards in every packhouse. I will come with the containers as a source of a storage facility.’ Can we take it to that level?” (Celani interview #2)

“I would even love to see a situation where they themselves as funders say ‘look, phase one, we want new communities coming from scratch. Do not take us to projects that are there but they need support in order to move from point B to point C. We want completely A, B, C, D. We will fund A; we will come and look. We will fund B; we will come and look. We will fund C; we will come and look. We will fund D; we will come and look. In addition, then we can say, hooray! All of us have achieved something.” (Celani interview #2)

Bongi supports Celani’s above statement by expressing that there is a desire to receive a long-term financial commitment, given the goal is to develop community gardens from the beginning to the end until a state of self-sustainability.

“...if we had a funder that could just give us like four or five mills. The unfortunate thing, and it’s not to say we are ungrateful, is that we are dealing with specific projects, and we have this much scope to do this and that. Then, you’re dealing with R150k, R200k, R300k, yeah it’s a lot of money, but I do think that for us to not be in a position where we are saying ‘oh yeah we are working on it but we have to abandon it because we have to find another funder that will fill this gap’...the role of a funder would be ‘look, I am investing in you guys and I’m investing five million rand” (Bongi interview #2).

4.7. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This section presents a summary of the findings of the current study. Each finding is linked to a respective theme, which subsequently links to a secondary research question.

4.7.1. Finding 1 Theme 1

The community experiences their involvement in sustainability initiatives as a collaborative effort with the case company.

Subthemes:

Community and sustainability initiative compatibility: The community experienced compatibility with the sustainability initiatives through pre-implementation consultations and garnering their buy-in. These processes actively involved the community in the sustainability initiative and could guarantee their commitment. However, there were still incompatibilities between some sustainability initiatives and the community, which may be mitigated through improved pre-implementation research.

Transparency and inclusion: Transparency was promoted through clearly stated expectations and a contractual agreement thereof in the form of an MOU.

4.7.2. Finding 2 Theme 2

The community experiences an improved quality of life as an effect of the case company sustainability initiatives.

Subthemes

Skills development: The community experienced the development of new skills and refining existing knowledge through sustainability initiatives. Skills development was accompanied by higher operational standards.

Improved income generation: The sustainability initiatives empowered the community towards broader opportunities for income generation. The community has developed a business and experienced the perk of sustainable living from the community garden.

Improved food security: The community experienced an improved quality and availability of food by adopting improved farming techniques, placing emphasis on food safety and prioritising crop diversity.

Improved esteem: Improved dedication and pride towards farming is an effect of the sustainability initiatives by the case company. The community experienced social recognition and praise for operating gardens producing high-quality food.

4.7.3. Finding 3 Theme 3

The community experiences security in their relationship with the case company.

Subthemes:

Commitment: The community-based organisation experienced the relationship with the case company as long-term, involved and committed. The case company is knowledgeable on the agricultural sector, which creates a sense of relatability.

Reliable partnership: The community experiences the case company as reliable and consistent. This creates a relationship with trust and allows for open communication and flexibility.

4.7.4. Finding 4 Theme 4

It is recommended for the case company to prioritise sustainable community development.

Subthemes

Improve pre- and post-implementation awareness: It is recommended for the case company to invest more time and resources towards conducting substantial research before and after implementing sustainability initiatives. This will assist in creating and maintaining compatibility between the community and the sustainability initiative, as well as service the specific needs of community stakeholders.

Promote farmer independence: It is recommended that the case company prioritise sustainability initiatives that empower the community to be self-sustaining. However, there is a concern that the community might not reach that level soon due to social and political barriers.

Holistic investment: Participants recommended that the case company consider shifting the funding approach from an initiative-focused view towards a community garden view. In this shift, the case company would not longer solely fund initiatives but would fund entire community gardens towards a level of sustainability.

Figure 4.6 illustrates the interrelatedness of the themes to the research question.

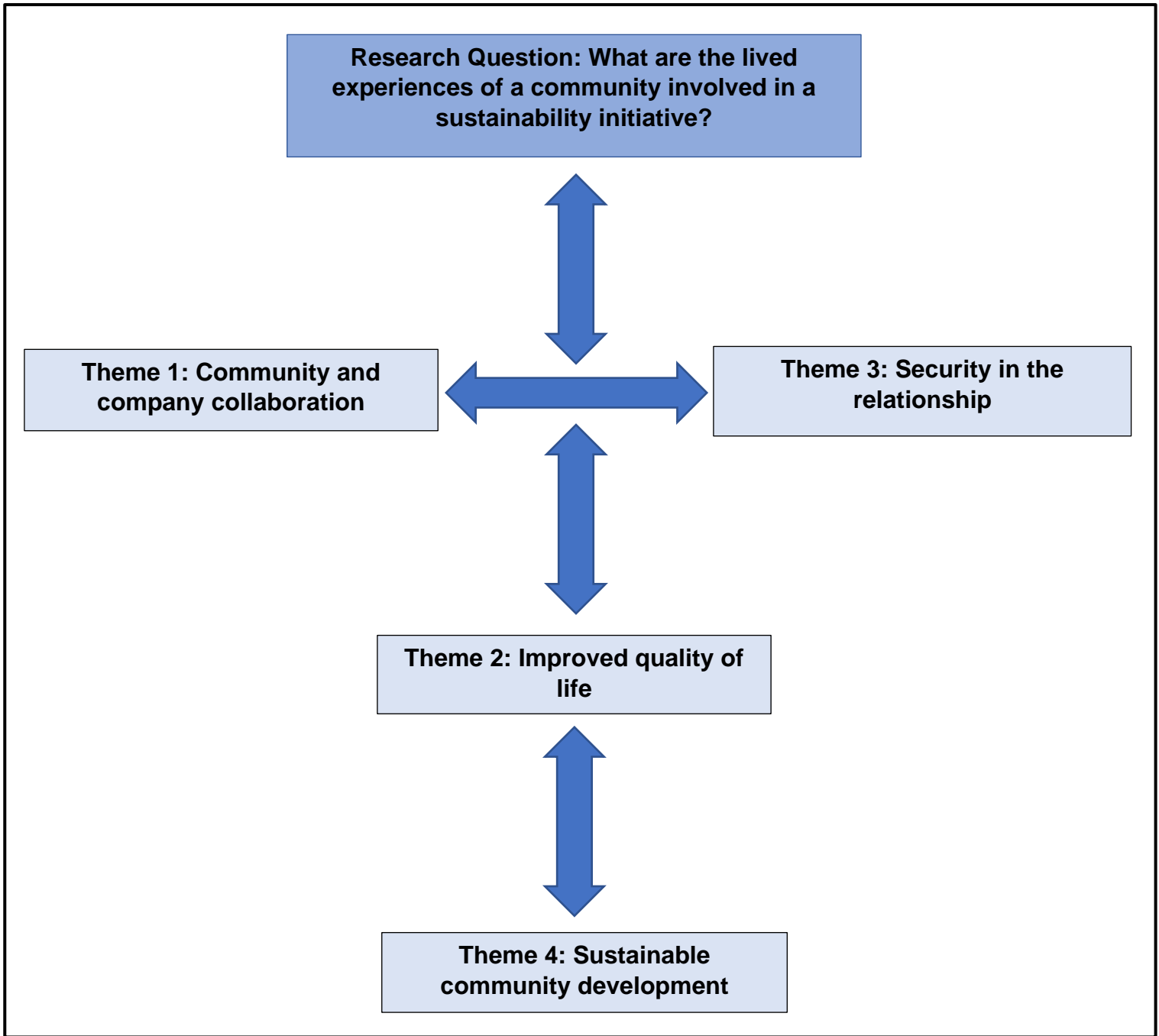


Figure 4. 6: Interrelatedness of the themes to the research question

Source: Own compilation

4.8. RESEARCHER'S REFLECTIONS ON DATA GATHERING

Gathering data for my study was the most fulfilling part of the Master's journey. It felt good to step out of the theoretical bubble and experience the practical aspect of the study. Prior to gathering data, I did not know what to expect. However, I had preconceived notions that the case company had established the community gardens from scratch and continued to hold the hands of the community members involved in the community gardens. I assumed that the sustainability initiatives would reflect philanthropic efforts that promoted dependency on the case company. This is far from what I found in the data. From the interviews with the participants, I was made aware that the community members were hard-working individuals who may not have access to immense resources but possess a passion for farming. The data-gathering process made me aware of the partnership relationship between the community members, the community-based organisation and the case company. My trip to KZN for the second round of data gathering was insightful and exciting. Observing the hardworking smallholder farmers made me even more aware of the disadvantages that come with a lack of resources, but their ability to use the packhouse and local GAP certification to develop a sustainable value chain for themselves affirmed in me that opportunities come to those who have a strong will to make things happen.

4.9. CONCLUSION

Chapter 4 presented the findings uncovered through the data analysis of data gathered from participants. The background to the data gathering and analysis was outlined, where the data gathering process as well as the participant profiles, were highlighted. A summary of the data analysis method through Saldaña's (2015) coding-to-theory model was outlined. Four overarching themes were presented, along with their corresponding subthemes. The themes sought to answer the research question and secondary research questions.

Chapter 5 presents the reflections on the research questions and findings as well as the benefits of the current study. Recommendations are made for managers, future studies and the community. The researcher concludes the study by providing personal reflections and concluding the dissertation.

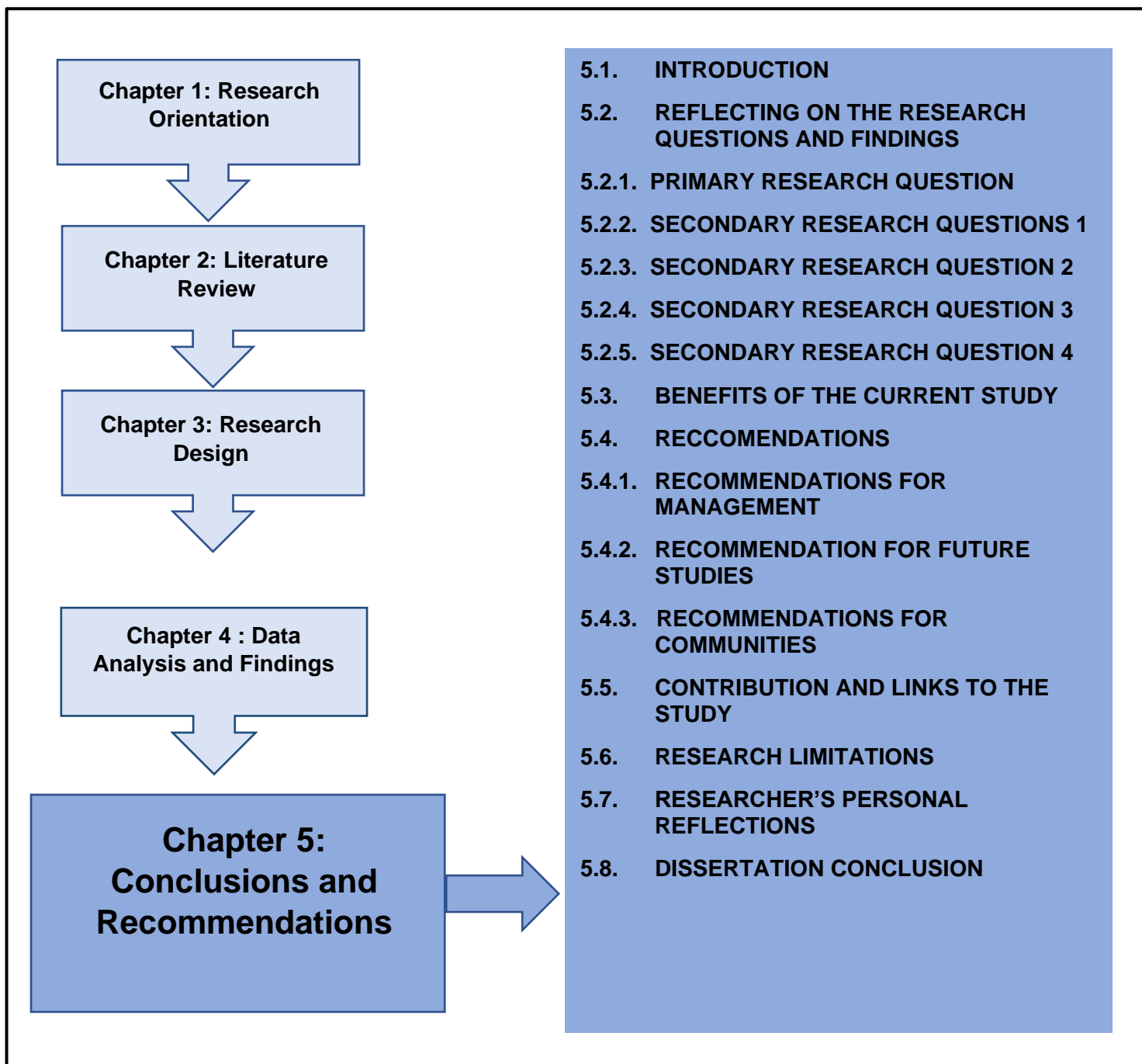


Figure 5. 1: Structure of Chapter 5

Source: Own adaptation

Figure 5.1 illustrates the structure of Chapter 5 and its position in the dissertation.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

The current study aimed to fill the knowledge gap on the perceptions and experiences of communities involved in sustainability initiatives by uncovering data on how a community experiences the sustainability initiative. This study uncovered the relational experience between the company, the community-based organisation, and the community involved in the sustainability initiative. Chapter 1 outlined the research background and problem statement that the current study sought to explore and presented the primary research question and the secondary research questions that were set out. Chapter 2 presented the theoretical background in a literature review of concepts related to corporate sustainability in the global and South African context, internal and external drivers of corporate sustainability and the evolution and criticism of integrated reporting. Chapter 3 outlined the research methodology that was used and justified the adoption of a qualitative research approach, phenomenological research strategy and single-case research design as appropriate for the current study. Furthermore, the case company was presented, and the data gathering and data analysis processes were described. Chapter 4 presented the findings from the data analysed from 11 interviews and 2 observations and a focus group conducted during the data gathering process. Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation by reflecting on the research questions in line with the research findings. Subsequently, the benefits are presented, and the researcher proposes recommendations for managers and future studies.

5.2. REFLECTING ON THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND FINDINGS

The data analysis uncovered four overarching themes that answered the primary and secondary research questions and explored the community's experience of a company's sustainability initiative. The findings revealed that the smallholder farmers experienced a collaborative and secure relationship with the case company – Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation through the community-based organisation. In addition, the smallholder farmers involved in sustainability initiatives experienced an improved quality of life through sustainability initiatives. Through the data, participants

also shared recommendations for the sustainability of the initiative, and these were analysed and formed part of the themes within Chapter 4.

Table 5.1 illustrates the link between the primary research question and secondary research questions, the literature review from Chapter 2, and the themes and findings developed from Chapter 4.

Primary research question: What are the lived experiences of the community members involved in a company's sustainability initiative?	Secondary research question	Literature (Chapter 2)	Theme	Finding
	How does a community experience its involvement in a sustainability initiative?	Bhattacharya et al. (2009) Cheong et al. (2017) Wanner and Probstl-Haider, (2019) Raub and Martin-Rios (2019) Miller et al. (2020) Paine (2020)	Community and company collaboration	The community experienced compatibility with the sustainability initiative and perceived their involvement in the implementation of the initiatives as a transparent and collaborative effort with the case company through conducting pre-implementation consultations and contractual agreements in the form of an MOU
How is the community affected by the sustainability initiative?	Le Roux & Pretorius (2019) Naidoo (2021) Futshane (2021) Carroll (2021) Hamann and Acutt (2003)	Improved quality of life	The community experienced an improvement in skill development, income generation, food security and self-esteem, resulting in an overall improvement in the quality of life. The community gained the ability to sustain an improved quality of life through skill development	

				around income generation and sustainable farming
	How does the community experience the relationship with the company?	Linda et al., (2013) Aguas (2020) Shnayder et al. (2015) Nonet et al. (2016) Freeman & Dmytriyev (2017) Brunton et al., (2017) Laasch (2018) Dwivedi et al., (2021)	Security in the relationship	The community experienced a committed and reliable relationship with the case company, which has resulted in an improved stakeholder relation
	What recommendations can be made to a company regarding its corporate sustainability initiative based on the lived experiences of the community?	Bhattacharya et al. (2009) Hörisch, Schaltegger and Windolph (2015) Rampersad (2017) Hafizyar & Dheyaaldin (2019) Chu, Chan, Stewart, Zhou, Leung, Wan, Lam (2017) Wanner and Probstl-Haider, (2019)	Sustainable community development	It is recommended that the case company veer towards long-term community development by improving pre-implementation research and post-implementation reflecting, in addition to promoting farmers independence by focusing on a holistic investment towards the community's development

Table 5. 1: Links between the secondary questions, literature, themes, and findings

Source: Own compilation

In the following section, the researcher conclude the primary and secondary research questions by linking them to the appropriate findings and theory from Chapter 2.

5.2.1. Primary research question

What are the lived experiences of the community members involved in a company's sustainability initiative?

The findings revealed that the community experiences a sense of collaboration with the case company when there is the transparency of expectations and inclusion in all implementation stages of the sustainability initiative. The sustainability initiative positively affects the community's quality of life by fostering sustainable skill development, which in turn empowers the community to improve income generation and food security. The satisfaction of the community's physiological needs has an effect on the esteem of the community members as they experience increased confidence and dignity. In addition, long-term commitment between the company and the community establishes a secure, reliable, and trusting stakeholder relationship.

5.2.2. Secondary research question 1

How does a community experience its involvement in a sustainability initiative?

A community experiences involvement in a corporate sustainability initiative as collaborative when there is a committed effort towards understanding the community's needs and expectations (Miller et al., 2020; Cheong et al., 2017). To achieve compatibility between the sustainability initiative and the community, there were pre-implementation consultations between the community-based organisation and the community to examine the community's needs and evaluate their commitment towards collaborating with the company in the sustainability initiative.

However, it was evident from the data that compatibility was not always achieved. Although all community member had derived value from the packhouses, some community members did not have the literacy capacity to fully exploit the local GAP certification. Some community members that received the local GAP certification struggled to adapt to the intense farming standards required by local GAP, specifically, record keeping. Challenges with record keeping and accessing the formal market made it difficult for some community members to derive the full value from this sustainability initiative. In contrast, other community members could utilise their literacy capacity to thrive with the local GAP certification. This is because one group of community members comprised mainly of older women who did not have a strong educational background, while another group contained young individuals with an

academic background in agriculture. The group of older, female community members sold a majority of the produce to the local market and did not have a desire or the logistical capacity to penetrate the formal market, while the group of community members comprising of young individuals had the capacity and desire to operate in the formal market and therefore benefitted from the formalisation provided by the local GAP certification. Different community members in the same geographical area can have differing needs, capabilities and interests, and therefore, the compatibility between the sustainability initiative and community should be assessed on a specified, individual level (Bhattacharya et al., 2009; Paine, 2020).

Therefore, involving the community in pre-implementation consultations allowed for an improved assessment of capacity and interests. By transparently communicating the roles and responsibilities of the company and the community in the sustainability initiatives through the MOU that is communicated in their primary language, Zulu, the community was enabled to provide their full buy-in and commit to their involvement in the sustainability initiatives.

5.2.3. Secondary research question 2

How is the community affected by the sustainability initiative?

According to the data, the community experienced an improved quality of life as a result of the packhouses and local GAP certification. As highlighted in Chapter 2, a company's sustainability initiatives reflect effective sustainability embeddedness when they not only decrease the negative impacts of operation but also take it a step further by creating positive impacts for the community (Le Roux & Pretorius, 2019). The packhouses and local GAP certification allowed the community to make a sustainable living from the garden. This meant that the community developed and improved its farming and business skills. The packhouses improved the working environment by providing shelter and consequently increased the community's commitment to farming in the community garden despite unfavourable weather conditions. In addition, the local GAP certification imposed high farming and crop processing standards that were linked to food safety and food traceability. The increased time spent on the community garden and the local GAP standards had an effect on the improvement of the food quality and increased food availability.

Cheong et al. (2017) state that a sustainability initiative is successful when the stakeholder experiences value from it. The expansion into the formal market introduced the community to an environment that required formalised business skills. The packhouses allowed the community to deliver clean and fresh produce to the market. The record-keeping requirements that accompany the local GAP certification equipped the community with skills to weigh and price the produce.

South Africa's high poverty and the unemployment rate have left many in danger without a source of income (Naidoo, 2021; Futshane, 2021). This was further highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic, where the middle and upper classes were able to meet their basic needs, and those on the poorer side suffered through the social and economic implications of the pandemic (Carroll, 2021). Although farming was an essential service during the COVID-19 pandemic, as stated in section 4.2.1, smallholder farmers were negatively impacted by the pandemic, as the surrounding communities struggled to afford food, which in turn affected the community garden's income and ability to reinvest in purchasing seeds and seedlings, along with the required PPE material. In collaboration with Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation, the community-based organisation formulated a strategy to mitigate the impact on food security and income generation by establishing a sustainable value chain for long-term recovery (Siyazisiza Trust, 2021). Access to formal markets and improved food quality and availability through the local GAP certification has empowered the community towards increased income generation. The packhouses and local GAP certifications have enabled the community to supply better quality crops to the local and formal markets, which has increased the demand for products and established a sustainable market for community gardens. Although there are challenges in the formal market, such as bias against smallholder farmers and the inability to meet demand, community gardens have made a living from saturating the informal market. There is great potential to establish a sustainable income stream in the local market.

Additionally, the packhouses and local GAP certification formalised the community gardens in the eyes of the community. Although farming has been a prevalent way of life for generations, and the smallholder farmers had farmed for their families and sold the produce on a small scale to the community even before the sustainability initiatives, the farmers experienced a sense of legitimacy from the signage, equipment, and training. Below is a photo of the packhouse at a community garden.



Photo 1: A packhouse on a community garden

Source: Own image

Although the sustainability initiatives addressed the ‘people’ in the community, the data revealed an interweaving of ‘planet’ sustainability. Hafizyar and Dheyaaldin (2019) highlight that sustainability embeddedness is evident through the equal integration of ‘people’, ‘planet’ and ‘profit’. The data revealed that the local GAP certification has a positive effect on environmental sustainability. As part of the local GAP certification, the smallholder farmers were trained in pesticide management that subsequently experienced improved farming practices aimed towards organic and sustainable farming. Through the acquisition of knowledge on sustainable farming practices, the

community was able to transition from using environmentally harmful pesticides to utilising 'natural' methods such as planting onions between crops as a form of pest management, as captured in Photo 2. The introduction of pesticide-free farming practices through the implementation of the local GAP certification standards integrates the 'people' and the 'planet' as the data revealed that the community lacked awareness of the health and environmental dangers of pesticides. Additionally, the decreased use of synthetic fertilisers led to increased production of safe, organic produce.



Photo 2: An example of planting spring onions as a natural pest repellent

Source: Own image

Good sustainability initiatives attract praise and a positive reputation from stakeholders Hamann and Acutt (2003). An indirect effect of the sustainability initiative was an improved experience of basic human dignity due to the installation of ablutions facilities from the local GAP certification requirements. Through food and farming safety requirements imposed by the local GAP certification, the aesthetics of the community garden and the crop quality improved. Consequently, the community experienced increased esteem and pride from the recognition and praise from the surrounding community. Additionally, the improved aesthetics of the community garden has led to an increase in farming, particularly from young people.

5.2.4. Secondary research question 3

How does the community experience the relationship with the company?

The community experiences security in its relationship with the company. A good relationship between the community and the company is imperative for good stakeholder relations (Freeman & Dmytriyev, 2017). According to Nonet et al. (2016) and Laasch (2018), responsible managers have a role to play in setting the company's tone of commitment towards sustainability. The community experienced the company's commitment through the management's effort towards being present for voluntary social events such as 'opening' the packhouses. Consistent communication is crucial for establishing trust, reducing uncertainty, understanding stakeholder expectations, and garnering support when implementing initiatives (Linda et al., 2013; Aguas, 2020). The case company managers were credited for consistently communicating with the community-based organisation during the implementation of the sustainability initiative.

The security in the relationship emanates from the relationship that spans over a long period and is not a once-off corporate sustainability event (Shnayder et al., 2015). The community expressed that the trust relationship allows for continuous collaboration with the company. The mutual benefit of a collaborative relationship between the company and the community was evident through the community's participation in the formal market. The community received an opportunity to supply the produce from the community garden to the formal market through the supply agreement with Boxer. In turn, Boxer secured a sustainable food supply source from the community garden. With the increased emphasis on supporting local farmers, establishing a business

relationship with the community beyond the sustainability initiative ensures that the retail store has access to local produce. Furthermore, the training that was provided to the community regarding the use of pesticides provides the case company with assurance that the crops that are supplied from the community garden are organic. Essentially, the case company has inevitably established a supply chain from the field to the shelf.

In addition, the community experienced reliability and trust with the company, evident through the resource flexibility afforded to the community. When implementing the sustainability initiative, a budget was set; however, due to the trust relationship, the company was flexible to budget changes and additions as the need arose. Shnayder et al. (2015) highlight that when there is trust between the company and the community, there is an intuitive sense of support from the company to the community.

5.2.5. Secondary research question 4

What recommendations can be made to companies regarding their corporate sustainability initiative based on the lived experiences of the community?

It was recommended that the company adjusts the sustainability initiatives towards a long-term sustainable community development approach. This would be achieved by improving pre- and post-implementation knowledge, promoting farmer independence, and implementing a holistic corporate sustainability investment model.

The research participants recommended that the company could benefit by conducting more thorough research before implementing the sustainability initiative. This could be achieved by extensively consulting with the community and uncovering their individualised needs. According to Bhattacharya et al. (2009), companies struggle to improve their relationship with the stakeholder because of a lack of customised sustainability initiatives and the assumption that what works for one community will work for another. It was further recommended that the company conduct extensive post-implementation reflection and learning to improve the shortfalls of previous sustainability initiatives. Research findings by Hörisch et al. (2015) and Chu et al. (2017) confirm that stakeholder feedback on a sustainability initiative positively affects future sustainability initiatives due to improved corporate sustainability performance.

It was further recommended that the company promotes community independence by empowering the community to graduate past the requirement of assistance from the community-based organisation or the company and instead become self-sufficient. It was revealed that the current model of supporting the community for extended periods of time posed a risk of creating a dependent relationship between the community and the community-based organisation. This is evident through a community garden that has been on the Siyazisiza database since the inception of the community-based organisation in 1985. On the other hand, there were concerns that the community might not be ready to be entirely independent due to the political history of South Africa and the social implication that still exists as a result thereof, such as inequality. As stated in Chapter 2, the partnership between companies, community-based organisations and communities play a pivotal role in community development (Rampersad, 2017; Cervi & Ginesta, 2007).

It is important to consider the communities involved in sustainability initiatives individually and subsequently define community sustainability according to the specific context and capabilities. As discussed earlier, some of community members involved in the sustainability initiative could thrive and achieve the markers of community sustainability, supplying the formal market, and involving younger farmers. Whereas, data also revealed that another group of community members seemed to have 'failed' under the sustainability initiative by not operating in the formal market and struggling with record keeping and implementing technological advances such as card machines. However, these community members expressed pride and contentment in their activity in the local market and their ability to undertake basic activities such as purchasing their own seeds, propagating their own seedlings and subsequently diversifying the crops and establishing sustainable income from the local market. For the community members, that is enough and in their experience, they can self-sustain. As discussed earlier, different community members may have different interests and capabilities; therefore, sustainability initiatives should be tailored on an individualised level (Bhattacharya et al., 2009; Wanner and Probstl-Haider, 2019; Paine, 2020), and the same can be true for assessing sustainability.

The data revealed a recommendation for the company to prioritise holistic investment by dedicating additional resources towards all-inclusive community development. Communities usually face challenges with obtaining the adequate funding needed. As

revealed in the data analysis, some smallholder farmers at a community garden struggled with upholding the local GAP certification requirements, such as record keeping, due to literacy challenges. Improved pre-implementation could lead to a better understanding of the limitations faced by the community and assist the company in tailoring diverse sustainability initiatives that can achieve sustainable community development holistically. A holistic investment may not yield short-term results; however, the benefit may be experienced in the longer term. This approach supports the integrated view illustrated in Figure 2.2, where the company's financial resources are integrated with social operations and goals, which is community development (Hafizyar & Dheyaldin, 2019: 2).

Figure 5.2. illustrates the conceptual view of the findings and their interrelatedness.

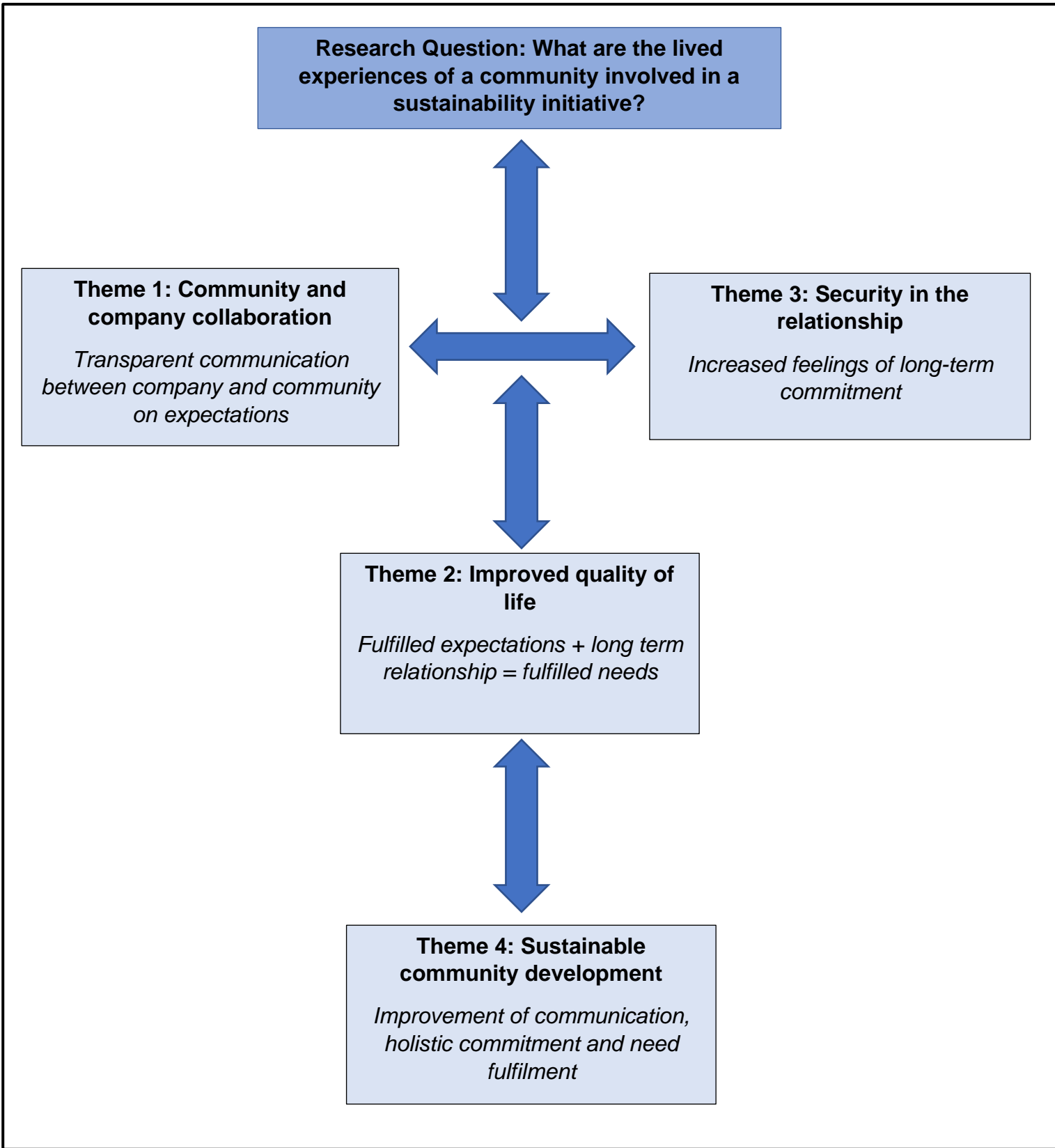


Figure 5. 2: A conceptual view of the findings and their interrelatedness

Source: Own compilation

5.3. BENEFITS OF THE CURRENT STUDY

The study offered stakeholder feedback in the form of a contextual exploration of the perceptions and lived experiences of a community involved in a corporate sustainability initiative by uncovering the community's experience of collaboration and security in the relationship with the case company and the effect of an improved quality of life resulting from the sustainability initiative. In addition, the current study amplifies the voices of the community by offering the company recommendations for improvement in pre- and post-implementation research and the promotion of community independence in pursuit of sustainable community development. This information offers useful insight into community stakeholder expectations and needs from the sustainability initiatives, which may inform future corporate sustainability strategies and improve stakeholder relations.

The recommendations of the current study are discussed in the following section.

5.4. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.4.1. Recommendation for managers

The following section makes recommendations to managers who formulate corporate sustainability strategies. The following recommendations are not industry specific and may be utilised across diverse industries.

The findings from the current study revealed that communities experience their involvement in a sustainability initiative as collaborative when they are allowed to make inputs regarding the initiative and are able to convey their needs. It is recommended that management conduct extensive pre-implementation research on community needs, capacity, limitations and expectations prior to implementing sustainability initiatives. This would assist managers in understanding the community and being able to tailor sustainability initiatives according to community stakeholders' expectations and abilities. As revealed in the story of the card machine, a company cannot assume the desires and capabilities of the community. Moreover, extensive pre-implementation research would also be useful in setting realistic indicators of success for sustainability initiatives. Managers who are aware of the community's capabilities, potential and limitations would be able to set well-informed and tailored expectations

on the outcome of the sustainability initiative. In addition, it would be beneficial for managers to define how sustainability would be measured for each community. The data revealed that some community members that received the local GAP certification could not reach the full potential of the formal market as expected from obtaining the local GAP certification. However, the community members were content as they were able to saturate the local market. Different stakeholders may have different desires and capabilities. The same concept applies to the level of sustainability that different stakeholders may be able to or have the desire to achieve.

In addition, it is recommended that managers institute intensive reflection and learning feedback systems that aim to understand the successes and failures of sustainability initiatives. Although monitoring and evaluation are conducted by the community-based organisation, sustainability managers could, based on measurable outcomes, benefit from conducting intensive post-implementation reviews with the communities that were involved in the sustainability initiatives. In these reviews, communities could share their experience of the sustainability initiative as well as collaborate with the company in bridging any gaps to improve future sustainability initiatives. In addition, it is recommended that management include the experiences of communities in the company's integrated reports. This inclusion could be done in the form of real testimonials of the feelings, perspectives, and effects of the sustainability initiatives. The testimonials would amplify the voices of the community to the public and promote a holistic manner of reporting. A more holistic reporting on sustainability initiatives could be beneficial in legitimising the impact of a company's sustainability initiatives. As discussed in section 2.3.5, corporate sustainability reporting has been criticised for being used as a tool to gain a positive public image without a true translation between what is being reported and what is actually happening. The voices of the community in the company's integrated reports serve as endorsements of the real-life impact of sustainability initiatives through the lived experiences of the community.

Furthermore, it is recommended that managers adopt the integrated approach of sustainability embeddedness (Hafizyar & Dheyaaldin, 2019), where financial resources are directed towards the environment and social and economical operations equally and on a larger and more intentional scale. The integration of sustainable farming training as part of the sustainability initiative illustrated the interrelatedness of social and environmental sustainability. A holistic approach towards community

development would be beneficial when adopting this integrated approach. Managers would be required to consider other factors that may affect the community's ability to reach the full potential of the sustainability initiative. The findings in the current study revealed that literacy levels hindered some community members from fully exploiting the benefits of sustainability initiatives. Although the sustainability initiatives analysed in this study aimed at addressing the *zero hunger, responsible consumption and production* and *decent work and economic growth* SDGs (United Nations, 2021), it would have been advantageous towards the overall experience of the initiative if the case company expanded the scope to include literacy programmes. Therefore, it is recommended that managers be adjustable to the community's needs and consider other factors outside of the sustainability initiative that may affect it.

Managers may consider committing to developing particular communities from the grassroots level to a level where the community is sustainable and independent. This would require substantial time and monetary commitment from the company. It would also require the company to fully embrace sustainability embeddedness and integrate the environmental and social operations in the corporate strategy, vision, mission, culture, governance and operations (Le Roux & Pretorius, 2016).

5.4.2. Recommendations for Communities

The following section makes recommendations to communities involved in a company's sustainability initiative. The recommendations are in a specific context to the findings of the current study.

The community members in the current study primarily consisted of older women. However, it was revealed through the findings that it is beneficial to include more diverse demographics that can contribute different skills to the sustainability initiative. It is therefore recommended that community gardens aim to integrate an increased number of young people into smallholder farming. Young people were described as having the ability to easily retain knowledge, along with possessing better literacy. Including young people promotes sustainability, as the new skills and knowledge acquired through sustainability initiatives may be passed down to future generations if older smallholder farmers 'retire' or pass on. In addition to including more young people, it is recommended that community gardens include more males. Farming is

labour intensive; therefore, the community may benefit from involving males who could exert more physical effort.

The findings of the current study revealed that community members were able to participate in the formal and local markets; however, the formal market presented challenges that were not experienced in the local market. By saturating the local market, the smallholder farmers could still establish a sustainable income and provide valuable products to the surrounding communities. Therefore, smallholder farmers should consider saturating the local market before penetrating the formal market. In the local market, smallholder farmers can determine the price of the produce, there are limited transportation costs, there is limited pressure to produce a large number of crops as well as is limited competition from commercial farmers. Operating in the local market allows smallholder farmers to establish a sustainable supply chain and market.

5.4.3. Recommendation for future studies

There is limited research on corporate sustainability in the context of a developing country, such as South Africa from the perspective of the community. The current study was conducted in a single case study in the retail industry and agricultural sector, it would therefore be beneficial to explore the lived experiences of communities involved in corporate sustainability initiatives across various industries and sectors, such as education and health. Future studies could also utilise varying data-gathering methods, such as in-depth observations over an extended period of time. There remains much work to be done to mitigate the single-sided nature of integrated reports and the exclusion of the experiences and perceptions of the communities that are involved in the corporate sustainability initiatives.

Future studies could consider researching the lived experience of varying stakeholders involved in a corporate sustainability initiative, such as employees. Multistakeholder views of a sustainability initiative may also prove beneficial in contributing towards a holistic understanding of the implementation and impact of sustainability initiatives on all role-players (company, intermediary, stakeholder).

Following the recommendation to corporate sustainability managers, it would be beneficial to clearly define the different levels of sustainability achievement from an academic perspective. Future studies could seek to develop a framework that describes different sustainability orientations from the perspective of the stakeholders

involved, parallel to the sustainability adoption orientations discussed in Chapter 2. In these studies, researchers could explore the motivations of stakeholders involved in a company's sustainability initiatives and further explore their role in the success of sustainability initiatives.

5.5. CONTRIBUTION AND LINKS TO THE STUDY

The current study contributes to the body of literature and knowledge in corporate sustainability. Corporate sustainability has evolved since its introduction into the business environment, but ultimately, corporate sustainability requires a company to operate all business functions ethically over a long period. Sustainability embeddedness requires a balanced and interrelated commitment towards economic, environmental, and social development. Although the various reporting methods indicate the effects of the sustainability initiative, there is a lack of contextual knowledge of the relational experiences of the communities involved in sustainability initiatives. The current study aimed to contribute to the body of literature on corporate sustainability in the South African context and from the perception of the community.

The findings of the current study highlight the community's experience with a sustainability initiative, with the aim of exploring and understanding stakeholders' expectations and perceptions. This information is useful in improving stakeholder relations and informing strategic decision-making aligned with achieving sustainability embeddedness.

5.6. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

The current study was conducted within the single case study research design and is therefore not generalisable. It can provide useful insight into the relationship between the company and the community from the community's lived experience of a sustainability initiative. An additional limitation occurred in the data-gathering process when the researcher struggled to garner much participation. This was mainly because of the organisational restructuring that had occurred at the community-based organisation, which increased the workload on the participants. This challenge caused delays in the data-gathering process and prolonged the data-gathering period. The

national state of disaster, the COVID-19 travel restrictions and the accompanying ethical restrictions resulted in a limitation for gathering data in person. This was mitigated by conducting virtual interviews for the first round of data gathering. After the national state of disaster was lifted on 05 April 2022, the researcher arranged for a second round of in-person data gathering.

5.7. RESEARCHER'S PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

It feels incredibly surreal to have arrived at the stage where I am reflecting back on my Master's journey. The journey has been a long and challenging one, yet at this moment, I feel so much pride that I have fought through the self-doubt, and have made it to the other side. I am completely different from the 23-year-old girl who started this journey to now a 26-year-old woman. I have grown to understand my strengths and weaknesses. This journey has taught me to be flexible and take criticism not as a personal attack but as an opportunity to evolve and be better. I have also learned to trust the process. In one of my low moments, my supervisor, Dr Catherine Le Roux, encouraged me with a quote from the movie 'Finding Nemo' "keep swimming Dory". I did not realise at that moment how powerful a mantra would be for me. I learned to "keep swimming" by adding one word after the other, even when I did not know what to write, and just like that, I would flow with ideas and I started to believe that I could keep swimming past the finish line.

At the beginning of my study, I was unsure what I would find. I had preconceived notions that the community's experience would reveal a strained relationship with the case company that is only revived once every so often for a photo opportunity. However, I was pleasantly surprised to uncover a relationship based on mutual interest and long-term commitment. The findings revealed that the case company truly cared about the community members on a human-to-human level. Although the evidence of this can be seen throughout the findings, I was struck by the story of one of the Ackerman Pick n Pay managers flying from Cape Town to KZN for an informal launch of the packhouses that was organised by the community members. The story warmed my heart and restored hope that it is possible for large corporates to prioritise the society from which they make the profits and truly integrate the 'people' and 'profits'.

My trip to KZN was when I felt like a certified researcher. I woke up every morning to prepare some notes for the day and headed to the Siyazisiza office. The beautiful scenery of the mountains in Mthunzini, along with the vibrant community, made me feel alive, and I soaked it all in. On a personal level, I drew a lot of inspiration from the employees at Siyazisiza Trust. Their passion for community development was undeniable and almost radiated off of them. Most employees came from distant cities such as Durban (a 3-hour drive from Obajeni), and some came as far as other provinces such as Mpumalanga. They left their families and the conveniences of the city to live on a farm with the mission of living a life of service to the communities. They did that with pride and joy. For me, it felt like a selfless and purposeful life. It was also unmissable how much the mamas at the community gardens appreciated the employees at Siyazisiza. I would often witness what appeared to be a parent-child relationship between the employees at Siyazisiza and the smallholder farmers. They would have casual conversations about family and catch up on any new details since the last they had seen each other. In my short few days there, I was able to experience the real feeling of *ubuntu*. After one of the community garden visits, the mamas offered me a head of cabbages and beetroot from the garden. I had to politely decline because these would not be accepted on the flight, but they insisted that I take some with me to show my parents in Gauteng that I was taken care of in KZN. This warmed my heart because they did not care that I was a stranger or that I spoke broken Zulu; to them I was their child and part of their community.



Photo 3: Researcher interacting with the smallholder farmers

Source: Own image

During my data analysis was when my study truly came together. Although I used ATLAS.ti to derive the codes and themes, I insisted on writing them out on post-it notes and sticking them to my wall, as depicted in Photo 4. This showed me the bigger version of the study and let me know that I had come far in my journey.

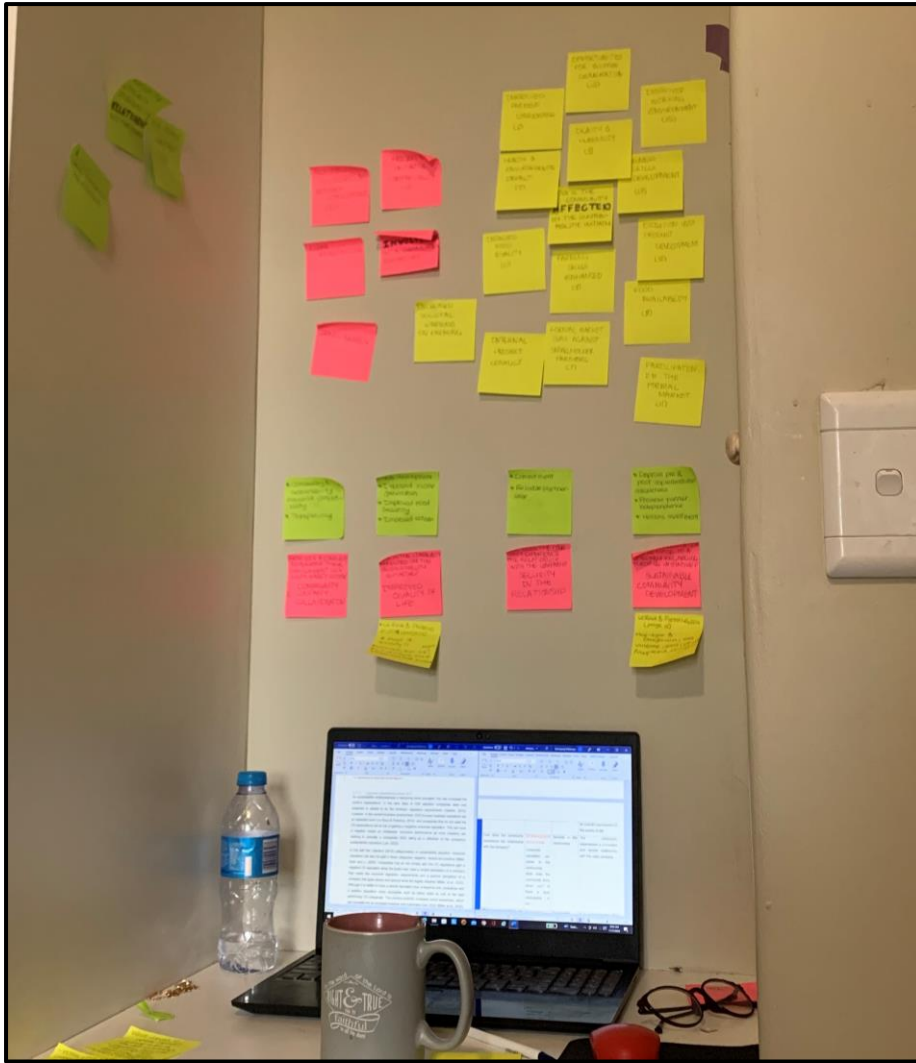


Photo 4: The researcher's workstation during data analysis

Source: Own image

I am happy to see my study fleshed out, and I am enthusiastic about having this dissertation as the first building block towards what I can achieve in academia, industry and the non-profit sector.

5.8. DISSERTATION CONCLUSION

The current chapter concludes the dissertation by satisfying the research problem that was presented in Chapter 1. The dissertation answered the primary and secondary research questions that sought to uncover the experience of a community's involvement in a sustainability initiative, how the community was affected by the sustainability initiative, how the community experienced the relationship with the

company and what recommendations could be made to a company regarding the sustainability initiative. This was achieved by linking the themes and findings that we uncovered through data analysis, as outlined in Chapter 4.

The data gathered through the methodology detailed in Chapter 3 revealed that the community experienced its involvement in the sustainability initiative as collaborative; in addition, the community experienced an improved quality of life as an effect of the sustainability initiative. The community also experienced security in its relationship with the company and recommended that the company implement sustainable community development as part of its corporate sustainability strategy. It is further recommended that managers improve stakeholder research by fostering a culture of feedback with communities. Increased knowledge of stakeholders' needs and capabilities may improve the strategic planning of future initiatives. The themes and findings were further linked to the literature review that was presented in Chapter 2. In conclusion, Chapter 5 presents recommendations to managers and recommendations for further studies and highlights the contribution link and research limitations of the current study.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: SIGNED NDA

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

entered into between:

THE ACKERMAN FAMILY OFFICE (herein represented by Freya Megan Griffiths, SA
IDENTITY NUMBER [REDACTED])

(hereinafter "the AFO")

and

Lebogang Liberty Mametja

[REDACTED]

(hereinafter "the Master's researcher")

1. Introduction

Whereas the Master's researcher is preparing a dissertation on food gardens (including the structures, the various role players, duration amongst other topics), as a result of which she will be privy to and have access to confidential information relating to the long-term plans for the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation and the Siyazisaza Trust;

The AFO has the desire to protect sensitive information relating to their philanthropic endeavours against exploitation by the Master's researcher and to protect their family and related entities against any negative publicity.

Now therefore the parties enter into this agreement, the terms and conditions of which shall constitute a binding and enforceable agreement between the parties in terms whereof the Master's researcher undertakes to keep all information referred to herein confidential.

2 Interpretation and definitions

In this Undertaking, unless inconsistent with, or otherwise indicated by the context:

2.1 "Confidential Information" shall include, but shall not be limited in its interpretation to, all secret knowledge, any technical, commercial or scientific information and specifications, manufacturing techniques, designs, samples, drawings, visual merchandising, trade secrets, know-how, strategy, information concerning materials, marketing and business information generally, financial information and in general any other information of a sensitive, proprietary or confidential nature in which the AFO or any related person, entity or trust may have an interest.

2.2 "Commencement Date" means 1 October 2021;

2.3 words in the singular include the plural and vice versa;

2.4 words importing any one gender include each of the other two genders; and

2.5 a reference to a natural person includes a legal persona.

3 Title to the Confidential Information

The Master's researcher acknowledges that all right, title and interest in and to the confidential information vests in the AFO and that she has no claim of any nature in and to the confidential information.

FmG

4 Period of confidentiality

The provisions of this Undertaking shall remain in force indefinitely.

5 Non-disclosure

5.1 The Master's researcher undertakes to maintain the confidentiality of any confidential information to which she was allowed access by the AFO, whether before or after the effective date of this undertaking. She will not divulge or permit to be divulged to any person any aspect of such confidential information.

5.2 The Master's researcher shall take all such steps as may be reasonably necessary to prevent the confidential information falling into the hands of an unauthorised third party.

5.3 The Master's researcher shall not utilise, exploit or in any other manner use or attempt to use the confidential information for any purpose whatsoever.

5.4 Disclosure of the confidential information to a third party is likely to cause loss, harm and damage to the AFO. Accordingly, the Master's researcher indemnifies and holds the AFO harmless against any loss, claim, harm or damage suffered or sustained by the AFO due to a breach by the Master's researcher of this undertaking.

5.5 All documentation furnished to the Master's researcher by the AFO during the period of engagement relating to any confidential information will remain the property of the AFO and will be returned to them upon signature hereof. The Master's researcher will not make copies of, circulate, publish or otherwise reproduce any part of such documentation, without the prior consent of the AFO.

6 Breach

Should the Master's researcher fail to comply with any of the terms and conditions of this undertaking, the AFO shall have the right, without any further notice, to apply for an interdict against her and to claim damages and hold the Master's researcher liable for all legal costs incurred on a scale of attorney and own client.

7 Exceptions

7.1 The above undertakings relating to the confidentiality shall not apply to information which:

7.1.1 is in fact lawfully in the public domain at the commencement date; or

7.1.2 lawfully comes into the public domain after the commencement date otherwise than as a result of the Master's researcher's conduct; or

7.1.3 The Master's researcher is compelled to disclose in terms of a court order.

7.2 The onus of proving the facts necessary to sustain any one of the exceptions listed in subparagraphs 7.1.1 to 7.1.3 rests with the Master's researcher.

8 Jurisdiction

This undertaking shall be governed by South African law and the parties hereby irrevocably agrees to the jurisdiction of the High Courts of South Africa in respect of any dispute flowing from this undertaking.

9 Whole agreement

9.1 This document constitutes the whole of this undertaking to the exclusion of all else.

9.2 No amendment, alteration, addition, variation or consensual cancellation of this undertaking will be valid unless in writing and signed by both parties.

10 Waiver

10.1 No waiver of any of the terms or conditions of this undertaking will be binding for any purpose unless expressed in writing and signed by the AFO and any such waiver will be effective only in the specific instance and for the purpose given.

10.2 No failure or delay on the part of the AFO in exercising any right, power or privilege will operate as a waiver, nor will any single or partial exercise by the AFO of any right, power or privilege preclude any other or further exercise thereof, nor shall it affect the validity of this undertaking or the right of the AFO to enforce the provisions hereof.

11 Severability

In the event that any of the provisions of this undertaking are found to be invalid, unlawful, or unenforceable such provision shall not affect the validity of any other provisions of this agreement which shall continue to be valid and enforceable and the agreement shall be carried out as nearly as possible in accordance with its original terms and intent.

12. Domicilium addresses


12.1 The parties hereby choose the following addresses as their domicilium citandi et executandi where they will receive any written notice in terms of or as a result of this agreement:

- The AFOs: [REDACTED]
- The Master's researcher: [REDACTED]

12.2 Any party may change its above-mentioned address by giving the other party written notice of its new address. The new address shall become effective 5(five) days after delivery of the said notice.

Dated: 28 September 2021.

Witnesses:

1. 



MASTER'S RESEARCHER:

2. 

The AFOS accept the above undertaking:


ACKERMAN FAMILY OFFICE:

Date: 19 October 2021

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Research permission reference number: 2021_CEMS_BM_131

19 January 2021

Title: Exploring the lived experiences of a South African community involved in a corporate sustainability initiative.

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Lebogang Mamefja and I am completing an MCom in Business Management at the University of South Africa (UNISA) by conducting research under the supervision of Dr Catherine Le Roux and Prof Annamarie Davis from the Department of Business Management.

You are invited to participate in a study entitled "Exploring the lived experiences of a South African community involved in a corporate sustainability initiative."

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

This research aims to better understand the lived experiences of a South African community involved in a corporate sustainability initiative. This study will explore the relationship between the company and the community involved in a corporate sustainability initiative from the community's perspective.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

Your contact details were obtained from the Monitoring and Evaluation manager at Siyazisisa Trust, Nokulunga Gasa. I am requesting that you participate in the research because you form part of a community that is involved in Ackerman Pick n Pay's community garden sustainability initiative

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?



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www.unisa.ac.za

You will be interviewed and the questions will relate to the research questions for this study which are: What are the lived experiences of the communities involved in a company's sustainability initiative? How does a community experience their involvement in a sustainability initiative? What is the community's perception of the company regarding the sustainability initiative? How does the community experience the relationship with the company?

Each interview will take 1 hour – 1.5 hours of your time.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There are no potential benefits to taking part in this study. Participation in this study is voluntary and there is no incentive offered in exchange for your participation.

There is a lack of academic literature on corporate sustainability, with your assistance, the current study will be contributing to the academic body of literature and knowledge. In addition to contributing to the body of literature, the current study will offer insight to corporates on how sustainability initiatives operate and form part of the greater sustainability agenda.

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

Your responses will be confidential and your name will not be used in the research. No personal identifying information will be shared with third parties, therefore there is no foreseeable threat of intimidation, bullying or ostracization for participating in this study. COVID-19 protocols will be adhered to in order to curb the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

Data for this study is collected through interviews that will over a period of 3 weeks and for a duration of 1-1.5 hours per interview. The interviews may be time consuming for participants and lead to minimal discomfort in this regard.

The interviews will be held at a time of your convenience.



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WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

The interviews will be recorded. To ensure confidentiality, your name will not be associated with the answers you give. There will not be any personal identifiable information. Your answers will be given a code number, or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings.

Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including the transcriber, study supervisors and members of the Research Ethics Review Committee.

The data collected from you may be used for other purposes such as a research report, journal articles and/or conference proceedings. A research report, journal article or conference proceeding may be submitted for publication, but your identity will remain confidential.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Hard copies of the filed notes will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard in the researcher's work office at UNISA. In the occasion that the documents are moved from the work office, the copies will be stored in a locked cupboard at the researcher's home in Midrand. Electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable.

If information has to be destroyed, hard copies will be shredded, and electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL?

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the College of Economic and Management Sciences, UNISA. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?



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If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Lebogang Mametja on [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. The findings are accessible for 5 years after the interviews have been conducted.

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Dr Catherine Le Roux on [REDACTED] and/or Prof Annamarie Davis [REDACTED].

Please contact the research ethics chairperson of the Ethics Review Committee (ERC), Dr Marianne Engelbrecht [REDACTED] if you have any ethical concerns.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.



Lebogang Mametja



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APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the semi-structured interview. |

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname..... (please print)

Participant Signature..... .Date.....



Researcher's Name & Surname.....(please print)

Researcher's signature..... .Date.....



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APPENDIX D: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

		
UNISA ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE		
23 November 2021	<table border="1"><tr><td>NHREC Registration # : N/A ERC Reference # 2021_CEMS_BM_131 Name : Ms LL Mametja Student #67142087 Staff # N/A</td></tr></table>	NHREC Registration # : N/A ERC Reference # 2021_CEMS_BM_131 Name : Ms LL Mametja Student #67142087 Staff # N/A
NHREC Registration # : N/A ERC Reference # 2021_CEMS_BM_131 Name : Ms LL Mametja Student #67142087 Staff # N/A		
Dear Ms LL Mametja		
<table border="1"><tr><td>Decision: Ethics Approval from 23 November 2021 to 22 November 2024</td></tr></table>	Decision: Ethics Approval from 23 November 2021 to 22 November 2024	
Decision: Ethics Approval from 23 November 2021 to 22 November 2024		
<hr/>		
Researcher(s): Name:	Ms LL Mametja E-mail address: [REDACTED] Telephone # #0 [REDACTED]	
Supervisor(s): Name:	Dr C Le Roux E-mail address # [REDACTED] Telephone # 012 [REDACTED]	
Supervisor(s): Name:	Prof A Davis E-mail address # [REDACTED] Telephone # 012 [REDACTED]	
<table border="1"><tr><td>Working title of research: Exploring the lived experiences of a South African community involved in a corporate sustainability initiative</td></tr></table>		Working title of research: Exploring the lived experiences of a South African community involved in a corporate sustainability initiative
Working title of research: Exploring the lived experiences of a South African community involved in a corporate sustainability initiative		
Qualification: M Com		
<hr/>		
Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Unisa Ethics Review Committee for the above-mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for 3 years.		
<table border="1"><tr><td><i>The low risk application was reviewed by a Sub-committee (Department of Business Management Ethics Review Committee) of URERC on 23 November 2021 in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment. The decision was approved on 23 November 2021.</i> The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:</td></tr></table>		<i>The low risk application was reviewed by a Sub-committee (Department of Business Management Ethics Review Committee) of URERC on 23 November 2021 in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment. The decision was approved on 23 November 2021.</i> The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:
<i>The low risk application was reviewed by a Sub-committee (Department of Business Management Ethics Review Committee) of URERC on 23 November 2021 in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment. The decision was approved on 23 November 2021.</i> The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:		
 Open Rubric	University of South Africa Pretter Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150 www.unisa.ac.za	

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the relevant guidelines set out in the Unisa Covid-19 position statement on research ethics attached.
2. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
3. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the Ethics Review Committee.
4. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
5. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.
6. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's Act, no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
7. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.
8. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date 22 November 2024. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Review Committee approval.

Note:

The reference number 2021_CEMS_BM_131 should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.

Yours sincerely,



Chairperson: Prof T Visser
Department of Business Management
E-mail: vi [REDACTED]
Tel: (012) [REDACTED]




Executive Dean: Prof Thomas Mogale
Economic and Management Sciences
E-mail: mo [REDACTED]
Tel: (012) [REDACTED]



URERC 16.04.29 - Decision template (V2) - Approve

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APPENDIX E: AMENDED ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

AGENDA DATE <i>(For expedited transactions, the agenda date is the date the expedited approval gets reported or ratified at the convened ERC)</i>	18 November 2021
<u>DECISION OF</u> ERC (approved, referred back, disapproved)	Approved with minor corrections to the satisfaction of the Supervisors.
DATE OF ISSUING APPROVAL CERTIFICATE OR FEEDBACK LETTER	23 November 2021
Period for which approval is valid (Approved until/next renewal date)	22 November 2024
Signature Chairperson of the ERC Date signed: 21 July 2022	
<u>Comments to principal researcher from the ERC</u> Request approved to expand data gathering methods to observations and focus groups.	

APPENDIX F: ORIGINAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

Research questions	Interview questions
What are the <u>lived experiences</u> of the community involved in a company's sustainability initiative?	Tell me about the Ackerman Pick n Pay community garden project.
	Thinking back on the community garden project, has there been any benefits?
	What are the benefits that you can recall on a short and longer term?
	Were there any negatives to the project? Please tell me about it.
	What makes you excited about this project?
	What worries you about this project?
How does a community experience their <u>involvement</u> in a sustainability initiative?	What do you do in terms of the garden project? (Kindly describe your role)
	How are you involved with the project?
	Do you think the Vumanhlamvu community benefitted from the project? Tell me about the new skills that the community members have gained.
	In your experience, how has the drip irrigation roll out and conservation training benefitted the Vumanhlamvu community?
What is a community <u>affected</u> by the sustainability initiative?	In your opinion, what is the importance of the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation's community garden funding initiative?
	What do you think about the impact of the garden project on the Vumanhlamvu community?
	In your opinion, what effect on food security has the Vukanimphakathi community garden had on the community?
	In your opinion, what effect on income generation has the Vukanimphakathi community garden had on the community?
How does the community experience the <u>relationship with the company</u> ?	Tell me about the link between this garden project and the Ackerman PnP foundation, what do you know about it?
	Describe your experiences with the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation's managers.
	What impact has the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation's community garden funding initiative had on you?
What <u>recommendations</u> can be made to the company regarding their initiative based on the lived experiences of community?	What would you keep the same about the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation's community garden funding initiative?
	What would you change about the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation's community garden funding initiative?

APPENDIX G: FINAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

Research questions	Interview questions
What are the <u>lived experiences</u> of the community involved in a company's sustainability initiative?	Tell me about the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation funded initiatives.
	Thinking back on the initiatives has there been any benefits? And were they short term of long term?
	Were there any negatives to the initiatives? Please tell me about it.
	What makes you excited about the initiatives?
How does a community experience their <u>involvement</u> in a sustainability initiative?	What do you do in terms of the garden project? (Kindly describe your role)
	Tell me about the new skills that the community members have gained.
	In your experience, how has the drip irrigation roll out and conservation training benefitted the community?
	In your opinion, if Siyazisiza Trust and Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundations were to cease to exist, what would happen to the community gardens?
What is a community <u>affected</u> by the sustainability initiative?	In your opinion, what is the importance of the initiatives?
	What do you think about the impact of the initiatives on the community?
	In your opinion, what effect on food security has the initiatives had on the community?
	In your opinion, what effect on income generation has the community garden had on the community?
How does the community experience the <u>relationship with the company</u> ?	Describe your experiences with the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation's managers.
	What impact has the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation's Ackerman Pick n Pay Funded sustainability initiatives funding initiative had on you personally?
What <u>recommendations</u> can be made to the company regarding their initiative based on the lived experiences of community?	What would you keep the same about the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation's Ackerman Pick n Pay Funded sustainability initiatives funding initiative?
	What would you change about the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation's Ackerman Pick n Pay Funded sustainability initiatives funding initiative?

APPENDIX H: TRANSCRIBER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I, ZK Mabunda, transcriber, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes and documentation received from Lebogang Liberty Mametja, researcher, related to her Master's study on *exploring the lived experiences of a South African community involved in a corporate sustainability initiative*.

Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in the strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped interviews, or in any associated documents;
2. To not make copies of any audiotapes or computerised files of the transcribed interview texts, unless specifically requested to do so by the researcher, Lebogang Liberty Mametja;
3. To store all study related audiotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession;
4. To return all audiotapes and study related documents to researcher, Lebogang Liberty Mametja, in a timely manner.
5. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any backup devices.

I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files which I have access.

Transcriber's name (printed) Zambuko Khanyisile Mabunda

Transcriber's signature  _____

Date 22/09/2022 _____

APPENDIX I: FOCUS GROUP NOTES

#1 4 August 2022

1. Farmers are ready to participate in the formal market.
Agree / disagree
2. Farmers have an input during the project planning phase. *
Agree / disagree
3. Community garden needs are the same
Agree / disagree
4. Funders have a clear understanding of the developmental needs of the community gardens.
Agree / disagree
5. Funders are flexible to arising needs *
Agree / disagree
6. Farmers can graduate & operate independently from Siyazisiza & funders
Agree / disagree

#2

4 August 2022

1. Farmers are ready to participate in the formal market.
Agree / disagree * *describe the gap between ready & not.*
2. Farmers have an input during the project planning phase.
Agree / Disagree * *why? what is project implementation based on?*
3. Community garden needs are ~~uniform~~ the same.
Agree / disagree
4. Funders have a clear understanding of the developmental needs of the community gardens.
Agree / disagree
- ~~5. Funders have a clear and~~
5. Funders are flexible to arising needs.
Agree / disagree * *neither agree or disagree*
6. Farmers can graduate & operate independently from Siyazisiza & Funders.
Agree / disagree * *neither agree or disagree*

#7

4 August 2022

1. Farmers are ready to participate in the formal market

Agree | disagree

2. Farmers have an input during the project planning phase.

Agree | disagree

3. Community garden needs are the same

Agree | disagree

4. Funders have a clear understanding of the developmental needs of community gardens.

Agree | disagree

what is missing? more reporting?
more research before projects?


5. Funders are flexible to arising needs.

Agree | disagree (some are)

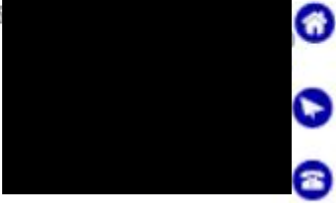
6. Farmers can graduate & operate independently from Siyazisiza & funders.

Agree | disagree

APPENDIX J: CONFIRMATION BY LANGUAGE EDITOR



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Editing Certificate

Date: 16 JANUARY 2023


The MASTER'S DISSERTATION titled "EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF A SOUTH AFRICAN COMMUNITY INVOLVED IN A CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE" was edited by Mr. Khomotso Moses Leshaba, a member of the Professional Editor's Guild (Membership number: LE5003) and European Association of Science Editors (Membership number: 5471). Mr. Leshaba has been contracted by the University of South Africa's College of Economic and Management Sciences for over three years to provide academic editing. He has an NQF Level 8 certificate in Editing: Principles and Practice from the University of Pretoria and Professional Editing Standards Certificate from Queen's University in Canada.

The services provided include:


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Leshaba Khomotso Moses
Associate Member
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