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Case Study:

Siyavuna Abalimi Development Groundbreak

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Siyavuna Abalimi Development Programme supports smallholder farmers in nine rural KwaZulu-Natal communities, driving agricultural programmes which showcase that when interventions are embedded in local context and sustained over time, they lead to deeper local economic shifts.

Programme Context



The Social Employment Fund (SEF) supports initiatives that deliver meaningful work while addressing structural challenges in communities. Within this framework, the SEF works together with the Strategic Implementing Partners (SIPs) to achieve this at grass-root level.

A SIP is a civil society organisation contracted through the SEF to design and deliver socially beneficial work opportunities in communities across South Africa. They work directly with communities to create meaningful opportunities that respond to local needs while building skills, restoring dignity, and strengthening the social economy.

The Siyavuna Abalimi Development Programme, a SIP, operates across rural and peri-urban communities along KwaZulu-Natal's South Coast, focusing on youth and women farmers. The programme combines social employment, skills development, and agricultural support to strengthen household food security and create pathways towards sustainable livelihoods.

This case study draws on a qualitative research conducted during the 2024/2025 implementation year, capturing the lived experiences of farmers, mentors, and technical advisors participating in the Siyavuna programme. It illustrates how SEF-supported work responds to systemic rural challenges, while also highlighting lessons for programme design and scalability.



| The Challenge

Smallholder and survivalist farmers in rural KwaZulu-Natal face layered and interrelated constraints that limit productivity, income generation, and long-term sustainability. These challenges include:



Limited income opportunities

Local markets often become saturated once communities achieve greater food security, reducing opportunities for farmers to generate sustainable income.



Insecure access to land

Limited land ownership and access, especially for women and youth, restricts farmers' ability to invest, plan ahead, and scale production.



Social and cultural barriers

Negative perceptions of farming, resistance to visible success within communities, and cultural taboos around certain farming practices can discourage participation and growth.



Environmental and resource challenges

Farmers face unreliable access to water, poor soil conditions, pests, livestock losses, and the impacts of climate variability.



Skills and knowledge gaps

Many first-time farmers lack experience in areas such as planting techniques, soil management, and crop planning, affecting productivity and long-term success.

For farmers identified as high performers with potential to scale, these challenges intensify. Transitioning from subsistence farming to smallholder farmers' requires capital, infrastructure, land security, market access, and a shift from survivalist to entrepreneurial mindsets conditions that are rarely all present at once.

The SEF-supported Intervention

Through SEF funding, the Siyavuna Abalimi Programme provides structured social employment and layered support to address these constraints. Participants are employed to farm, contributing directly to household food security while gaining practical agricultural experience. Alongside this, farmers receive accredited training in organic farming methods, including deep-bed farming, composting, and crop management, supported by ongoing mentorship. Experienced mentors and technical advisors offer hands-on guidance that reinforces learning and helps resolve challenges as they arise.

The programme also recognises different participant needs and potential by supporting farmers along two pathways: survivalist farmers who focus primarily on food security, and selected high performers who are encouraged and assisted to explore opportunities for scaling into agri-preneurship. In addition, market access is strengthened through Kumnandi, Siyavuna's social enterprise arm, which aggregates and sells produce externally, reducing reliance on saturated local markets.

Together, these elements enable SEF-funded work to move beyond short-term employment by embedding skills, confidence, and social value within communities.



Outcomes and Insights

The study highlights several important outcomes aligned with SEF objectives:

- **Improved household food security:** Many participants report more consistent access to vegetables, reducing food costs and improving nutrition.
- **Enhanced skills and confidence:** Farmers gain practical knowledge and begin to view farming as a legitimate and valuable form of work.
- **Youth and women participation:** The programme create accessible entry points for groups often excluded from formal employment and land ownership.
- **Economic spillover effects:** Surplus produce sales and aggregation through Kumnandi create income opportunities beyond subsistence.

However, the findings also surface critical lessons that not all participants can or should scale as there are structural barriers which means that subsistence farming remains the most realistic and valuable outcome for many households. This has a potential to create dependency risks and will continue reliance on programme support which can limit independence if exit pathways are

not clearly defined. Social dynamics matter and community perceptions, jealousy, and cultural beliefs significantly influence programme uptake and success. Infrastructure and land access are decisive as the communities do not have sufficient land, water, and fencing, even skilled and motivated farmers struggle to sustain progress.

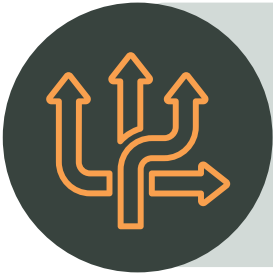


Relevance to the Social Employment Fund

This case study demonstrates how SEF-funded social employment can address immediate livelihood needs while building longer-term capability. The programme creates public and social value through food security, skills transfer, and local economic activity; and surface systemic constraints that require adaptive, differentiated programme design rather than one-size-fits-all solutions.



| Key Learning for SEF Programmes



Design multiple success pathways, recognising food security and stability as valid outcomes alongside enterprise development.



Invest in mentorship, social facilitation, and community engagement, not only technical training.



Align social employment with market systems and infrastructure, where possible, to prevent income bottlenecks.



Use ongoing learning and research to adapt programme models over time.

The Siyavuna experience underscores the importance of viewing social employment not only as job creation, but as a platform for learning, resilience, and gradual economic inclusion, particularly in sectors like small-scale agriculture where structural barriers remain high.



This case study is based on qualitative research conducted with Siyavuna Abalimi Programme participants, mentors, and technical advisors during the 2024/2025 implementation period.



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