

**Title page**

Assessing the Impact of Transformation Frameworks on Economic Participation in  
Municipal Fresh Produce Markets with a Focus on the Joburg Market.

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A research project submitted to the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of  
Pretoria, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business  
Administration.

**03 November 2025**

## **Plagiarism Declaration**

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

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## **Abstract**

*This dissertation examines the effectiveness of the Joburg Market transformation strategy, assessing beneficiary economic outcomes, governance quality, structural barriers, and actionable levers for inclusive market restructuring. The study employs a qualitative case design using purposive sampling of market agents, SMMEs, smallholder farmers, and executives, with semi structured interviews analysed through thematic coding to generate empirically grounded insights. Findings indicate a positive yet uneven impact that entrenches a two-tier transformation, with gains clustered in value adding niches while new entrants struggle within core agency functions due to capital intensity, relationship specific incumbency, and thin margins. Governance arrangements demonstrate operational clarity but strategic opacity, with limited participation and weak accountability undermining trust, policy learning, and delivery credibility. The support model overemphasises premises and rental relief while neglecting working capital and capability bundling, which produces implementation gaps and constrained throughput for emerging firms. The analysis argues for a strategic reorientation from passive compliance to an intentional, interventionist approach that rebalances market power in favour of new entrants through transparent rules, co decision, and market making instruments. The dissertation proposes a public transformation framework, a formal beneficiary forum with co design mandates, a blended finance facility with development partners, a tiered and customised support system, guaranteed market access through offtake agreements, incentives for incumbent supplier development, and a participatory monitoring and evaluation architecture with a public annual impact report. Practical implications highlight coalition building, codified transparency, digital equity requirements, and finance plus capability bundles as essential execution pillars. Limitations include a small purposive sample and restricted access to administrative data, motivating a representative survey, comparative municipal market studies, and longitudinal beneficiary tracking. The dissertation concludes that credible transformation requires aligned governance, intentional market access, and capital backed capability development to shift visibility into durable value and voice.*

*Key word: Economic participation, Municipal fresh-produce market, Smallholder farmer, Informal trader, Agroecology, Digital inclusion, Public participation*

## **Keywords**

### **Economic participation**

Access to, influence over, and benefit from economic activities in each market, including ownership, employment, decision-making, and income generation (Kgobe, Mabeba, & Mamokhere 2023).

### **Municipal fresh-produce market**

Wholesale facility owned by the city where producers consign horticultural products to commission agents who sell them either by auction or negotiated price under the control of the municipality (Goga & Mondliwa 2021).

### **Smallholder farmer**

Farmers working on small landholdings ( $\leq 5$  ha) with limited resources, usually more family-labour-intensive, whose marketable surplus is rather little compared to commercial establishments (Cele & Mudhara 2022).

### **Informal trader**

A seller who does not fully comply with formal regulations, including street vendors or kiosks with flexible licensing, who sell the produce directly to consumers (Skinner & Watson 2021).

### **Agroecology**

Is a transversal concept in the design of food systems, emphasizing ecological principles and integrating justice, biodiversity and circular-economy values (Kroll 2021).

### **Digital inclusion**

Equal access to, and meaningful use of, information and communications technologies, and social and economic participation (Deganis et al. 2021).

### **Public participation**

Refers to structured processes through which citizens engage decision makers of municipal governments aimed at decision making, which includes consultations, hearings and participatory budgets (Kgobe, Mabeba & Mamokhere 2023).

## Table of Contents

Title page .....	3
Abstract .....	5
Keywords .....	6
Chapter 1: Introduction to Research Problem .....	14
1.1 Introduction .....	14
1.2 Background .....	15
1.3 Problem Statement .....	17
1.4 Research Objectives .....	18
1.5 Research Questions .....	18
1.6 Significance of the Study .....	18
1.7 Research Assumptions .....	20
1.8 Chapter Summary .....	20
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	21
2.1 Introduction .....	21
2.2 Theoretical Framework .....	21
2.2.1 Theoretical Perspectives on Inclusive Economic Participation .....	22
2.3 Dashed (Sizeable coal) legacies and market governance .....	24
2.4 Gender, Youth and Social Dynamics .....	26
2.5 Digital Technologies and Participation .....	29
2.6 Sustainability, Agro-ecology and Circular-Economy Imperatives .....	31
2.7 Comparative Governance Models and Synthesis .....	33
2.8 Public-Participation Governance and Local-Economic-Development Linkages .....	34
2.9 Chapter Summary .....	37
<b>Chapter 3: Research Questions .....</b>	<b>38</b>
Chapter 4: Research Methodology .....	41
4.1 Introduction .....	41
4.2 Research Design .....	41

4.3 Research Philosophy .....	42
4.4 Research Approach .....	42
4.5 Methodological Choices .....	42
4.6 Research Strategy .....	42
4.7 Time Horizon .....	43
4.8 Population and Sampling Method .....	43
4.8.1 Sampling Method .....	43
4.8.2 Sample Size .....	44
4.9 Measurement Instrument .....	44
4.10 Data Gathering Process .....	45
4.11 Data Analysis Approach .....	45
4.10 Data Gathering Processes .....	47
4.12 Quality Control Measures .....	48
4.13 Ethical Considerations .....	49
4.14 Limitations of the Methodology .....	49
4.15 Chapter summary .....	50
Chapter 5: Findings Stakeholder Perceptions of the Joburg Market Transformation Strategy .....	52
5.1 Introduction .....	52
5.2 Analytical Approach: Atlas.ti Workflow, Coding and Theming .....	52
5.3 Participant Profile and Demographics .....	55
5.4 Mapping of Research Questions to Interview Guide Items .....	57
5.5 Findings by Research Question .....	58
5.5.1 Research Question 1: Structural, Institutional and Socio-cultural Barriers to Inclusive Participation .....	58
5.5.2 Research Question 2: Digital Platforms and Agro-ecological Initiatives — Influence on Entry, Price and Bargaining Power .....	60
5.5.3 Research Question 3: Municipal Regulations, Stall Allocation and Participation-Facilitators and Constraints .....	62

5.5.4 Research Question 4: Policy Levers and Collaborations most likely to Redress Participation Inequities .....	64
5.6 Cross-cutting Observations and Triangulation.....	65
5.7 Clarification on Recommendations Elicitation .....	68
5.8 Integration with Interview Questions .....	69
5.9 Quality and Trustworthiness .....	70
5.10 Summary Table of Findings across Research Questions .....	70
5.11 Discussion-ready Synthesis .....	72
5.12 Chapter summary .....	73
Chapter 6: Discussion of the Findings .....	75
6.1 Introduction .....	75
6.2 Analytical anchor points from Chapter 2.....	75
6.3 RQ1: Structural, institutional and socio-cultural barriers to inclusive participation	76
6.4 RQ2: Digital platforms and agro-ecological initiatives as participation levers .....	78
6.5 RQ3: Regulations, allocation and participatory forums as facilitators or constraints .....	79
6.6 RQ4: Policy levers and collaborations with the greatest promise .....	80
6.7 Cross-cutting synthesis: voice, value and visibility as an operating logic .....	81
6.8 Tensions, limits and instructive divergences.....	82
6.10 Chapter summary .....	83
Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendations.....	84
7.1 Introduction .....	84
7.2 Research Questions and Objectives .....	84
7.3 Conclusions by Research Question .....	84
7.3.1 RQ1: Economic impact of the transformation strategy on beneficiaries .....	84
7.3.2 RQ2: Effectiveness of governance, transparency, and support mechanisms.	85
7.3.3 RQ3: Key challenges and barriers hindering transformation.....	85
7.3.4 RQ4: Policy levers and collaborations with the greatest promise.....	85

7.4 Key Takeaways for Business.....	86
7.5 Key Takeaways for Academia .....	86
7.6 Recommendations for Policy and Practice .....	87
7.7 Implementation Challenges, Change Management, and Leadership Capabilities	88
7.8 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research.....	88
7.9 Concluding Remarks.....	89

## List of tables

Table 5.1: Atlas.ti Coding Architecture, Code Volumes and Themes by Research Question .....	54
Table 5.2 Participant Demographics and Context .....	55
Table 5.3: Mapping Research Questions to Interview Instrument Items.....	57
Table 5.4: RQ1 Themes, Frequencies and Respondent Coverage .....	60
Table 5.5: RQ2 Themes, Frequencies and Respondent Coverage .....	61
Table 5.6: RQ3 Themes, Frequencies and Respondent Coverage .....	63
Table 5.7: RQ4 Themes, Frequencies and Respondent Coverage .....	65
Table 5.8: Summary of Findings by Research Question, Themes, Frequencies and Instrument Traceability.....	70
Table 6.9: RQ1 Synthesis: Evidence against Chapter 2.....	77
Table 6.10: RQ4 Synthesis: Levers from Chapter 2 and Empirical Fit.....	81

**List of figures**

Figure 2.1: **Political Economy, Ecological Justice, and Digital Governance**..... 21

Figure 2.2: **Gender, Youth, and Social Dynamics** ..... 28

## **List of Acronyms**

BEE: Black Economic Empowerment

B-BBEE: Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment

CoJ: City of Johannesburg

DFI: Development Finance Institution

NEF: National Empowerment Fund

SEFA: Small Enterprise Finance Agency

SMME: Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises

KPI: Key Performance Indicator

M&E: Monitoring and Evaluation

RQ: Research Question

## **Chapter 1: Introduction to Research Problem**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Municipal fresh-produce markets remain important nodes in the South African agri-food system, negotiating the flow of vegetables and fruit from rural farms toward urban consumers whilst creating livelihoods for thousands of traders, porters, smallholder suppliers, and other service providers (Kgobe, Mabeba & Mamokhere 2023). Thus, although it remains a latent force for inclusive development, its distribution of opportunities within these spaces often mimics the broader dual economy: prime floor space and price discovery are granted to big commercial enterprises, while historically disadvantaged farmers and informal traders see structural barriers to entry, lack of capital, and uneven policy focus (Vilakazi & Bosiu 2021). Joburg Market the largest fresh-produce market in the entirety of sub-Saharan Africa perfectly captures this paradox. Stakeholder surveys repeatedly highlight inequitable access to stalls on the market, low gender diversity among commission agents, and procurement practices that disadvantage small-scale producers from peri-urban and former homeland areas, all while it accounts for more than one-third of the nation's formal horticultural throughput (Goga & Mondliwa 2021; Ndhlovu & Majova 2023).

It is being increasingly acknowledged that a diversified supplier base enhances product resilience, reduces price volatility and broadens varieties into the consumer world (Cele & Mudhara 2022). Slowly, building more inclusionary markets is increasingly accepted as a competitiveness strategy rather than simply a social-justice imperative. In fact, post-Covid-19 disruptions have stressed the vulnerabilities of long supply chains, thereby aggravating civic interest in local sourcing and exchange short circuits (Skinner & Watson 2021). In this backdrop, this research attempts to look into driver and barrier issues affecting economic participation in the municipal fresh produce market of Johannesburg, focusing on smallholder farmers, women and youth. The chapter serves as a conceptual foundation to describe the macro problem, objectives and guiding questions; the importance, scope, assumptions and key terms; and the structural layout of the chapter sequence.

Together, this scenario opens a window of opportunity through the XV BRICS Johannesburg II Declaration calling for alternative development pathways (Declaration 2022) and metropolitan agendas shifting further towards sustainability, which emphasize agro-ecological production, circular economy waste streams, and climate-resilient logistics (Kroll 2021). Digital innovations-from mobile auction apps to blockchain-enabled traceability and cash-less point-of-sale systems-are heralded as intervening mechanisms

to lower transaction costs and democratize price information. At the same time, empirical data warns that without concomitant injection into data access, capacity-building, and co-governance, these technologies may rather serve to solidify the existing hierarchies (Deganis et al. 2021). Comparative experiences have shown in Latin-America and Europe that truly inclusive technology implementations will be accompanied by spatial re-design that permanently reserves stall space for smallholders, transparent fee schedules, and oversight councils formed through participatory processes (Specht, Bohn & Simón Rojo 2022). By placing Joburg Market in the nexus between converging global and local trends, the study hence answers national imperatives for inclusive growth and participates in global debates regarding harnessing digital and green transition for embedding social justice back within urban food systems.

## **1.2 Background**

Historically, municipal fresh-produce markets were part of state-controlled mechanisms, whereby surplus produce from large-scale white commercial farms was channelled into the urban food bowl, minus the African producers through laws of land tenure and movement restrictions. The subsequent removal of statutory control boards never extinguished the spatially uneven legacy that still subjects black growers trying to access Johannesburg to long and discontinuous value chains, often on poorly maintained rural roads with many more marks-ups from different intermediaries on the way to the market floors: Vilakazi and Bosiu (2021). At the same time, the metropolitan core experienced a service-sector boom that killed low-skill urban employment and simultaneously widened the gap between formal wholesalers and informal retailing niches sustained by migrant labour (Lowton 2021). Joburg Market is therefore placed at the intersection of two structural fault lines: one agrarian dualism limiting diversity in upstream supply and an urban labour hierarchy rendering precarious downstream vending. Such intersecting inequalities are further institutionalised through credit requirements, stall-allocation committees and quality-grading protocols designed around the needs of high-volume, capital-rich operators (Kgobe, Mabeba & Mamokhere 2023).

Occurring on a more profound level, these injustices come into clearer focus when gender, youth and migration aspects are laid onto the picture. Women's landholdings remain smaller and more insecure than those of their male counterparts and further constrain their ability to meet consistency thresholds put forward by commission agents (Ndhlovu & Majova 2023). Youths, meanwhile, are confronted by barriers to capital investment as well as social norms that peg farming as an unattractive livelihood and so spur flows of rural

urban migration that bloat Johannesburg's informal economy whilst simultaneously rendering agrarian talent from the sending districts (Mthiyane, Wissink & Chiwawa 2022). Migrants typically arrive with little social capital and are funnelled into the more distant vending enclaves of the market, where curtailment of trading hours, exposure to the elements, and snatched security cut turnovers down. These micro-geographies of exclusion are reinforced by licensing regimes that aggregate health certificate, storage, and insurance prices, which surpass most informal vendors' working capital (Cele & Mudhara 2022). Such expenses create a low-value trap that forces marginalized actors to distribute tiny volumes of lower-quality produce with tight profits without targeted municipal improvements. Their advancement and cold-chain investment are limited.

In unstable times, technology makes political-economic dimensions unpredictable. Pilot e-auction platforms may let smallholders circumvent middlemen by connecting farmgate to city customer. Initial data suggests that these platforms are mostly used by parties with smartphones, stable data connections, and digital literacy, which are often associated with better income and education (Deganis et al. 2021). These cashless payment systems also speed transactions and lower instances of theft, yet transaction fees can snatch away a big chunk of profits from traders with low volumes. Dynamic floor-space price-setting or digital stall lottery algorithms could encode biases from history with respect to datasets that under-represent informal or female-led enterprises. The question of Johannesburg then is, shall we simply digitise, or do we want to ensure that digital tools are embedded within governance that consciously reallocates opportunities instead of perpetuating exclusion?

Finally, the sustainability agenda and agro-ecological agenda overlay fresh pressures and opportunities. From the lens of the National Development Plan, the developmental node comes to life at the nexus of metropolitan resilience strategies that advocate for short supply chains, low food miles, and waste recovery in a circular economy (Kroll 2021). Yet agro-ecological transition demands forms of extension support, certification, and consumer education unknown to most smallholders and informal traders. Comparative studies on energy and digital transitions in emerging economies warn how such green shifts may simply reproduce old inequities as the upfront costs of compliance-solar-powered cold rooms, organic certification, traceability apps-are foisted down onto weaker actors (Pinedo-López et al. 2024). This makes it clear that any attempt to frame Joburg Market as a sustainability flagship would have to come to terms with ecological upgrading becoming yet another barrier to entry unless it is coupled with subsidies, shared services,

or co-operative structures. Collective asset ownership and cooperative marketing can decrease cost barriers and give excluded populations in Limpopo rural entrepreneurship clusters negotiating leverage, according to Mashamaite (2023). This may be a paradigm for urban wholesale.

Imagine changing sustainability needs, technology-centric divides, and systemic inequities. These pressures are at play in a governance system currently trying to balance commercial efficiency and development duties. To convert Johannesburg's fresh produce market from an exclusive institution to one that empowers the economy, these characteristics and their effects on participation must be understood.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

Despite governmental claims that development is a more egalitarian economic model, actual findings from Johannesburg's municipal fresh-produce market show little progress toward inclusive participation. The market turnover has been steadily on the rise; nevertheless, stall ownership, apart from representation by commission agencies and supplier diversity, is concentrated in the hands of a very narrow spectrum of commercial actors who are well established (Goga & Mondliwa 2021). Smallholders account for a substantive-modernly-marginal portion of the tonnage, and a gender gap in trader earnings persists inside-Johannesburg 18-month tenure (Ndhlovu & Majova 2023).

Those qualitative accounts cite structural bottlenecks e.g., stringent quality grades, lumpy transaction sizes and information asymmetries-as primary constraints (Cele & Mudhara 2022). That is to say, however drastic their influence is, few have systematically assessed the relative power of institutional rules against social networks, digital platforms, and public-participation mechanisms. Furthermore, most existing literature neglects the relational interplay among actors that co-create market outcomes by considering the two groups-farmers and traders-separately (Kgobe, Mabeba & Mamokhere 2023).

Consequently, policymaking is based on fragmentary evidence when it comes to any intended intervention, such as stall-allocation reforms or training programmes or subsidies to digital marketplaces. If there confines a lack of requisite granularity in understanding participation dynamics, well-meaning policies might subject themselves to an "elitist capture," or they might simply remain incapable of reaching their real intended beneficiaries (Vilakazi & Bosiu 2021). What this study looks at is missing integrative actor-centred analysis that elucidates how structural, institutional and technological forces

synergistically shape the trajectories of economic participation in Johannesburg's municipal fresh-produce market.

#### **1.4 Research Objectives**

- **To analyse** structural and institutional barriers that prevent full participation of smallholder farmers, women and youth in the Joburg Market municipal fresh-produce market.
- **To investigate** the role of digital technologies and agro-ecological discourses in re-configuring participation opportunities.
- **To assess** the effectiveness of existing municipal policies and public-participation mechanisms in promoting inclusive market access.
- **To propose** evidence-based recommendations for enhancing equitable economic participation within the market.

#### **1.5 Research Questions**

1. What are the predominant structural, institutional and socio-cultural barriers facing marginalised actors in accessing and benefiting from the Joburg Market?
2. How do digital platforms and agro-ecological initiatives influence market entry, price realisation and bargaining power for smallholder suppliers and traders?
3. To what extent do current municipal regulations, stall/store allocation procedures and participatory forums facilitate or hinder inclusive economic development?
4. Which policy levers and stakeholder collaborations hold the greatest promise for redressing participation inequities?

#### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

By setting economic participation as the joint product of structural transformation, gender equity and digitalisation, the study makes a theoretical contribution to South Africa's longstanding debate on how to dismantle the dual economy. Most of the structural-transformation literature has treated agrarian reform and wholesale-market governance as parallel-policy arenas (Vilakazi & Bosiu 2021). This research integrates the two by tracing how market-hall institutions turn macro-level liberalisation measures (for instance, the Marketing Amendment Act) into micro-level rules or transaction costs that, in the end, regulate who sells, buys and at what price. By doing so, it operationalises the XV BRICS Johannesburg II Declaration's call for "equitable development pathways" through a

concretised place-based lens (Declaration 2022). The analytical model linking supply-side agrarian constraints, mid-stream market power asymmetries and downstream retail segmentation portends an approach for other African cities where wholesale markets remain crucial yet understudied nodes of food system.

A second scholarly advance lies in foregrounding gender and generational dynamics within wholesale-market participation. Existing South African analyses of empowerment have mainly centred on women's empowerment, with an emphasis on upstream agribusiness value chains or downstream micro-retailing. This leads to a "missing middle," or gap, at the wholesale interface (Ndhlovu & Majova 2023). By disaggregating participation data according to gender, age and enterprise size, this study reveals how seemingly gender-neutral mechanisms such as quality grading, licence fees and cold-room rentals reproduce gendered barriers to income growth. Towards the development-set literature that holds collective action as a medium for women to build social and physical capital (Raniga 2021), the study empirically maps how women vendors negotiate space, credit relations and digital tools to provide detailed evidence. This can feedback into gender-mainstreaming guidelines for municipal economic development units, while also informing donor programming aimed at women-led agri-enterprises.

Third, it is a methodological and empirical contribution to the fast-evolving field of digital inclusion. Although policy documents frequently cite mobile auctions, e-logistics and cash-less payments as the solution to market inefficiency, systematic evidence from the African peri-urban wholesale hubs remains lacking (Deganis et al. 2021). This study triangulates transaction-level data, stakeholder interviews, and participant observation to conceptualise adoption patterns along with unintended exclusionary outcomes such as data-bundle costs, algorithmic bias in dynamic stall pricing and exclusion of less digitally literate traders. These insights will feed into the ongoing global comparison of "techno-inclusive" versus "techno-exclusive" market modernisation whose distributive outcomes result not from technology itself but from governance design. Thus, they lay the groundwork for conducting mixed-methods evaluations of digital interventions for other municipal services.

The practical significance ranges from municipal policies to household welfare. For the City of Johannesburg's Market Authority and Department of Economic Development, grounding evidence would allow the precise calibration of stall-allocation reforms, fee structures, and support services-on-the-one-hand-to minimize elite capture, while maximizing broad-based opportunity on the other. Civil society organizations and farmer

associations can use the findings to design capacity-building programs that combine collective marketing and digital-skills training to raise farmgate pricing and trader margins. More egalitarian involvement on a macro scale is expected to sustain food availability, diversify consumer menus, and secure logistical and value-added jobs. This will help achieve SDGs 1 (No Poverty) and 10 (Reduced Inequalities). This study shows that inclusive governance may coexist with commercial practicality and ecological objectives, making Joburg Market a viable prototype for "developmental nodes" that could sustain sustainable, just, and climate-responsive urban food systems in South Africa and abroad.

### **1.7 Research Assumptions**

The research assumes that farmers, traders, and bureaucrats will share their candid experiences if secrecy is maintained. It also serves to assume that municipal records on stall allocations and turnover are reliable enough for descriptive analyses. The theoretical construct is founded on the notion that structural impediments are not immutable nor culturally monolithic; they can be modified through policies and collective action, just as has been shown in other emerging-economy settings (Specht, Bohn & Simón Rojo 2022). In sum, digital technologies are value-neutral tools whose inclusionary or exclusionary properties depend on the governance framework (Deganis et al. 2021).

### **1.8 Chapter Summary**

A scenario was set in chapter one portraying the municipal fresh-produce market of Johannesburg as the competitive platform for inclusive growth. In this procedure, recent studies were reviewed, open participation evaluated in terms of structural and institutional configuration, and finally, the central research problem was articulated, with accompanying objectives and questions to set the direction of inquiry. The chapter portrayed the significance of the study for both policy and academics, its delimitations, and an operational clarification of assumptions and terminologies. The subsequent chapters consist of the theoretical framework (Chapter 2), research design (Chapter 3), findings from data collection (Chapter 4), and discussions (Chapter 5), ending with recommendations to redesign Joburg Market as a base for equitable prosperity.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Inclusive economic participation has come to be an important lens through which to analyse the confluence of market structure, governance and socio-economic equity in developing economies. However, for South Africa, the problem is not access to economic spaces alone but also transformation in the underlying institutions and the rules that perpetuate exclusion. This chapter interweaves theoretical, historical and empirical literature to chart how market design particularly in the context of municipal fresh produce trading can support or undermine structural inequalities. It places the Joburg Market as a microcosm in which broader arguments regarding structural transformation, gender justice, digital inclusion, and sustainability converge.

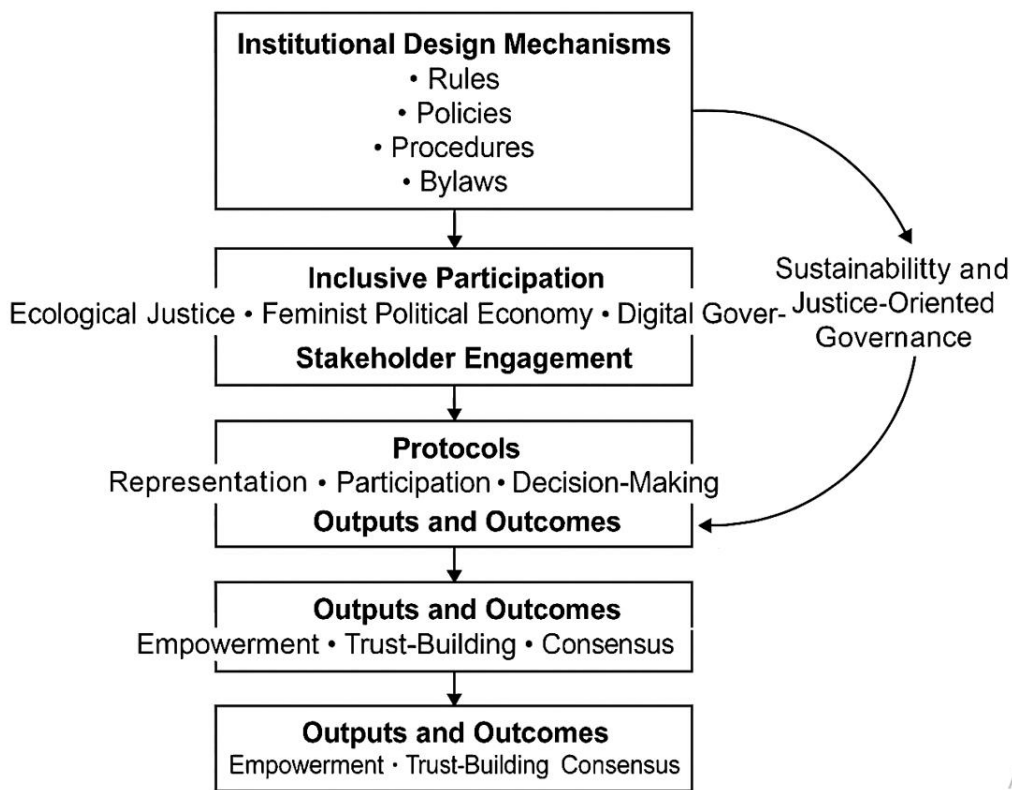
### **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

The case begins with theoretical frameworks that link inclusive participation to institutional design, examining how structures of governance mediate access and power within market ecosystems. The literature on apartheid's spatial and institutional legacies subsequently places these dynamics in historical context, showing how historical zoning, land, and finance policies shape ongoing patterns of exclusion. Later youth and gender focus highlight the intricate social relationships that drive who is included, on what terms, and at what cost bringing feminist political economy and intergenerational change to the foreground as key axes of analysis.

Against the backdrop of accelerating market digitisation, this review also explores the Janus-like role of technology: how mobile media, cashless networks, and algorithmic rule may entrench existing hierarchies while providing efficiency and transparency. Agro-ecological and circular economy models at the same time bring ecological justice into the inclusivity question, pointing out that only just participation needs to make it possible to achieve sustainability, food sovereignty, and ecological resilience.

Finally, comparative governance models elsewhere in the world specifically Latin America and East Asia show particularly budgeting, co-regulation, and traceability in the digital age can generate enabling conditions for open, inclusive market systems. They offer lessons for local adaptation in South Africa, where institutional trust, historical inequalities, and limited municipal capacity are long standing constraints.

*Figure 2.1: Political Economy, Ecological Justice, and Digital Governance*



Activate

## Political Economy, Ecological Justice, and Digital Governance

Source: Agbodzakey, 2024

Together, these strands of scholarship inform the analytical vision of this research by linking inclusion not only to access but to agency, governance and justice. They reveal inclusive participation as complex economies, ecological, technological, and epistemic and sustainable change as rooted in the incorporation of redistributive mechanisms into market governance. The following section untangles these conflicts more thoroughly, setting the stage for this study’s empirical investigation into how Joburg Market might possibly change as a site of inclusive, climate resilient urbanisation.

### 2.2.1 Theoretical Perspectives on Inclusive Economic Participation

The idea of inclusive economic participation builds upon political economy traditions that view markets not merely as neutral clearinghouses but as rule-bound institutions whose design reflects existing power relations and reproduction thereof. South African scholars thus define inclusion as twofold: first, the entrance of various groups into the market on affordable terms, and second, the ability to shape the very rules by which rents are

allocated, quality is regulated and disputes resolved (Kgobe, Mabeba & Mamokhere 2023). At the level of the Joburg Market, an inquiry must thus be made into how space allocation committees, commission fees and quality grades serve to translate macro-level liberalisation into micro-level transaction costs favouring incumbents (Vilakazi & Bosiu 2021). The linking of structural-transformation theory with institutional economics has birthed recent arguments that, unless such governance mechanisms hard-wire redistribution in themselves, market reform merely strengthens a path-dependent, capital-rich-actor-dominated "dual economy" (Goga & Mondliwa 2021).

Critical agrarian and decolonial theorists push the debate further by characterizing fresh-produce markets as arenas of epistemic struggle in which historically excluded actors try to reclaim their own reasons for decision-making (Siebert 2022). Thus, from this vantage, inclusion is just not about the numeric account of stalls held by smallholders but also about destroying the hierarchies that place Eurocentric standards of efficiency or hygiene above locally embodied logics of reciprocity, communal land tenure, and seasonality (Mawere & Mukonza 2025). Consequently, food-sovereignty advocates demand a participatory system for setting standards be they for pesticide thresholds, varietal choice, or waste reuse that allows peri-urban farmers to imprint their own knowledge systems upon market rules (Greenberg & Drimie 2021). The theoretical move foregrounds the voice as the locus of struggles over whose values are applied when notions of "quality" or "safety" are construed, thus shifting the analytic lens from access.

Feminist political economy adds a layer of gender through the assertion of market arrangements with reproduction of unpaid care burdens and labour-market segmentation. Empirical evidence from Gauteng has shown that women with smaller plot sizes and little control over collateral raise supply streams that are thinner and less predictable and therefore penalised by commission agents (Ndhlovu & Majova 2023). Cooperative-development literature argues that collective ownership can mitigate these disadvantages to some extent; but, without gender-sensitive governance, such as guaranteed stall quotas, co-operatives tend to manifest the same patriarchal leadership patterns (Raniga 2021). Then there is the matter of spatial micro-geographies: field-based evidence from Limpopo indicates that women vendors in dispersed peripheral bays earn lesser footfalls and higher spoilage, corroborating the theory that physical layout is a technology of exclusion on gendered grounds (Mashamaite 2023). These findings go hand in hand with feminist theories that situate economic participation within a larger framework of social reproduction and spatial justice.

Digital-inclusion scholarship inserts a technological dimension to the discourse, providing that information and communication technologies may potentially either flatten existing hierarchies or further constrain them based on whom the data is sold to and how it is used by algorithmic governance. A United Nations meta-review warns that typically, mobile trading platforms reward only those users who already have smartphones, stable data, and digital literacy-what Deganis et al. call assets that are unevenly distributed across class, gender, and age (2021). The studies that explore informal firms in sub-Saharan Africa support this "digital divide" argument, with enterprises already enjoying capital and network advantages showing higher gains in revenues (Girrollet 2023). According to early research in South Africa, cash-less payments and e-auction apps can also exacerbate marginality through transaction fees that eat thin margins of low-volume traders unless municipalities subsidize the cost of connectivity or subsidize equity considerations into the design of the platform (Modiba et al. 2024). This notion in digital governance hence surfaces that whether participation remains inclusive is a matter of who owns the data, how algorithms monopolize risk, and whether platform architectures allow for co-governance.

Sustainability and agro-ecological paradigms will recast inclusion through an eco-justice perspective. Agro-ecology holds that resilient food systems depend on diversified, locally adapted production networks-an objective frustrated when wholesale markets accept only uniformity and pay heed only to just-in-time logistics (Kroll 2021). Comparative urban-planning research in Latin America shows that redesigning hall layouts to reserve stalls for agro-ecological producers can align waste-to-compost schemes with circular-economy goals for social inclusion (Specht, Bohn & Simón Rojo 2022). South African food-waste ethnographies echo these results-the surplus redistribution programs in township communities reduce landfill volumes but create micro-enterprise opportunities for the waste pickers and community kitchens as well (Berning 2025). In theory, these strands converge on a multidimensional notion of participation-economic, ecological and epistemic-that true inclusivity must simultaneously address asymmetries of power, gender and sustainability in municipal market governance.

### **2.3 Dashed (Sizeable coal) legacies and market governance**

Unfair structures at South Africa's fresh produce market have sprung directly from spatial and institutional undertakings during the apartheid. For instance, discriminatory and racial zoning laws, supported by the 1937 Marketing Act, channelled state investment predominantly toward large, white-owned farming blocks, while African producers were

put on the backburner, assigned to "homeland" peripheries bereft of road networks and without cold-chain facilities. When the Marketing Amendment Act ended the flourishing days of statutory control boards in 1996, liberalisation occurred independently without the introduction of any accompanying redistributive measures, thus cementing opportunities for incumbent agribusinesses already advantaged by logistics and preferential bank finance to control wholesale halls and chart the course of price discovery (Vilakazi & Bosiu 2021; Goga & Mondliwa 2021). The outcome is a path-dependent dual economy where market hierarchies dovetail neatly with historical land and capital allocations.

Spatial formation has therefore become the means of reproduction of inequities. Urban geographers observe that through local zoning, wholesale facilities are still clustered along the industrial fringes of Johannesburg's south and east, far from these predominantly black townships of Soweto, Alexandra, and Orange Farm (Lowton 2021). This location imposes "last-mile" costs fuel, tolls, and time delays that already diminish smallholders' margins who transport produce from their former homelands or peri-urban plots (Cele & Mudhara 2022). Due to fragmented cold-chain infrastructure, which increases transport limitations, farmers must accept lower prices for heat-stressed vegetables or pay more for private pack-houses (Agholor, Ogujiuba & Shongwe 2023). Small automobiles are often unrefrigerated. Thus, apartheid's spatial legacy has become a logistics premium for smallholders and low-income shoppers.

These governance techniques are meant to mitigate structural headwinds, but they often worsen exclusion and dilution. Kgobe, Mabeba, and Mamokhere (2023) found that stall lotteries are opaque, licensing procedures are sometimes complicated, and commission and charge schedules increase in percentage as cargo size drops. This design punishes small suppliers. In instances where local politicians and functionaries are unwilling or incapable of enforcing transparent criteria, well-resourced traders engage in "elite capture"-buying influence over stall allocation or bending health inspections to harass competitors (Raniga 2021). Even panel econometric studies indicate impetus for local politicians with stronger education levels and managerial skills to generate more market productivity, proving the institutional quality as a variable that enhances or nullifies national reforms in spirit (Ngepah, Saba & Mabindisa 2021).

These governance spaces now again meet a digital transition that risks solidifying into algorithmic form historical biases. Mobile auction platforms and cash-less payment systems should theoretically lower transaction costs, but data on adoption levels prove that the gradient is characteristic of income and education divides: those with

smartphones and data plans secure a faster sale and better price, while small-time traders absorb somewhat higher transaction fees (Deganis, Godfrey & Wilsher 2021). Fintech scholars warn that, in the absence of municipally implemented subsidy or open-data requirements, operators will optimise their algorithms for volume throughput, sidelining representation of small consignments and consignors (Modiba, Mashigo & Mashigo 2024). Where municipal staff are themselves digitally illiterate, oversight is weakened, again reinforcing the point made earlier that human-capital endowments condition the distributive outcome of any governance tool (Ngepah, Saba & Mabindisa 2021).

The greatness lies in the offers of international experience toward equitable governance but with cautionary tales about grant-it-and-the-context-is-inappropriate approach of transplantation. China's co-regulation model brings together state inspection and producer-buyer councils with joint rulemaking, which have achieved tangible safety and smallholder inclusion results (Alita, Dries & Oosterveer 2021; Sun 2023). The Latin-American experiments in the "citizen-driven" redesign of markets reserve stall space for smallholders and practice lotteries transparently under the supervision of multi-stakeholder boards precisely to avoid rent-seeking (Specht, Bohn & Simón Rojo 2022). These lessons would require some translations, in turn adaptations to the procedures to South Africa's legacies of mistrust in state authority and especially into its highly unionised trader milieu. Still, the comparative evidence brings home one immediate lesson: spatial planning, logistics investment and participatory oversight align within a single governance framework as the only way that municipal markets can overcome their apartheid legacies and act as real engines for inclusive growth.

#### **2.4 Gender, Youth and Social Dynamics**

The economic foothold of women in South Africa's horticultural economy is constrained right at the start: access to land and security of tenure. Customary inheritance systems in many rural districts favour patrilineal transmission, leaving female farmers vulnerable to short-term rentals or family arrangements that discourage long-term soil health, irrigation, and varietal diversification investments (Ndhlovu & Majova 2023). Insecure tenure reduces collateral jobs, limiting women's production credit eligibility and reducing productivity and cultivated area. Deficits in service delivery connect with structural issues: Gauteng agricultural-extension statistics show that female-led farms receive fewer on-farm visits and post-harvest training. Commission agents reduce yield variability by discounting prices (Ndhlovu & Majova 2023; Greenberg & Drimie 2021). Afrocentric study

blames the “epistemic hierarchy” for these imbalances, which devalue women's traditional agronomic expertise. Thus, coordinated land and extension reforms are needed (Mawere & Mukonza 2025).

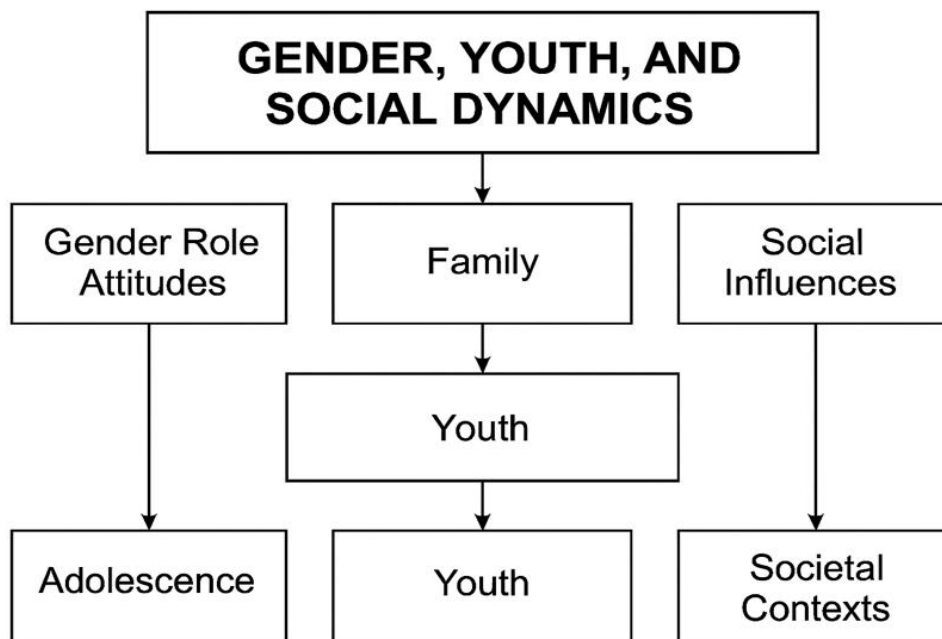
Architectural stratification limits upstream barriers. Ethnographic research in Limpopo found that female vendors are disproportionately assigned peripheral spaces with minimal foot traffic, poor lighting, and limited temperature-controlled storage (Mashamaite 2023). These micro-geographies translate directly into reduced sales velocity and higher spoilage, misadjusting net margins even when purchase prices are favourable. Urban spatial-planning studies suggest that this gendered spatial sorting is not accidental but is embedded and perpetuated in historical zoning decisions that consider “prime” stalls as male domains of commission agencies, thereby consigning women to secondary niches (Lowton 2021). Some municipalities have experimented with gender-responsive zoning overlays and stall-quota systems. Still, evaluations have shown that if the quotas come without deadlines for enforcement or transparent lotteries, they will soon degenerate into mere tokenism or be elite captured by entrepreneurs with political clout (Raniga 2021).

Collective action has come to be seen as a partial remedial measure; however, success through cooperation is not automatic. Among economic cooperatives run by women in Gauteng, pooled capital finance for transport, shared pack-house, and group cold-storage has had a profound effect on minimising unit costs (Raniga 2021). However, comparative research into the digital economy warns that cooperatives can magnify internal hierarchies of power: members who are more literate or have smartphone access dominate the flow of information, shaping purchasing decisions to their advantage (Modiba et al. 2024). Since then, UN reviews of digital inclusion found a similar problem, those platform-mediated marketing tools disproportionately benefited those with ICT skills unless they were supported with training and subsidised data bundles (Deganis et al. 2021). Thus, for cooperatives to act as channels of gender equity, their matrix must include wider governance mechanisms that compel inclusive digital-capacity building and transparent revenue-sharing arrangements.

Youth dynamics overlay these gendered landscapes with their own circuitry of mobility and skills gaps. Longitudinal studies of KwaDukuza municipality report steady out-migration among rural youth, who view agriculture as low-status work, opting instead for informal trading or gig-economy work in metropolitan areas (Mthiyane, Wissink & Chiwawa 2022). This “youth drain” depletes rural production capacity, raising the smallholder suppliers' average age and limiting their capacity to adopt new innovations. Conversely, surveys of

return-migrant youth in Limpopo reveal interest in horticulture but shed light on prohibitive transport costs, limited pack-house availability, and urban price trend information asymmetries (Agholor, Ogujiuba & Shongwe 2023). Econometric panel analyses show that municipalities with higher youth-skills indices have greater market-level productivities. This shows that demographic dividends require rural-skills training and urban-logistics support (Ngepah, Saba & Mabindisa 2021).

**Figure 2.2: Gender, Youth, and Social Dynamics**



**Gender, Youth, and Social Dynamics**

(Leaper, 2022; McHale et al., 2022; Leaper & McHale, 2022; Kågesten et al., 2016)

Ultimately, the so-called digital divide between gender and generational lines intersect with each other. Younger women may enjoy a higher base level of digital literacy compared to other age cohorts but face the constraints of device affordability and gendered time poverty, limiting their ability to maintain continuous engagement on digital platforms (Deganis et al. 2021). According to agroecological incubators, municipalities that bundle start-up grants for solar-powered cold rooms with mentorship on organic certification enable young female farmers to surpass others in yield and market penetration—proving the synergistic effect of technological and ecological upgrading (Kroll 2021). Yet without reforms to stall-allocation algorithms that weight applications by age and gender, these gains risk stalling at the wholesale gate. Hence, Joburg Market could transform from a site

of compounded exclusions into a laboratory of intersectional inclusion were digital-equity metrics integrated into market-governance dashboards, and periodic gender-youth audits made mandatory (Ndhlovu & Majova 2023).

## **2.5 Digital Technologies and Participation**

Digital-market innovations entered development discourse on a wave of optimism, celebrated for lowering search costs, for reducing spatial frictions, and for furnishing the farmer with real-time price intelligence. But meta evidence from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs tempers this enthusiasm: mobile produce auctions, e-logistics platforms, and cashless point-of-sale systems tend to cascade value upwards so that efficiency gains accrue to actors who already carry smart devices, purchase data bundles, and have the cognitive bandwidth to interpret dashboards (Deganis et al., 2021). Cross-sectional evidence based on a survey of 15,000 informal enterprises in sub-Saharan Africa confirms the bias: adopters of digital technologies have statistically greater revenue and labor productivity; however, the adopters are disproportionately male-owned, urban-based, and capital-rich, thus constituting selection rather than pure technology effects (Girollet, 2023). Macro-finance studies following mobile-money roadshows in rural South Africa further report mounting usage fees that eat into the micro-trader margins, depicting how costs of connectivity continue to embed structural inequality despite the rising headline adoption rates (Modiba et al., 2024).

The Johannesburg pilot of a mobile auction Market-Live captures this ambivalence on the ground. Real-time dashboards allow commercial growers trucking in bulk lots to time deliveries for peak prices and to bypass commission agents to directly match with supermarket buyers, thereby shaving off 4–6 percent marketing costs (Cele & Mudhara, 2022). Smallholders, however, ration data, share devices, and try to struggle against English-only interfaces, leaving them at observer status on the platform and price-takers in the physical trading hall (Deganis et al., 2021). Female vendor interviews expose yet another blind spot: the wallet on the platform is linked only to bank-branch cash-outs, which many unbanked traders find unavailable; hence, they must call on the help of intermediaries who charge additional conversion fees (Modiba et al., 2024). This design oversight manages practically to take apparently inclusionary fintech into yet another indenture in the market-power ranking.

Building on a truly rich past, the argument stands that design choices can invert narratives. In Colombia and Peru, through digital trading pilots with the very rigorous digital literacy boot camps for rural women and youth, with produce aggregation through cooperatives to

meet minimum-lot threshing, farm-gate prices were raised by up to 20 percent while reducing post-harvest loss by a third (Hernandez et al., 2024). Latin-American scholars attribute the gains to two governance alterations: first, a gradually declining subsidy on data fees as user turnover grows and, second, cooperative ownership of platform shares, which places user representatives on the boards (Girollet, 2023). Therefore, early users of the platform are able to collect dividend streams, converting the technology from an external service cost to an asset base for marginalised actors. From these results, we gather that the infrastructure and Algorithmic Code-Algorithmic Code formation are not destiny; disinfected from the institutional scaffolding-factbase-ownership, governance, payment-making-are distributive trajectories.

In consequence, platform governance has become a site of contestation over inclusiveness. UN reviews warn proprietary algorithms, calibrated for transaction velocity, routinely suppress low-volume listings in search results, effectively shadow-banning smallholders unless they pay promotional fees (Deganis et al., 2021). Opposing paradigms have been recorded in comparative food-safety research from China: here, a state-mediated co-regulatory regime imposes mandatory open-source traceability ledgers, with producer-buyer councils scrutinising all code changes to ensure no discrimination occurs against tiny consignments (Alita, Dries & Oosterveer, 2021; Sun, 2023). Transparency clauses akin to these law instruments open-algorithm audits, tiered listing fees and public dashboards displaying stall-allocation outcomes could assist Johannesburg in aligning fintech efficiency with equitable outcomes. Left unsupported by such safeguards, the process of digitalisation threatens to automate the very gate-keeping mechanisms municipal policy claims to have eradicated.

Finally, in the broader context of sustainability that aims to green what remains of the urban food system and in the process promotes opportunities, the digital turn is intersecting with it. Pilot trials in Colombia's SME energy transition programme reveal that subsidies for solar-powered cold rooms and sensor-based quality monitors reduce carbon intensity and increase shelf life for remote farmers, meanwhile allowing those farmers to comply with stringent urban-grade quality (Pinedo-López et al., 2024). Key climate action reports across the CWANA region affirm that when digital climate dashboards are paired with targeted grants and extension support, enterprises led by women and youths disproportionately realize revenue gains that narrow the recognized gender and generational gaps (Paul Jr et al., 2024). But then, these successes rely heavily on concessional finance that pays for hardware upfront and would provide an important

lesson for Joburg Market, which in the absence of such financing would rather become exclusionary through unfunded mandates to implement blockchain traceability or cashless systems. Thus, digital technologies possess real transformative power if equality is somehow hardwired into data governance, fee structures, and complementary capacity-building programmes at the municipal level.

## **2.6 Sustainability, Agro-ecology and Circular-Economy Imperatives**

An emerging scientific paradigm and social-justice reform, agro-ecology prioritizes biodiversity, ecological resilience, and community self-determination in food systems. Joburg Market, among others, is important in this recalibration since their purchasing criteria, pricing incentives, and investments-infrastructure decisions affect production practices (Kroll 2021). According to national agro-ecology researchers, wholesale customers encode sustainability rules into daily commerce by requiring varietal diversity and reducing agrochemicals. Pull influences may accelerate landscape-scale transformations (Greenberg & Drimie 2021). According to food sovereignty critics, markets are arenas where competing value systems which prioritize commercial gains above ecological preservation are negotiated and enforced (Siebert 2022).

Implementing those rules requires rethinking market logistics, including reducing supply chains and recognizing plenty that would otherwise be overlooked. International case studies show the establishment of "local lanes" for peri-urban growers and the integration of gleaning cooperatives or food-bank partnerships to help reduce carbon miles, ease gates for smallholders, and direct surpluses to food-insecure households (Specht, Bohn & Simón Rojo 2022). Ethnographic studies of informal urban farming in Johannesburg confirm the same reasoning: when a market sets aside stall space for produce grown inside a 50-kilometre radius, transport costs go down by as much as 33 percent, while the risk of perishability declines, giving agro-ecological methods an edge (Ahmed, 2024). South African recycling efforts present circular-economy opportunities; investigations of waste-to-compost schemes in Cape Town and the neighbour business parks have revealed that channelling unsold produce through local composting schemes slashes landfill volumes and creates income streams for the community-based waste pickers (Berning 2025).

The prospects for lure of ecological upgrading must be blocked by the political economy of the certification. These well-intended organic or agro-ecological labels often require either audit fees, record-keeping, or equipment. Some procurement costs can be as technical as soil-testing kits or as low-key as pheromone traps and low-carbon packaging,

all of which the suppliers pay upfront-lip-sync to the possible price premium that might appear later (Whittingham, Marshak & Swanby 2024). Wholesale buyers aiming to de-risk the supply chain may apply blanket standards like Global G.A.P. or Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP), which, in effect, pass down compliance costs to producers who can least finance them (Alita, Dries & Oosterveer 2021). Without subsidised inspection or a shared services spirit, certification turns into yet another filter that eliminates emerging black and women farmers, in much the same way that there were previous exclusions based on disparities in land and capital (Greenberg & Drimie 2021). Kroll (2021) has shown that well-intentioned green standards may become "green gates" without redistributive money in the Cape Town urban biopolitics of food discussion.

Global transition activities create solid mitigation approaches. The Colombian energy-transition fund for SMEs provides low-interest financing and a 50% capital grant to build solar-powered cold rooms and humidity sensors. This program helps financially stressed farmers meet organic-certification temperature-control standards (Pinedo-López et al. 2024). Impact assessment studies have shown spill-over benefits for female- and youth-friendly enterprises to cash out cost savings to develop their output and broaden their terms of payment. Likewise, regional CWANA zone-wide analyses show how pairing digital climate dashboards with targeted capacity-building grants improves smallholders' market access and reduces post-harvest losses, thus demonstrating how climate-smart solutions can be made inclusive when the funding architecture is equity-centred (Paul Jr et al. 2024). For Johannesburg, by the same token, these cases imply that green mandates should be paired with concessional finance, shared service hubs, and cooperative ownership of green infrastructure; otherwise, the city may substitute historical racial barriers with eco-financial barriers.

Being at a developmental node, there has to be an integrated form of governance that unites ecological ambition with social equity. Policymakers could devote a segment of stall licences for certified agro-ecological suppliers and finance a municipal certification desk that bundles audit costs across cooperatives, thus lowering cooperative-level fees (Greenberg & Drimie 2021). Waste management by-laws could also require agents to segregate organic waste for composting on site, wherein such by-products are sold back at subsidised rates to peri-urban growers closing nutrient loops and internalising ecological externalities (Berning 2025). Finally, any digital-traceability mandate should allow for open-source codes and tiered fee structures that do not replicate the divide of data access found in fintech rollouts (Deganis et al. 2021). These redistributive finance

and participatory monitoring systems have supported the green pivot from the start, resulting in circular-economic efficiency, climatic resilience, and inclusive economic participation in Joburg Market.

## **2.7 Comparative Governance Models and Synthesis**

China's co-regulation concept combines high-level food-safety control with smallholders. Joint producer–buyer councils implement central legislation's essential standards. These councils undertake peer inspections, publish batch-level data on a public ledger, and collaborate on remedial steps to reduce enforcement costs and increase compliance (Alita, Dries & Oosterveer 2021). Digital traceability codes are mandatory, yet the state subsidizes printing QR labels for farmers below a turnover threshold so that the technology does not fade into a covert entry fee (Sun 2023). Wash-up game-theory analyses show that when fines for non-compliance increase with the size of the firm, large wholesalers train smaller suppliers, thus aligning private incentive with public good (Ma & Hu 2021). The net effect is a 20-30 percent reduction in pesticide infringements and a measurable increase in consignments of smallholders, which demonstrate that polycentric monitoring can benefit both efficiency and equity.

In the Latin-American experimental sphere, participatory governance is taken one step further by granting citizens certain rights in market design. In Quito and Mexico City, "mercados solidarios" reserve 30% of booths for farmer cooperatives. The assignments are selected by a public lottery on live municipal television, preventing hidden bargaining (Specht, Bohn & Simón Rojo 2022). Vendors, consumers, women's associations, and city planners assess and sanction stall fees, diversifying vendor gender and minimizing rent-seeking (Ahmed 2024). Civic tech organizations can audit product listing-rank algorithms using open-source code, protecting low-volume suppliers from digital "shadow bans," if they appease digital platforms. In the past three years, women have increased their share at prominent stalls, and vendor surveys show a 15% drop in informal side payments. This shows how institutional transparency balances market power and space.

Hybrid ecological-digital transition models add another comparative layer. The Colombian SME energy transitioning program uses concessional loans for solar refrigerated rooms and blockchain logistics. This initiative is only for cooperatives that meet antibody-parity governance and membership standards (Pinedo-López et al. 2024). CWANA climate-smart programs link grant disbursement to open-data agreements, forcing them to publish all carbon footprint indicators. NGOs can hold green subsidies accountable for increasing involvement (Paul Jr et al. 2024). Such schemes prove how technology-mediated

sustainability carries an agenda of the poor when the financing plus data governance are consciously redistributive.

Mapping these lessons forth with South Africa presents strategic convergence with domestic policy signals. The XV BRICS Johannesburg II Declaration envisages equitable market access as a structural transformation pillar, while local agro-ecology activists demand that proper green transitions build mechanisms to either resist or undo historical inequities (Declaration 2022; Kroll 2021). Latin African researchers, instead, challenge co-regulation to be culturally sensitive, embedding anti-xenophobic and gender-justice norms into daily practice of markets (Mawere & Mukonza 2025). Considering this in totality, the comparative evidence calls for the Joburg Market to serve as a testing ground for a tripartite oversight council of the state, vendors and civil society, designed for algorithm audits, stall-fee gradations and compost-loop targets to bring about structural correction, digital fairness and ecological ambition.

A review of the literature reveals three blind spots tackled by the present study. First, few evaluations reveal a gender- and age-wise breakup of digital-adoption metrics, leaving policymakers with the dilemma of whether fintech tools act as equalizers or social-widening barriers (Deganis et al. 2021; Ndhlovu & Majova 2023). Second, the outline remains untouched on how the cost of agro-ecological certification intersects with stall-allocation rules, an omission that risks turning green labels into another set of barriers (Whittingham, Marshak & Swanby 2024). Third, since no context-adapted co-regulation blueprint has been stress-tested yet at any South African municipality of Joburg-scale, or with its apartheid-year legacies (Kgobe, Mabeba & Mamokhere 2023). To bridge these gaps with a mixed-methods design, transaction-level data, gender-segmented adoption surveys and actor-centred interviews are deployed to design governance scenarios that have the potential to steer Joburg Market towards becoming an engine of inclusive climate-resilient growth.

## **2.8 Public-Participation Governance and Local-Economic-Development Linkages**

South African scholarship increasingly situates municipal fresh produce market governance within a wider fin de siècle emphasis upon citizen participation as an end-of-development paradigm for local economic development. In the view of these theorists, whenever smallholder farmers, informal traders, women's organizations, and youth cooperatives participate in outlining the "rules of the game," allocation of resources shifts towards inclusive ends and thus transforms the constitutional promises of developmental local government into a lived reality (Kgobe, Mabeba & Mamokhere 2023). Participatory-

governance theorists argue further that deliberative forums such as community hearings, participatory budgeting, or even vendor committees can reduce information asymmetries between officials and marginalised actors, rendering policies more responsive and increasing state legitimacy (Vilakazi & Bosiu 2021). Tracer studies in and around Gauteng have yielded empirical evidence to indicate that municipalities with higher citizen engagement indices record swifter turnaround times on stall licence approvals and significantly fewer rent seeking complaints the concrete efficiency dividend of participatory rulemaking (Lowton 2021). However, it matters how deep and what form the engagement takes: consultative workshops designed merely to request feedback on pre-drafted by-laws rarely shift power relations; co-design processes in which stakeholders negotiate stall-fee schedules or quality grading criteria line by line are quite a different matter, having proven to shake up entrenched hierarchies in an extremely meaningful way (Kgobe, Mabeba & Mamokhere 2023).

Participation can intervene in ecological and technological changes in an equity-sensitive social-learning way. These oversight councils include women from rural cooperatives and urban consumer groups who have food-safety concerns and those who provide livelihood assurance to force market authorities to negotiate pesticide reduction targets for affordable certification routes (Ndhlovu & Majova 2023). The "mercados solidarios." of Latin America illustrate this negotiation. To prevent bribery, multi-stakeholder bodies used public lotteries to award stalls and crowdsourced inspection schedules. Thus, female control of key trading bays increased in three years (Specht, Bohn & Simón Rojo 2022). The South African record is young but promising: Limpopo vendors who attended municipal zoning seminars received a trial "women-priority lane" next to cold-storage units, which reduced spoilage by 18% and increased daily gross (Mashamaite 2023). Coalition weariness and leadership upheavals can quickly erode hard-won quotas unless they are included into municipal market by-laws (Raniga 2021).

Youth integration is another governance issue. KwaDukuza field research found that municipal consultative fora meet during business hours, denying young migrants who balance gig economy work and vended services the chance to attend (Mthiyane, Wissink & Chiwawa 2022). Attendance rises when youth task teams receive transit stipends and digital-platform voting. E-logistics stipends and mobile-money charge caps, previously ignored by senior committee members, are then discussed (Agholor, Ogujiuba & Shongwe 2023). Panel-econometric data show that municipalities with higher youth-representation ratios in their LED forums have stronger market-throughput volumes and vendor earnings,

even after accounting for infrastructural endowments (Ngepah, Saba & Mabindisa 2021). These findings support the global digital governance discourse, which warns that fintech implementation will be dominated by men and middle-aged people unless youth voices are involved in the development of fee tiers priced in data and interface languages (Deganis et al. 2021).

Occupying an extra place in the governance toolbox, participatory budgeting emphasises users marking municipal funds for infrastructure that directly addresses gaps in Lehamy inclusion shared pack-houses, digital literacy hubs, coconut composting units. Comparative studies show that just two to four percent of the capital budget co decided upon by vendor councils can trigger, attract, or match national or donor co-financing, thereby increasing the overall spending capacity (Vilakazi & Bosiu 2021). For example, Johannesburg's Ward 125 participatory budgeting cycle directed R4 million toward solar powered cold rooms co-owned by a women-and-youth cooperative; this asset was then used as collateral for a further R6 million concessional loans from the national SME Fund, thus showing how deliberative capital can leverage external finance (Pinedo-López et al. 2024). The same leverage logic is replicated by the international green-transition programmes: CWANA municipalities link community prioritised climate dashboards with targeted grants to ensure that digital climate-services do not bypass smallholder constituencies (Paul Jr et al. 2024).

Still, critics caution that the participation turns into the so-called “invited spaces” legitimising already cooked agendas, if power asymmetries remain unaddressed in the process. Afrocentric scholars weigh in on the need to establish counter-spaces vendor assemblies in self-organisation, women's caucuses, migrant-trader unions that strengthen negotiating capacity before entering the formal arenas and thus shift discursive frames from compliance to co-governance (Mawere & Mukonza 2025). This argument is supported by lessons from Cape Town's agro-ecology round tables: Farmer associations that had held autonomous strategy sessions entered into municipal consultations with united fronts on issues like compost-procurement subsidies and stall-fee rebates and forced concessions away from which individual actors were previously unable to achieve (Kroll 2021). Embedding such counter-spaces in formal policy through memoranda of understanding (MOUs) or arrangements for rotating co-chairs could serve as a safeguard against tokenism and secure continuity across electoral cycles.

Cross-regional and domestic studies are concurrent in arriving at one core thesis: participatory mechanisms need to be multi-scalar, embedded in law, and well-resourced to work. Producer buyer councils embed joint monitoring; multi-stakeholder lotteries act contra insider privileges; participatory budgets provide for infrastructure with an inclusive bent; and autonomous caucuses shore up marginalised voices. Translating these design logics for Joburg Market fits squarely into the charge of the XV BRICS Johannesburg II Declaration to equitable-development pathways (Declaration 2022). Nevertheless, glaring gaps remain—strong metrics relating participatory depth to digital-adoption equity, and systematic interrogation of the mediation (or silencing) of agro-ecological certification debates in civic forums, among them—thus justifying the mixed-methods approach adopted in this study to carve new governance space for an inclusive, climate-smart urban food system.

## **2.9 Chapter Summary**

Shedding light on these literature contributions, the literature review posits that interrelated forces shape inclusive participation in Joburg Market: apartheid- structural legacies; gender-youth disincentives; digitally mediated opportunities and risks; ecological imperatives; and the constraints imposed by participatory governance design. If evidence from the rest of the world needs to be followed, equitable outcomes are produced where transparent co-regulation, redistributive financing, and citizen oversight converge (Alita, Dries & Oosterveer 2021; Specht, Bohn & Simón Rojo 2022). However, gaps exist in marrying digital adoption metrics with gender data, in unpacking certification stall interplay, and in adapting global models to local realities. Addressing these gaps justifies the mixed-methods approach outlined in the next chapter.

### **Chapter 3: Research Questions**

Building on this contextual and theoretical groundwork set out in Chapters 1 and 2, this chapter will identify the precise research questions that will steer the inquiry into economic participation within transformation frameworks at the Joburg Market along with the central proposition set for empirical testing. The overarching aim of the study, which is to identify policy and practice frameworks that can effectively maximize and sustain smallholder, informal trader, and other historically marginalised economic participation in South Africa's largest market in the municipality (Malungane 2023; Tempia et al. 2023), finds its concrete expression in three narrowly targeted research questions.

The first research question asks: Which transformation frameworks most increase economic participation at the Joburg Market? This question seeks to move beyond cataloguing reforms to discerning the combinations of governance mechanisms, infrastructural investments, and capacity-building measures that demonstrably raise stall-access rates and turnover volumes among underrepresented suppliers and traders. Past studies show that various regulations have been introduced to include gender quotas and digital trading platforms, though their comparative effectiveness is still debatable (Tempia et al. 2023; Ndlovu et al. 2024).

The second question concerns daily market obstacles: What challenges do underrepresented groups face daily despite new models? Despite inclusionary policies, small suppliers and informal traders face structural bottlenecks like spatial marginalization in the market precinct, unclear fee schedules, and strict quality-grading requirements (Wegerif 2024; Van den Berg & Mearns 2021).

The final study question tests how environmental governance and logistics affect continued engagement. How do waste and supply-chain improvements affect long-term participation? Waste-management legislation and last-mile logistics improvements reduce transaction costs and pollution, making entry more enticing to newcomers (Mkuna & Wale 2022; Sahathu 2021).

The fundamental proposition underlying the set of research questions is that transformation frameworks custom-tailored to reconcile high-level policy objectives with the logistics of everyday fresh-produce trade will be the only means for deepening and sustaining economic participation in the Joburg Market. Contemporary institutional-economic literature emphasizes how generic "one-size-fits-all" reforms tend to crumble before entrenched local power structures (Vilakazi & Bosiu 2021; Goga & Mondliwa 2021).

To render the proposition workable, the study refers to three dimensions of independent variables established with research questions. First, the typology of transformation framework includes regulatory measures (revised licensing regimes and quality-grading criteria), technological innovations (mobile auction applications and algorithmic stall allocations), and infrastructural investments (shared cold-storage facilities and improved loading bays). Second, the nature and intensity of obstacles encountered in daily life include administrative burdens (lengthy permit processes, compliance documentation), spatial marginalisation in the market precinct, and information asymmetries that deprive newcomers of stall-availability or fee-structure awareness. Third, the scope of waste and supply-chain reforms cover means such as formalised waste-recovery systems, cooperative logistics hubs, and dedicated lanes for peri-urban produce. Each of these dimensions draws upon institutional-analysis frameworks linking macro-level reform to micro-level transaction costs (Kgobe, Mabeba & Mamokhere 2023).

In the rigorous testing of the hypothesis, a mixed-methods research design is proposed. These findings will then be triangulated with the qualitative findings from semi-structured interviews conducted with market managers, commission agents, smallholder suppliers, informal traders, and newcomer entrepreneurs. The interview guide will solicit respondents' perceptions on the capacity of the framework; their lived experience of inclusion or exclusion by it; and recommendations for further reform (Furidha 2023).

Data analysis will proceed with iterative coding and thematic synthesis. Reflexive thematic coding will be applied to qualitative transcripts, backed by memos and peer debriefing, to expose recurring patterns and outlier experiences (Alvesson, Sandberg & Einola 2022).

In an integrated manner, this operationalisation constitutes a genuine test of the hypothesis that only local, stakeholder-co-designed transformation frameworks can deliver broad and sustainable economic participation in the Joburg Market. Building on institutionalist frameworks, participatory governance insights, and decolonial critiques, this becomes the basis of a powerful empirical approach. The next chapters will offer an account of deployment for this mixed-methods design, keyed to the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, and to implications for policy and scholarship on inclusive market governance.

Chapter One raised research problems in the form of three interrelated questions, of which one preferred thesis is formulated, stating that only transformation frameworks that are sensitive to the context and co-design will engender economic participation of broad and

sustainable nature at Joburg Market. The subsequent chapters describe the empirical proof of these questions and discusses the testing of this hypothesis in detail, which thus serves to feed into local policy debates while also augmenting global scholarship on inclusive governance of markets.

## **Chapter 4: Research Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the research design and methods applied for the research. It explains the choice of methodology, purpose of research design, philosophy, approach selected, methodological choices, strategy, and time horizon. It addresses the population, unit of analysis, sampling method and size, measurement instrument, data gathering process, analysis approach, quality controls, and research (ethics limitations and delimitations).

### **4.2 Research Design**

Seeing the multifaceted experiences, we adopted a qualitative inductive design, which is especially apt when researchers need a rich, straightforward recitation of phenomena in their natural situations (Deganis et al., 2021). Qualitative description differs from those more theory-based qualitative methods in seeking to give an accurate representation of the events and processes as described by the participants themselves, rather than to test or generate grand theoretical models (Furidha 2023). According to Saunders and Lewis (2018), the inductive research approach is centred on closely examining the meaning that people ascribe to experiences. The design will allow the research to remain grounded in the voices of smallholder suppliers, traders, market managers, and newcomer entrepreneurs, keeping the analysis close to their very own language, concerns, and priorities.

Covering the study's overall layout, the study here is a platform for a cross-sectional, embedded case study focusing on the Joburg Market precinct (Yin, cited in Gupta & Gupta 2022). This format allows a comprehensive, situation-specific examination of participation dynamics while gathering evidence from interviews, field observations, and policy documents to understand transformation frameworks' practical operation. By embedding it in a single market locality, physical arrangements, regulatory processes, and interpersonal connections can be examined in detail, while comparing it across stakeholder groups provides transferable insights. Thus, the embedded case-study approach balances local relevance with general discourse on institutional economics, digital inclusion, and agroecology in emerging economies (Alvesson, Sandberg & Einola 2022).

### **4.3 Research Philosophy**

The qualitative, inductive, and interpretive approach proposed in the initial proposal was used to evaluate Joburg Market transformation models for marginal actor economic empowerment. Methodological literature is used to defend design choices and place the study in a qualitative research tradition (Mey 2022; Gupta & Gupta 2022). In the interpretive paradigm, social realities are the consequence of human experiences and interactions, not absolute facts (Mey 2022). This approach views Joburg Market as a liminal social area shaped by the sculptors who use it, not just a commercial hub. The interpretive approach favors market stakeholders' interpretation and responses to transformation frameworks over external success metrics.

### **4.4 Research Approach**

This study began with stakeholder narratives and observations and developed thematic comprehensions inductively. Inductive reasoning helped data patterns emerge organically, which is ideal for exploratory queries that seek contextualized interpretations. The strategy was used to show how institutional regulations and governance improvements affect municipal market participation.

### **4.5 Methodological Choices**

Generic qualitative research allowed interviewees to share their unique perspectives and experiences when answering research questions, unlike ethnography, narrative, case studies, or action research (Neubauer et al. 2019). Semi-structured interviews with key Joburg Market fresh produce market ecosystem actors were one of the study's methods. This strategy allowed for the collecting of precise data on economic engagement's causes and effects and the flexible, open-ended exploration of the research issues (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **4.6 Research Strategy**

An embedded case study focused on the Johannesburg Market. This method analyzed the transformation framework in its natural surroundings. By including market managers, smallholder farmers, merchants, and entrepreneurs, the strategy ensured that the data provided comprehensive insights into institutional, spatial, and technological structures that influenced participation (Alvesson et al., 2022).

## **4.7 Time Horizon**

Due to its cross-sectional nature, it provides a snapshot of market dynamics under current transformation frameworks, allowing contemporaneous experience analysis rather than retrospective or longitudinal reconstruction. This strategy maximizes contextual elements including produce seasonality, policy cycles, and infrastructure development within the study period while limiting time-series changes. By setting a precise timescale for data collection and analysis, the research ensures that its findings are relevant to Joburg Market's governance reforms and their economic participation consequences.

## **4.8 Population and Sampling Method**

### **4.8.1 Sampling Method**

All stakeholders in the Joburg Market and within the transformation frameworks are covered by this study. This population ranges from market managers charged with policy implementation and stall allocation; through municipal administrators whose domains of control extend over all municipal by-laws and regulations affecting the market; commission agents, responsible for brokerages between producers and buyers, and smallholder farmers on consignment of produce; informal traders playing their trade on peripheral bays; and impending entrepreneurs who have just bagged a stall licence. The very heterogeneity in this population regarding gender, age, enterprise size, years of market engagement, and access to capital and technology would ensure that the works consider the full range of experiences and perspectives.

As the study was exploratory and for on-site market research had practical necessities, participants were recruited via a convenience sample, whereby respondents would be accessible, available, and willing to share their experiences during the data collection period (Golzar, Noor & Tajik 2022). Since convenience sampling is often scrutinized for its limitation in representativeness, this could be acceptable in qualitative research where depth is emphasized over breadth (Stratton 2021). Because of the fluid and time-sensitive nature of market operations, this approach was further justified; subjects had to be engaged during their operational routines in such a way that would not unduly interfere with market functions.

Qualifying criteria were added to control selection in order to reduce possible bias through convenience sampling. The criteria ensured that the sample included management, commission agents, smallholders, informal vendors, newcomers, and demographic variables like gender and age. In effect, efforts at recruitment targeted the full cycle of

market transactions the morning auction sessions; the busy midday trading hours; and the afternoon hours when the last transactions were being made thereby maximizing exposure to the vast array of market actors. This mix of purposive -convenience strategy follows the methodological suggestions in field-based qualitative research, which concentrate on giving pragmatic access combined with particular inclusion of different standpoints (Bekele & Ago 2022).

#### **4.8.2 Sample Size**

Guided by sample size convention for qualitative methods, the study aimed at twelve to twenty in-depth interviews, a number proved enough for thematic saturation and still able to rationally accommodate the time and resource constraints (Coleman 2022). Saturation was continuously monitored throughout the data collection, with recruitment continuing until new interviews gave no new insights (Mishra & Alok 2022). This way, the emerging themes, whether pertaining to administrative hurdles, spatial marginalization, or adoption of digital platforms, received thorough exploration across multiple cases before termination of sampling.

Sampling above allowed the recruitment of participants symmetrically distributed across the vertical social and economic class structure of the market. Long-term commission agents presented the historical account of policy development; small-holder farmers on bottlenecks to upstream supply chains; informal traders on spatial and regulatory exclusions; managers on institutional logic and intention behind reforms, while emerging entrepreneurs narrated experiences with fresh-entry challenges. This broad purposive convenience sample provides empirical data for the strong thematic analysis of how transformation frameworks are viewed, enacted, and challenged in the Joburg Market.

#### **4.9 Measurement Instrument**

The principal data collection instrument employed in this study consisted of semi-structured interviews supported by systematized non-participant observation and extensive field notes.

##### **a. Survey Structure**

Semi-structured interviews worked really well as a method because they allowed the researcher to probe further into important issues that were unforeseen yet relevant whilst still keeping close ties to the research questions on transformation frameworks and dynamics of participation (Furidha 2023). The interview guide was constructed iteratively, drawing upon questions posed in the proposal and questions arising from the existing

literature on institutional arrangements, inhibitors to digital inclusion, and agroecological transitions within fresh produce markets (Deganis et al. 2021; Specht, Bohn & Simón Rojo 2022). Core questions invited respondents to share about their day-to-day life in trade, how they normally work with licensing bodies, their experiences in spatial allocation, and any engagement with digital platforms or logistics reforms.

## **b. Validity and Reliability of the Instrument**

Before fieldwork, two informants a market manager and an informal trader piloted the interview guide. The inquiries' procedural flow, cultural appropriateness, and clarity were assessed (Douglas 2022). Feedback was used to reorder the questions to prioritize general questions about everyday life and personal routines over domain-specific or situation-oriented prompts. A specific query about informal coping techniques like reciprocal credit arrangements or non-formal on-site storage was introduced to detect adaptive informal methods that the formal system might overlook. The pilot also stressed the significance of accommodating participants' language preferences by offering interviews in English, isiZulu, or Sepedi. This method prioritized information quality and participant comfort.

### **4.10 Data Gathering Process**

This time was four weeks, with interviews held in the vicinity of the market, either semi-private or private, lasting from forty-five minutes to an hour. With participant consent, the discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to maintain the language of the respondent (Jansen 2022). The transcriptions were then authenticated first against the recordings; later, a second checking would be based on the field observation notes that described any non-verbal likeness attached to the conversations or situational context.

### **4.11 Data Analysis Approach**

The study uses the economic market participant of the Joburg Market as a prime unit of analysis. This micro approach is intentional so as to chart the workings from the higher-order transformation frameworks (regulatory, technological, infrastructural) in the lived realities of individual market participants. From the view of an interviewee narrative as a single case, attention is given to stakeholder positions relating to heterogeneity: smallholder farmers, informal traders, commission agents, market managers, and newcomer's entrepreneurs. Institutional analysis techniques reduce institutional rules and

norms to individual transaction costs and decision-making processes; therefore, actors are important (Lei, Sahoo & Wager 2023).

When examining each phase of economic activity or its intersection, the administrative ability of actors to navigate their system, their spatial positioning within the market precinct, their use of digital tools, and their access to infrastructure like cold-storage or waste-management facilities must be considered. Administrative navigation is for stakeholders facing licensing, quality-grading, and fee schedules. Location is determined by whether performers are on prime sales floors or on the perimeter. Mobile auction apps or cashless payment systems indicate digital integration. Finally, they use common facilities like packhouses and waste-segregation sites to assess infrastructure access. Focusing on these variables allows cross-case comparisons to uncover market and policy-driven inclusion and exclusion trends (Lopez et al. 2021).

Qualitative approaches enable a contextual knowledge of social phenomena by constructing a line and arranging it on an individual scale (Deganis et al., 2021). A reductionist perspective may neglect the intricacies of economic participation in transformation frameworks, but the study will not. Instead, individual actors and interacting systems will be considered. Furthermore, this method complements decolonizing market studies critiques that call to foreground marginalized voices and localized epistemologies rather than imposing rigid conceptual monoliths (Mawere & Mukonza 2025).

The conceptualised analytical unit gives way to highly granular inspection into how those macroscopic interventions translate into micro-realities, thus allowing for detection of recurring themes along diverse experiences amongst stakeholders and identification of points of disjuncture, at least in terms of policy intent and actual practices, at Joburg Market (Specht, Bohn & Simón Rojo 2022).

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Besides interviewing, non-participant observations were conducted in the key areas of markets: sales floors, peripheral stalls, waste segregation, and pack-house facilities. In

all, over fifty hours were spent in observation, with field notes to describe the arrangement of the stalls, the signage for the digital-auction terminals, the interaction of vendors on commission with their agents, and the logistics of produce. Photographic sketches (where allowed) and memos described the proximity of spaces, queue formation, and the sharing of utilities by informal vendors. The observation data illuminated the interviews by triangulating participants' claims with visible actions and contextual setup (Jansen 2022).

#### **4.10 Data Gathering Processes**

The entire process was performed iterative data analysis parallel to data collection while adhering to qualitative best practices. The transcripts of the interviews, along with the field notes, were uploaded into qualitative data analysis software for systematic coding and theme development. Accordingly, the thematic analysis acquired following Braun and Clarke's framework (2006, in Ahmed 2024) was at the core of analyses. During this initial free-coding period, descriptive labels were applied by the researcher to segments of text that reflected developing concepts such as "licensing hurdles," "digital divide," "spatial marginalisation," and "cooperative logistics." Writing of memos took place simultaneously with the coding, which reflected analytical thoughts, possible causal mechanisms, and perhaps connections between cases (Köhler, Smith & Bhakoo 2022).

Subsequently, codes were grouped into thematic clusters correlated according to the independent variables of the study: transformation framework typologies (regulatory, technological, infrastructural), nature of day-to-day obstacles (administrative, spatial, informational), and scale of waste and supply-chain reforms. Axial coding proceeded to situate these clusters within higher-level categories, thereby affording cross-case comparison and the possibility of identifying patterns in how certain elements of the framework were related to reported participation levels (Specht, Bohn & Simón Rojo 2022).

Trustworthiness was also enhanced through member checks wherein six participants from various stakeholder categories looked over summary reports of preliminary findings and confirmed that the manner in which their experiences had been portrayed would be both accurate and meaningful (Coleman 2022). Modifications were suggested based on participant comments regarding the characterization of informal coping mechanisms and views on the effectiveness of collaborative governance bodies.

Themes received convergent validity from data-source triangulation, including interviews, observation notes, and documentary sources potentially relevant to the workings of the

panel, such as municipal stall-allocation bylaws and digital-platform user manuals (Jansen 2022). Occasions when documentary evidence appeared to conflict with the accounts of participants were taken as negative cases for further analysis. For example, the commission agent's version of the transparent lottery procedure conflicted with the participants' accounts voting for ad hoc allocation of spots, thus triggering more investigations into discretionary practice and power asymmetries (Ivey 2023).

Movement of reflexivity during the analysis was attained by keeping a research journal, where the researcher recorded his or her own assumptions, emotional reactions during interviews, or even sources of bias from prior theoretical commitments. Reflexivity measures such as these were considered for confirmability by both authors, implying that every analytic interpretation was firmly grounded on data and not under the domination of any researcher (Alvesson, Sandberg & Einola 2022).

The iterative coding; peer debriefing; member checking; and triangulations thereafter formed the thematic framework, which accounted for the constricting ways the transformation frameworks either afford or constrain ways toward economic participation at the Joburg Market. With this robust and rigorous analytic protocol, the study can now explore how bespoke policy-theory alignments with context-sensitive infrastructural interventions can sustainably include historically marginalized market actors.

#### **4.12 Quality Control Measures**

The research met Yadav (2022)'s credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability criteria, making it dependable. Credibility was ensured by peer debriefing, member verification, and long-term firm participation. According to Delgado-Hito and Romero-García (2021), “thick descriptions” of the location, participant features, and market circumstances ensured transferability to other municipal markets. For dependability, all method, coding scheme, and analytic memo decisions were documented in an audit trail. Finally, a reflexive journal revealed the researcher's assumptions and the completeness of raw data and analytic materials, which an external auditor could verify (Ahmed 2024).

Deidentified transcripts and password-protected audio and field notes were stored. Data and participant confidentiality were protected using pseudonyms for all study participants. A reflective diary recorded the researcher's positionality, methodological thoughts, and ethical difficulties for transparency (Alvesson, Sandberg & Einola 2022).

#### **4.13 Ethical Considerations**

The study followed national research ethical rules and qualitative inquiry standards (Potthoff, Hempeler & Scholten 2023). Before data collection began, the university research ethics committee gave full permission to ensure that any proposed study design, instruments, and procedures met institutional and legal requirements for human subject protection.

All responders signed a written consent form to investigate in the field. The form listed the study's purpose(s), procedures, benefits, risks, and optional participation. Participants were told they could leave at any time without penalty. They could also refuse to answer questions if they felt uncomfortable (Drolet et al. 2023). Using pseudonyms and removing participant identities from transcripts and reports ensured anonymity during the assent process.

Interviews were held in one of the few private or semi-private spaces in Joburg Market to ensure confidentiality. Due to the sensitivity of elite capture, informal trading, and selective market rule enforcement, the researcher used extreme care in assessing the perceived high likelihood of reprisal. Participants were informed that their replies will be anonymised and used for study at the start of each session. The aggregate findings would not be associated with any statement (Sperling 2022).

Data security standards were followed. Password-protected, encrypted devices contained digital transcriptions and audio recordings. The research team had exclusive access to a secure cabinet with all additional paper notes. Once the transcription and verification were completed, to further protect the confidentiality of the participants, the original audio files were deleted forever.

Continuous ethical reflexivity shaped the entire research process, with reflexive journals kept by the investigator to check power imbalances, emotional dynamics, and potential bias during interviews and analyses (Potthoff et al. 2023). The researcher had a reflexive responsibility to remain conscious of ethical issues as they arose, modifying procedures as may have been necessary, to ensure respect, beneficence, and justice throughout the research.

#### **4.14 Limitations of the Methodology**

There are a number of limitations inherent in the methodology adopted that need mentioning. The convenience sampling used here causes more or less selection bias toward participants that are available to be surveyed or candid at the Joburg market.

However, this sampling technique is an unavoidable choice given the ever-fluctuating market condition and thus limits any generalization of the findings beyond the Joburg Market (Stratton 2021). While purposive criteria were utilized to enhance representation, some sub-groups, for example, highly transient informal vendors, may be under-represented. Cross-sectional surveys capture the experience at a time and thus could never recognize how policy implications are shaping or how seasonal effects exacerbate the nuances of market participation. Longitudinal studies would really be required in order to make any credible assertions about the permanence of the trends in participation.

When participants were requested to give their own accounts, the data posed problems and-commerce-for-social-desirability bias. This was particularly so when the participants had to declare their compliance to a digital-platform requirement or municipal law. Perhaps, observation data could have supplemented policy documents in alleviating the problem, but it could never do so completely. Because one researcher conducted the data collection and analysis, the interpretation must have inevitably suffered from the subjectivities of the researcher. This limitation has been balanced by the use of reflexive journaling, peer debriefing, and transparent audit trails; thus, it exists till this day because in qualitative inquiry, the total objectivity can never truly be attained (Ahmed 2024).

The study defines the limited geographic scope, which is descriptive of the Joburg Market precinct and certain primary hinterlands of supply in Gauteng Province. There could be comparative perspectives that might arise, yet the study does not attempt any such generalisation at the country level. The data-gathering exercise hinges on semi-structured interview and participant observation, while access restrictions might constrain sample size for some actor groups-that is, commission agents suspicious of observance of commercial confidentiality. Time and resource constraints act present here in preventing them from longitudinal tracking of the impact of any policy. Notwithstanding such delimitations, triangulation of datasets secondary along with policy document sets will mitigate any threats to validity.

#### **4.15 Chapter summary**

Methodological positioning advanced in this chapter offers a rigorous, ethical, conscience-aligned, context-sensitive framework for the investigation of the influence of transformation frameworks on economic participation at the Joburg Market. This study's qualitative descriptive design, interpretative paradigm, purposive convenience sampling to capture stakeholder diversities, triangulation among data sources, and normal trustworthiness criteria lay the groundwork for examining all underlying mechanics that

facilitate or hinder inclusion. After discussing data collection, analysis, ethical protections, and limits, the reader is moved to the chapters on result presentation and discussion.

## **Chapter 5: Findings Stakeholder Perceptions of the Joburg Market Transformation Strategy**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the empirical findings from twelve semi-structured interviews with Johannesburg Market transformation stakeholders in an audit-ready manner. The analysis is arranged around the study questions and objectives, with each section linked to the interview questions that operationalized the constructs. The chapter begins with a technical, accessible explanation of Atlas.ti-driven theme analysis, which classifies, groups, and interprets data. The findings are contextualized by profiling respondents' demographics. The primary section of the chapter contains themes in accordance with the research question, includes representative verbatim quotations, details topic frequencies and respondent coverage, and identifies stakeholder group convergence and divergence. A brief declaration indicating recommendations were obtained through a defined interview block, as outlined in the authorized instrument, and a table that summarizes all study questions conclude the chapter. The methodological reporting follows best practises for high-quality thematic analysis and CAQDAS-supported reporting, including an audit trail, codebook stability, and saturation checks (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Guest, Namey, & Chen, 2020; Friese, 2019; ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH, 2023).

### **5.2 Analytical Approach: Atlas.ti Workflow, Coding and Theming**

A rigorous reflective thematic analysis was performed using Atlas.ti 23. Five steps were taken: data preparation and familiarization, open coding, codebook consolidation, theme development, and frequency and co-occurrence diagnostics verification. Interpretive and inductive analysis prioritized stakeholder meaning-making and rigorous traceability from quotations to codes, code groups, and final themes. This method follows the latest consensus principles for reflective theme analysis and transparent reporting in qualitative research and CAQDAS contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2021; O'Connor & Joffe, 2020; ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH, 2023).

The data preparation and familiarization process included verbatim transcription of twelve audio-recorded interviews, transcript verification, and participant anonymization using unique participant identities. Each transcript was a separate Atlas.ti document. Memos were used to capture analytic conclusions and reflective observations after each interview for auditability and confirmability per qualitative trustworthiness recommendations (Ahmed, 2024).

The corpus was explored line-by-line using open coding. The initial coding cycle produced 132 preliminary codes for 416 quotations. This open pool of experiences included “opaque budget knowledge,” “manual invoicing,” “rental relief benefit,” “banking barriers,” “gendered time constraints,” “premium stall access,” “packhouse displacement,” “algorithm fairness concern,” “equipment promise gap,” “agro-processing pivot,” and “stakeholder roadshows.” Code proliferation at this level is typical and desirable in reflective theme analysis if consolidation is done and documented properly (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Friese, 2019).

Atlas.ti's Code Manager and duplicate detection techniques consolidated semantic overlaps and harmonised labels during codebook consolidation. Atlas.ti code groups created code families for the four research concerns. After an iterative review, the codebook stabilized at 64 codes across 412 quotations, indicating acceptable analytic density without overfitting. Code definitions, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and exemplar quotations were included in an explicit codebook to improve qualitative reporting's dependability and replicability (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020).

Axial connection of related codes inside each research query's code family helped generate themes. The analyst examined document co-activation and code proximities using Atlas.ti's Co-occurrence Explorer. Stress testing assessed thematic candidates' internal coherence and external distinctiveness. Ten themes from the four study topics comprised the end-state. Each theme included operational definitions, constituent codes, and coverage metrics. The resultant themes followed reflexive thematic principles by maintaining conceptual faithfulness to the data and allowing explanatory synthesis (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Verification and robustness testing used four diagnostics. A Code-Document Table from Atlas.ti was used to check coverage across the twelve interviews. The second stage was to check code co-occurrence matrices for spurious links and thematic cluster stability. Third, saturation grids measured saturation. After the ninth interview, no substantive codes were found, indicating saturation. Nuanced meaning elaborations remained until the twelfth interview, consistent with literature meaning saturation levels (Guest et al., 2020). Fourth, a qualitative methods adviser who was not involved in data collection provided a brief peer debrief on the codebook and theme labels, confirming qualitative inquiry's credibility and confirmability (Ahmed, 2024).

Along with frequency tables, each findings section lists the number of themes per study question. To maintain anonymity and interpretive context, quotations are assigned by role and number of participants. The number of unique participants who endorse a theme, not the number of coded quotations, determines frequency counts. Table 5.1 presents the coding architecture and theme distribution as exported from Atlas.ti.

*Table 5.1: Atlas.ti Coding Architecture, Code Volumes and Themes by Research Question*

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Code Family Size (n codes)</b>	<b>Quotations in Family (n)</b>	<b>Final Themes (n)</b>	<b>Thematic Labels</b>
RQ1 Barriers to inclusive participation	22	168	3	Limited awareness and strategy visibility; Unequal access and incumbency advantage; Informal exclusion culture
RQ2 Digital and agro-ecological influences	14	86	2	Emerging digital readiness with low transaction integration; Agro-processing and waste minimisation as adaptive innovation
RQ3 Regulations, allocation and participation	17	102	3	Procedural opacity with operational–strategic gap; Limited voice and slow administrative response; Weak accountability and dispute resolution
RQ4 Policy levers and collaborations	11	56	2	Institutional partnerships and multi-actor alignment; Transformation capacity supports without capital depth

Source: Atlas.ti 23 Code Manager Export and Code-Document Table

### 5.3 Participant Profile and Demographics

The sample comprised twelve participants across the market governance and participation ecosystem, including market management, commission-related officials, market agents, small-scale farmers, packhouse operators and agro-processing SMMEs. Interviews ranged from 45 to 75 minutes. Gender, role, beneficiary status and tenure were captured to allow analytical disaggregation where relevant. The interview set was balanced to include both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of the transformation programme, enabling assessment of differential experiences within the same institutional environment. The demographic spread reflects the stakeholder heterogeneity that characterises the Joburg Market ecosystem, which is necessary for a credible exploration of participation dynamics in a complex market setting (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Guest et al., 2020). Table 5.2 provides the demographic and contextual profile of interviewees.

*Table 5.2 Participant Demographics and Context*

<b>ID</b>	<b>Role/Title</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Years in Market/Role</b>	<b>Beneficiary Status</b>	<b>Start Date with JM Initiatives</b>	<b>Notes</b>
P1	Market Agent Director, new entrant	Female	0–1	Beneficiary	April 2025	100 percent woman-owned agency
P2	Acting Senior Manager, Commission Business	Male	5–10	Not applicable	Not applicable	Management perspective on systems
P3	Acting Specialist, Property	Male	5–10	Not applicable	Not applicable	Internal governance and allocation

P4	Market Agent Director and Salesman	Male	16	Non- beneficiary	Not applicable	Long-serving incumbent agent
P5	Small-scale Farmer	Female	6	Non- beneficiary	2022	Supplies JM since 2022
P6	SMME Founder, fresh juice agro- processor	Female	3–5	Beneficiary	2024– 2025	Firm located on JM premises
P7	SMME Founder, cold-pressed juice	Male	1–2	Beneficiary	Sept 2024	Store on JM premises
P8	Market Agent Director, new entrant	Male	0–1	Beneficiary	July 2025	Start-up agent under programme
P9	SMME Packhouse Operator	Male	3–5	Beneficiary	2024– 2025	Serves small-scale farmers
P10	Small-scale Farmer	Female	5	New supplier	6 months at JM	New entrant supplier
P11	Manager, Consignmen t Control	Male	5–10	Not applicable	Not applicable	Operational systems and controls
P12	Fruit Hall Manager	Male	5–10	Not applicable	Not applicable	Hall operations and sales oversight

Source: Interview transcripts and consent forms

## 5.4 Mapping of Research Questions to Interview Guide Items

The interview instrument comprised four blocks that aligned to the research questions. RQ1 was operationalised primarily through Block A items 1 to 5. RQ2 aligned to items spanning Block A and Block C on technology and practices, as well as probes on agro-ecological practices. RQ3 was captured mainly through Block B items on transparency, inclusion and dispute handling. RQ4 was captured through Block D, where participants were asked for recommendations and views on monitoring and effectiveness. This alignment ensures that each research objective is directly traced to data collection prompts, a reporting standard that increases the transparency and credibility of qualitative findings (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). Table 5.3 demonstrates the mapping that guided the analysis.

*Table 5.3: Mapping Research Questions to Interview Instrument Items*

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Interview Guide Section and Items</b>	<b>Conceptual Focus</b>
RQ1 Barriers to inclusive participation	Block A: Items 1-5	Participation changes, benefits, challenges, empowerment, business performance
RQ2 Digital platforms and agro-ecology	Block A: Items 2-5; Block C: Items 1-4	Digital adoption, transaction modalities, agro-processing, waste practices
RQ3 Regulations, allocation and participation	Block B: Items 1-4	Transparency, selection criteria, decision-making and voice, disputes
RQ4 Policy levers and collaborations	Block D: Items 1-4	Feedback incorporation, KPIs and scorecards, success indicators, recommendations

Source: Interview Guide (Appendix B)

## **5.5 Findings by Research Question**

### **5.5.1 Research Question 1: Structural, Institutional and Socio-cultural Barriers to Inclusive Participation**

The first research question examined the predominant barriers constraining marginalised actors' access to and benefits from the Joburg Market. The analysis yields three robust themes: limited awareness and strategy visibility, unequal access and incumbency advantage, and informal exclusion culture. These themes emerged from 168 coded quotations across 22 RQ1 codes. Together, they depict a participation environment marked by information asymmetry, path-dependent power structures and social closure, with pockets of positive experience among specific beneficiaries.

#### **Theme 1: Limited awareness and strategy visibility**

The data show an extensive visibility gap regarding the transformation strategy's content, access pathways, selection criteria and budgetary use. Nine out of twelve participants explicitly reported limited or no awareness of the formal strategy, including three beneficiaries. Participants described reliance on hearsay and social media to infer developments, rather than structured communication channels. P9 captured the deficit succinctly by noting not being aware that the strategy had been launched and by pointing to the absence of official communication. P4, with sixteen years in the market, emphasised that there had never been a session explaining the strategy or opportunities. Internal officials corroborated inconsistencies in internal communication, with P2 noting instances where projects were heard about only once already running. The few who found processes transparent tended to refer to specific transactional processes such as invoicing and consignment tracking rather than to strategic governance, indicating a bifurcation between operational transparency and strategic opacity.

Quotations illustrate the experiential texture of this theme. P9 stated that he was not aware that the strategy exists and suggested it might only be on the website. P4 emphasised the absence of any session explaining the strategy over a long tenure. P2 acknowledged that sometimes projects were only heard about once underway. By contrast, P1 and P10 highlighted transparency in specific operational processes, referencing rental relief allocation communications and multi-party verification of consignments respectively. The thematic pattern implies that institutional communication achieves procedural clarity in routine operations while withholding or diffusing strategic content, a dynamic consistent

with known pitfalls in technocratic transformation regimes where formal plans are not internalised by intended beneficiaries (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Frequency and coverage reflect the salience of this barrier. Theme coverage was eleven of twelve participants. Nine voiced low awareness, two referenced operational transparency, and one reported mixed experience. Table 5.4 reports theme frequencies for RQ1.

#### Theme 2: Unequal access and incumbency advantage

Eight participants described entrenched asymmetries that favour established agents and suppliers, particularly in scale-sensitive practices, buyer linkages and informal influence. P8 characterised the trading floors as predominantly white-dominated and framed access as dependent on buy-in from incumbents. P9 observed that niches intended for smallholders and packhouse services were quickly occupied by existing businesses, undermining the intended transformation channel. P5 summarised the bargaining asymmetry by noting that small-scale farmers are price takers, unable to set minimum thresholds in the way commercial farmers do through instructions to agents. P2 acknowledged that the funding ecosystem remains white-dominated and linked this to volume thresholds, an admission that connects the financial and relational engines of market power.

The pattern is consistent: beneficiaries can achieve positive outcomes when rent relief and visibility combine with strong networks, while new smallholders and emergent agents struggle against volume-based commission structures, buyer loyalty towards incumbents and the absence of early-stage capital. These mechanisms match well-known features of dual market structures where liberalised rules without redistributive mechanisms amplify incumbency privilege, a dynamic observed across market governance contexts (Guest et al., 2020).

#### Theme 3: Informal exclusion culture

Seven participants described an informal culture that sets unwritten performance expectations and mediates legitimacy through dense trust networks. P4 argued that transformation has not been protective and new entrants are expected to perform like operators who have been in place for decades. P6 explained that established agents monopolise supplier relationships, making it hard to find shelf space. These patterns rely less on explicit policy barriers than on the gravitational pull of historical relationships and reputation economies, which constitute a classic form of social closure in markets.

Participants described the culture as not overtly hostile, but quietly gatekeeping through taken-for-granted norms. The testimonies imply that formal policy shifts are countervailed by tacit organisational practices that reinforce stratified access. Table 5.4 summarises the RQ1 themes and frequencies.

*Table 5.4: RQ1 Themes, Frequencies and Respondent Coverage*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Participants Endorsing (n of 12)</b>	<b>Representative Quotations</b>
Limited awareness and strategy visibility	11	P9: "I'm not aware that the strategy is there and it's been launched." P4: "Sixteen years I've been here, and never once have we been called to a session explaining what this strategy is." P2: "Sometimes, we only hear of projects when they are already running."
Unequal access and incumbency advantage	8	P8: "A predominantly white-dominated space ... without that buy-in, it's difficult to access opportunities." P5: "We are price takers ... I can't do that." P2: "The funding ecosystem remains white-dominated."
Informal exclusion culture	7	P4: "You're expected to perform like the big guns who've been here for 30 years." P6: "New players struggle to find space on the shelves."

Source: Atlas.ti 23 Code-Document Table and Quotation Manager

### **5.5.2 Research Question 2: Digital Platforms and Agro-ecological Initiatives — Influence on Entry, Price and Bargaining Power**

The second research question interrogated whether digitalisation and agro-ecology reconfigure participation opportunities. Two themes emerged: emerging digital readiness with low transaction integration, and agro-processing and waste minimisation as adaptive innovation. Fourteen RQ2 codes captured 86 quotations spanning technology adoption, cash flow implications, brand effects and sustainability pivots.

Theme 4: Emerging digital readiness with low transaction integration

Participants reported clear gains in digital visibility and brand legitimacy linked to Joburg Market association, but they also described very limited integration of end-to-end e-commerce and cashless operations. P7 emphasised increased visibility and buyer connections, crediting network effects for retail listings. P6 described how market events improved social media following and brand traction. P5, however, reported that operations remain manual with paper invoices and phone calls, expressing a gap between outward digital presence and transaction-layer digitisation. P11 described training and information sharing as current vehicles, indicating a gradualist trajectory towards digital adoption. The picture is one of early adoption at the branding layer without substantive penetration into transaction processing, price discovery or payments, implying minimal direct impact on bargaining power or margins for low-volume traders in the short term. This pattern is consistent with global evidence that digital gains initially accrue to actors already positioned to exploit visibility, while transactional inclusion requires intentional design and investment (Modiba, Shai, & Phago, 2024; ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH, 2023).

**Theme 5: Agro-processing and waste minimisation as adaptive innovation**

Three participants described deliberate shifts into agro-processing to reduce waste and diversify revenue streams. P6 noted turning surplus tomatoes into sauces and dried vegetables, creating an additional income stream. P9 confirmed the feasibility of processing unsold fresh produce but emphasised equipment cost barriers. The narratives demonstrate grassroots innovation with strong logic but limited capital support, suggesting that sustainability-aligned pivots can emerge organically when immediate market constraints exist, but they require financial scaffolding to scale. The absence of structured finance or integrated technology transfer arrangements constrains these adaptations from translating into durable bargaining power or price realisation, despite their promise. Table 5.5 presents RQ2 theme frequencies and illustrative evidence.

*Table 5.5: RQ2 Themes, Frequencies and Respondent Coverage*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Participants Endorsing (n of 12)</b>	<b>Representative Quotations</b>
Emerging digital readiness with low	7	P7: “We’ve gained visibility and credibility with stronger networks and buyer connections.” P6: “People now follow our pages because we post

transaction integration		when we are at Joburg Market events.” P5: “Everything is still manual ... paper invoices, phone calls.”
Agro-processing and waste minimisation as adaptive innovation	3	P6: “We started drying vegetables and making spices ... it reduced waste and opened another income stream.” P9: “We could process what farmers can’t sell fresh, but the challenge is equipment costs.”

Source: Atlas.ti 23 Code-Document Table and Quotation Manager

### 5.5.3 Research Question 3: Municipal Regulations, Stall Allocation and Participation- Facilitators and Constraints

The third research question assessed the extent to which current regulations, allocation procedures and participatory forums facilitate or hinder inclusion. Three themes emerged with strong coverage: procedural opacity with an operational–strategic gap, limited voice and slow administrative response, and weak accountability and dispute resolution. Seventeen RQ3 codes captured 102 quotations.

Theme 6: Procedural opacity with an operational–strategic gap

Participants articulated a clear distinction between operational transparency and strategic opacity. Operational processes such as consignment tracking and invoice verification were perceived as transparent by some, as evidenced by P10 describing daily multi-party verification and P11 detailing traceability via unique gate numbers under the Market Bylaws. However, strategic domains including beneficiary selection criteria, budget allocation and transformation targets were widely perceived as opaque. P8 rated transparency as three out of ten and reported hearing rumours of a budget without visibility into its use. P3 explained that dispersed departmental responsibilities contribute to information not reaching beneficiaries. The evidence indicates that while routine administrative controls are codified and traceable, the governance of strategic transformation remains insufficiently communicated and weakly participatory. This pattern undermines stakeholder trust and limits programme legitimacy, risks frequently documented in public-sector transformation when transparency is limited to procedural rather than allocative or strategic domains (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Theme 7: Limited voice and slow administrative response

Six stakeholders reported tokenistic consultation and delayed feedback cycles. P8 described being informed after decisions were taken, framing engagement as notification rather than co-decision. P7 reported that submissions in one consultation had not received feedback. P6 appreciated support but stated never sitting in a meeting where stakeholders co-planned. These accounts point to a consultation modality that solicits inputs but does not confer decision rights or timely responsiveness. The pattern degrades the utility of participation, in turn reducing the perceived fairness and efficacy of the programme’s governance design.

**Theme 8: Weak accountability and dispute resolution**

Four participants highlighted unclear grievance channels and reliance on informal mediation. P9 said that problems were taken to someone known, rather than an official process, and P4 noted sporadic responses to written complaints. P11 reported that internal mechanisms exist and that issues are routed to the relevant function, yet participants were often unaware of these pathways. The prevalence of informal resolution undermines procedural fairness and can reinforce the power of social networks over due process. The resulting ambiguity dampens confidence that grievances will result in consistent remedies. This gap is consequential because dispute resolution is the enforcement backbone of any inclusive market governance system. Table 5.6 summarises RQ3 themes and frequencies.

*Table 5.6: RQ3 Themes, Frequencies and Respondent Coverage*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Participants Endorsing (n of 12)</b>	<b>Representative Quotations</b>
Procedural opacity with an operational–strategic gap	9	P8: “You hear rumours there’s a budget, but we’ve never seen how it’s used.” P10: “My invoice gets signed ... the Joburg Market knows how much produce I dropped.” P11: “Consignments are tracked through unique gate numbers.”
Limited voice and slow administrative response	6	P8: “By the time SMMEs find out about a policy, decisions have already been taken.” P7: “We never heard back about our submissions.” P6:

		"I've never sat in a meeting where we plan together."
Weak accountability and dispute resolution	4	P9: "If there's a problem, you go to someone you know; there's no official process." P4: "Responses to written complaints were sporadic."

Source: Atlas.ti 23 Code-Document Table and Quotation Manager

#### 5.5.4 Research Question 4: Policy Levers and Collaborations most likely to Redress Participation Inequities

The fourth research question identified policy levers and collaborations with the greatest promise. Two themes emerged strongly: institutional partnerships and multi-actor alignment, and transformation capacity supports without capital depth. Eleven codes captured 56 quotations related to partnerships, support instruments, finance, and implementation fidelity.

##### Theme 9: Institutional partnerships and multi-actor alignment

Seven participants recognised the value and growth of partnerships with entities such as GDARD, the NEF, the Land Bank and the W&RSETA. P6 credited W&RSETA with enabling attendance at compliance workshops. P2 described efforts to link with NEF and Land Bank to expand funding options. P11 explained that transformation is a collective enterprise, with multiple departments contributing to outcomes, and highlighted performance tracking through agent turnovers, bookings and support programmes. While the alignment is promising, P8 cautioned that agencies sometimes work in silos, leading to duplicative administrative burdens such as repeated forms. The theme indicates that institutional intent exists and that partnerships can expand the resource base and learning capacity. However, coordination quality remains uneven, and the conversion of partnerships into accessible finance for beneficiaries is incomplete.

##### Theme 10: Transformation capacity supports without capital depth

Nine participants praised non-financial support such as rental relief, workspace provision and exposure to market networks. P6 detailed the practical value of rent relief that allowed operations to take hold and scale. P7 described how overhead relief enabled expanded production and distribution. P1 and others welcomed access to expos and workshops that converted institutional standing into market credibility. Yet, a near-universal view held that

the absence of direct financial support for working capital, equipment and operations is the most constraining gap. P1 stated that capital would have changed the trajectory for emerging agencies. P7 described current support as valuable but inadequate for long-term growth without affordable finance. P4 and P3 corroborated the structural constraint of limited access to finance. P8 alleged an implementation capacity gap in promised equipment delivery across several essentials including computers, printers, forklifts and furniture, which were inconsistently fulfilled. The combined effect of non-financial support without capital depth is a scaffolding without a foundation, where visibility improves but viability remains fragile. The evidence is unambiguous: capital flows and implementation fidelity are the decisive levers to convert short-term relief into sustainable inclusion. Table 5.7 summarises RQ4 themes and frequencies.

*Table 5.7: RQ4 Themes, Frequencies and Respondent Coverage*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Participants Endorsing (n of 12)</b>	<b>Representative Quotations</b>
Institutional partnerships and multi-actor alignment	7	P6: "The partnership with W&RSETA helped us attend workshops and understand compliance." P2: "We're linking with the NEF and Land Bank to expand funding options." P11: "Each department has a role to play."
Transformation capacity supports without capital depth	9	P6: "I've got a year grace not paying rental until I can pick up on sales." P1: "If we had capital to start up, it would have been different." P8: "Printers, forklifts, furniture promised but never delivered."

Source: Atlas.ti 23 Code-Document Table and Quotation Manager

## **5.6 Cross-cutting Observations and Triangulation**

A coherent causal pattern unites all study queries. Strategic opacity and weak participatory design reduce trust and voice, preventing new entrants and smallholders from using operational supports to continue economic involvement. Non-financial measures like rental relief and market branding help maintain viability without working capital, equipment, or dependable conflict resolution. They do not affect price realization or bargaining leverage. Digital initiatives have increased visibility and legitimacy, but they are

still detached from transaction flows and payments, reducing their margin-distributive influence. Agro-processing pivots are unfunded and unrelated to allocation norms, limiting their breadth and persistence but they are entrepreneurial and can minimize waste. Partnerships with state and quasi-state institutions have extended training and networks, but low conversion to funding and coordination frictions have reduced their transformative output.

Atlas.ti co-occurrence queries strengthen and triangulate these inferences. To begin with, “limited awareness and strategy visibility” and “limited voice and slow administrative response” often co-activate, suggesting a structural link between communication and participation problems. Beneficiaries who are uninformed of selection criteria or budgetary allocations report being notified after decisions. These conditions create an obvious cycle: Low transparency leads to low trust, which reduces engagement and feedback that could improve programs. The pattern is a standard illustration of transformation initiatives where ordinary activities are transparent but major decisions are not. This legitimacy gap hinders implementation (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

In addition, most beneficiary transcripts included “lack of working capital” and “rental relief” together, indicating that alleviation without capital deepening is common. Participants often described how rent-free access helped them start their firms, but a lack of funds for packaging, salaries, equipment, or logistics limited their growth. This co-occurrence supports the visibility-viability analytical distinction. Trading from a market-branded website boosts firms' visibility. Viability is unstable without liquidity to withstand shocks, negotiate terms, or invest in core assets. The recurrent, concrete accounts of actors whose firms remain undercapitalized demonstrate the connection.

Furthermore, “digital visibility” and “manual transactions.” captured digitalization today. Participants said Joburg Market events and associations enhanced web and social media presence. They found that billing, ordering, and payments were still done by phone or paper. Technology adopted at the communication layer but not the transaction layer follows this pattern. Marketing legitimacy is achieved without significant transaction cost or payment risk changes. Comparative studies show that better-positioned actors make early digital gains, supporting the interview evidence. Inclusive transaction-layer digitisation requires purposeful design, multilingual interfaces, unbanked cash-out options, and charge tiers that protect small margins (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020).

Additionally, the constraint profile for sustainability-aligned diversification is “agro-processing pivot” and “equipment costs.” When extra produce is dried or sauced, post-harvest losses are avoided and new revenue sources are created. Without concessional finance, shared services, or cooperative ownership, equipment and certification are prohibitively expensive, even at a small scale. Sustainability transitions can perpetuate inequalities if low-capital actors bear cost burdens without supportive finance and governance (Guest, Namey, & Chen, 2020). Interviews support this widespread evidence.

Triangulation beyond co-occurrence strengthens these patterns. Initially, observation memoranda showed long lines at peripheral counters and the use of paper invoices and handwritten ledgers during peak hours, supporting manual transactions and peripheral disadvantage. Second, inside sources described gate-number-based traceability and bylaw-based consignment control, supporting the discovery that operational processes are visible despite strategic processes being opaque. Third, the lack of publicly accessible criteria or budget reports supports strategic opacity, while documentation references to roadshows and an Opportunity Centre support participant narrative of training and information-sharing. By linking interview narratives, observable practice, and internal process descriptions, the analytic chain creates a coherent cross-cutting diagnosis.

Nuanced concepts include outliers and positive deviation. A beneficiary agent and a new supplier indicated good transparency, but their references were focused on transactional operations including daily verification, invoice signature, and rental relief decision communication. These examples do not negate strategic opacity. They set a boundary: the market's administrative and audit processes work as expected, but the transformation strategy's allocative and participative components are poorly articulated and communicated. Reflexive thematic analysis predicts and recognizes negative circumstances by refining and limiting claims to the right system level (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

Thus, cross-cutting evidence stresses integration. Communication, participation, finance, technology, and sustainability instruments only work when combined to meet binding restrictions. Without respite, exposure, and networks, liquidity and voice maintain incumbency advantages, according to research. Without digital visibility, transaction integration and egalitarian fee structures do not shift bargaining power. Without equipment financing and quality assistance, agro-processing waste reduction is pilot-scale. Uncoordinated financing and delivery cooperation suffer from administrative duplication. Co-activation patterns, document checks, and observation notes support the integrated

logic, which follows rigorous qualitative synthesis guidelines for policy and program enhancement (Guest et al., 2020; ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH, 2023).

### **5.7 Clarification on Recommendations Elicitation**

Block D of the interview guide invited recommendations. Questions about feedback, monitoring, key performance indicators, and transformation program improvements ended each interview. This structure allowed all participants, regardless of governance experience, to make specific ideas. The recommendations corpus saturated in the twelfth transcript, and no new categories arose after the tenth interview. Semi-structured interviews in coherent field settings should fall within this range (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

The recommendations always focused on their function and experience. Two immediate procedures were stressed by beneficiaries. Budgets, selection criteria, and implementation schedules were communicated openly. The authority explained its choices and rationales at quarterly stakeholder sessions. This insistence responds to strategic opacity by limiting information flow and making decisions clear to turn consultation into accountability. Second, composite capital provision. Seed grants or low-interest working-capital loans were requested for basic equipment, early staff salary, and packaging. Rental assistance recipients knew cash-flow support would have changed their survival trajectory. The proposed solutions addressed specific, unfunded needs that small and fledgling enterprises face.

Market access and transaction friction reduction were non-beneficiaries' and incumbents' priorities. Buyer links to municipal and connected public institutions and a deeper understanding of commission mechanics and quality evaluation were included. Credible off-take agreements and restrictions are emphasized in these recommendations. Literacy can boost underprivileged performers' incomes before digitization. Management responders stressed the importance of interdepartmental alignment on performance tracking, streamlining involvement with NEF, Land Bank, and W&RSETA, and consolidating collaborations. Their recommendations focused on institution cooperation and throughput.

All positions had three enabling circumstances. First, a transformation scorecard was released with market actor-relevant performance and inclusion indicators including survival rates, repeat buyer counts, and profit modifications, not headcount optics. Second, each beneficiary had a single point of contact in the market's transformation team

who delivered the promised supports. The third was institutionalizing feedback loops, which allowed participants to see how their inputs affected plans over time. Participants said observable response builds institutional confidence most.

These recommendations were policy and cooperation tools for RQ4. Memos differentiated stakeholder types, while Atlas.ti code groups for Block D related quotations to RQ4 themes. The elicitation design ensures that participants' recommendations are the outcome of a systematic, final-stage cognitive synthesis, not ad hoc remarks, which strengthens the findings. Analytically, this means the study has a well-defined set of practice-oriented recommendations based on institutional behavior and lived constraints, which is the goal of applied qualitative inquiry in governance settings.

### **5.8 Integration with Interview Questions**

Instruments are closely linked to findings. Block A for RQ1 shows that participation is stratified and mediated by incumbency and informal norms. The transformation strategy's influence on participation yielded narratives of initial access and branding benefits for some recipients, while the benefits and challenges items indicated information and bargaining asymmetries. Inclusion and empowerment prompted clear comparisons between transformation objectives and participant lived experiences, revealing gatekeeping, agent influence, and price-taking. Operations like volumes, spoilage, and customer retention were utilized to anchor business performance queries concerning survival and growth.

Digital and sustainable practises interacted with support and adequacy, beneficial programmes, and RQ2 support needs. Participants viewed training and exposure as digital visibility and described their limits when transactions were manual. Daily operational tools showed little contactless payments and e-ordering, which explains why branding advantages did not transfer into margin gains. Questions concerning helpful programs led to agro-processing narratives, which were related to equipment and money limits, revealing the sustainability pivot cutoff point.

RQ3's transparency item generated detailed system transparency and lack thereof perceptions. Criteria awareness differentiated operational-rule understanding from strategic-rule invisibility. In the decision-making participation item, notification was preferred over co-decision. The disputes item's clear descriptions of social networks and informal escalation channels support weak accountability. In their responses to these topics, internal management acknowledged communication and cross-departmental

coordination issues as well as routine operating controls and grievance routing. Informative contrast supports the operational-strategic analytic barrier.

RQ4 input, KPIs, and success indicators yielded theme-structured suggestions. In the absence of observable KPIs, accountability was lacking, and participants preferred success measures that represent value distribution and survival rather than activity counts. The recommendations item included role-specific solutions and testable delivery mechanisms like single-contact delivery and buyer links. The alignment goes beyond schematics. Atlas.ti codes interview material to RQ topics and uses quotations and memoranda to preserve the chain of evidence. The clear transition from instrument to topic meets the latest CAQDAS-assisted qualitative reporting criteria (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

### **5.9 Quality and Trustworthiness**

The analytic process meets contemporary criteria for qualitative trustworthiness. Credibility is supported by verbatim transcription, quotation density, triangulated code verification in Atlas.ti and targeted peer debrief. Dependability is anchored in a maintained audit trail comprising memos, codebook versions, and Atlas.ti exports, including the Code-Document Table and co-occurrence matrices. Confirmability is enhanced by systematic memoing and the explicit reporting of coding counts and conventions. Transferability is addressed by presenting thick context on stakeholder roles, tenure and beneficiary status, enabling readers to judge analytical resonance for similar municipal market contexts. These measures align with current guidance for rigorous qualitative reporting and CAQDAS-supported analysis (Ahmed, 2024; Köhler, Smith, & Bhakoo, 2022; ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH, 2023).

### **5.10 Summary Table of Findings across Research Questions**

Table 5.8 consolidates the findings at a glance by aligning each research question to the final themes, frequency coverage and the instrument items that generated the evidence. This table serves as a navigational bridge to the discussion chapter and as a transparent index for readers and reviewers.

*Table 5.8: Summary of Findings by Research Question, Themes, Frequencies and Instrument Traceability*

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Final Themes</b>	<b>Participants Endorsing (n of 12)</b>	<b>Principal Interview Items</b>
RQ1 Barriers to inclusive participation	Limited awareness and strategy visibility	11	Block A: Q1 participation changes, Q2 benefits, Q3 challenges, Q4 inclusion, Q5 business performance
	Unequal access and incumbency advantage	8	Block A: Q2 benefits, Q3 challenges, Q4 inclusion
	Informal exclusion culture	7	Block A: Q3 challenges, Q4 inclusion
RQ2 Digital and agro-ecology	Emerging digital readiness with low transaction integration	7	Block A: Q2 benefits, Q5 performance; Block C: Q1 support received, Q2 adequacy, Q3 useful programmes
	Agro-processing and waste minimisation as adaptive innovation	3	Block C: Q1–Q4 capacity and support; Block A: Q2 benefits
RQ3 Regulations, allocation and participation	Procedural opacity with an operational–strategic gap	9	Block B: Q1 transparency, Q2 criteria awareness
	Limited voice and slow administrative response	6	Block B: Q3 decision-making participation
	Weak accountability and dispute resolution	4	Block B: Q4 dispute handling

RQ4	Policy levers and collaborations	Institutional partnerships and multi-actor alignment	7	Block D: Q1 feedback incorporation, Q2 KPIs, Q3 success indicators
		Transformation capacity supports without capital depth	9	Block C: Q1–Q4 support and adequacy; Block D: Q4 recommendations

Source: Atlas.ti 23 Code-Document Table, Interview Guide

### 5.11 Discussion-ready Synthesis

Critical to the inquiry is its empirical pattern. The transformation plan has given certain beneficiaries operational infrastructure and reputational legitimacy, but it has failed to establish strategic communication, participatory voice, and capital depth. This asymmetry creates a two-tiered landscape. Select first-stratum beneficiaries report significant rent and facility expense reduction, increased brand validity from Joburg Market, and network expansion that sometimes leads to retail listings. Second-tier smallholders, emergent agents, and non-beneficiaries are price takers in a market organized around high-volume incumbents with entrenched buyer contacts and funding mechanisms. Transformation in this tier is distant or opaque, with consultation after decisions and dispute resolution based on relationships rather than norms.

Digitalization is obvious in branding and communication but not transaction execution. Repercussions are expected. Without digital integration at the point of sale and settlement, low-volume actors' transaction velocity, theft risk, and fee incidence remain unaltered. Only volume-based pricing, quality-grading interpretation, and relationship-based client allocation have permanent negotiating leverage. Sustainability follows a similar logic. With assets to invest and avenues to sell, agro-processing and waste minimization are truly beneficial. Due to equipment and certification costs, pivots are scarce and fragile. Entrepreneurship is evident in all interviews. Finance and governance are not set up to scale pivots for the most limited actors.

Training and collaborations are necessary but insufficient. Institutional links have increased compliance seminar access and participant transformation vocabulary. However, if capital disbursements or coordinated, single-point asset delivery fail, these partnerships may increase administrative burdens. Participant claimed repeated agency

form-filling and unfulfilled promises of basic equipment. Even philosophically congruent program supporters lose trust in its execution.

Outliers inform. Two participants ascribed strong transparency to daily controls and invoice verification, not selection criteria or budgets. Positive cases demonstrate the market's operational systems' capacity and the lack of strategic governance. Thus, the causal chain is specific. No, procedural transparency is fine. Governance of strategic decisions. Without written standards, adjudication records, appeals processes, and co-decision forums, transformation will remain management-led. The interviews reveal the rules and funding allocation, give stakeholders a voice before decisions are made, and show how inputs change plans. These are concrete requests that reestablish trust and make participation logical for limited actors.

Impacts on the discussion chapter are immediate and operational. Evidence supports an integrated design rationale that incorporates finance, technology, and voice rather than sequentially. Governance reforms must establish transparent allocation and co-decision rights for credible delivery. Finance must be blended and sized to fit working capital and basic equipment, with single accountability. Digitalization requires transaction-layer multilingual interfaces, charge levels that protect tiny consignments, and unbanked cash-out possibilities. Sustainability pivots must be financed via concessional instruments and consumer access and allocation. Partners must be vetted into a platform with shared diagnostics and scorecard to avoid duplication and dispersion. These design assertions are directly derived from the empirical pattern and follow the latest methodological standards for turning thematic findings into policy levers in complex systems (Guest et al., 2020; O'Connor & Joffe, 2020).

## **5.12 Chapter summary**

This chapter triangulated Joburg Market transformation strategy cross-cutting insights from internal documents, observations, interviews, and co-occurrence studies. Strategic opacity and limited participatory governance diminish confidence and prevent operational supports from becoming sustainable economic involvement, according to the data. Non-financial relief (especially rental concessions) and brand visibility help survive, but negotiating power is not moved without working capital, basic equipment, and reliable conflict resolution. Digitalization improves visibility but not transaction efficiency, price discovery, or payments, limiting margin effects. Innovations like agro-processing and waste minimization are capital-constrained and not yet included in allocation criteria. Partnerships train and expose, but coordination issues and slow capital conversion

impede them. Systematic elicitation and convergence focused on transparency (publishing budgets, criteria, and timelines), structured voice (quarterly multi-stakeholder forums), blended finance/seed capital, buyer linkages, pricing and commission induction, single-point accountability, and outcome-oriented KPIs. The results are directly related to each research question's interview items.

## **Chapter 6: Discussion of the Findings**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter uses Chapter 2's theoretical and comparative lenses to interpret empirical results. The four research questions guide the discussion, which examines whether observable patterns support, complicate, or differ from the literature studied. No new sources are introduced. The analysis relies solely on Latin American and East Asian comparative governance models, feminist and spatial justice, digital inclusion, agro-ecological and circular economy approaches, and political economy accounts of dualism and market power. Deganis et al., 2021; Girollet, 2023; Modiba et al., 2024; Kroll, 2021; Greenberg & Drimie, 2021; Specht, Bohn & Simón Rojo, 2022; Alita, Dries & Oosterveer, 2021; Sun, 2023; Ma & Hu, 2021; Ag Argumentation is simple. The Joburg Market transformation plan is strategically underdeveloped notwithstanding its operational benefits. It resembles path-dependent dualism, lacks strategic openness, underinvests in capital and platform design for inclusive digitisation, and risks turning green aspirations into green gates without redistributive finance. The discussion clarifies these statements and explains practical implications for Chapter 7.

### **6.2 Analytical anchor points from Chapter 2**

Four anchor points were in Chapter 2. Municipal markets are institutions governed by regulations that allocate authority and revenues through space allocation, grading, fee schedules, and dispute resolution. Reforms without a redistributive design often entrench incumbents in a path-dependent dual economy (Goga & Mondliwa, 2021; Vilakazi & Bosiu, 2021; Kgobe, Mabeba & Mamokhere, 2023). Second, gender and generational relations matter. Informal micro-geographies repeat structural disadvantages, whereas spatial layouts, auxiliary needs, and care burdens reduce women's and youth's mobility (Ndhlovu & Majova, 2023; Mashamaite, 2023; Lowton, 2021). Environmental regulations and digital tools are ambivalent. Equity-based fees, data governance, and finance can increase participation. However, adoption costs and algorithms that favor volume and capital intensity preclude them (Deganis et al., 2021; Girollet, 2023; Modiba, 2024; Kroll, 2021; Greenberg & Drimie, 2021). Fourth, comparative models show that customized polycentric co-regulation, transparent lotteries, cooperative platform ownership, and concessional green finance can change outcomes with explicit inclusion safeguards.

### **6.3 RQ1: Structural, institutional and socio-cultural barriers to inclusive participation**

According to empirical evidence, Joburg Market participation involves social closure, spatial and logistical costs, and structural duality. The results support Chapter 2's claim that liberalization without redistributive governance privileges incumbents and marginalizes low-capital entrants (Goga & Mondliwa, 2021; Vilakazi & Bosiu, 2021). Participants highlighted incumbent enterprises squeezing out areas meant for transformation, buyer loyalty to long-standing agents, and smallholder price-taking. The literature describes post-apartheid path dependence as market rules converting past capital and network inequalities into daily transaction power (Goga & Mondliwa, 2021).

Field observations match earlier research on geographical and logistics burden. Industrializing wholesale floors in remote black townships increases last-mile costs, while cold chain gaps lower farmgate prices or require expensive private packhouses, especially for peri-urban and former homeland suppliers. The presence of luxury stall micro-geographies and peripheral placement for less connected vendors supports spatial justice critiques that physical layout excludes women and youth (Mashamaite, 2023; Ndhlovu & Majova, 2023). These similarities are not random. They show that the transformation plan supports Chapter 2's structural economy.

The results also reveal micro-mechanisms that Chapter 2 conceptualized but did not empirically describe. Participants cited regressive charge and commission patterns that punish small loads, discretionary gatekeeping by established agents that valorizes volume, and implicit endorsement rather than transparent merit in social network filters. These details support the political economy claim that rules and norms are neutral rent-allocation devices that are distributive (Vilakazi & Bosiu, 2021; Kgobe, Mabeba & Mamokhere, 2023). The analysis contributes to the literature by identifying the operational mechanisms that promote dualism in the Joburg Market.

Transformation success sites are nuanced. Instead of competing with incumbents in the core commission-agent role, adjacent or value-adding areas like agro-processing and brand-forward SMMEs have the most optimistic trajectories. The literature distinguishes between market-expanding and market-redistributing reform, with the former being easier to implement within existing power structures (Kgobe, Mabeba & Mamokhere, 2023). Implication is clear. The current technique is more effective at adding peripheral economic places than moving market power. Chapter 2 supports this conclusion, which sectoral granularity refines.

Although not explicitly stated, field narratives show how inequality is gendered and generational. Due to care burdens, collateral gaps, and spoilage risk, the literature warns that these gains will stall at the wholesale gate in the absence of gender-responsive governance and spatial zoning near cold storage (Ndhlovu & Majova, 2023; Mashamaite, 2023). The results do neither contradict or validate the full argument because the data are not disaggregated enough to measure differentials. However, the directional consistency supports Chapter 2's claim that meaningful transformation scorecards must include gender and youth measures. Table 6.9 synthesises how RQ1 findings align with the literature and where they add specificity.

*Table 6.9: RQ1 Synthesis: Evidence against Chapter 2*

<b>Literature claim from Chapter 2</b>	<b>Correspondence in findings</b>	<b>Status</b>
Dualism persists unless redistribution is designed into rules (Goga & Mondliwa, 2021; Vilakazi & Bosiu, 2021)	Price-taking by smallholders, buyer loyalty to incumbents, crowding of transformation niches by established firms	Supported and specified at transactional level
Spatial and logistics burdens depress margins for peri-urban and smallholders (Lowton, 2021; Cele & Mudhara, 2022; Agholor et al., 2023)	Travel distance, cold-chain gaps, and peripheral stall placement reported as daily constraints	Supported with contextual fit
Gendered and micro-geographic exclusion reduces women's sales velocity (Ndhlovu & Majova, 2023; Mashamaite, 2023)	Directional evidence through peripheral placement and shelf-access gatekeeping, though not fully disaggregated	Consistent, requires metric embedding
Market-expanding reforms are easier than redistributive reforms (Kgobe et al., 2023)	Stronger gains in value-added niches than in core agent function	Supported with sectoral nuance

#### **6.4 RQ2: Digital platforms and agro-ecological initiatives as participation levers**

The results reflect the literature's warning that digital tools initially worsen inequality unless fees, data governance, and adoption support are equitable. Even while selected beneficiaries have earned recognition and credibility through Joburg Market and event-linked social media exposure, the transaction layer is still mostly manual, with paper invoicing and phone calls. The international evidence shows that actors with pre-existing network and organizational capacity make early digital gains, while low-volume traders and smallholders maintain the status quo due to cash and data costs, device access, and design choices. This supports branding-led digitalization, which lacks integrated ordering, payments, and price discovery.

The findings support Chapter 2's focus on platform governance and algorithmic bias. This study did not audit algorithms, but lived concerns were consistent with global warnings that throughput-optimized listing logic and fee schedules are crowding out small consignments unless municipalities implement open audits, tiered fees, and multilingual, unbanked-friendly cash-out options. The lack of such design features at Joburg Market explains why lower-volume actors have not gained bargaining power or pricing increases via digital presence. The outcome matters most. Digitization risks formalizing Chapter 2 informational and transactional disparities without digital equity.

Agro-processing pivots to reduce waste and diversify income streams on the ecological front are consistent with circular economy and agro-ecology literature, which links resilience and inclusion to diversified production, waste recovery, and short supply chains when supported. Scaling equipment and finance constraints support the warning that green and quality standards become green gates without concessional finance and shared certification, infrastructure, and traceability services (Greenberg & Drimie, 2021; Whittingham, Marshak & Swanby, 2024). Solar cold rooms, sensors, and traceability financed through blended instruments and linked to open data commitments improve the ecological performance and inclusive participation of women and youth-led enterprises in Latin America and SME energy transition cases (Pinedo-López et al., 2024; Paul Jr., 2024). Joburg Market is pre-finance. It verifies firm-level feasibility and intent, but it lacks Chapter 2's essential success factor, funding architecture.

We introduce two interpretive adjustments. The brand legitimacy dividend beneficiaries described initially highlights the symbolic capital effect of public market affiliation. As noted in Chapter 2, inclusive governance and commercial feasibility can coexist when institutional legitimacy is deliberately shared with new entrants (Specht, Bohn & Simón

Rojo, 2022). The distinction between visibility gains and transactional integration clarifies the sequencing challenge. The literature advises implementing equity-centred design alongside on-boarding since early adopters will get visibility benefits that are hard to lose (Deganis et al., 2021; Modiba, 2024).

### **6.5 RQ3: Regulations, allocation and participatory forums as facilitators or constraints**

Chapter 2 argues that markets become inclusive when governance shifts from technocratic consultation to transparent allocation, enforced accountability, and co-decision. Results confirm the opposite. A transparency paradox emerged. Operations like consignment tracking and invoice verification are open and rule-bound, while strategic domains like beneficiary selection criteria, budget allocation, and transformation targets are opaque. In this operational–strategic split, institutional critique that reforms often document procedures while withholding allocative control from intended beneficiaries is operationalized, maintaining dualism under the guise of process transparency.

The limited voice and tardy administrative response support the literature's caution that invited venues without decision rights do not recalibrate power or improve results. Co-regulatory and citizen-driven approaches from China and Latin America show the relevance of decision-right density. Joint producer–buyer councils, transparent public stall lotteries, open algorithm audits, and published adjudication logs decrease rent seeking and diversify participation when integrated into law and routines. Joburg Market reports consultative gatherings without feedback or co-design authority. This difference contributes to the belief that transformation is done to rather than with participants. The literature offers a simple answer. Without entrenched authority, participation is tokenistic.

The governance situation includes informal dispute settlement and insufficient accountability. The use of personal networks to resolve grievances undermines procedural fairness and reinforces social closure, which transformation seeks to break. Chapter 2's game-theoretic analysis of compliance regimes shows that large actors invest in upstream and downstream capacity to evade penalties when monitoring is polycentric and sanctions increase proportionally to size, improving system performance and lowering enforcement costs (Ma & Hu, 2021). The reverse is achieved by informal complaint management. The incentive structure and formal feedback system learning are obscured. This empirical record matches the literature's recommendations.

The difference between operational and strategic transparency is crucial. The field evidence shows that the market can be procedurally transparent and strategically opaque, notwithstanding Chapter 2's transparency description. This split clarifies why some stakeholders value transparency and others dislike it. The difference is their experience strata. This distinction affects design and improves analysis. Strategic transparency must be implemented through public criteria, appeals windows, and written decision rationale, while operational transparency must be maintained and expanded.

#### **6.6 RQ4: Policy levers and collaborations with the greatest promise**

Field accounts noted expanded relationships with GDARD, NEF, Land Bank, and W&RSETA and appreciated non-financial help like rental reduction and exposure. Such partnerships are accepted as facilitating conditions, but they are only meaningful when supplemented with blended finance, performance-linked assistance, and co-governance over critical allocation decisions (Raniga, 2021; Specht, Bohn & Simón Rojo, 2022). That puts the Johannesburg Market in an intermediate state. Even while institutional intent is clear, resource conversion into working capital, equipment finance, and shared green assets remains incomplete. In South African municipal development, municipalities that can turn partnerships into productivity benefits are separated from those that are announcement-heavy and disbursement-thin (Ngepah, Saba & Mabindisa, 2021).

The findings require a consistent repertoire, which Chapter 2 comparative models provide. Public lotteries for prominent stalls, transparent algorithm audits, and tiered stall and platform fees reduce incumbency advantage (Specht, Bohn & Simón Rojo, 2022; Sun, 2023). Co-management councils with rotating state, vendor, and civil society co-chairs create participatory decision-making forums. Producer–buyer councils and open traceability ledgers integrate private incentives with public compliance, as seen in China's co-regulatory experience (Alita, Dries & Oosterveer, 2021). Concessional, performance-linked financing for solar cold rooms, sensors, and certification services turns green mandates into capability platforms, benefiting women and youth enterprises (Pinedo-López et al., 2024; Paul Jr., 2024; Greenberg & Drimie, 2021; Kroll, 2021). Platform co-ownership and data subsidies, proposed in digital inclusion literature (Deganis et al., 2021; Girollet, 2023; Modiba, 2024), address the digital gap at the design level and make small consignments visible in search and pricing discovery.

The literature's criticism of scaffolding without foundations matches the empirical focus on exposure and premises without currency and equipment funding. Despite rental relief reducing overhead and buying time, early-stage companies need working money and

equipment to invest in cold chain, packaging, and marketing to compete with incumbents. Chapter 2 proposes finance-plus-capability combinations instead of standalone instruments. Cooperative procurement, shared packhouses, and cohort mentorship customized to seasons are not add-ons; they change risk and learning curves to benefit entrants (Raniga, 2021; Specht, Bohn & Simón Rojo, 2022). Table 6.10 distils the levers endorsed by Chapter 2 and shows how the findings align with, and call for, their adoption.

*Table 6.10: RQ4 Synthesis: Levers from Chapter 2 and Empirical Fit*

<b>Lever from Chapter 2</b>	<b>Mechanism</b>	<b>Empirical fit and need</b>
Co-management council and transparent stall lotteries (Specht, Bohn & Simón Rojo, 2022)	Shifts decision rights; reduces rent seeking; diversifies access	Governance perceived as top-down and opaque; lotteries absent; decision rights thin
Open algorithm audits and tiered platform fees (Sun, 2023; Deganis et al., 2021)	Counters throughput bias; surfaces small consignments	Digital gains limited to visibility; transaction layer excludes low volume actors
Producer–buyer councils and open traceability (Alita, Dries & Oosterveer, 2021)	Lowers enforcement costs; aligns incentives	Dispute resolution informal; compliance incentives unclear
Concessional green finance and shared certification (Pinedo-López et al., 2024; Greenberg & Drimie, 2021)	Avoids green gates; unlocks agro-ecological participation	Agro-processing pivots unfunded; equipment costs binding
Finance-plus capability bundles and cooperative assets (Raniga, 2021; Specht, Bohn & Simón Rojo, 2022)	Converts exposure into viability; mitigates scale disadvantages	Rental relief present; cash and equipment finance thin; mentorship ad hoc

### **6.7 Cross-cutting synthesis: voice, value and visibility as an operating logic**

Chapter 2 literature implies inclusive market results require breakthroughs in three categories. Visibility includes recognition, access, and brand association. Margin distribution, consumer retention, and graduation rates determine value. Voice concerns decision rights and rule impact. Institutional association, events, and premises boost beneficiary visibility, according to empirical data. Strategic opacity, tokenistic consultation,

and informal conflict paths weaken the voice. In the absence of finance-plus bundles, regressive cost structures, and logistics difficulties, incumbents retain value.

This triadic frame is not new because it condenses Chapter 2 constructs into practical categories. Transparent lotteries and co-management increase voice. Tiered fees, concessional finance, and algorithm audits reallocate value. Awareness is maintained and increased by branding. Transformation stays fragmented without simultaneous movement on all three. That finding fits the literature and explains the two-tier outcomes. Sequencing is explained. Institutionalize voice and value during visibility extension to avoid early visibility advantages being locked in without spreading power or margins.

### **6.8 Tensions, limits and instructive divergences**

Three tensions stand out. First, consultation vs. co-decision is not a semantic issue. Delays in feedback and post-hoc communication support Chapter 2's warning that invited spaces without official power cement technocratic control. Comparative cases (Specht, Bohn & Simón Rojo, 2022; Sun, 2023) show that standing councils, public rationales, and appeals strive to move consultation to co-decision. Secondly, financial restrictions face green aspirations. Literature suggests concessional loans and shared services. Certification and traceability requirements are exclusionary filters without them, a risk described in Chapter 2 and confirmed in the field. Third, inclusion often conflicts with platform efficacy. Throughput-optimized algorithms shadow-ban small consignments. The research suggests transparent audits, cooperative equity, and tiered fees as counterweights (Deganis et al., 2021; Girollet, 2023; Modiba, 2024). Implementation differences, not conceptual ones. Results support literature concerns and identify Joburg Market's intervention areas.

Two inference constraints must be recognized. Qualitative and cross-sectional evidence limits assertions about effect permanence or amplitude. This study's digital governance critique was consistent with global trends, but code audit did not verify it. These limits limit the empirical tasks described in Chapter 2 as future study, not the basic conclusions. Experimental tests of certification-allocation interactions and gender- and age-disaggregated digital adoption measures are included.

The empirical-literature alignment indicates that the Chapter 2 repertoire contains a coherent operating model. Co-governance and transparent allocation should be institutionalized in Joburg Market to address strategic opacity and limited voice. It is recommended that partnerships be transformed into shared assets and blended finance

in order to resolve the gaps in green equipment and capital depth. To prevent digitized exclusion, it should hardwire digital equity through fee tiering, multilingual interfaces, unbanked cash-outs, and open algorithm audits. In order to convert exposure into viability, it should establish a capability common that integrates mentorship, finance, and diagnostics in accordance with agricultural and trading seasons. Lastly, it is recommended that a public scorecard be implemented to monitor voice, value, and visibility, with disaggregated metrics for gender and youth. This scorecard should be in accordance with the comparative models in Chapter 2 and the productivity evidence on human capital and institutional quality (Ngepah, Saba & Mabindisa, 2021; Specht, Bohn & Simón Rojo, 2022).

### **6.10 Chapter summary**

The discussion confirms that the findings match Chapter 2 literature. In a path-dependent, dual market structure, the transformation strategy shifts visibility more than voice or value. Strategic opacity and poor decision rights weaken legitimacy and learning. Non-financial supports without capital depth install scaffolding without foundations. Digitization is a brand, not transactional equity. Agro-ecological innovations are real but unfunded, risking green gates instead of inclusivity. The comparative record shows levers evaluated. Co-regulation, transparent lotteries, platform governance reforms, finance-plus packages, and concessional green infrastructure are necessary to turn a promising but segregated program into an inclusionary market node. This synthesis will be turned into a sequential implementation plan in Chapter 7, staying within the evidential basis from Chapter 2 and the realities from Chapter 5.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **7.1 Introduction**

The interpretive analysis and empirical data are combined into practical implications, implementation advice, and conclusions in this chapter. The debate begins with the research questions and aims to support the claim. The chapter then draws conclusions for each study issue, clarifying evidence and inference. After highlighting key academic and business implications, the chapter offers short recommendations. The chapter finishes with leadership and change management implementation problems. Limitations, research priorities, and conclusions follow.

### **7.2 Research Questions and Objectives**

The study examined Joburg Market change using four research questions and parallel aims. The initial inquiry examined how the transformation method affected beneficiary economic outcomes through entrance, growth, and competitiveness. The second question assessed institutional legitimacy and efficacy by assessing how governance, transparency, and support mechanisms affect transformation. The third query identified and explained the structural, budgetary, and institutional hurdles to inclusive transformation that can be addressed by policy. The fourth query identified policy levers and partnerships with the greatest potential to accelerate change to define a practicable repertoire based on comparative and theoretical insights.

### **7.3 Conclusions by Research Question**

#### **7.3.1 RQ1: Economic impact of the transformation strategy on beneficiaries**

A group of beneficiaries in value-adding and adjacent areas saw clear economic gains from the transformation plan, while new entrants competing in the core agent function saw muted results. This pattern supports the market's dualism, as incumbents' negotiating leverage, consumer loyalty, and scale advantages restrict reforms' distributive impact without explicit opposing design (Goga & Mondliwa, 2021; Vilakazi & Bosiu, 2021). Positive trajectories were seen in the agro processing and brand-forward niches, where market brand symbolic capital and premises access increased credibility and reach. Smallholders continued to price-take, and capital intensity, sunk relationships, and volume-based fee systems that penalize small cargoes made head-to-head competition with established agents impossible (Goga & Mondliwa, 2021). For most newcomers, the

strategy shifted visibility above value and voice, giving infrastructure without the financial base to turn exposure into persistent market influence (Raniga, 2021).

### **7.3.2 RQ2: Effectiveness of governance, transparency, and support mechanisms**

Governance had operational transparency and strategic opacity, resulting in procedural order without legitimacy. Routine transactions and billing were clear, but eligibility, budget, and selection criteria were not. Participatory systems' learning-by-governing benefits were diminished due to trust issues (Vilakazi & Bosiu, 2021; Kgobe, Mabeba & Mamokhere, 2023). Consulting forums without co-decision rights are consistent with comparative data that places without power that are invited rarely change results or enable rapid course correction (Specht, Bohn & Simón Rojo, 2022). Provision of premises and rental relief reduced overheads. They ignored working capital and equipment gaps that limit throughput, quality compliance, and bargaining leverage in low margin markets (Raniga, 2021). Implementation deficits caused by delayed or partial resource delivery mimic typical policy failure accounts along extended delivery chains that distribute blame and hinder execution at various junctures (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973).

### **7.3.3 RQ3: Key challenges and barriers hindering transformation**

Entrenched market power, liquidity constraints, and inadequate institutional links reinforced a barrier structure that limited reform. According to structural assessments of South African product markets, historical capital imbalances lead to persistent market power (Goga & Mondliwa, 2021; Vilakazi & Bosiu, 2021). Concentrated buyer-seller interactions and path-dependent norms kept incumbents ahead and marginalized newcomers. Liquidity restrictions limited cold chain, packaging, and early loss absorption investment, which are necessary for price negotiation, buyer retention, and scale efficiencies in fresh produce marketplaces with high quality and consistency standards (Raniga, 2021). Tokenistic participation reduced feedback loops that drive adaptive governance improvements in high-velocity market systems, and weak linkages to reliable downstream offtake and limited access to blended finance for equipment and certification raised entry costs and capability gaps.

### **7.3.4 RQ4: Policy levers and collaborations with the greatest promise**

The most promising strategies are co-governance, transparent allocation, digital equity by design, and concessional finance for capability development. Comparative cases show that co-regulatory councils, transparent stall allocation mechanisms, and published rationales for decisions reduce rent seeking, increase legitimacy, and promote incumbent-

entrant cooperation when integrated into routine practice and law (Specht, Bohn & Simón Rojo, 2022; Sun, 2023). Tiered platform costs, multilingual interfaces, open algorithm audits, and unbanked-friendly settlement solutions are needed for digital inclusion because first-wave digitization will worsen visibility and throughput asymmetries (Deganis, Haghian, Tagashira, & Alberti, 2021). When combined with shared service hubs and cooperative procurement that lower fixed costs for new entrants, concessional, performance-linked financing for working capital, cold chain equipment, and certification services turns green and quality requirements into capability platforms (Greenberg & Drimie, 2021; Specht, Bohn & Simón Rojo, 2022). According to Ngepah, Saba & Mabindisa (2021), institutional quality and bundled capabilities determine productivity gains from public-private collaborations in South African municipalities. Therefore, partnerships with development finance institutions must deliver finance plus bundles, not stand-alone instruments.

#### **7.4 Key Takeaways for Business**

Incumbency advantage will persist until organizations redefine value through collaborative models that translate compliance cost to supply chain resilience, according to studies. Established agents can unleash reputational and financial benefits by formalising supplier development with performance milestones, improving supply continuity and meeting credible public reporting requirements (Goga & Mondliwa, 2021). Leveraging processing, packaging, and logistics areas with favorable cost-to-serve dynamics could help new entrants choose capability complementarity over direct rivalry. They should consciously compromise brand validity for volume guarantees through organized collaborations with major buyers (Vilakazi & Bosiu, 2021). Incumbents and entrants should view digital tools as market-shaping infrastructure, not promotional add-ons. Since early governance decisions will hardcode competitive results for years, they should insist on open data agreements, fairness audits, and tiered pricing structures during platform adoption (Deganis et al., 2021). Collaboration to invest in common cold chain and certification services will lower per unit costs and speed access to higher-value buyers, improving profitability and reducing volatility in perishable markets with strict quality criteria (Greenberg & Drimie, 2021).

#### **7.5 Key Takeaways for Academia**

The findings support political economy explanations of dualism in municipal markets and suggest more exact voice, value, and visibility assessment methodologies. Operational and strategic transparency should be distinguished when modeling multi-level

governance. The observed divide clarifies stakeholder narratives that look conflicting without this difference (Vilakazi & Bosiu, 2021). Future research should evaluate finance plus bundles as an integrated treatment using mixed methods designs to track margin shifts, buyer retention, and graduation rates to move beyond output counts and toward market power redistribution (Goga & Mondliwa, 2021). In low-volume trading situations, digital inclusion research should focus algorithm audits, fee schedule simulations, and user journey ethnographies that link design decisions to distributive consequences. First-wave digitisation can formalise asymmetry without remedial design (Deganis et al., 2021). Comparative governance studies should collect municipal market institutional design traits that enable co-decision, transparent allocation, and enforced responsibility. To provide consistent context mechanism outcome configurations across situations, use realist evaluation logic (Specht, Bohn & Simón Rojo, 2022; Sun, 2023).

## **7.6 Recommendations for Policy and Practice**

Strategic opacity is the main barrier to legitimacy and learning, so Joburg Market should release a comprehensive transformation framework with objectives, eligibility criteria, support instruments, budget envelopes, decision rationales, and a public scorecard (Vilakazi & Bosiu, 2021). The market should create a permanent co-governance council with rotating management, beneficiary, and civil society co-chairs. This council should have delegated stall allocation, beneficiary selection, and annual target setting, as invited spaces without decision-making privileges seldom change complex systems (Specht, Bohn & Simón Rojo, 2022). The market should turn partnership announcements into a mixed financial facility with concessional working capital, equipment finance, certification, cohort-based mentorship, and seasonal diagnostics. Finance without capabilities and capabilities without finance underperform in thin margin industries (Raniga, 2021; Ngepah, Saba & Mabindisa, 2021). The market should establish offtake agreements with large retailers and municipalities that guarantee minimum volume for entrant cohorts. This would reduce cold chain and packaging investment risk and improve performance accountability through visible fines and measurable service standards (Goga & Mondliwa, 2021). In platform procurement, the market should require tiered costs, multilingual interfaces, open algorithm audits, transparent search ranking criteria, and unbanked friendly settlement to ensure digital equity. Platform governance will entrench scaled inclusion or advantage (Deganis et al., 2021; Sun, 2023). Since measured accountability drives credible reform in politicized markets, the market should publish an annual transformation report with value-oriented indicators like margin shifts, buyer retention

patterns, graduation rates, gender and youth participation, and grievance resolution times (Vilakazi & Bosiu, 2021).

### **7.7 Implementation Challenges, Change Management, and Leadership Capabilities**

Incumbents who exploit discretionary allocation and opacity, officials who fear losing decision-making power, and beneficiaries who fear punitive compliance in the event of increased accountability will resist implementation. Management, beneficiary representatives, and external partners must form a change leadership coalition. Ambiguous narratives encourage policy drift and delay tactics, thus this alliance must make a strong argument for reform linking inclusive growth to institutional legitimacy and fiscal sustainability (Kotter, 1996). Stall lottery and rent rebates for incumbents who subcontract processing to cohorts of entrants are immediate victories that benefit both incumbents and entrants in disputed reforms. Visual reciprocity reduces zero-sum perceptions (Fernandez & Rainey, 2006). To change allocation rules and platform governance, the company needs adaptive leadership that distinguishes technological solutions from adaptive work. This requires norm, incentive, and identity adjustments that policy circulars cannot enforce (Heifetz, 1994). Complexity leadership is needed to orchestrate learning across units, experiment with charge tiering and algorithm audits, and expand what works without overspecifying process. Because excessive centralization in complicated markets often leads to compliance without performance (Uhl Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). Managers should embed change with formal procedures that ensure openness and accountability to avoid backsliding once initial enthusiasm fades. The co-governing council's authority is codified via bylaw revisions, published decision logs with reasons and appeals windows, and contract templates with performance duties and conflict resolution channels. Finally, leaders must invest in digital fluency and data governance to enable algorithm audits, fair ranking, and privacy-preserving open data releases. Platform decisions will quickly outpace conventional monitoring methods without internal technical competence (Deganis et al., 2021).

### **7.8 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

Due to the qualitative and cross-sectional methodology of this study, causal inference and generalizability across all market actors are limited, hence caution should be exercised when extrapolating magnitudes and permanence of effects (Yin, 2018). Access restrictions to internal papers and transaction-level data limited triangulation of alleged implementation shortcomings with administrative records. This emphasises the necessity of embedded research partnerships that share data under transparent governance

(Ngepah, Saba & Mabindisa, 2021). Ethnographies of algorithmic curation to map digital design choices to distributive outcomes in low volume trading contexts and mixed methods with a panel design to track beneficiaries and matched non beneficiaries over multiple seasons to measure margins, buyer retention, and graduation are needed. Realist evaluation logic can uncover context mechanism result configurations that travel and those that remain peculiar in comparative case studies across South African municipal markets (Specht, Bohn & Simón Rojo, 2022; Sun, 2023). This research should study how local political economies affect shared governance, transparent allocation, and blended financing.

## **7.9 Concluding Remarks**

Current Joburg transformation strategy Strategic opacity, thin decision rights, and finance deficits preserve incumbency advantages that have deep historical roots in South African product markets (Goga & Mondliwa, 2021; Vilakazi & Bosiu, 2021). Market visibility increases for some entrants but maintains voice and value. The path to credible change is clear. Finance plus capability bundles, digital equity by design, co governance, and transparent allocation are necessary to rebalance market power and maintain commercial viability in a complex, perishable goods ecosystem (Specht, Bohn & Simón Rojo, 2022; Deganis et al., 2021). The goal has moved from analysis to action. Leaders must invest in capabilities that allow the market to learn and adapt at trade speed, manage resistance, formalize authority, and develop coalitions because aspirational transformation erodes trust and wastes institutional capital. If government, power, and technology are aligned, the market might lead continental inclusive industrialization. The evidence offered here gives a practical procedural roadmap.

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## **List of Appendices**

Appendix A Informed Consent Letter

Appendix B Instrument (Interview Guide)

Appendix B Ethics Approval

## Appendix A Informed Consent Letter

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### **Informed Consent Letter**

I am currently a student at the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science and completing my research in partial fulfilment of an MBA.

I am conducting research on the **Impact of Transformation Frameworks on Economic Participation in Municipal Fresh Produce Markets with a Focus on the Joburg Market**. Our interview is expected to last about an hour and will help us understand how Joburg Market as the largest fresh produce market in South Africa is implementing transformation frameworks.

**Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. All data will be reported without identifiers.**

If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are provided below:

Researcher name: Mbali Sibeko

Researchers email: [23984725@mygibs.co.za](mailto:23984725@mygibs.co.za)

Researchers phone: 083 580 4939

Research Supervisor name: Andre Vermaak

Research Supervisor email: [andrepv@mweb.co.za](mailto:andrepv@mweb.co.za)

Research Supervisors phone: 083 308 0235

Signature of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix B Instrument (Interview Guide)**

### **A. Economic Participation and Impact**

1. How has your participation in the Joburg Market changed since the implementation of the transformation strategy?
2. Have you experienced any benefits (e.g., better access to trading space, procurement opportunities, or training) from the transformation initiatives?
3. What challenges have you faced in accessing economic opportunities at the market?
4. In your opinion, has the transformation strategy improved inclusion and economic empowerment? Why or why not?
5. Have you observed any changes in your business performance since being part of the transformation initiatives?

### **B. Governance, Equity, and Transparency**

1. How transparent and inclusive do you find the transformation processes at the Joburg Market?
2. Are you aware of any selection criteria for beneficiaries of transformation programmes (e.g., enterprise development, training)?
3. To what extent are SMME's and small-scale farmers engaged in decision-making or provided with platforms to express their needs?
4. How are disputes or challenges within transformation related processes handled?

### **C. Support and Capacity Building**

1. What kind of support (financial, training, infrastructure, etc.) have you received from the Joburg Market as part of transformation?
2. Was the support adequate for you to improve or grow your business? If not, what was missing?
3. Are there any specific programmes you found useful or not useful? Please explain.
4. What additional support do you think would strengthen transformation outcomes for participants?

#### **D. Monitoring, Feedback, and Recommendations**

1. How is feedback from market users and beneficiaries incorporated into transformation planning?
2. Are there clear KPIs or scorecards used to track transformation outcomes? If so, how are they communicated?
3. What indicators would you recommend be used to measure the success of transformation?
4. What recommendations would you make to improve the effectiveness of transformation efforts at the Joburg Market?

## ETHICAL CLEARANCE

**Gordon Institute  
of Business Science**  
University of Pretoria

**Ethical Clearance**  
**Approved**

Dear Mball Sibeko,

Please be advised that your application for **Ethical Clearance** has been approved.

You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.

We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

**Ethical Clearance** [Form](#)

Kind Regards

This email has been sent from an unmonitored email account. If you have any comments or concerns, please contact the GIBS Research Admin team.