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Organic consumption as a means to achieve sustainable development goals and agenda 2063

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Abstract

As the global population approaches 10 billion by 2050, addressing sustainable food production is imperative for achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 – Zero Hunger, SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production, and Agenda 2063's Aspiration 1 for inclusive growth and sustainable development in Africa. This qualitative study explored South African consumers' perceptions of organic food using an extended Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) model. Emphasising health perspectives, it investigates implications for SDGs and Agenda 2063. Employing non-probability snowball sampling, 25 semi-structured interviews reached data saturation. Thematic analysis revealed that while health and environmental benefits of organic food are recognised, many consumers do not perceive organic food as inherently healthier. The study underscores the need for improved communication and consumer education to align perceptions with sustainability goals and foster a prosperous future and achievement of Agenda 2063.

KEYWORDS

agenda 2063, health consciousness, organic food products, SDG12, SDG2, sustainable consumption, zero hunger

1 | INTRODUCTION

The global population reached almost 8 billion in 2022 with over 6.5 billion coming from less developed countries, such as much of Africa (UNFPA, 2023). It is projected that global population will reach 9.7 billion by 2050, with more than half of the increase anticipated to come from sub-Saharan Africa and that presents a critical challenge of balancing food production and sustainability (UNDESA, 2022). Such growth will necessitate a drastic increase in food production (OECD/FAO, 2021) leading to a challenge of balancing rising food demand and sustainable farming practices (Singh et al., 2021). This challenge is expressed in sustainable development goals SDG2 and SDG12. SDG2 aims to end hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition (FAO

et al., 2020) while SDG12 aims to ensure sustainable consumption and production (UN, 2022a).

Organic food production is recognised as a sustainable practice that can contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) (FAO, 2023; Willer et al., 2021). In a study conducted in Thailand on organic food provision in a fresh market to promote organic production–consumption, the study highlighted the potential economic benefits of local organic food provision for farmers, which contributes to poverty reduction and food security (Thongplew et al., 2023). Agenda 2063, Africa's response to sustainable development, shares similar objectives to SDG's, particularly under Aspiration One, focusing on inclusive growth and sustainable agriculture (AfricanUnion, 2022b; Ndizera & Muzee, 2018). It outlines that by

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2063 citizens on the continent should be healthy, well-nourished and have a high quality of life. This aspiration also states that modern agriculture for increased production, productivity and value addition should contribute to farmer and national prosperity (Ndizera & Muzee, 2018; AfricanUnion).

Globally, there is a rising demand for healthy products, including organic foods, driven by consumer health awareness and increased purchasing power (Kautish et al., 2019). Despite the global market's substantial value, Africa's demand for organic products remains relatively low (Ben Khadda et al., 2022; Mhlophe, 2016; Mkhize & Ellis, 2020; Naidoo & Ramatsetse, 2016). However, it is expected to grow, aligning with heightened environmental and health concerns (RaM, 2022; TBRC, 2023). Thus, the promotion of organic product consumption aligns with the principles of Agenda 2063, and could be further encouraged through targeted policies and awareness campaigns.

To appropriately promote consumption, it is necessary to know what factors affect that consumption. Studies on factors affecting green consumption have often used the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) as a theoretical foundation. The TPB proposes that perceived behaviour control, attitudes towards the behaviour, and social norms affect individuals' intention to perform that behaviour (Paul et al., 2016). Since it is original development by Ajzen (1991), there have been numerous extensions to the model adding antecedents such as environmental concern (Koloba, 2020; Paul et al., 2016), beliefs (Kim & Han, 2010), awareness (Macovei, 2015), moral obligation (Chen, 2016), environmental knowledge (Koloba, 2020; Sutikno & Margaretha, 2020), perceived value, green trust, collectivism and perceived risk (Zhuang et al., 2021) among others. While research on the drivers and barriers to organic food consumption exists, it is mostly focused in western countries and limited research is published on Africa (e.g., Mhlophe, 2016; Naidoo & Ramatsetse, 2016). The research gap this research aims to fill, is to explore perceptions and attitudes towards the purchase organic foods particularly from a health perspective and in a developing nation, such as South Africa.

South Africa, like other developing nations, faces the challenge of balancing health consciousness promotion and environmental protection (Naidoo & Ramatsetse, 2016; Udeagha & Muchapondwa, 2023). An extended version of TPB was used for the current study, in our case that of (Yadav & Pathak, 2016b) whose model also incorporated health consciousness, deemed appropriate in the context of organic foods. The primary questions answered were firstly, if Africa's organic consumption is expected to grow due to environmental and health concerns (RaM, 2022; TBRC, 2023), what roles do these variables play in organic consumption in a key African market, South Africa. Secondly, how can these findings be interpreted in the context of achieving SDG 2 and 12 and Agenda 2063.

The subsequent sections of this paper include a literature review, research methods, findings and discussion. Thereafter, recommendations, implications, limitations, and conclusion of the study are presented.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | SDGs 2 and 12

SDGs 2 and 12, critical components of the global sustainable development agenda, bear the responsibility of addressing pressing challenges related to food security and sustainable consumption.

SDG 2 is committed to ending hunger, food insecurity, and malnutrition (FAO et al., 2020). However, the Covid-19 pandemic, Ukraine war effect on food prices and supplies, and an escalating climate crises are increasing the food security crisis worldwide, putting the globe on the brink of a food crisis, and achievement of SDG2 even further away with only seven years to go to 2030 (OECD/FAO, 2021; UN, 2022a). Notably, the year 2022 witnessed the highest levels of food insecurity in six years (FSIN and GNAFC, 2022). Sub-Saharan Africa is believed to be experiencing the worst of this crisis (World Bank, 2022). Alarmingly, predictions from TWC (2022) suggest that, following current food systems, the world may deplete its food resources within 26 years. Consumers also impact food security and the environment through their food choices (Aibana et al., 2017; UN, 2023).

SDG12 aims to ensure sustainable consumption and production. Unsustainable patterns of production and consumption are the underlying causes of the triple planetary crises: climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution (UN, 2022a). The earth's resources are also being consumed too fast to be regenerated due to various factors including overconsumption and waste, deforestation and destruction of the environment, and inappropriate use of the environment (TWC, 2022). Addressing these issues necessitates significant shifts in consumption behaviours, ranging from dietary choices to responsible water and energy usage, as well as a commitment to recycling (Aibana et al., 2017). Promoting these changes requires consumer education on sustainable consumption and lifestyles (UN, 2023).

Agriculture, with its significant environmental footprint, has played a crucial role in climate change. Hence, further efforts are imperative to enhance sustainable production (OECD/FAO, 2021). Both production systems and consumption patterns need to become more sustainable to "improve resource efficiency, reduce waste and pollution, and shape a new circular economy" (UN, 2022a: 50). SDG12 aims to achieve, among others, sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources, reduced food waste and environmentally sound management of detrimental wastes (UN, 2023). A study conducted in Germany by Stefanovic (2022) on SDG performance in local organic food systems and the role of sustainable public procurement, found that SDG 12 appeared to be the goal addressed to a high extent in organic food systems. Consequently, it becomes necessary to investigate the role of environmental concern and its influence on achieving SDG12.

Research has shown that organic food systems play a significant role in addressing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 2 and 12 on sustainable consumption and production

(Stefanovic, 2022). This particular research focuses on factors affecting consumption of organic food, which then affects achievement of SDGs 2 and 12.

2.2 | Agenda 2063

In line with the global commitment to the SDGs and a sustainable future, at the 24th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union in January 2015, the continent's leaders formulated Agenda 2063 – the Africa we want, as Africa's long term strategic social and economic development plan (Mhangara et al., 2019). The plan contains seven overarching aspirations with multiple goals for each. This study focused on Aspiration 1: A prosperous Africa determined to eradicate poverty in one generation and build shared prosperity through social and economic transformation of the continent (Ndizera & Muzee, 2018). Among the seven goals related to Aspiration One are: “Healthy and well-nourished citizens” (Goal 3), “Modern agriculture for increased productivity and production” (Goal 5), and “Environmentally sustainable climate and resilient economies and communities” (Goal 7) (AUDA-NEPAD, 2022: 20, 26, 29). Hence, the adoption of organic food aligns with the pursuit of modern, environmentally sustainable farming practices that prioritise the well-being of citizens by ensuring nutritious food production without harming the environment.

1. Healthy and Well-Nourished Citizens

While Aspiration One, Goal 3: Healthy and Well-nourished Citizens, also deals with the eradication of disease, of relevance to this study, are the nutritional aspect of the goal. In relation to nutrition, the goal is to reduce malnutrition, which is still a major challenge on the continent (AfricanUnion, 2022a). This goal aligns strongly with the SDG Goal 2 to “end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture” (ECA, 2022). An adequate level of nutrition is a requirement for health (Marsman et al., 2018). The African Union reported that some progress had been made in prioritising nutrition and “Africa's share in the world's under-nourished population decreased from 35.5% in 1990 to 22% in 2019” (AfricanUnion, 2022a). However, a more recent report indicates that the COVID–19 pandemic reversed this trend with approximately 800 million more people facing hunger in 2020, compared to 2019 and nearly one in three people globally (2.37 billion) not having adequate access to food (FAO, 2021). About a third of these people are in Africa (FAO, 2021). The 2nd Continental report on the implementation of Agenda 2063 reports that in 2021 the prevalence of under-nourishment returned to the level it was in 2013, at 24%, well short of the target of 9% (AUDA-NEPAD, 2022). Thus, more needs to be done to achieve food security and good health nutrition in Africa (AfricanUnion, 2022a). Food and nutritional security remain a challenge for developing countries in Africa (Kisaka-Lwago & Obi, 2016). Organic food products meet nutritional needs without damage to the environment (Suh et al., 2015) and organic farming is considered a

sustainable approach to development and food security (Precedence Research, 2022). Organic food has been found to be associated with health (Hamilton & Hekmat, 2018; PrecedenceResearch, 2022; Rizzo et al., 2020). Pacho (2020) reports that growing concerns over non-communicable diseases is also influencing developing nation consumers to shift to organic food products. This research explores this concern in South Africa, a developing nation.

2. Modern Agriculture for Increased Productivity and Production

The Agenda 2063, Aspiration One, Goal 5 relating to modern agriculture “aims at radically transforming African agriculture to enable the continent to feed itself and be a major player as a net food exporter” (AfricanUnion, 2022b). For Africa to make progress on poverty alleviation, achieve economic growth and lessen inequality there has to be emphasis on investments in agriculture, health, education, and infrastructure (Cilliers, 2014: 10). Thus, modern agriculture and farming systems for increased productivity and production, is a goal of Agenda 2063 and this includes organic agriculture. Not only is organic agriculture better for the African physical environment (FAO, 2023) but it also offers Africa a lucrative export market (Willer et al., 2021).

Agriculture is a necessary requirement for development in Africa as it produces economic wealth and food security (Nwakwuo et al., 2021) and thus assists in achieving SDG 2, Food security, as well as ensuring sustainable consumption and production (SDG 12). Africa has been exporting agricultural products such as organically farmed produce for a number of years and there remains an opportunity for growth in exports in this sector (Kelly & Metelerkamp, 2015; Willer et al., 2021). However, domestic demand for organic products remains low for various reasons such as price, availability, and consumers regarding organic products as new products (Gakobo & Jere, 2016; Naidoo & Ramatsetse, 2016). Understanding the factors affecting this consumption is therefore important.

3. Environmentally Sustainable Climate and Resilient Economies and Communities

Agenda 2063, Goal 7” seeks to promote environmentally sustainable climate and resilient economies and communities” (AUC, 2015: 8). To achieve this goal all African governments will need appropriate and integrated environmental policies, laws and measures to ensure implementation (Muigua, 2019; Ndizera & Muzee, 2018). Salihu and Muhammed (2016) explain that this goal implies that by 2063 Africa will need to be ecologically conscious and show that the continent has an established green economy, which incorporates green energy and responsible use of natural resources. Efforts to ensure water security are also part of this aspiration (ECA, 2022). Achievement of Agenda 2063 Goal 7, will contribute to achievement of SDG 12, ensuring sustainable consumption and production.

Organic foods are beneficial to the environment (Chen, 2007; Yadav & Pathak, 2016a). The benefits of farmers moving from traditional to organic farming practices can be a goal for African governments as these are in line with Agenda 2063 priorities (Muigua, 2019).

However, such environmental benefits will need to be communicated to farmers, retailers and consumers of organic food products such that by 2063 organic farming practices are a farming method of choice to sustain the environment.

Consumers who are eco-friendly are conscious about the deterioration of the environment and are concerned about ecological protection (Wijekoon & Sabri, 2021). This concern influences their buying choices leading to the purchase of organic products (Chen, 2007; Mhlophe, 2016; Wijekoon & Sabri, 2021). According to Budhathoki et al. (2022), consumer household purchases were responsible for 40% of environmental damage and yet the attitude-intention gap often exists and environmental concern does not necessarily lead to environmentally friendly behaviour (Budhathoki et al., 2022; Mkhize & Ellis, 2018). Understanding why consumers don't behave in an environmentally friendly manner is important for implementing strategies to ensure achievement of the Agenda 2063 and SDG goals.

Table 1 summarises the alignment between Agenda 2063's aspirations and specific goals, relevant SDGs, and how organic food consumption contributes to these objectives.

Understanding factors affecting the consumption of organic foods is thus important for the achievement of SDGs 2 and 12 as well as Aspiration 1 of Agenda 2063.

4. Health Consciousness & Environmental Concern

Although (Yadav & Pathak, 2016b) full model was used as a conceptual framework for better understanding the participants' perceptions of, and attitudes towards, organic products, a focus of this paper was their perceptions in relation to their environmental concern and their own health consciousness and the health benefits of organic products. Environmental concern is said to be on the rise (Lampert et al., 2021) and has positive effects on consumers attitudes towards organic products (Shamsi et al., 2020) and purchase intentions (Saleki et al., 2019). Health is an essential variable related to the purchase of food products and organic products are regarded as a healthier alternative to food products produced using conventional farming methods (Yadav & Pathak, 2016a; Yazdanpanah & Forouzani, 2015). Health consciousness has been found to significantly affect organic food attitudes and behaviours. For example, Rana and Paul (2020) concluded from their meta-analysis, that the health factor positively affects attitudes towards organic food and Le-Anh and Nguyen-To (2020) found food safety concern positively impacts attitudes towards organic products. A study by Yadav and Pathak (2016a) discovered that health concern positively influences both attitude towards organic food and intention to buy these items and Sharma and Singhvi (2018) concluded that health consciousness is one of the most important factors affecting consumer preferences for organic products. Studies in South Africa have found similar results (Mhlophe, 2016; Naidoo & Ramatsetse, 2016; Wekeza & Sibanda, 2019). These studies however, employed quantitative methodologies which, while being able to quantify effects, were not able to qualitatively understand the consumer perceptions and feelings about organic produce which

TABLE 1 Agenda 2063, SDG's and their relationship to organic food adoption.

Agenda 2063 aspiration & SDGs	Relevant goals & implications	Organic food contribution
Aspiration 1 – Prosperous Africa	Goal 3: Healthy and Well-Nourished Citizens	Organic consumption aids in reducing malnutrition and supports food security.
	Goal 5: Modern Agriculture for Increased Productivity	Organic agriculture contributes to modernising African farming for increased productivity and production, supporting Agenda 2063's aim to transform agriculture and be a net food exporter.
	Goal 7: Environmentally Sustainable Climate and Resilient Economies	Organic farming practices align with environmentally sustainable goals, contributing to resilient economies and ecological consciousness. Organic food's environmental benefits relate to Agenda 2063's green economy and climate resilience.
Sustainable Development Goals	SDG 2: Zero Hunger	Organic food consumption supports improved nutrition, contributing to ending hunger and achieving food security.
	SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production	Organic food adoption reflects sustainable consumption and production, aligning with both SDG 12

Note: (ECA, 2022; Ndizera & Muzee, 2018; UN, 2022b).

might help better understand barriers to consumption that could impede the attainment of Agenda 2063 and SDGs 2 and 12. Understanding South African consumers concerns about the environment and their health, as well as the health benefits they perceive organic products to have, will offer opportunities for green and social marketers as well as policy makers to formulate strategies for using these findings to contribute to achievement of some of the Africa 2063 and SDG goals.

2.3 | The study

To explore the attitudes towards, and perceptions of, organic food products as healthy food alternatives in South Africa and thus facilitate the progress towards attainment of some of the Agenda 2063 and SDG goals, this research employed an exploratory, qualitative design. Snowball sampling, used when population members are difficult to locate (Venter et al., 2010), such as when no sampling frame exists (Sharma, 2017), was used to identify participants who were the main shopper for the household and who believed the consumption of organic foods was beneficial. As recommended by Handcock and Gile (2011) in this study, snowball sampling is defined as “chain-referral sampling, a non-probability sampling technique where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances” (Sharma, 2017). Using purposive sampling of the researchers' personal networks, seed informants (initial participants) meeting the inclusion criteria, were identified. Purposive selection criteria were also applied to ensure a diverse sample in terms of income, gender, age and background. Applying the chain referral, snowball sampling technique, seed participants were requested to refer the researcher to further participants in the seed participants' networks who they believed met the inclusion criterion as indicated by Parker et al. (2019). In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant until data saturation occurred. This resulted in a final sample of 25. Interviews are an appropriate data collection technique for capturing in-depth and rich data as they allow two-way communication, and the probing and clarification of responses to ensure the acquisition of participant perspectives and deeper understanding (Venter et al., 2010).

To ascertain health consciousness of participants as a possible barrier to the purchase of organic foods, two questions were asked: Question 1: *Do you believe organic produce is healthier? Why or why not?* Question 2: *Do you consider yourself a health-conscious consumer? What health activities do you engage in?* To explore participants' environmental concern as a possible barrier to purchase of organic foods, four questions were asked: Question 3: *Do you believe human beings damage the environment? If so, how?* Question 4: *Do you think a lack of concern for the environment is a reason for non-purchase of organic foods?* Question 5: *Would you say this applies to you? Do people important to you behave in an environmentally friendly way?* Question 6: *What is your view on the statement? 'By purchasing organic food, I can save the environment'.* All these questions were formulated based on existing studies and literature discussing the adoption of organic food, specifically focusing on health consciousness and environmental concern as key factors influencing consumer behaviour in this domain.

In accordance with the university's Ethics policy, the research methodology, interview guide and informed consent template were submitted and approved by the Ethics Committee prior to data collection. Informed consent was obtained from each interviewee prior to the interview. In the preamble to the interview, participants were informed of the research topic and objectives, that the research was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any stage without any penalty. Permission to record the interviews was obtained.

Participant responses to the interview questions were recorded manually and then transcribed. Data checking was performed by returning the transcripts to participants to confirm they accurately captured their responses. This assists in ensuring trustworthiness and credibility in qualitative research (Wahyuni, 2012). In line with recommendations by Venter et al. (2010), inductive content analysis was performed on the transcripts. Key words extracted from the data were grouped to form themes.

3 | RESULTS

The subsequent discussion contextualises the findings and relate these to SDG 2, SDG 12, and the objectives outlined in Agenda 2063, specifically pertaining to Aspiration One goals. Initially, the demographic profile of the participants is presented, followed by a discussion of their organic purchase decisions. Subsequently, the discourse delves into the exploration of environmental concerns and health consciousness exhibited by the participants.

Table 2 provides analysis of the demographics of the sample's participants. Of the 25 interviews, 22 were conducted with women. The current research used a screening question for participant inclusion, which asked if participants did household shopping and this led to a predominantly female sample. Most participants were educated and in some form of employment. In terms of ethnicity the sample, include participants from the main ethnic groups in South Africa. Although national population statistics indicate that approximately 81% of the population is Black African, 8% Coloured and White and 3% Indian (Statista, 2022), the province from which the participants were drawn, KwaZulu-Natal is the province where the majority of South Africa's Indian population lives and in which the Coloured population is very small, as the majority of South Africa's Coloured population lives in the Western and Northern Cape provinces (PopulationU.com, 2023). Thus, the researchers were satisfied that the sample profile included reasonable coverage of the different ethnic groups represented in the province.

The findings from the study that are relevant to this paper, are presented below. These findings are then discussed in relation to the Agenda 2063, Aspiration One and SDG 2 and SDG12 goals described above, and recommendations provided for achieving these goals.

1. Organic Product Purchasing

Almost two thirds of the participants said they never buy organic produce (16, 64%) while the remainder only occasionally buy these products. If they buy organic products, it is mostly fruit and vegetables and occasionally organic clothes. At least a third of participants said they weren't sure if they were buying organic produce as labelling wasn't clear.

2. Perceptions about environmental concern and organic food products purchase decision

TABLE 2 Participant profile – Frequency (Percentage).

Gender	Male	Female		
	3 (12)	22 (88)		
Education	Below matric	Matric	Diploma/degree	Postgrad
	0	6 (24)	15 (60)	4 (16)
Employment	Student	Employed	Self-employed	Unemployed (not a student)
	2 (8)	21 (84)	2 (8)	0
Ethnicity	African	White	Indian	Coloured
	14 (56)	5 (20)	5 (20)	1 (4)
Age	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59
	6 (24)	12 (48)	4 (16)	3 (12)
Income pa	0 – R120000	121,000–250,000	>250,000	
	99(31.2)	39(12.3)	46(14.5)	21(8.5)

Note: Author.

Participants were asked the following question in relation to environmental concern: *Do you believe human beings damage the environment? If so, how? Do you think a lack of concern for the environment is a reason for non-purchase of organic foods? Do people important to you behave in an environmentally friendly way? What is your view on the statement? 'By purchasing organic food, I can save the environment'.*

Eighty percent of participants had positive perceptions about organic products addressing environmental concerns while 20% (5) had negative perceptions. Thus, environmental concern is an important issue on the participants interviewed.

There were 68% of participants who believe humans damage the environment but there were mixed views on lack of concern for environment leading to non-purchase of organic foods. People important to participants do not behave in environmentally safe way reinforcing lack of social norms from participants network to persuade participants to behave in an environmentally safe way. However, 54% participants believe purchasing organic can save the environment and this finding shows that there are mixed views on concern for environment and this can be a barrier to organic purchases.

Participants expressed positive perceptions regarding organic products as these were associated with being beneficial to an individual's **health** (mentioned by 14 participants) as well as being **better for the environment** (mentioned by 6 participants). In relation to organic products being better for the environment, Participant 6, for example, stated that organic products provide *"better care for the environment since using less chemicals. Chemicals can damage the eco-system leading to death of fish and other insects"* and Participant 5 stated that organic products are *"better for environment as they are farmed God's way without distracting [extracting] top soil and rigorously changing the soil structure while using no pesticides or any other chemicals"*.

Some participants exhibited negative perceptions related to the perceived **cost of organic food products** and that they were **no better than conventional products** (mentioned by 5 participants). Participant 15 stated that, *"I avoid purchasing organic because of high price"*, and Participant 4 stated that, *"I don't buy organic because they are expensive and are no better than conventional products"*. Participant 24 also

stated that there is *"No benefit to organic consumption; it's a marketing ploy, organic is same as conventional"*. Thus, there seems to be a perception of some green washing in that some consumers believe organic producers just say organic products are better when they aren't. These participants are obviously not aware of organic benefits and believe organic produce is no better than conventional products and the hype around organic produce is not true. Parguel et al. (2015: 107–108) cite the original definition by Terrachoice (2010) that green washing is *"the act of misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service"*.

Despite these negative perceptions, the most dominant theme that emerged was that participants associated consuming organic foods as the healthier alternative both for the environment and themselves.

3. Health Perceptions

To explore participants' health consciousness, participants were asked the following questions *Do you believe organic produce is healthier? Why or why not? Do you consider yourself a health-conscious consumer? What health activities do you engage in?*

Results indicated that nearly half of the participants (48%) hold the belief that organic products are beneficial for health, while about 28% of participants do not share this belief. However, their belief does not lead to organic purchase decision. Findings also reveal that participants are health conscious (68%) while others are not health conscious (32%), however half of participants do not purchase organic products. For example, Participant 3, *"From marketing information, I believe it is healthier as it is farmed without pesticides and other chemicals that may cause us disease"*. However, Participant 22 stated that, *"vegetables are vegetables. There are no healthier vegetables"*. However, of the remaining participants just over half of those (7, 28%) believed organic food products were not necessarily healthier and just under half (6, 24%) were not sure. For example, Participant 16 stated that, *"there is no proof to the goodness of organic products. Organic and*

conventional products are the same” and Participant 4 that “it could be a marketing ploy. Marketers can create a hype around organic. How can we prove that it's healthier?”

Together, more than half of the participants in this study were at least not sure about the health benefits being greater for organic than conventionally grown products or were not convinced of the claim that organic foods a healthier option than those grown conventionally.

An example of the dominant theme was from Participant 15: “Organic foods are healthy as they are grown with less harmful chemicals”. Participants often mentioned the absence of pesticides and other chemicals on organic products as being beneficial to their health. There was a perception from participants that chemicals used in growing conventionally farmed produce may cause diseases. Participant 21 stated that organic products were: “Healthy and free of pesticides that cause cancer in the long run”. Participants also mentioned that organic products are natural and contain nutrients without chemicals. Participant 5 stated that, “organic products are healthy as they are natural products that contains nutrients and no pesticides or any other dangerous chemicals”. Participant 19 stated that, “Organic foods are healthier, tastier and status products that match my lifestyle”. This quote also introduces the perceived benefits of organic produce tasting better and being perceived as being a status product.

4 | DISCUSSION

The findings are now discussed in relation to the SDG 2, SDG 12 and Agenda 2063, Aspiration One goals described above, and then recommendations provided for achieving these goals.

1. Consumer Perceptions of Organic Food Products

This study found that these South African consumers generally perceive that purchasing organic food products will be beneficial because of its health and environmental preservation attributes. This should bode well for organic consumption as numerous studies have found a significant and positive impact of attitudes on organic food product purchase intention (e.g., Pacho, 2020; Shamsi et al., 2020; Teng & Wang, 2015) and adoption or consumption (Li et al., 2021).

Although the Agenda 2063 document makes no specific provisions in support of organic agriculture it aims to achieve inclusive, sustainable development for Africa (Mhangara et al., 2019) and organic farming is considered the sustainable development option (FAO, 2023; Kisaka-Lwayo & Obi, 2016). Thus, positive perceptions towards organic food and associations with environmental benefits poses an opportunity for achievement of the sustainable development goal of Agenda 2063 at least within South Africa.

The fact that at least half these South African participants either had negative perceptions or were undecided about the benefits of organic produce, is a concern for achievement of food security from SDG2, sustainable consumption from SDG 12 as well as inclusive and

sustainable development from Agenda 2063. These concerns are addressed in the recommendations below.

2. Health Consciousness, and the Perceived Health Benefits of Organic Products

This research suggests that these South African consumers generally consider themselves to be health conscious and many perceive the main benefit of organic food products to be the health benefits. This corresponds with the findings of Rizzo et al. (2020) that the health attribute was the main motivator for consumers to pay a premium for organic products and Rana and Paul (2020) that health was the main motive for the purchase of organic products. However, less than half the participants in the current study were definitely sure that organic food products are healthier than conventionally grown products. Thus, organic food products are perceived as healthy, but not necessarily a healthier option than conventionally grown food products. This presents both an opportunity to organic food product producers and retailers, and a challenge to the achievement of the Agenda 2063 and SDG2 and SDG12 goals discussed in this paper. Recommendations for dealing with this challenge are provided in the following section.

4.1 | Recommendations

Based on the findings of the above qualitative study on the attitudes and perceptions of organic food products by a sample of South African participants, the following discussion presents recommendations on how Agenda 2063 – the Africa we want: Aspiration One, and SDG2 – end hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition and SDG12 – sustainable consumption, can be achieved through a focus on organic farming and organic food product awareness and consumption among consumers:

1. Communication of Agenda 2063 aspirations and UN's Sustainable development goals (SDGs)

The study highlights the need for widespread education and awareness campaigns about the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Africa's Agenda 2063. This supports Ndizera and Muzee (2018) who indicate that the aims and potential outcomes of Agenda 2063 need to be communicated more broadly to all stakeholders in African countries to ensure maximum support. These communication initiatives should emphasise not only the significance of the SDGs and Agenda 2063 goals for the continent but also the roles and responsibilities of individuals in contributing to their achievement. Currently, there is a lack of knowledge and buy-in on the Agenda 2063 aspirations and SDGs as they tend to be known only by the elite in society (Ndizera & Muzee, 2018). While the SDGs and Agenda 2063 aspirations are long term in nature, their implementation depends on a consistent and continued effort by all stakeholders including citizens. As

indicated by Ndizera and Muzee (2018: 153) “for commitment, they need to be owned by the citizens”. Therefore, it is essential that citizens are informed about these goals and understand how their individual actions can contribute to their attainment. This would foster greater citizen engagement and buy-in.

With increased concern about health and food security due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Ukraine-Russian war interrupting global food resources and extreme climatic events currently, this is a good time to provide national and regional campaigns on the SDGs and Agenda 2063 and how individuals can play a role in their achievement through their choices. These campaigns should promote the benefits of organic food consumption for both health and the environment and highlight the links between individual actions and the achievement of these critical goals. Campaigns should encourage organic food consumption for its health and environmental benefits and make explicit the links between these individual actions and achievement of the SDG2, SDG12 and Agenda 2063. This should build pride and ownership in the achievement of these critical aspirations and goals.

Therefore, it is recommended that national and regional campaigns be launched to educate citizens about the SDGs and Agenda 2063 aspirations and how their choices can contribute to their achievement. These campaigns should focus on promoting organic food consumption and highlighting the benefits of such consumption for health and the environment. By doing so, citizens will be more likely to take ownership of these critical goals and commit to their attainment.

2. Consumer awareness of, and education on, organic food products' relative health benefits

As the study underscores the role of organic production and consumption in supporting SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), it's imperative to promote sustainable consumption patterns. The finding that one in five participants perceived organic products as expensive and not necessarily better than conventionally grown produce suggests the importance of addressing these misconceptions. Efforts to clarify the costs versus benefits of organic produce could help influence consumer choices positively. More consumer education on the benefits of organic food product consumption over conventionally farmed food products is needed to create strong consumer demand. Consumers, particularly in developing nations perceive organic products as new (Naidoo & Ramatsetse, 2016) and thus knowledge of the real benefits is likely to be low yet increasing knowledge has been found to increase pro-environmental behaviours (Testa et al., 2019). Many participants in this South African study were found to associate organic food products with being healthy and yet many others did not really understand why organic products are healthier. Communication needs to educate consumers about how organically grown food products are healthier due to there being no pesticides or chemicals nor genetically modified hormones. Organic products' positive effects on the environment should also be communicated for example, improved soil and water quality, reduced pollution and greater biodiversity (FAO, 2023). The

United Nations also recommends education to teach consumers about what a sustainable lifestyle is (UN, 2023). For the South African government and governments in Africa to achieve the goal of healthy and well-nourished citizens, zero hunger, food security and sustainable consumption, particularly from a nutritional health perspective, they will also need to show support for such education. For example, in South Africa, this may include incorporating health and environmental benefits of organic food products into the Life Orientation syllabus or specific subject syllabi such as Consumer Studies, Life Orientation and Life Sciences where nutrition is discussed. Therefore, there's a need to include organic education in the syllabus and conduct continuous awareness campaigns highlighting the health and environmental advantages of organic food.

3. Organic food product messaging

To support the achievement of Agenda 2063, Aspiration One Goal 3 and SDG 2, farmers and retailers of organic food products should focus their messaging on the health and environmental benefits associated with organic products. Organic food product messaging by farmers and retailers should therefore focus on what has been found scientifically to be associated with organic food products i.e. these products' association with both individual and environmental health. The contribution of organic food products to nutritional health, nourishment and disease prevention should be emphasised. This supports Pacho's (2020: 11) suggestion that “organic foods should be labelled with information regarding food safety and health information”. Either positive or negative message framing can be used. Positive message framing would focus attention on the health and environmental benefits (Kim & Kim, 2014) of organic products for human quality of life. Negative message framing could emphasise the negative consequences of not adopting a behaviour (Kim & Kim, 2014), such as emphasising the negative effects, conventional farming has on the environment and on human health.

Additionally, it is recommended to label organic food products with information regarding food safety and health information to increase consumer awareness. A national or regional organic certification programme should be developed by governments to provide standardisation, which consumers can trust. This could begin in more developed countries in Africa like South Africa and then be extended as the markets for organic products develop throughout Africa. Such certification would help prevent greenwashing by producers and retailers and help consumers to know and trust genuinely organic products.

4. Support for Organic farming

SDG12 and Agenda 2063, Aspiration One also aim to move the agricultural systems on the continent to more sustainable production and modern systems for increased production, productivity and value addition which should ultimately contribute to farmer and national prosperity (AfricanUnion, 2022b; Ndizera & Muzee, 2018). While some may argue that this actually encourages conventional, modern

farming practices, organic farming protects water quality and preserves water resources, increases soil productivity and eliminates pests and diseases without damaging the environment (FAO, 2023; Yazdanpanah & Forouzani, 2015). Thus, farmers in Africa should be encouraged and assisted to transition to organic farming. Subsidies could be provided to support this change as it can be costly in the beginning. This recommendation will not only assist in achieving Agenda 2063 Goal 5, “Modern agriculture for increased productivity and production” (AUDA-NEPAD, 2022: 26) and Goal 7, “Environmentally sustainable climate and resilient economies and communities” (AUDA-NEPAD, 2022: 29) but also SDG12 by promoting resource and energy efficiency and “doing more and better with less” (UN, 2023: 1). The support can include the following:

1. **Government support:** Governments should support and promote organic agriculture through policies, funding, and incentives. This will encourage more farmers to adopt organic farming practices and improve the availability of organic food products in the market.
2. **Farmer support (Educate farmers):** Farmers should be trained and educated on organic farming practices to ensure that they meet the required standards. This can be done through workshops, training programs, seminars, etc.
3. **Improve labelling and certification:** The South African government should develop an organic produce certification scheme with training and support materials to assist farmers to reach the standards for certification. This will also require the establishment of monitoring mechanisms necessary to ensure compliance. While this will require substantial government investment, it will assist in the achievement of responsible production (SDG12), better food security (SDG2) and climate resilient communities (Agenda, 2063). Organic food products should then be clearly labelled to help consumers identify them easily as certified organic produce. This will help to build trust in the products and increase their demand.
4. **Stakeholder Collaboration:** The study underscores the shared responsibility of all stakeholders, including governments, the commercial sector, and citizens, in achieving food security, sustainable production, and consumption. Collaborative efforts are required to drive policies, practices, and behaviours that contribute to national and continental prosperity. For example, food retailers should be encouraged to stock more organic food products and to provide information to consumers about the benefits of organic products.

Implementing these recommendations could help to improve consumer perceptions of organic food products and contribute to achieving the sustainable development goals of Agenda 2063, SDG2, and SDG12.

4.2 | Limitations of the study

The limitations of this study include:

TABLE 3 Future research questions.

- 1 How can the perceived high cost of organic produce be addressed to encourage its adoption among consumers from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds with SDG and agenda 2063 messaging?
- 2 How can governmental policies effectively incentivise farmers to transition to organic farming practices, particularly in developing regions, to support sustainable agriculture and food security?
- 3 What role do cultural factors play in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviours towards organic food products across different African countries?
- 4 How might the impact of organic farming on environmental sustainability and biodiversity be quantified to better inform consumers and policymakers?
- 5 How do various communication strategies, including positive versus negative message framing, influence consumer perceptions and purchase intentions regarding organic food products?
- 6 What is the relationship between consumer attitudes towards organic produce and their actual purchasing behaviour, and how might this vary across different socio-economic and demographic groups?
- 7 What are the most effective methods for disseminating information about the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 2063 to ensure widespread understanding and commitment among citizens in African nations?
- 8 How might the introduction of certified organic food product labels, detailing health and environmental benefits, impact consumer perceptions and choices?

Note: Author.

1. **Sample Size and Composition:** The study's sample size of 25 participants limits the generalisability of the findings to a broader South African and African population. The participants' demographics and socio-economic backgrounds are unlikely to fully represent the diversity of South African and particularly African consumers, which impacts the transferability of the results. Being qualitative, the aims were to gain a deeper understanding of participant perceptions and feelings about organic products so as to try to guide strategies for addressing the SDGs and Agenda 2063 goals discussed in the paper that could be influenced by organic produce consumption. It is acknowledged that many Africans may neither be aware of, nor even able to consider, organic products.
2. **Qualitative Nature:** The study relies on qualitative methods, which provide in-depth insights but do not quantify perceptions and behaviours regarding organic consumption. It is hoped that these findings complement the quantitative findings of other studies by providing a more comprehensive understanding of what South African participants think, feel and believe about organic products.
3. **Social Desirability Bias:** Participants might have provided responses that they deemed socially acceptable, especially when discussing topics related to health and environmental concerns. This could

lead to underreporting of negative perceptions or barriers related to organic consumption.

4. **Contextual Specificity:** The study's focus on South Africa participants might limit the applicability of its findings to other regions or countries with different cultural, economic, and regulatory contexts. Cultural factors specific to South Africa might influence perceptions of organic consumption differently than in other parts of the world. Future research throughout Africa is recommended below.
5. **Sampling Bias:** The use of non-probability, snowball or chain-referral sampling might introduce bias, as participants who are more interested in, or familiar with, organic consumption might be more likely to participate. This could have resulted in an overrepresentation of individuals with positive attitudes towards organic products.

These limitations should be considered when interpreting the study's findings and applying them to broader contexts or making policy recommendations. Recommendations for future research address some of these limitations.

4.3 | Future research questions

The subsequent table presents potential future research questions derived from the discussion on consumer perceptions of organic food products and their implications for achieving sustainable development goals:

These future research questions presented in Table 3 aim to delve deeper into various aspects related to consumer perceptions of organic food products, sustainable consumption, education strategies, and policy interventions to promote organic farming and consumption in the context of achieving sustainable development goals in African nations.

5 | CONCLUSION

Global environmental concerns are growing. The United Nation's sustainable development goals address many different challenges, but the focus of this paper was on a study assessing South African consumers perceptions of organic consumption and the implications thereof for achievement of SDG2, food security and zero hunger and malnutrition, SDG12, sustainable production and consumption and Africa's Agenda 2063's focus in aspiration 1, on a prosperous Africa, based on inclusive growth and sustainable development with healthy, and well-nourished citizens who have a high quality of life. This aspiration also states that modern agriculture for increased production, productivity and value addition should contribute to farmer and national prosperity. South African consumers in this study were not regular buyers of organic food products but generally perceived themselves to be health conscious and organic produce to be healthy

for humans with some participants also perceiving organic products to be beneficial for the environment. Of concern however, is that one in five participants perceived organic products to be expensive and no better than conventionally grown produce. As organic food production and consumption supports SDGs 2 and 12 as well as Agenda 2063 Aspiration one, for a healthy and well-nourished African society, nurturing the generally positive perceptions of organic produce needs to be a national and continental imperative. In conclusion, this study emphasises the need for comprehensive efforts involving education, awareness, consumer behaviour transformation, producer support, and multi-stakeholder collaboration. These strategies collectively contribute to nurturing a sustainable food production and consumption ecosystem that aligns with global and regional goals for a prosperous, healthy, well-nourished and sustainable African society.

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