

# ADAPTING NETHERLANDS 'STARTERSLENIING' MODEL TO IMPROVE THE CURRENT FINANCE LINKED INDIVIDUAL SUBSIDY SCHEME IN SOUTH AFRICA

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## Abstract

Finance Linked Individual Subsidy Scheme Programme (FLISP) assists households who earn between R3 501 to R22 000 to get additional funds from National Housing Finance Corporation of R130 505 to the lowest income band and R30 001 to the highest income band in South Africa. This money can be used to pay for deposit or legal fees. The problem is that there has emerged a 'sandwich' class of households who earn just above the R22 000 threshold and still cannot afford entry level mortgages. Adapted from Netherlands starterslening model, the paper conceptualized a hybrid FLISP that can absorb the sandwich class termed FLISP-plus. To this class, the National Housing Finance Corporation would give 70% of the R30 001 (R21 001) while FI offer a 30% additional loan (R9 000) which can be paid after 3 years. The applicability of the proposed FLISP-plus to the South African market was evaluated by analysing responses from interview data, purposefully sampled respondents from the Department of Human Settlements (DHS) and the financial institutions. Results showed that 'education' and 'credit score' for the FLISP-plus in affordable mortgages were common themes. Further, the results showed that the proposed FLISP-plus can be adopted for the proportion of the sandwich class segment whose credit scores are low but whose incomes are high. Households can work towards improving their credit scores in order to access FLISP- plus. The study concluded that DHS can train the sandwich class to educate them on how to manage their finances well for FLISP plus to be successful in increasing homeownership. On the other hand, financial institutions can train them on different products that can support savings towards consistent mortgage payments, making

homeownership affordable.

### **Keywords**

Assisted Affordability, FLISP, Homeownership, Low and moderate income, mortgages, South Africa, Starterslening, Netherlands

## **1.0. Introduction**

Finance Linked Individual Subsidy Scheme Programme (FLISP) assists households who earn between R3 501 to R22 000 to get additional funds from National Housing Finance Corporation (NHFC) of R130 505 to the lowest income band and R30 001 to the highest income band in South Africa. NHFC also manages the guarantee fund allocated from the DHS since 2010. The problem is that there has emerged a 'sandwich' class of households who earn just above the R22 000 threshold and still cannot afford entry level mortgages from Financial Institutions (FIs) (Muhoro, 2015). This quagmire is also complicated by the fact that house prices are unrelenting to a first time homebuyer who has to pay for transportation, food, children's education, health among others (Olanrewaju and Wong, 2020). The question remains on how the current FLISP can be improved so that NHFC is able to extend subsidies to households who earn more than the prescribed threshold. Thus aim of this paper is to conceptualise a hybrid FLISP model that can cater for the sandwich class by adapting the "Starterslening" from Netherlands, to suit the context of South Africa. Two sub questions included:

- a) Can FIs in South Africa agree with the proposed tenets of FLISP plus and the interest free loan for three years?
- b) The Department of Human Settlements (DHS) agree with the tenets of FLISP-plus, extending the subsidy threshold.

To be specific, the objectives of this paper were twofold:

- a) To investigate the financial institutions (FI) perspectives on FLISP – plus in South Africa.
- b) To investigate the Department of Human Settlements (DHS) perspectives on the FLIP - plus in South Africa.

The paper puts forward the hypothesis that both the financial institutions (FI) and the Department of Human Settlements (DHS) positively appraise FLISP – plus by extending

housing finance to the sandwich class who constitutes first time homeowners.

## 2.0. Literature Review

Low-income households generally do have access to mortgages and they face stricter lending standards which restricts them as such loans are long term (Nwuba and Chukwuma-Nwuba (2018; Baqutaya, Amoako and Boamah, 2017). As defined, affordability is the ratio of the sum of total loans to the income or total household salary. This means that most households end up renting instead of constructing or buying a finished house from the market and the challenges associated with renting are well known in literature (Asante, Gavu, Quansah, & Osei, 2018; Bah *et al.* 2018). FIs focus on extending mortgages to creditworthy households who are less risky (Afrane and Asamoah, 2011). Most low and moderate income (LMI) households are not able to pay the needed deposit due to a maximum debt-to-income ratio (affordability ratio) and poor credit score ratings (Limba, 2019); Acolin, Bricker). Another problem is that FIs do not lend to those households who are informally employed because proof of income is difficult to ascertain.

Ganiyu, Fapohunda and Haldenwang (2017) state that the households in South Africa do not have the capability to access mortgage finance properly. Expansion of credit programmes will have valuable positive effects on LMI households who live in abject deprivation in the form of informal settlements where slums are known to have an environmental and health risk to society (Sobantu, Zulu and Maphosa, 2019; Nyashanu *et al.* 2020). LMIs were unable to acquire formal resources due to lengthy and difficult procedures.

There is a role that government can play in collaborating with FIs to make low income mortgages more accessible and affordable, especially in lowering interest rates for low income households (Kavishe & Chileshe, 2019; Jayantha and Oladinrin, 2020; Muganga and Gitahi, 2021). This is because access to low income mortgages is constrained by high interest rates in most countries resulting in a small percentage of the urban population affording a mortgage (Mohd-Yusof *et al.* 2019; Nwuba *et al.* *ibid*; Kieti and K'Akumu, 2018). Even for those who can afford initial mortgages, there are higher chances of defaulting as mortgage payments on adjustable-rate mortgages rise (Campbell and Cocco (2015).

### ***The Current Finance-Linked Individual Subsidy Programme (FLISP) in South Africa***

In 2006, DHS in South Africa introduced FLISP and the National Housing Finance Corporation (NHFC) was mandated to manage the programme to assist the 'gap market' households with the purchase of a mortgaged house (new or resale), a serviced site, or the construction of it

thereof. Houses can be detached, semi-detached single or double-story building with a floor area of more than 40 m<sup>2</sup> (Ludick, Dyason and Fourie, 2021). Broadly, FLISP was intended for households whose income is inadequate to qualify for a home loan, but which exceeds the maximum limit applicable to access government's 'free basic house subsidy scheme', known as the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) housing (Maluleke, 2019). Household income threshold started off between R3 3001 to R15 000 and currently is between R3 5001 to R22 000 (Butcher, 2020; Coetzee, 2018; Cirolia (2016). The FLISP subsidy is a once off amount that is paid into the mortgage provider to reduce the mortgage amount so that the mortgage payment is lesser. It is a deposit payment that helps first-time home buyers to purchase a house.

Each housing programme has its own set of eligibility requirements. Maluleke, Dlamini and Rakololo, (*ibid*) describe that a person is eligible for a subsidy if he or she is a lawful resident of South Africa or in possession of permanent residency status; legally competent to contract; and has not previously received government assistance. Additionally, persons who previously had a fixed residential property may be eligible to purchase a vacant serviced site if the property was bought without government assistance. The Chief Directorate Policy Development, 2010 shows that the Housing Subsidy System (HSS) administers the National Housing Programs, and all beneficiaries of housing subsidies are documented on the National Housing Subsidy Database to guarantee that no one receives assistance twice. For South Africa, the problem is that there has emerged a 'sandwich' class of households who earn just above the R22 000 threshold and still cannot afford entry level mortgages. The paper identifies the need to adapt from other countries how to open mortgages to LMI households, the likes of Netherlands.

### ***'Starterslening' assists LMI mortgages for first time homebuyers in Netherlands***

Netherlands introduced 'starterslening' to bridge the gap of the gap market (missing middle, the sandwich class). The programme is targeted at first time buyers and it provides a special purpose fund called the SVn (public housing stimulation fund) as an extra loan. SVn is financed by contributions from participating municipalities' housing associations and the central government (Elsinga, Hoekstra & Dol, 2015; Hoekstra & Marais, 2016). This decreases the beneficiary's mortgage loan, making homeownership accessible (Fasakin, Olanrewaju, and Umeokeke, 2019; Deng, Yan, and Chen, 2019). The loan is intended to be taken out on top of a regular loan. The borrower does not have to pay any interest over this added loan for the first three years. Additionally, the borrower will be tested every three years and if the borrower's income conditions improve, then the loan is repaid over 30 years. After three

years of paying the interest on the regular loan (the interest is determined by National Mortgage Guarantee (NHG)), then the applicant will start to repay the additional loan amount. On the other hand, if the borrower's conditions are still below the expected income growth, then the borrower can continue to keep paying interest with no loan repayment on regular loan (Jones & Semlali, 2018).

Hoekstra & Marais (2016) compared Western European housing finance products for the gap market and considered their potential applicability in South African market. In their paper, they argued that the Western European housing financing products for the gap market could potentially work in South Africa even though there are obstacles ranging from macro-economic differences to institutional problems at local levels. There is a gap in research on how the current model called FLISP in South Africa can be extended to a slightly higher income group. This paper proposed a modification of the current FLISP subsidy in the South African market by proposing a FLISP –plus model by adopting some elements of the 'Starterslening' programme used in the Netherlands.

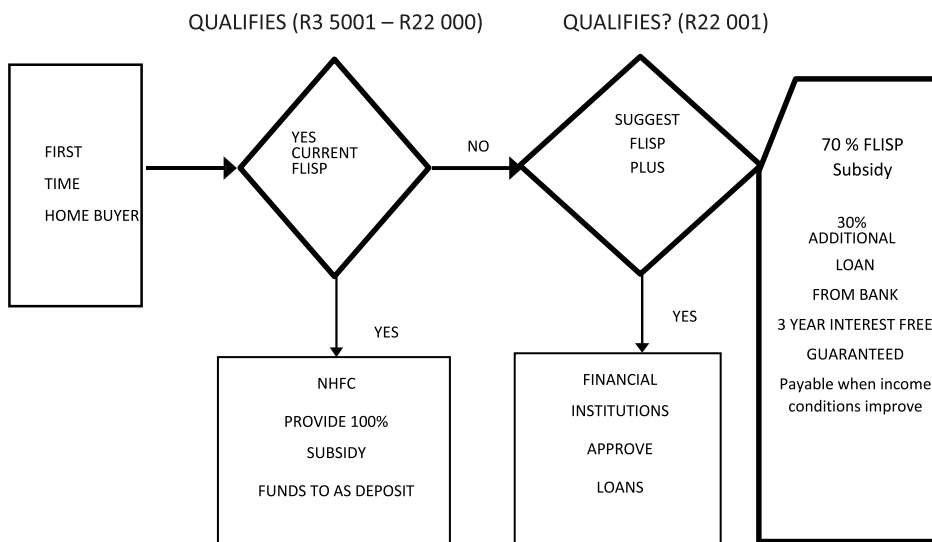
### **3.0. Theoretical Underpinnings; Mortgage Risk & Access To Homeownership**

Investment theory postulates that a good investment asset does not lose its value in the future. FIs are encouraged to finance LMI mortgages which do not pose the risk of default. Thus, the NHFC guarantee provided by the DHS and the Association of Mortgage Lenders (AML) has an effect to reduce mortgage default. In South Africa, there is fear of the default 'culture' that was linked to political objections against apartheid where people would simply stop paying because they attained democracy and they earn depressed incomes (Mutsindikwa, 2020; Okem, Myeni, Mtapuri, and Nkambule, 2019; Rakodi and Withers, 1995). The guarantee is highly considered in the LMI market as it encourages private sector participation. From this theoretical view point, the paper adapted from Netherlands starterslening model, a conceptualized hybrid FLISP that has potential to absorb the sandwich class termed FLISP-plus. FLISP-plus is considered low risk, as the mortgage is guaranteed by DHS and so it will be a success in making LMI households access a mortgage in South Africa. This will also promote inclusive housing developments which have potential to subsidize the lowest income home owners (Simbanegavi, 2019; Deng, Yan, and Chen, 2019)

## 4.0. The Conceptualized Flisp- Plus

Adapted from the Netherlands starterslending model, the paper conceptualized a hybrid FLISP that can absorb the sandwich class termed FLISP-plus. To this class, the NHFC would give 70% of the R30 001 (R21 001) while the FI offers a 30% additional loan (R9 000) which is interest free for three years. If the financial situation of the home buyer improves after three years, then the bank will start charging interest on the additional loan. If the financial situation does not improve after three years, then the financial condition of the home buyer will be tested every year until a household is able to start paying for it over 30 years, illustrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1:** The conceptualized FLISP- Plus



Source: Authors

## 5.0. Research Methodology

The paper uses qualitative research under interpretivist paradigm to get a deeper investigation into mortgage affordability concepts that are quantitative in nature. Following Nichiforeanu (2020), the paper used purposeful sampling targeting people who work in home loan departments such as managers of different FIs as well as policy makers and project managers at the DHS in South Africa. Employees from the financial institutions and the department of human settlements were scheduled for interviews at their convenient times. Fourteen FI experts and twelve DHS experts prompted a research saturation that was satisfactory to the researchers. Responses were recorded, cleaned, and converted into text documents.

Primary data was collected using individual structured interviews and final nodes captured the answers given under each specific question and facilitated colour coding as a thematic analysis in an iterative way. Following Adams *et al.* (2016), there was no need for a larger number of participants except to establish a saturation point. The interview data was collected in an exhaustive way whereby interviews took between 20 minutes to one hour. The schedule of questions for the FIs consisted of 15 questions that focused on the additional loan interest and the term of the loan. Validation of the nodes was done through a second stage of data collection. The researcher facilitated the process by engaging participants who are experts to synthesize and rationalize the different views that emerged from interview data. Cross validation involved contacting participants again to check the exactitude of facts and observations. NVivo 1.5.1 software was used to analyse the documents.

## 6.0. Results

### *Financial Institutions' perspective on FLISP plus*

A thematic analysis was used to derive all the themes that are shown in Table 1 using responses from financial institutions. Some of the names in the themes were cut, this is due to the output we obtained from the Nvivo tool which was used to derive the themes.

**Table 1:** FIs Responses Themes



Source: Authors







**Figure 3: FIs Text Search**



Source: Authors

***Department of Human Settlements perspectives on FLISP plus***

A similar thematic analysis was performed to extract the themes for the DHS. Through text analysis, important themes were education, policy, lending, credit scoring and incentivize. Again 'education' theme alludes to the fact that DHS prefers that FLISP –plus home buyers understand the product that they are taking with the FIs. The distribution of themes also showed that education was suggested and over and above that, all respondents mentioned credit record and policy in their responses. A word cloud for the DHS showed that 'government' and 'affordability' were the most mentioned words.

***Sentiment analysis for FI and the DHS***

To both the FIs and the DHS, a question was posed for the sentiment analysis:

*'FLISP-plus is considered low risk, as the mortgage is guaranteed by DHS, will it be a success for the LMI households in South Africa?'*

Sentiment analysis was done to see if the respondents were positive, negative, neutral or mixed in their point of view on the application of the adapted low income mortgage model in South Africa. Some respondents were negative about the adoption of the FLISP-plus. Overall, the sentiment analysis showed that most respondents were positive that the new model will be successful if implemented by the NHFC.

In all the analyses that was performed using both DHSs and FIs responses, we observed that there is commonality in their point of view. The commonality stems from the fact that

applicants would need to be educated in one form or the other and the education must include teachings about the FIs products and also financial literacy. The education will improve the credit scoring standings of the applicants, which will then lead to easy access to bank's credit products when LMI applicants decide to be homeowners. This will accelerate homeownership in South Africa if initiatives such as the FLISP - plus are adopted.

## 7.0. Discussion

This paper investigated an extended version of the current FLISP as highlighted by Coetzee (2018), who suggested adjustments to it. Further, this paper shares the same sentiments with Coetzee (2018) on the issue of the gap market as a model to expedite homeownership in South Africa. The view of the FIs and those of the DHSs on the application of FLISP - plus corroborates with what is discussed by Hoekstra & Marais (2016). Government has a role to play and continues extending subsidies to the LMI households (Jarbandhan, Viljoen, De Beer, and Blaauw, 2016). They suggested adoption of financing products in South Africa from the Western European countries. A 'savings' culture cannot be underestimated (Chen, and Deng 2014) and this talks to the financial literacy that was discussed in our paper. The LMI applicants who are knowledgeable about the bank's products and who are financially savvy will only show the efficacy of the FLISP-plus.

## 8.0. Conclusion and Recommendation

The respondents from FIs highlighted the need for LMI households to have a good credit score as well as educating the applicants and the FLISP-plus beneficiaries about financial management. With financial management, it is possible to have a good credit score. Results showed 'credit' and 'scores' words being inseparable and this shows how the success and ability of FLISP –plus hinges on good credit scores which come from good financial management. The knowledge of the products from the FIs has potential to assist LMI households to make better choices when applying for mortgage products on offer from government and private sector collaboration.

The perspective from the DHSs on the application of the FLISP-plus is that there should be avoidance on extending the new programme to applicants that have adverse credit scores.

The negative responses pertaining to application of the 'FLISP - plus in South Africa from the sentiment analysis purely came from the fact that some first-time home buyers who fall in the

sandwich class, usually have low credit scores and low affordability. It will be difficult to apply the FLISP plus to those individuals. If the affordability ratio is high, it means a household may be at risk of mortgage default. It can be concluded that the 'FLISP plus can be applied only to applicants that have low credit scores but high affordability in the sandwich class. This means that FLISP—plus will be successful if a household has a lower sum of owed loans relative to the household income. The paper recommends that if individuals have low credit scores and have good affordability, then FLISP plus can be applied. Recommendations to industry and include:

### ***Contribution to industry***

- The paper has put forward a model for adoption by NHFC to extend the LMI household access home mortgages through the new FLISP—plus.
- FIs can identify pockets of households that can qualify to apply for FLISP - plus. This will provide a new stream of revenue for financial institutions as it is a new business.

### ***Limitations and future research***

The limitation of the research was reinforced by the Popi Act of 2022 which prevented the identity of households that could be evaluated for FLISP – plus. Investigation could not get insight from the targeted households. Further, the cut-off threshold for 'high affordability' needs to be quantified in the future research.

### ***Funding, conflict of interest and acknowledgement***

The research received no funding and authors declare no conflict of interest. Our sincere gratitude goes to Princess Makhosazana Dastile: a Masters student who pioneered this study at Wits University from 2022. Gratitude also extends to respondents who provided their time to answer this research. This article receives profound insight from the scheduled AfRES conference in Accra, Ghana in 2022.

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