

## CHAPTER FIVE

### EMPIRICAL STUDY AND FINDINGS

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this empirical study was to explore current social work practice with regard to sustainable development and identify new challenges and opportunities for sustainable social work practice in the changing South Africa. The concept of sustainable development has evoked considerable controversy. (Compare Hunter, 1997: 233-235 and Bremner and Visser, 1997: 219-220.) According to Ngobese and Cock (1997: 256) the concept “sustainable development” itself is subject to various criticisms because it means different things to different people. (Compare Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development, 1999: 1 and United Kingdom, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), 2004.) Visser and Sunter (2002: 15) drew attention to the fact that the concept is almost a cliché now; but the idea behind it remains a powerful source of inspiration and according to these authors, is responsible for an umbrella movement encompassing a diverse group – academics, avant-garde entrepreneurs, mother-earthers, pop singers, students, housewives, activists in nongovernmental organizations, organic farmers, green scientists, and politicians. They all share one thing in common: an interest in improving human wellbeing by seeking a proper balance between social, economic and environmental change.

This study was as an exploration of the perceptions and knowledge base of social workers with regard to the sustainable development paradigm. In this chapter, a brief overview of the research methodology and the findings of the qualitative study will be presented and discussed. It further will describe the way in which information was processed and integrated with the literature study. The information obtained from the focus group discussions are discussed in themes.

The themes presented the most significant aspects identified from the data obtained.

## **5.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **5.2.1 Research approach**

As cited in the first chapter of this study, this research was of a qualitative nature. According to Krueger (in Smith and Stewart, 2001: 11) qualitative research and analysis has three principal phases. The first phase is planning and background research, the second phase is data collection and finally, an analysis phase. Smith and Stewart (2001: 2) defined qualitative research as a systematic, empirical strategy for answering questions about people in a bounded social context. These authors (2001: 2) stated the following: “Like most other methodological approaches, qualitative research seeks to answer the question: “What’s going on here?” Brown, Stevens, Troiano and Schneider (2002: 1) are of the opinion that although qualitative research means different things to different people, it generally refers to research that leads to understanding people’s lives, stories, behaviours, or is about organizational functioning, social movements, or interactional relationships. Pope and Mays (1995: 3) contributed to this discussion and in their opinion qualitative studies are concerned with answering questions such as “What is X and how does X vary in different circumstances, and why?” rather than “How many Xs are there?”

CERIS ([sa]: 23) contributed a valuable perspective of particular relevance to this research study, when the following statement is made: “ Qualitative methods of observing and interviewing are useful for gaining a holistic understanding, especially of complex socio-economic changes, and empathy with participants and their situation”. Thomas (2000: 4) emphasized that a prominent feature of qualitative data is the richness and holism, with a strong potential for revealing complexity. In Thomas’s opinion such data provide “thick descriptions” that are

vivid, nested in a real context, and have a ring of truth that has strong impact on the reader.

Although sustainable development in its broad context is not a new concept, the position of social work and its applicability within the sustainable development paradigm, is new. The significance of social work within the sustainable development paradigm and the perceptions, knowledge and attitudes of social workers are extremely important not only to the social work profession, but also to the functioning of society. (Compare Abrahams and Adair, 1997: 46.)

This study was a process of discovery and not the testing of a hypothesis. The researcher entered the realm of the participants' everyday experience and through conversation extracted detailed descriptions of their perceptions, ideas and concerns. In this research the emphasis was on understanding the experiences, attitudes, assumptions and perspectives of the participants. In Leedy's opinion (1997: 156) in these instances, a qualitative study can help define what is important.

### **5.2.2 Type of research**

According to Fouché (2002: 108) basic and applied research are complementary and she noted in this regard that the advancement of knowledge and the solution of problems are both scientific necessities. Fouché (2002: 108) supported the position of Arkava and Lane (1983) and Grinnell (1993) in that basic and applied research are the broad goals of research.

For this research study the researcher utilized applied research. According to Fouché (2002: 108-109) applied research is aimed at solving specific policy problems or at helping practitioners accomplish tasks. It is focused on solving problems in practice. With this in mind the researcher's aim was to gather data on various aspects of the sustainable development paradigm and the position of

the social work profession within this paradigm. Within this research study the focus was on achieving a clearer understanding of the role and functions of social work practice within the sustainable development paradigm, and how this can be implemented to ensure sustainable social work practice. According to Fouché (2002: 109) most applied research findings have implications for knowledge development. The primary focus was on the outcome of the investigations to increase the knowledge of the social work profession and use this to devise new applications for the pressing problems in communities and broader society.

### **5.3 THE RESEARCH STRATEGY**

As previously discussed in chapter one of this research study, Fouché (2002: 271) used the term “strategy” for the equivalent of research design in the quantitative approach. Fouché further stated that researchers undertaking qualitative studies have a number of choices of strategies. Creswell (in Fouché, 2002: 272 and Oliver and Linkon, 2003) identified five strategies of inquiry, the case study being one of these strategies. Yin (in Dubé and Paré, 2001: 5) defined the scope of a case study as follows: “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”. Dubé and Paré (2001: 5) further stated that case research is useful when a phenomenon is broad and complex, where the existing body of knowledge is insufficient to permit the posing of causal questions, when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed, and when a phenomenon cannot be studied outside the context in which it occurs. These authors concluded by stating that case study research is more widely used for exploration and hypothesis generation. CERIS ([sa]: 15) stated that case studies become particularly useful where it is needed to understand some particular problem or situation in great depth, and where it is possible to identify cases rich in information in the sense that a great deal can be learned from a few exemplars of

the phenomenon in question. Mark (in Fouché, 2002: 275-276) referred to three types of case studies, namely: the intrinsic case study, the instrumental case study and the collective case study. For the purpose of this study, the researcher utilized the instrumental case study. As discussed in chapter one of this study, the instrumental case study is used to elaborate on a theory or to gain a better understanding of a social issue.

In this research study, the instrumental case study was used to provide insight into sustainable development as a new paradigm within the social welfare field and to discover the issues and challenges faced by the social work profession as they pertained to sustainable development. Furthermore its purpose was to develop guidelines and intervention strategies to address the issues of poverty, underdevelopment and unemployment in a sustainable manner.

#### **5.4 FOCUS GROUPS AS A DATA-COLLECTION TECHNIQUE**

The researcher utilized focus group discussions as a method of generating data. According to Schurink, Schurink and Poggenpoel (1998: 314) a focus group interview can be described as a purposive discussion of a specific topic or related topics taking place between participants with a similar background and common interest.

The researcher utilized an exploratory research purpose as little is known about the topic of investigation and the utilization of focus groups are particularly useful in its ability to explore the topic and generate hypotheses. Researcher wanted to gain insight into the everyday experience of social work practice and the frame of reference of participants regarding sustainable development. Greeff (2002: 306) stated in this regard that focus groups allow the researcher to investigate a multitude of perceptions in a defined area of interest.

An important assumption of the focus group method is that people will become aware of their own perceptions when confronted with active disagreement of others and thus be prompted to analyze their own views more intensely. Schurink, Schurink and Poggenpoel (1998: 314) stated that this enables the researcher to develop concepts, inductively from the bottom up rather than the top down. The focus groups were conducted as a form of open conversation on the specific topic and a number of questions were designed to stimulate and guide the discussion. The abovementioned authors (1998: 315) stated clearly and accurately the nature and value of such a focused discussion: "Focus group interviews are designed to do exactly what the name implies – focus. Far from free-wheeling conversations among group members, focus groups have focuses and clear agendas. In fact, the topics of discussion in a focus group interview are carefully predetermined and sequenced in an understandable and logical way. As such they facilitate the natural, spontaneous discussion of events or experiences by the participants. Participants in focus group interviews need not reach consensus. Instead, emphasis is placed on finding out as much as possible about participants' experiences and feelings about a specific aspect of social reality, such as an event, product or service". Greeff (2002: 307) was in agreement with this point of view and according to this author focus groups draw on three of the fundamental strengths that are shared by all qualitative methods, namely:

- Exploration and discovery
- Context and depth
- Interpretation

According to Nitzke (2000: 10), the researcher who uses focus groups is interested in the kinds of data produced by in-depth interviews, as well as the process of negotiation among participants. Barbour (1999: 129) contributed the following in this regard: "Potentially, therefore, focus groups offer a more critical or reflexive framework for research on the very nature of attitudes, on the construction of the issue at hand, as well as on the constructive role of the social

scientist as interpreter or part-constructor of such views”. The focus groups conducted in this study provided a platform for discussion around the concept of sustainable development and the realities of social work practice in an ever-changing society. Participants were able to voice their own perceptions and concerns and exchanged information with others in order to clarify a number of burning issues within the social work profession.

Questions were carefully selected in order to elicit the maximum amount of information. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998: 41) the research question in a qualitative study is a statement that identifies the phenomenon to be studied. It tells the reader what the researcher specifically wants to know about this subject.

## **5.5 POPULATION AND SAMPLING**

Strydom and De Vos (1998: 190) defined a population as the totality of persons, events, organisation units, case records or other sampling units with which the research problem is concerned. Strydom and Venter (2002: 198) also referred to the definition by Seaberg, namely: “A population is the total set from which the individuals or units of the study are chosen”. The population in this study was all social workers in the Pretoria area that do developmental work. It was not feasible to utilize the whole social work community; therefore a sample was selected from different social work organizations and non-governmental organizations, in and around the Pretoria area. Smith and Stewart (2001: 3) stated that qualitative research typically utilizes a small sample representing the key constituents in the market under scrutiny.

For the purpose of this research study purposive sampling was used. Fossey, Harvey, McDermott and Davidson (2002: 10) contributed the following with regard to qualitative sampling: “Qualitative sampling is described as purposive (or purposeful) when it aims to select appropriate information sources to explore meanings, and theoretical when its aim is the selection of people, situations or

processes on theoretical grounds to explore emerging ideas and build theory as data analysis progresses”.

Merriam (2002: 12) added the following to the discussion: “Instead, since qualitative inquiry seeks to understand the meaning of phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants, it is important to select a sample from which the most can be learned. This is called a purposive or purposeful sample”. D’Onofrio (2001: 1) contributed to the discussion as follows: “Sampling is purposive. One makes an effort to seek out those with credible and authentic experiences. One focuses on whose voice will tell a representative and complete story. One might seek out deviant cases along with centrally positioned respondents in order to create a multifaceted sense to the story of a place”. Patton (in Merriam, 2002: 12) agreed with this point of view and argued that it is important to select “information-rich cases” for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research.

Strydom and Delpont (2002: 334) postulated that clear identification and formulation of criteria for the selection of respondents in the case of purposive sampling are of cardinal importance. Creswell (in Strydom and Delpont, 2002: 334) commented as follows in this regard: “The purposeful selection of participants represents a key decision point in a qualitative study. Researchers designing qualitative studies need clear criteria in mind and need to provide rationales for their decision”. In this research study the researcher consulted with the management of various social service organizations, government departments and non-governmental organizations, in and around the Pretoria area, to assist researcher in identifying those social workers meeting the following criteria: In their working experience involved in one or more of the following:

- Community development
- The development of social networks

- Income-generating projects and small business development
- Human development programmes, namely skills development and adult basic education.

The researcher contacted in excess of forty organizations in and around the Pretoria area. These organizations ranged from “traditional” welfare organizations, non-governmental organizations, various national government departments, local governments, and church or faith-based organizations. At the initial stage of contact all of the organizations claimed to be involved in “development work”. All of these organizations were kindly requested to assist the researcher in identifying those social workers involved in one or more of the abovementioned areas of social work practice. The researcher purposefully selected the participants that in the view of the researcher were in a position to best answer the research questions and provide a unique perspective to this study.

The researcher requested that all the social workers that were willing to participate in the focus group discussions complete and sign a consent form. (See Appendix 3) The researcher proposed six different dates and times for the focus group discussions after consultation with various organizations with regard to the availability and work schedules of social workers involved in community development and development work. Many of the social workers that committed themselves to participating in this research provided the researcher with a firm commitment (verbal and written) to be present at a focus group discussion on a given date and time. The researcher made use of written reminders two to three days before the actual focus group discussion to the different organisations as well as the individual social workers involved. The day before each group interview, the researcher contacted each participant by telephone to confirm his or her involvement. Unfortunately some of the participants could not attend due to circumstances beyond their control for reasons of work pressure, or in some instances, unexpected court appearances. Other participants simply failed to

notify the researcher that they were either no longer able to attend, or wished not to be part of the research project. In all instances the researcher again made contact with these participants and suggested alternative dates and times for the discussions in an attempt to accommodate their work schedules. In spite of this continuous effort to convince all of those social workers identified by the various organizations to be part of this research study, many were not willing to participate. The researcher had to respect the decisions of those not willing to participate, as it was their right to withdraw at any stage of the research process. (Compare Strydom, 2002: 65.)

The difficulty in getting social workers to commit themselves to participating in the focus group discussions proved to be a financially expensive part of this research. Many weeks of preparation and hundreds of telephone calls and electronic mail communication preceded the actual focus group discussions. Morgan (in Greeff, 2002: 312) stated that the sheer availability of participants could be a concern. Pretorius (2004: 56) indicated that in her study concerning the prevention of relationship violence, she also encountered the problem of extremely low actual participation. In this study the potential participants engaged enthusiastically in the discussion of the purpose of the research but for various reasons did not follow through on their commitment to participate.

Gibbs (1997: 4) added another dimension to this difficult issue and stated the following in this regard: "On a practical note, focus groups can be difficult to assemble. It may not be easy to get a representative sample and focus groups may discourage certain people from participating, for example those who are not very articulate or confident, and those who have communication problems or special needs. The method of focus group discussion may also discourage some people from trusting others with sensitive or personal information".

Fossey, Harvey, McDermott and Davidson (2002: 10) entered this debate and indicated that qualitative sampling may involve small numbers of participants,

while the amount of data gathered can be large, with many hours of participant interviews, or multiple data sources related to one setting including interviews, observation-based field notes and written documents. These authors (2002: 10) stated in this regard the following: “No fixed minimum number of participants is necessary to conduct sound qualitative research, however, sufficient depth of information needs to be gathered to fully describe the phenomena being studied”. The researcher is of the opinion that she would not have gained more information if more respondents participated in this research study.

## **5.6 PILOT STUDY**

According to Strydom and Delport (2002: 337) it is important to conduct a pilot study, whether it is a qualitative or a quantitative study that is undertaken. These authors stated that in qualitative research the pilot study is usually informal and a few respondents and or participants possessing the same characteristics as those of the main investigation can be involved in the study. They further emphasized that a statistically correct pilot study does not play as important a role in qualitative as in quantitative research. In their view, the pilot study allows the researcher to test certain questions. By testing the nature of questions in an interviewing schedule or for focus groups in the pilot study, the qualitative researcher is able to make modifications to ensure quality interviewing during the main investigation.

In contrast to this view van Teijlingen and Hundley (2002: 1) maintained that the term “pilot studies” refers to mini versions of the full-scale study, also called “feasibility studies”, and should be regarded as a crucial element of a good study design. In their opinion (2002: 2) one of the advantages of conducting a pilot study is that it might give advance warning about where the main research project could fail, where research protocols may not be followed, or whether proposed methods or instruments are inappropriate or too complicated. Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2002: 2) stated that pilot studies are used for collecting

preliminary data and for assessing the proposed data analysis techniques to uncover potential problems.

According to Strydom (2002: 214) an overview of the literature, conducting discussions with experts, exploring the actual research area, as well as undertaking an intensive study of strategic units, are all necessary tasks that the prospective researcher should undertake. An intensive study of strategic units means that the researcher should expose a few cases that are similar to the planned main inquiry to the same procedures as are planned for the main investigation. In this research study, the researcher had a focus group discussion, attended by four social workers, fitting the criteria as set out in the section on sampling and sampling procedures. The researcher obtained valuable insight with regard to the type of questions in the interview schedule from these participants.

The pilot study for this research study, therefore, included an extensive literature study; interviews with experts; a preliminary exploratory study, as well as a study of strategic units.

## **5.7 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF EMPIRICAL DATA**

According to Lal (2001: 4) in research, data analysis is a process. The goal of this process is to bring order, structure, and meaning to the vast amounts of data collected. Marshall and Rossman (in Thames Valley University, [sa]) agreed with this point of view and offered this graphic description: "Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. It is a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative, and fascinating process. It does not proceed in a linear fashion; it is not neat. Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data". According to Fossey, Harvey, McDermott and Davidson (2002: 13) qualitative analysis involves more than simply coding data. According to these authors (2002: 13) developing an understanding of qualitative data requires conceptual

level processes of exploring the meanings, patterns or connections among data that involves the researcher's own thought, reflection and intuition. Strauss and Corbin (1998: 11) stated the following with regard to qualitative analysis: "In speaking about qualitative analysis, we are referring not to the quantifying of qualitative data but rather to a nonmathematical process of interpretation, carried out for the purpose of discovering concepts and relationships in raw data and then organizing these into a theoretical explanatory scheme".

In this research study, the researcher did a qualitative content analysis. Schurink (1998: 242) described the qualitative content analysis as an emphasis on the development of concepts, insights and understanding from the patterns in the data rather than exact figures gained from precise measurement. Lal (2001: 4) stated in this regard: "Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships among categories (themes and patterns)". According to Fossey, Harvey, McDermott and Davidson (2002: 7) qualitative research aims to give privilege to the perspectives of research participants and to illuminate the subjective meaning, actions and context of those being researched. In their opinion central to the quality of qualitative research is whether participants' perspectives have been authentically represented in the research process and the interpretations made from information gathered (authenticity), and whether the findings are coherent in the sense that they "fit" the data and social context from which they were derived. These authors (2002: 14) further stated that qualitative research stresses the importance of understanding findings in the particular contexts and settings of the research. They concluded with the following statement (2002: 14): "The aim is not to generalize about the distribution of experiences, or processes. Therefore qualitative research makes no claim of the generalizability of findings to a specified larger population in a probabilistic sense. Rather, qualitative researchers are interested in the applicability of their findings, based on how the nature and processes involved in experiences generalize".

### 5.7.1 Analysis phase

The analysis phase of this qualitative research study proceeded with the following four-step process, utilized for the purpose of data analysis in the study.

**Step 1:** Three focus groups were conducted during the months of March and April 2003. Audiotapes of the discussions were comprehensively transcribed. Comprehensive notes were taken during the focus group discussions. These notes were compared with the transcriptions of the audiotapes.

**Step 2:** The text was read through as a whole to familiarise the researcher with its content and to note patterns or themes that were recurring in the data. Both Creswell and Tesch (in East Carolina University [sa]: 1) were of the opinion that an overview of the data is necessary before the process of data explication starts. These authors gave the following advice: “Before beginning to unfold the data it is important to examine what is right there on the surface. By reading through all the collected information you are able to attain an overall sense of the data similar to identifying the major landmarks in an area prior to mapping a route through”.

**Step 3:** The data was re-read. Thames Valley University ([sa]: 2) identified content analysis as a process of reading and re-reading the transcripts while looking for similarities and differences in order to find themes and to develop categories. Marshall and Rossman (in Zelna, [sa]: 15) described this process as follows: “The researcher does not search for the exhaustive and mutually exclusive categories of the statistician but, instead, identifies the salient, grounded categories of meaning held by participants in the setting”.

**Step 4:** A number of key themes/categories emerged from the data. Excerpts related to these key themes were then grouped together.

A review of the literature reflected that in quantitative research most procedures have a definite beginning and end. The question arises, when conducting

interviews and observations, when does the researcher know that enough data has been collected? Theoretical saturation is the term used to describe the point at which no new information or concepts emerge from the data and when themes or theories that have emerged from the data have been well-supported. (Compare Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Smith and Stewart, 2001: 5; Brown, Stevens, Troiano and Schneider, 2002: 5.)

Strauss and Corbin (1998: 136) contributed a substantial description of the concept “saturation” by explaining that a category is considered saturated when no new information seems to emerge during coding, that is, when no new properties, dimensions, conditions, actions/interactions, or consequences are seen in the data. These authors further stated the following: “Saturation is more a matter of reaching the point in the research where collecting additional data seems counterproductive; the “new” that is uncovered does not add that much more to the explanation at this time”.

Brown, Stevens, Troiano and Schneider (2002: 7) highlighted that theoretical saturation is achieved when each category is dense enough to cover variations and process, and the relationships between categories are delineated satisfactorily as well. Beveridge (2003: 2) also explained this concept by adding that when a researcher is able to recognize themes or categories in the data, the researcher can then decide that if the next few data samples fit into these categories, then the categories represent the phenomena being studied. At this point the data is saturated and data collection is complete. The researcher found this situation to be applicable in this research study.

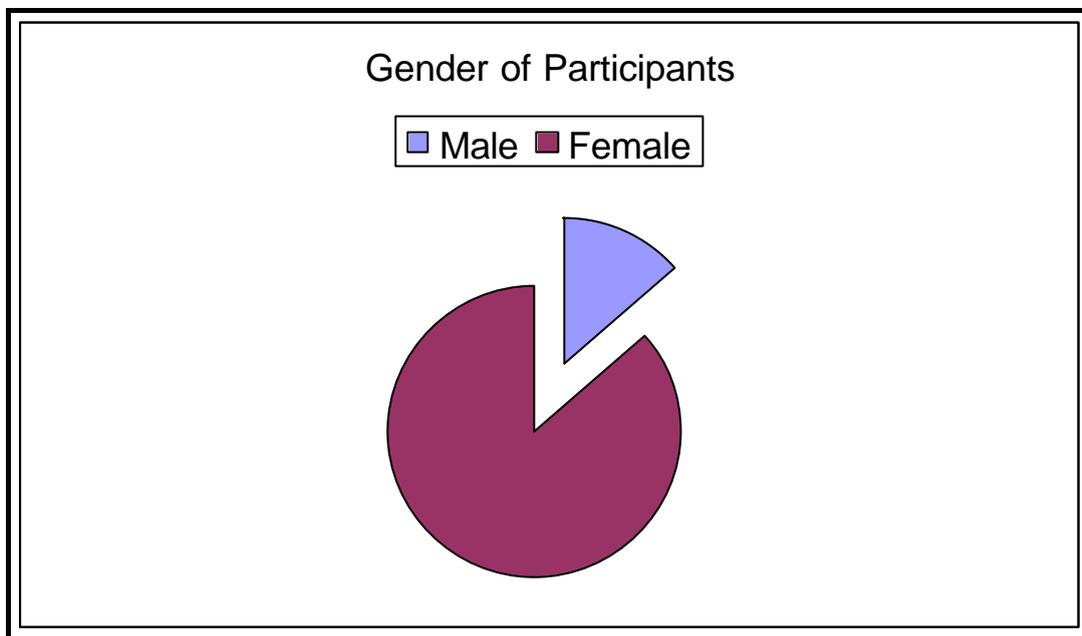
The following section will focus on analyzing and interpreting the information derived from the focus group discussions.

## 5.8 CONTENT ANALYSIS FROM FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

### 5.8.1 Demographic profile of the participants

#### 5.8.1.1 Gender of participants

The gender of participants is reflected in Figure 2.



**Figure 2: Gender of participants**

From the sample of 22 participants three were males and nineteen were females. There were considerably more female participants. The number of males in the study was determined by the availability within the different service fields. These figures confirm the gender composition of the social work profession as being mainly female.

**5.8.1.2 Field of experience**

Table 6 reflects the different organisations represented by the participants.

**Table 6: Organisations represented by participants**

<b>Field of Experience</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
Church-based activities	3
Department of Social Development	1
Community Development Trust Faith-based charitable trust	3
Non-profit Organisation Generic social work	2
Non-Governmental Organisation Faith-based organization	6
Non-Governmental Organisation	1
Section 21 Organisation Faith-based	1
Non-profit Organisation Exclusively disabled population	3
Section 21 Organisation Exclusively disabled population	1
Other	1

There was a representative spread of organizations that participated in the focus group discussions.

### 5.8.2 Themes

The content was analyzed through themes that could be identified from the focus group discussions. The data was subjected to a literature control, which enabled a process of verification against existing knowledge. The following themes and questions were identified from the discussions deriving from the interviewing schedule:

- Theme One: Sustainable development

***Question 1: “What is your perception of the concept “sustainable development?”***

***Question 2: “How sustainable do you think the interventions on individual, family, group and community level are in your working environment?”***

***Question 3: “How do social service providers, social workers and administrators within your working environment plan and strategize to ensure sustainability of interventions?”***

***Question 4: “When would you say a project or programme is sustainable?”***

- Theme Two: Entrepreneurial activities/ entrepreneurship

***Question 5: “What are your perceptions of a business focus in social work?”***

***Question 6: “What is your perception of social workers willingness or readiness to change with regard to a business focus in social work practice?”***

***Question 7: “Are social workers motivated to explore extending the core areas of knowledge and skills to include business skills?”***

***Question 8: “What should social workers do to encourage the client population to develop entrepreneurial skills?”***

***Question 9: “How would skills and knowledge on entrepreneurship assist social workers to facilitate sustainable human, social and economic development?”***

- Theme Three: Training and education of social workers

***Question 10: “Do you think social workers and managers are adequately skilled to facilitate sustainable development?”***

***Question 11: Do you think social workers are equipped to deal with the many changes in the new South Africa?”***

- Theme Four: Networking and partnership between government departments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and social service providers

**Question 12: “What should be in place for social workers to be empowered to facilitate a developmental paradigm, i.e. to integrate human and economic development?”**

**Question 13: “What plans/strategies do you have in place to enhance people’s participation in projects/enterprises as a means to improve sustainability?”**

**Question 14: “What plans/strategies, in your organisation, are in place to equip people with knowledge and skills to improve the general quality of their lives?”**

#### **THEME ONE: THE CONCEPT “SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT”**

During the focus group discussions it became evident to the researcher that a significant number of the participants were uncertain as to the meaning of the concept “sustainable development”. Throughout the focus group discussions it also became clear that participants were aware of some aspects of the concept “sustainable development”, but were not informed as to the overall place and value of sustainable development within the context of their working environment. Participants were unable to define the concept or articulate the various interrelated and interdependent elements of sustainable development. This was evident in the discussions by the participants and one of the participants articulated the following perception:

***“Economic sustainability is one side”.***

Consistent with literature in this area, sustainable economic development is indeed one of the pillars of sustainable development. Together with social development and ecological conservation, economic development constitutes the foundation for sustainable communities. A further review of the literature (compare Lee, Holland and McNeill, 2000: 16; Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development, 1999: 1; United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2001: 1 and Teferra, [sa]: 2) with regard to the concept “sustainable development” reflected the general consensus that sustainable development is concerned with economic, social and ecological objectives. Visser and Sunter (2002: 57) added another dimension to this concept and stated the following in this regard: “Essentially, sustainability – the ability of something living to sustain itself – is about surviving over the long term”.

According to the World Bank Group (1998: 2), industrial and agricultural growth, equity and efficiency are economic objectives and are prerequisites for obtaining economic sustainability. Economic sustainability is hardly possible without the empowerment, participation and social mobility of communities. Visser and Sunter (2002: 122) defined a sustainable economy as one which ensures the provision of appropriate goods and services to enhance the quality of life of all citizens; and done in a way that is socially just and equitable as well as ecologically sustainable and responsible. This together with social cohesion and institutional development, are the desired social objectives necessary to achieve social sustainability. Ecological sustainability as the third pillar of sustainable development implies maintaining the integrity of ecosystems, carrying capacity and biodiversity, necessary for ecological sustainability. (Compare Brackett, 2002: 61.) These objectives evolved over a number of years through a process of consultation and negotiation by a whole range of global institutions, government organizations and private enterprise. The development of the abovementioned objectives, as a result of many world conferences and summits was discussed in detail in chapter 2 of this study.

Wagiet (2002: 28) reinforced the now widely accepted holistic conceptualization of sustainable development, by defining it as a complex medley involving economic, social, political, cultural and ecological dimensions that are interacting and interdependent. Visser and Sunter (2002: 65) supported this view and described this concept as the three prongs of the sustainability fork, namely economic prosperity, environmental quality and social justice. According to these authors the ultimate goal in society is an integrated and balanced performance across these three dimensions. Dalal-Clayton (1999: 4) agreed with this perspective and contributed the following: “Sustainable development will entail integration of these three objectives where possible, and making hard choices and negotiating trade-offs between objectives where integration is not possible”.

In the context of this study, the picture painted by some of the participants appeared to be that of scepticism and an uncertainty whether sustainable development as a paradigm is aligned with the social work profession. This is evidenced in the following quotation:

***“It [sustainable development] is not a recipe for everything”.***

Sustainable development is not a “recipe” but entails a holistic approach to economics and social organization, as well as environmental controls and conservation strategies. Fakir (2002: 14) stated the following in this regard: “The entire strategy for sustainable development is premised on the idea that the linkages between political governance, social and economic programmes, are intertwined with environmental considerations”. Dalal-Clayton (1999: 4) supported the abovementioned perspective and contributed the following: “There is no blueprint for sustainable development. It needs to be defined to meet and respect the particular needs and circumstances of individual countries, societies and cultures”.

A review of the literature (compare Mayfield, 1997: 420; Dalal-Clayton, 1999 and 2003 and Hart, [sa]) suggested that sustainable development encompasses cost effective development that do not degrade environmental quality and recognizes that people are central to the success of development. It is for that reason that alleviating poverty has significant implications and practical consequences for sustainable development since there are close links between poverty, environmental degradation and rapid population growth. Ngobese and Cook (1997: 256) stated the following in this regard: “It is now generally recognized that the environment and development are inseparable. The one is linked to the other and the integral nature of this relationship is generally beyond dispute. In the past development has often been at the expense of the environment, and, in particular, the methods used to affect economic development have invariably led to environmental degradation”. These authors (1997: 269) also highlighted the fact that poverty reduction has been shown to have a significant effect on environmental conditions, the reason being that poverty is both a cause as well as a consequence of environmental degradation.

Mayfield (1997: 421) postulated that sustainable development entails making full use of human resources by improving education and health services and combating hunger. Sustainable development would mean redirecting or reallocating resources to ensure that basic human needs, such as literacy, primary health care and clean water are satisfied. Mayfield (1997: 421) stressed that beyond basic needs, sustainable development means improving social well-being, protecting cultural diversity, and investing in human capital – training the educators, health-care workers, agricultural extension workers, appropriate technology technicians, and community development workers. Making development sustainable is thus ensuring that people’s basic needs are being met, that the resource base is conserved and that the environment and business sectors are integrated into decision-making processes and that communities are empowered. A review of the literature (compare Naudé and Jansen van Rensburg, 2002: 9 and United Kingdom Sustainable Development Commission,

2004) in this regard indicated that sustainable development is concerned with addressing basic needs within a multisectoral approach. Dalal-Clayton (1999: 5) concluded with the following statement: “The aim of sustainable development is thus to optimize the realization of a society’s many and different social, environmental and economic objectives at one and the same time”.

There were a number of participants who, at times, seemed unclear about whether sustainable development underpins social work interventions in their work with individuals and communities. The participants, however, did make a connection between sustainable development and the sustainability of community projects and programmes. The following quotation indicated the views of some of the participants:

***“It means the social worker must assess all the time if a project or programme is working”.***

A number of participants expressed the perception that empowerment and participation are integral parts of sustainable development. A review of the literature in this regard reveals that sustainable development is indeed concerned with social and economic development from a grassroots level. The sustainability of projects and programmes depends on the empowerment of all stakeholders in development. Cook (1997: 289) contributed a valuable perspective to the discussion, and in his opinion: “Sustainable development is dependent on the empowerment of people to sustain their own development in order to be the sustainers of development in their communities”. This can be attained through capacity building and skills training. Empowerment, community participation, and the bottom-up approach to power and decision-making at a grassroots level are the key ingredients for successful and sustainable development. Cook (1997: 290) stated the following in this regard: “ In a community, development can only be sustainable if the people concerned have the capacity – and the will to use that capacity – to manage development themselves”. This was congruent with

the views of some of the participants. The following quotations described the perceptions of the participants:

***“It is not giving handouts! It means that there are no quick fixes”.***

***“It means the way in which social workers help people to develop. People must be given the opportunity to develop themselves”.***

It became clear from the focus group discussions that participants wanted communities and individuals to take greater responsibility for their own development and were in favour of an empowering approach to assisting clients in bettering their lives. This is in line with the perspective of Van Zyl (in Bremner and Visser, 1997: 226) expressing the following view: “A central proposition of this approach is that development occurs inside people; either they do it themselves or it does not happen at all”. It follows that it is simply not possible to give or hand out “development” to people. People can indeed be given objects (goods and services) but if “development” is to occur they have to get actively involved themselves. In short, they have to learn to “deliver” their own development, i.e. to become more self-reliant”. The views expressed above appeared to be similar to the perceptions voiced by participants.

The following quotations pointed to the perceptions of participants that real development can only be a reality when and if communities are actively encouraged to take responsibility for their own development:

***“It means the community must have a say in what the money is used for”.***

***“It means involving the client. The client must be fully involved and come with own ideas” .***

The social work profession is often confronted and challenged by individuals and communities locked in poverty by illiteracy and unemployment. Individuals and communities are faced with a lack of employment opportunities, inadequate financial resources, spreading homelessness and the expansion of squatter settlements, increased poverty, growing insecurity and rising crime rates, a lack of health and educational facilities, inadequate water supply and sanitation and uncoordinated urban development (Narayan, Patel, Schafft, Rademacher and Koch-Schulte, 1999: 6). Max-Neef (in Bremner and Visser, 1997: 231) asserted: "But poverties are not only poverties. Much more than that, each poverty generates pathologies". Social workers are thus concerned with human well-being, including equity and within the sustainable development paradigm, with the stress that development places on the environment. Unfortunately, as O'Brien and Mazibuko (1998: 136) clearly stated, social workers have been criticised in the past for their failure to reach the poor. These authors made the following valuable contribution: "Poverty is no longer centred in remote rural areas inaccessible to social workers. It is increasingly a phenomenon of the urban environment, as the rapid movement of people into our cities has given rise to street children, pavement people and squatters, and social problems which social workers can no longer avoid". According to these authors (1998: 140) social work as a profession has established a reputation for specialised and centralised therapeutic services, but has made few real contributions to long-term strategies and programmes to alleviate poverty. They maintained the following in this regard: "In its interventions, social work has lacked the capacity for social analysis in order to examine the social environments of clients and the socio-political baggage brought by the client systems through the presenting problems. The person-in-environment approach has been lost somewhere in practice". From the above discussion it is clear that development is often defined in economic or political terms but the psychosocial aspects should receive equal attention. (Compare Mayfield, 1997: 92.)

Lélé (1991) made a significant contribution to the analysis of the concept sustainable development. According to Lélé (1991: 614) the removal of poverty, sustainability and participation are in essence the three fundamental objectives of the sustainable development paradigm. Poverty is the lack of options. Poverty can also be defined as the lack of choice in a given situation. Poverty is a condition where people have very few opportunities. Poor people are faced with numerous obstacles to change that which they would like to change, with environmental (economic, political, and social), physical (productive stamina and freedom from disease) and mental (educational, emotional and intellectual) constraints blocking these people from improving their way of life. (Compare Mayfield, 1997: 41 and Parnell and Mosdell, 2003.) Bremner and Visser (1997: 225) endorsed the view expressed by Max-Neef: “Quality of life depends on the possibilities people have to adequately satisfy their fundamental human needs”.

The call has been made for social workers to acknowledge their role within an interdisciplinary approach to sustainable community development. According to O’Brien and Mazibuko (1998: 137) there are ever-increasing calls made for the social work profession to get back to its roots and assist in the empowerment of all those disempowered by societal systems. These authors (1998: 144) encapsulated the essence of the social development paradigm with the following statement: “Relevance, sustainability and appropriateness are the critical issues at stake for social work within the social development framework”. Researcher is in agreement with the abovementioned perspective and supports the view that social workers are in a position to address the spiral of poverty, confront waste and resource degradation and actively work towards increasing the economic strength of the family unit and the social advancement of the community. (Compare Dominelli, 2002: 83.)

The picture that seemed to emerge from the data was that the participants displayed a lack of knowledge regarding the interdependent nature of different systems within community life. It became clear from the focus group discussions

that participants were inadequately equipped to deal with the extensive number of problems confronting poor communities. Participants were uncertain as to how, when and where social work interventions form part of sustainable development. It was noted with interest that the participants did not indicate that they had ever attended a course or lecture regarding sustainable development. The World Summit on Sustainable Development was held in Johannesburg, South Africa from August, 26 to the 4<sup>th</sup> September 2002. No indication was given during the focus group discussions that participants actively participated in this significant event or attended one or more of the various lectures and workshops dealing with all aspects of sustainable development. The media coverage of the World Summit was extensive and lasted for many months before the actual event. Since there was no direct question relating to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, researcher can only speculate as to why participants did not indicate their involvement, if any with the World Summit. It may be that the participants did not see their day-to-day involvement with individuals and communities as part of a sustainable development strategy. It may also be that the participants were merely ignorant with regard to the significance of the World Summit.

Whatever the reason, this was of concern to the researcher as, stated by O'Brien and Mazibuko (1998: 144), the Reconstruction and Development Programme and welfare policy (White Paper [for RDP], 1994) are undergirded by a combination of six complementary principles, namely integration and sustainability, people-driven process, peace and security, nation-building, meeting basic needs and building infrastructure. The Developmental Welfare Governance Bill (in National Progressive Primary Health Care Network, 1999: 4) defined *developmental social welfare* as “planned social change designed to promote social and economic development of the people of South Africa by utilizing social welfare services, programmes, methods and approaches which are responsive to the specific conditions and needs of South Africans. The goal is

to prevent, alleviate and eventually eradicate the social problems of individuals, groups and communities”.

The White Paper for Social Welfare, 1997 (Department of Welfare, 1997: 2) stated that the goal of developmental social welfare is a humane, peaceful, just and caring society which will uphold welfare rights, facilitate the meeting of basic human needs, release people’s creative energies, help them achieve their aspirations, build human capacity and self-reliance, and participate fully in all spheres of social, economic and political life. These goals in turn correspond with the basic tenets of sustainable development (Sewpaul, 2001: 315 and Midgley, 1996a: 7). From the data it appeared that participants’ perception of sustainable development lacked real understanding of the interrelationship between social, economic, political and cultural aspects within any given community.

It was further of concern that participants did not make a connection between social development and sustainable development. A review of the literature (Gray, 1998: 58; Midgley, 1995: 1 and 2001: 2; Noyoo, 2000: 453) indicated that social development is the implementation of comprehensive solutions to poverty involving all sectors including health, housing, employment, welfare and education. The abovementioned authors also highlighted the fact that social development recognised the relationship between these sectors in providing for the well-being of people.

Another theoretical viewpoint concerning social development came from O'Brien and Mazibuko (1998: 150). These authors concurred with the viewpoint of Gray (1998) and that of Potgieter (1998: 243) and reaffirmed that social work needs to examine its relations to the economic institutions and to the concepts of work and economic productivity. A more skilled and productive workforce and an overall commitment to lifelong learning are necessary to address the absolute poverty that exists in many communities. Dominelli (2002: 131) added another valuable perspective to this debate. She contributed the following viewpoint of social

development: “Social development is a process of intervention that locates the individual in their physical and social environments with the aim of improving individual and community well-being through collective action. It aims to develop people as well as their localities and often involves extending local resources through networking initiatives and campaigning to secure social and economic justice within national and international jurisdictions”.

An interesting aspect came to the fore with regard to the sustainability of social work interventions and the way social service providers plan and strategize to ensure sustainability of interventions. From the data it appeared that some participants were of the opinion that religious and spiritual counselling constitutes the basis for restoring the lives of individuals and communities. A number of participants made direct reference to the role they perceive religious and spiritual counselling play in contributing to the upliftment of people. The following quotations reflected the perceptions of the participants in this regard:

***“We have an intensive program to uplift the person so that the person can carry something through! In the beginning there is resistance but we have people not believing in themselves. We have to invest in the person”.***

***“The focus is from a Christian perspective but we have all kinds of South Africans”.***

***“These people are homeless and have lost their employment. It takes months but we have to restore their faith”.***

From the data it was clear that a number of the participants firmly expressed the view that people need assistance on a very personal level. In their opinion all

interventions, whether on a person-to-person basis, or on group level or within the community, should start with an intensive program to help people believe in themselves. In their opinion projects are doomed to failure if people are not assisted in a process of personal growth. The emphasis was placed on accepting responsibility and acknowledgement of the importance of perseverance. As social workers they felt strongly that homeless and unemployed people should receive the opportunity to attend courses, learn skills and have their spiritual faith restored. In this instance the focus was undoubtedly on a religious perspective in pursuing sustainable development for the client population.

The following theme dealt with entrepreneurial activities, sustainability of such activities, and the development and encouragement of entrepreneurship.

## **THEME TWO: ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTIVITIES/**

It was stated in chapters one and two of this research report that sustainable development encompasses economic growth and development, social progress and environmental conservation. These three dimensions are inextricably interconnected and interrelated. Economic growth and development is necessary to ensure the provision of basic needs for individuals and communities. Economic development is necessary to facilitate sustained progress and improvement in the standard of living for all people. Economic growth implies an increase in average wealth but does not necessarily mean that all people in a given society reap the benefits from the growth. According to Schoeman (2001: 325) South Africa experienced economic growth, but not economic development, as the majority of its population remained poor.

The development of small, medium and micro enterprises constitutes an invaluable part of an overall economic strategy to better the lives of all people in South Africa. A review of the literature (compare Mataire, [sa]: 2; Midgley, 1999:

14; Sewpaul, 2001: 319; Raheim, 1996: 69; McBroom, 1999: 2; Bent-Goodley, 2002: 298; Mupedziswa, 1996: 51 and Cannon, 2000: 1) with regard to the stimulation of entrepreneurial ventures confirmed the importance of such activities to bridge the cycle of dependence and deepening poverty.

The concept of entrepreneurship has a wide range of meanings. The word *entrepreneur* originates from the French word, *entreprendre*, which means, “to undertake”. In a business context, it means to start a business. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary presented the definition of an entrepreneur as one who organizes, manages, and assumes the risks of a business or enterprise (QuickMBA, 2004: 1). Dees (2002: 1) postulated that at its heart, entrepreneurship is about getting things done or changing the way things are done. In almost all of the definitions of entrepreneurship there is an agreement that entrepreneurship implies a kind of behaviour that includes:

- initiative taking (finding the “opportunity niche”)
- the organizing and reorganizing of social and economic mechanisms to turn resources and situations to practical application, and
- the acceptance of risk and failure.

The following definitions obtained from the Canadian Foundation for Economic Education ([sa]: 1-4) provided valuable insight into the concept of entrepreneurship:

- *Willingness to take the risks involved in starting and managing a business.*
- *Entrepreneurship is a process through which individuals and groups pursue opportunity, leverage resources, and initiate change and create value. Thus, an entrepreneur is one who creates and manages change by pursuing opportunity, acting with passion for a purpose, living proactively, and leveraging resources to create value.*

- *Entrepreneurship involves the recognition of opportunities (needs, wants, problems, and challenges) and the use of resources to implement innovative ideas for new, thoughtfully planned ventures.*
- *Entrepreneurship involves bringing about change to achieve some benefit. This benefit may be financial but it also involves the satisfaction of knowing you have changed something for the better.*
- *Entrepreneurship is essentially the act of creation requiring the ability to recognize an opportunity, shape a goal, and take advantage of a situation. Entrepreneurs plan, persuade, raise resources, and give birth to new ventures.*

The questions relating to entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial- and income-generating activities elicited substantial comments in the focus group discussions. The majority of participants had a positive attitude towards the development and encouragement of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial activities were recognized in all the discussions and identified as a substantial part of the empowerment of individuals and communities. Although the encouragement of entrepreneurial activities on the part of the social worker was seen as a way of empowering individuals and communities by allowing them to actively participate in their own progress towards a better life, participants were not experienced or knowledgeable in securing economic opportunities for communities or individuals. The following quotations indicated the perceptions of participants:

***“I am not skilled enough although I am interested in initiating income-generating projects”.***

***“I believe the emphasis is on entrepreneurial skills. What is it that you can do to relieve the***

***burden on the social worker?”***

***“Many newly founded non-governmental organizations do not know how to manage money and cash flow. They need a basic course in business administration”.***

***“The basic stuff is important – more than entrepreneurial skills, very often it is a question of mismanagement because people are not skilled in office management”.***

Congruent with the perceptions of participants on this theme, several authors (compare Gray, 1998; Lombard, 1996: 171 and 2003; Potgieter, 1998: 242-243; Raheim, 1996: 69; Midgley, 1995, 1996a; 1996b and 2001; Kehler, 2000: 4 and Gray and Crofts, 2001: 4) have made reference to social and economic strategies to empower people and address prevailing poverty. Within the spirit and climate of the new democratic South Africa, social workers are challenged to develop new ideas and strategies to deal with the tragedies of poverty. Gray (1998: 56) elaborated on this perspective when she stated the following: “However, social workers, both in South Africa and abroad, have shown a preference for individual and group therapy and counselling and have not practised community development on a wide scale (Cox, 1994; Fraser, Taylor, Jackson and O’Jack, 1991; Gray, 1989; Midgley, 1995; Muller, 1989). Social workers in South Africa can no longer afford the luxury of this choice”. (Compare Sturgeon, 1998: 34.) Bent-Goodley (2002: 291) contributed substantially to this debate and stated the following: “Most social workers are not trained to start, build, and maintain a business (Gold, 1994; Lawless, 1997; Tropman, 1989) and without formal preparation, they must acquire entrepreneurial knowledge on their own. This is not an effective way to train social workers within the profession, and private practices and other social organizations often fail due to a lack of business skills (Brown, 1990; Gold, 1994)”.

According to Gray (1998: 56) the need is emphasized for social work to move away from small-scale, isolated local development initiatives focusing only on non-material issues towards income-generating programmes, which empower people from a social and economic perspective. Gray (1998: 59) and Potgieter (1998: 244) stressed the fact that it is necessary to link social and political empowerment to economic development. In Gray's opinion (1998: 59) new development models stress the importance of economic growth linked to income-generating programmes and small business development in communities. Visser and Sunter (2002: 143) contributed to this debate with such a significant statement when they argued that a fundamental re-perception needed to occur about the way society structure work and welfare. These authors stated the following in this regard: "We have to move our focus from creating employment to creating livelihoods. We have to empower people to put whatever skills and talents they may have to good use. People should not have to spend all their energy and resources on struggling to survive. Nor should they have to wait to be offered a job or to be told that they are economically valuable only when they engage in productive work for someone else in the private or public sector".

It became clear from the focus group discussions that many of the participants had some, though limited knowledge regarding entrepreneurial ventures, but were unable to put this into practice. In addition to this some of the participants displayed a lack of knowledge regarding business skills, business planning and the technical know-how of obtaining financial resources. Participants did not indicate that they had established relationships and networks with industries and the banking sector in an effort to secure more job creation opportunities for individuals or groups within communities. Participants displayed a lack of initiative and confidence with regard to assisting individuals and communities to overcome obstacles in establishing income-generating ventures.

Some participants were rather adamant that not every person is an entrepreneur, and for that reason did not see entrepreneurial ventures as a solution to many of

the problems faced by their clients. In their opinion some clients have personal limitations that cannot be ignored and for that reason cannot be thrust into establishing any entrepreneurial activity that is doomed to fail. The participants voiced the following perceptions and ideas:

***“Not everyone is an entrepreneur!”***

***“People need to be trained in business skills. Not all people are entrepreneurs, but can be involved in business, working for somebody else. Learning business skills should be part of personal development”.***

A number of participants had negative perceptions of entrepreneurial activities with the objective of making people financially independent. One of the participants for example was very despondent with regard to establishing food gardens as a sustainable source of income for families. In the view of this participant the obstacles encountered in such a project are overwhelming and resulted in very little income for those community members who worked in the gardens. From the discussions it became clear that participants often encountered setbacks in their efforts to establish income-generating projects. In their opinion these setbacks or problems had very little to do with business skills and business acumen. Participants cited crime and vandalism in some communities as reasons for the failure of establishing food gardens. From the data it appeared that a combination of factors inhibited the establishment of job creation projects. The majority of participants were eager to facilitate projects that could lead to providing some financial income for their clients, but experienced so many incidences of frustration that it left them impotent to pursue job creation as a priority in various communities.

In one particular instance a participant reported the vast amount of money paid to “consultants” to establish the viability and sustainability of food gardens in a

specific community. According to this participant this exercise resulted in very little positive outcome for the community. According to the participant the consultants knew from the outset that this particular entrepreneurial initiative could not succeed. They allowed second-hand materials to be used with the result that the food garden hardly produced enough fresh produce for the two people involved to use at home. The participant felt that the practical experience she gained over a number of years with regard to entrepreneurial activity was in fact very negative. The extreme negative experiences voiced by this participant were echoed by a number of other participants. The following selected quotations are indicative of these views as expressed by participants:

***“I want to see something working! Even with the sewing project in our organization people are making little money. People are still desperate”.***

***“I have never seen a sustainable project anywhere! I have asked everywhere and have not seen one! I think a sustainable project should provide at least an income of R 800.00 per month. Why should a person be satisfied with a few bunches of spinach? People have the same hopes and needs as people in rich areas. I would like to see examples of entrepreneurship with good results”.***

***“People worked day and night and after four or five months they earned R400.00 to R500.00 between five of them!”***

The picture that emerged from the data was that any negative experience regarding job creation projects impacted significantly on the motivation and perception of participants to pursue entrepreneurial activities.

In the discussion of this theme, the perceptions of some of the participants that community projects where large numbers of people were involved were destined for failure, emerged quite strongly. These participants reported that in their experience community projects were often characterized by power struggles and disagreements. In their opinion more could be gained from assisting an individual to initiate a business venture that had the potential to blossom into a business where more people could be employed. The following quotations indicated the perceptions expressed by participants of the importance of finding that one “champion” in the community that has the initiative and the ability to succeed in an entrepreneurial venture:

***“Sometimes you need to start with one person!”***

***“In my opinion community projects do not work. There are always in-fighting. It is better to help one person start for example a daycare operation and that person can then employ more people. I have a good example of a person starting a daycare with 3 children and now look after 25 children, all are paying for the service”.***

One participant reported that income-generating activities where a production line was involved, for example the packaging of products, had the best outcome. This participant also indicated that this kind of activity is often reserved for people with disabilities. According to the participant contracts for the packaging of products are not easy to obtain as companies can choose to employ able-bodied people at very low wages.

Another participant expressed the opinion that job creation for people with disabilities has become increasingly difficult due to various laws that have been passed in favour of Labour Unions. In the opinion of this participant the Labour Unions supported first and foremost job opportunities for able-bodied people and

showed very little understanding for the need to assist the disabled in securing paid employment. According to this participant the Labour Unions are of the opinion that people with disabilities are entitled to receive a disability pension and for that reason should not be eligible for the available positions in the open labour market. For social workers working in the field of care for the disabled, the position of various Labour Unions has become a significant obstacle in serving their clients effectively. Turmusani (2003: 1) contributed the following in this regard: “The relationship between poverty, disability and employment is in fact a vicious circle”. Turmusani (2003: 2) expanded on this discussion and added the following perspective: “Yet, poverty, social and economic deprivation is the everyday experience of people with impairments in developing countries. Their access to various services is often restricted and their opportunity to secure enough income to meet their basic needs is almost non-existent. This makes remunerated employment a matter of economic survival for disabled people and their families”.

The following quotation reflected the perception of one of the participants with regard to income-generating activities for people with disabilities:

***“Job creation for people with disabilities in this country is more difficult than ever. Because of the stance of Labour Unions we are confronted on a daily basis with Unions that would rather not have the disabled compete for the available jobs out there!”***

The literature reviewed (compare Mayfield, 1997: 417-419; Swilling and Wooldridge, 1997: 487; Munslow, Fitzgerald and McLennan, 1997: 3-13; and Sparks, 2003: 331) reflected the general consensus that development and underdevelopment are extremely complex phenomena.

Visser and Sunter (2002: 162) added to this discussion regarding the difficulties and obstacles on the path to sustainability and voiced the following opinion: “And being a complex issue, the problem is not going to go away at any time soon. For decades to come, poverty will remain the single biggest threat to social sustainability”.

The encouragement and development of entrepreneurial activities are important ways of enhancing the physical, material, social and cultural welfare of people. Sunter (1998: 28) referred to the views expressed by Dr Pundy Pillay from the Deputy President’s Office. Dr Pillay pointed out that antipoverty strategies in developing countries had two predominant objectives: a growth-oriented economic policy to increase employment and the provision of basic social services as a safety net. Dr Pillay stressed that the Malaysian experience showed it takes time to conquer the problem of poverty. He also indicated that government should no longer be considered a major source of job creation. Thus, welfare initiatives would have to be structured in such a way that they were not hand-outs to passive recipients but a source of empowerment which led people to take charge of their own lives. Sunter (1998: 28) concluded in the following way: “Basically, don’t look for quick fixes because even the poor don’t expect them; don’t waste time any more with rhetoric but concentrate only on ideas that can easily lead to action; and help people to help themselves”.

Gray (1998: 59) emphasized this viewpoint by stating unequivocally: “True empowerment comes with economic independence”. James-Mseme (2002: 51) was in agreement with the view of Gray and in her opinion poverty alleviation is a critical national priority, and must be at the forefront of all initiatives. This author stated that job creation must be aggressively promoted in all sectors of the South African society. Lee and Woolard (2002: 1) also supported this view and stated that policy measures to combat unemployment should be as diverse as possible in nature. Sunter (1998: 40) added his voice to this debate and stated the following in this regard: “Thus, to eliminate poverty and create a full employment

economy, the focus must now be on microeconomics and the family – and should move away from macroeconomics and grand solutions”.

The majority of the participants regarded skills training and development of people as important, but not specifically and exclusively with the objective of creating or establishing entrepreneurs. The impression was created that participants believed that should their clients obtain business skills and knowledge, they would prefer that the client try to secure paid employment in an established industry. The general opinion was that successful income generating projects were few and far between. In their opinion entrepreneurship based on theoretical knowledge was quite far removed from the practical experience and severe difficulties they encountered in their daily contacts with individuals and communities.

The perceptions and experiences recounted by the participants appeared to suggest that the creation of entrepreneurial ventures and income-generating projects were not regarded as a priority. From the data it appeared as if the participants believed that their unemployed clients have a better chance of finding employment in the established formal labour market. Unfortunately the situation in the formal labour market seems to be less than favourable. The literature reviewed highlights the fact that South Africa's extraordinary unemployment levels exist within the context of specific employment shifts that have occurred in the economy over the last few decades (Bhorat, 2001: 3; Proudly South African, 2003: 1). Bhorat (2001: 3) indicated that in terms of skill levels, the sectoral change in employment reveals that the need for highly skilled workers (concentrated in the service sectors) has risen dramatically. Unfortunately, the demand for unskilled workers has plummeted. Dominelli (2002: 82) contributed the following to this discussion: “Poverty is another social ill that has been aggravated by the loss of highly paid, full-time posts. Both men and women lose out in these trends”. Other authors (compare Sparks, 2003: 338; Erasmus and Steyn, 2002: 11 and Mulholland, 2002: 200) concurred with this

sentiment and indicated that job opportunities within the formal sector are shrinking at an ever-increasing rate. Blaauw and Bothma (2003: 2) clarified this perspective and added their view to this discussion: “Unemployment is expected to increase because the number of new entrants into the labour market far outweighs the employment opportunities that can be created in the formal sector, given the current economic conditions in South Africa”.

Erasmus and Steyn (2002: x) further elaborated on this theme and contributed the following perspective: “South Africa re-entered the world economy with several disadvantages of which an exceptionally high unemployment rate and a low-skilled labour force were the most challenging. Each year over the past decade increasing numbers of jobs have been destroyed in South Africa. There are virtually no jobs for the hundreds of thousands of (apparently better qualified) new entrants to the labour market, let alone the backlog of millions who have been unable to find a job or who cannot generate an income on their own initiative”.

Sunter (1998: 17) expounded on the perspective that the macroeconomic system will not provide job opportunities for the millions of job seekers. Sunter stated the following in this regard: “I believe that we have to destroy the myth that if big government, big business and big labour get together they can somehow pull a rabbit out of the hat and create millions of new jobs. It just isn't going to happen that way. Rather, it will be because we create a climate conducive for existing entrepreneurs to grow their businesses and for new entrepreneurs to open up additional enterprises. Hence, I have been advocating for some time that the focus of the RDP should be changed from home ownership to the creation of a new entrepreneurial class in South Africa. The reason for promoting this is that joblessness is more fundamental than homelessness. If a person has a job, he can buy a house; but if he doesn't have a job, even if you give him a house he can't maintain it”. Sunter (1998: 17) concluded that it is only through the creation of millions of enterprises that millions of jobs will be created. Sparks (2003: 338)

supported this view and in his opinion the informal sector is ballooning everywhere in the developing world. Globalization, with its downsizing and outsourcing, drives more people out of the formal economy. According to Sparks (2003: 339) the informal sector accounts for between 40% and 60% of the total workforce in most of the developing countries. Borat (2001: 6) contributed more ideas to this debate and in his opinion employment trends over the last few years indicated nothing surprising, i.e. that aggregate employment grew at modestly low levels, with the informal sector being a job creator and the formal sector a job shedder.

Some of the participants in discussing the encouragement and development of income-generating projects, focused more directly on the emotional or moral support provided by the social worker to persuade people to act on those possibilities and activities that they are able to do. These participants expressed the opinion that the social worker needs to unleash the inner potential of the client and that the motivation of people can be instrumental in obtaining an improved standard of living. The picture painted by these participants seemed to be one of not giving too much direct advice or suggestions to their clients. These participants expressed the opinion that people should not be “pushed” into job creation projects or income-generating activities. The following quotations pointed to the perceptions of some of the participants that people in fact need direction and vision more than anything else:

***“What is most important is that you give people vision, for example that you can grow vegetables in your own backyard! At least you can have enough for supper. People have the potential to do something for themselves. The best thing for me is not to push them. In their own time they will know that they are not completely helpless”.***

***“The relationship between the social worker and the individual client or the community is very important. People need to make informed decisions based on adequate information. People need to know that there are different options. We can do this together. People can’t be forced to do certain things. They need skills”.***

***“The decision is with the group. Ownership is important. Give them the option – they must buy into the project – ownership”.***

The following theme relates to the training and education of social workers and their perceptions of the skills and knowledge required from social workers to deliver effective services.

### **THEME THREE: TRAINING AND EDUCATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS**

The training and education of social workers was recognized in all the focus group discussions as extremely important and most of the participants were in agreement as to the significance of including business skills and training as part of the social work curriculum.

A review of the literature also endorsed the findings with regard to business skills and training, forming an integral part of the knowledge base of social workers. The reviewed literature (compare Potgieter, 1998: 242-243; Midgley, 1999 and Sewpaul, 2001: 317) indicated that social workers needed to be educated on the subject of economics and be informed as to the extent that economic development and trade policies create the structural context of the communities in which they work. Sewpaul (2001: 309) contributed an accurate description as to the reasons for this perspective: “There are several compelling reasons for

social workers to understand how macro-economic policies impact on welfare. Social work, as a core human service discipline, is often left to pick up the consequences of macro-socio-political and economic policies as they impact directly on people's lives at the micro-level". Bent-Goodley (2002: 293) emphasized this perspective and contributed the following: "Training social workers to view themselves as producers of entrepreneurial programs may help them to stop allowing other professions to dictate the tone of human services". The participants that do support a business perspective in the social work profession are in line with the opinion of Prigoff. According to Prigoff (2000: xii) economics to a great extent, determine the resources that will be available to social workers and their clients. In Prigoff's opinion (2000: xii) it is in the interests of social work clients and the service profession itself that its practitioners should understand economic processes and policies, and should be able to apply that knowledge to current local and global issues. This author stressed the fact that in these years of economic volatility, social work professionals must be informed if they are to be effective in promoting a better life for their clients and for the society in which they work. It is important for social workers to encourage the full integration of clients into all aspects of community life and therefore also to be part of the economic activity in a community. (Compare Noyoo, 2000: 463.) Encouraging the economic independence of clients is a significant part of the empowerment of the individual client or a community. Bent-Goodley (2002: 298) expressed very clear views in this regard and emphasized the following: "Social workers should be encouraged to be creative and to take risks, which encourages entrepreneurial ventures to innovate inside of service delivery, to undertake new initiatives, and to take a chance in creating better opportunities for clients".

The following quotations pointed to the perceptions of participants that business skills and knowledge are necessary tools in the armour of social workers:

***“In the social work degree – in our training – the business plan is very important”.***

***“It is important that student training be improved”.***

***“I agree with business skills training. The Department of Labour should now provide that training for us”.***

***“Look at the training for social work students. They should not only learn business jargon but also have an analytical approach. If you have that you are more equipped and more effective”.***

***“Social workers do not have the theoretical skills. They go back to the supervisor all the time. They should be more exposed to business knowledge and in that way be more effective”.***

Most participants agreed that there should be business skills training for undergraduate social work students. There was overall agreement as to the importance of social workers being able to write a business plan. There was also agreement as to the importance of having the necessary business knowledge in order to empower clients. Participants expressed the view that the Department of Labour should provide the necessary business training for social workers that never had exposure to business knowledge during their university training as social workers. The researcher is of the impression that most of the participants acknowledged that the traditional approaches to social work were not successful in addressing the socio-economic needs of communities in the new South Africa.

Sturgeon (1998: 27) referred to the White Paper for Social Welfare, 1997, in this regard where it is stated as follows: “The challenge facing the welfare system is to devise appropriate and integrated strategies to address the alienation and the economic and social marginalisation of vast sectors of the population who are

living in poverty, are vulnerable, and have special needs”. Sturgeon’s (1998: 28) interpretation of the guidelines provided by the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) entailed that new programmes will be devised and community development strategies will be employed to address material, physical and psycho-social needs. In her opinion the intention is to shift the emphasis from social work intervention on an individual basis to more holistic strategies, which can reach the broader community.

Another participant felt strongly that social workers could no longer ignore and neglect the very important business aspect of social development and more specifically of community development. According to this participant social welfare organizations should take cognizance of the potential of the social worker and encourage him/her to optimize his or her potential. The participant stressed that very often the real problem lies with the management of welfare organizations who are unable and seem to be unwilling to change according to the demands of the new South Africa.

The following quotation indicated the perception of the participant:

***“Too many social workers are narrow-minded.  
Social workers need to constantly develop  
themselves to keep one step ahead.  
What is needed is a holistic approach”.***

A participant employed by a non-governmental organization was of the opinion that the management of an organization is all-important with regard to the execution of the task at hand. From the data it appeared that the participants were of the opinion that very often management needs to be persuaded to implement the necessary procedures to ensure sustainability of projects. This is indicative of a resistance to change. Social workers have to be empowered to render effective and sufficient social work services. There are multiple roles,

responsibilities and expectations placed on social workers. Cronje (1998: 104) was of the opinion that the transition from traditional, bureaucratic, authoritarian management models to participatory, empowering, capacity-building approaches in welfare agencies and in local communities, is the greatest challenge facing social work managers in South Africa today. In Cronje's (1998: 104) words: "Welfare agencies can no longer ignore the changing social context within which they operate". Dominelli (2002: 159) made a substantial contribution to this debate by claiming that initiating organizational change in welfare institutions is very often not an easy task. She stated the following in this regard: "For social workers, organizational change has to occur within their own organizations, in their relationships with clients and in the broader society within which they are embedded. Engaging in organizational change means that social workers have to subject their own agencies to scrutiny and find ways of making good the shortcomings they find within their own institutions".

In direct contrast to the above discussion one participant felt strongly that social workers do not need to have a business perspective. This participant questioned whether it is part of social workers' responsibility to address the basic economic needs of a community. In the opinion of this participant, a social worker with an interest in business studies should study and develop his or her skills in their own time. According to this participant the particular interest of the social worker is of paramount importance and should guide the person and the organization as to how the social worker will be deployed as to best serve the profession. This particular participant stressed the fact that in the current socio-economic climate in South Africa, there will always be the need for individual casework because of the growing phenomena of child neglect and family violence and the failure of the extended family to care for orphaned children. The participant alluded frequently to the dire position of social workers in South Africa, swamped with many hundreds of individual cases and was of the opinion that there is more than enough work for social workers dealing with "traditional" social work.

In Gray's opinion (1998: 24) there is general agreement that while there will always be a need for clinically trained social workers, they can only cater to a very small part of the South African population. Gray (1998: 24) stated in this regard the following: "The changed political scenario is forcing social workers to confront poverty, to re-evaluate their helping methods and to fulfil their commitment to social justice". McKendrick (in Sturgeon, 1998: 25) added to this debate and summarised this particular dilemma as follows: "one cannot "casework people out of poverty".

However, some participants also had a negative perception about what they regarded as being another load placed on the social worker. In their opinion social workers have to deal with an excessive workload. Many social workers are responsible for individual casework, conducting group sessions and initiating community projects. From the data it appeared that the participants were of the opinion that business skills and training, job creation and the encouragement of entrepreneurship are areas of concern only for the social worker specializing in community work. According to these participants it is unrealistic of the management of social work organizations to expect these social workers to handle individual casework and conduct group therapy. The impression is created that many social workers are "overloaded" with the result that it is very difficult for them to educate themselves with regard to business skills and knowledge. It is for that reason that job creation projects are often haphazardly put together with very little positive results. It is the researcher's opinion that this can have a severe negative influence on the quality and quantity of future job creation ventures.

The following quotations pointed to the perceptions of participants that the establishment of entrepreneurial ventures, income-generating projects and business development places an additional responsibility on social workers, one for which they were not always sufficiently knowledgeable or adequately equipped:

***“More and more is expected of the social worker.  
Marketing and job creation should be with different departments.  
Social workers need other professionals”.***

***“What is needed in a “One-Stop-Shop” where  
social workers can network and obtain business  
referrals and information. An information  
network for social workers is desperately needed”.***

***“The person comes to me for help but I don’t know where I am!”***

One participant in response to this discussion reported that in their organization, because of the specialized nature of the work, a specifically appointed community worker dealt with skills development, marketing and job placement for clients.

The following theme dealt with the place, value and role of important relationships within the working environment of the social worker.

**THEME FOUR: NETWORKING AND PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN STATE DEPARTMENTS, NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS AND SOCIAL SERVICE PROVIDERS**

It became clear from the focus group discussions that the participants were often frustrated with the lack of support and coordination from the various government departments. Many of the participants felt powerless to effectively serve their clients because of the obstacles they encounter in dealing with various government departments. Most of the participants felt that they wasted many hours on duplicating documents and trying to locate the official dealing with their

applications. In their opinion there exists very little continuity in the services offered by the various departments. The following quotation illustrated the perception of participants:

***“Social services are fragmented. There is no coordination. Social Development is unable to coordinate services”.***

Although various departments offer training and support in terms of literacy and skills training, participants express the concern that many obstacles are put in the way of accessing the training. The participants raised a number of key issues regarding the perceived lack of support and services from various government departments:

***“We are told that training through the Department of Labour is available but a person comes to the social worker but the social worker is frustrated! We cannot solve the problem because there is not one single source where we can find help for our clients!”***

***“They [Department of Labour] will only train for projects they have identified. “Their projects” are given preference. Projects must be up and running! How do you have a project without training the people first? Department of Education says that people with disabilities are not their problem! People need skills to get a job or any work!”***

***“You first need literacy training for people before you can start a business. You need a step-by-step approach. You need a business plan. You need to determine the needs first”.***

It became clear from the focus group discussions that participants wanted the various government departments to acknowledge the contributions made by social workers and social service providers in meeting social service needs and promoting development. Participants expressed the view that the various government departments need to acknowledge social workers from non-governmental organizations and other social service providers as partners in community development. Some of the participants were of the opinion that their relationships with the various government departments are characterized as an “us and them” situation. From the discussions it became clear that the participants did not experience synergy in their working relationships with the government departments.

In the context of this study, the picture painted by the participants appeared to be that they do not have the financial or structural means to support their clients in their efforts to better their own circumstances. They resented the fact that they were not consulted as to the priorities for spending what they perceive as vast amounts of money received from overseas donors. They further expressed concern regarding the difficulty in raising funds for their own organizations due to the fact that many national and international donors are now donating money directly to the various government departments. (Compare Johnson, 2002: 3.) The Charities Aid Foundation ([sa]: 2) confirmed this perspective. This organization stated the following in this regard: “Following the transition to democracy, the non-profit sector in South Africa is facing severe problems. The most important of these is the drastic reduction in funding from outside South Africa. In the final apartheid years, huge sums poured into the South African non-profit sector from governments and other overseas sources, reflecting the desire of European governments and the USA to put pressure on the South African authorities. Now the funds have largely dried up or are being directed to government departments”.

In the view of the participants it has become increasingly difficult to raise funds for development projects because leading companies now have their own social responsibility departments and allocate funds to support those causes that they have identified as important. It is also true that companies that do donate funds insist on regular and consistent feedback coupled with accurate financial audited reports. The following quotation reflected the perception of a number of the participants:

***“The government received many millions of donated funds for development. Why do we have to struggle to receive some of that money for bona fide projects? We submit documents to the Department. They claim that they have never received those documents. We have to photocopy documents again and again. So many hours are lost trying to locate the contact person! It is extremely frustrating working with the Department”.***

The description appeared to suggest that for the participants, the perception was that generally the various government departments have the funds and the technical means to address those very pressing issues in community development, but for various reasons fail to do so. Dominelli (2002: 125) stated clearly that accountability has become an important part of supporting social responsibility programmes. Participants expressed the view that social workers have to be provided with resources, e.g. finances to do their work effectively. It is clear from the sentiments expressed by the participants that clear communication channels between private welfare organizations and government departments can go a long way to create better partnerships in the future.

Participants expressed concern and frustration regarding the many changes made by the various departments with regard to procedures and documentation

required by the departments. Participants made it clear that they wished to empower their clients by providing technical assistance and financial and emotional support. Their daily efforts in this regard were often in vain due to the ineffectiveness of bureaucracy. The following selected quotations made reference to the ways in which participants perceived the various government departments as not being supportive:

***“There are millions of people without jobs. There are empty government-owned buildings in our area but the authorities will only allow certain projects to go ahead. We have done all the homework at great financial cost. The Department of Social Services and Development would not consider the merits of our proposal. The church did everything required to deliver a well-researched business plan and proposal but because it did not fit one of the seven projects identified by the Department, it was rejected. We will not approach the Department again”.***

***“Policies, rules and regulations should be clear and precise for all to understand. I have encountered two officials from the same department with totally different views and interpretations of the same policy document!”***

***“It is clear that the policymakers do not know what it is we are dealing with on ground level. Social workers need to be involved in the formulation of policies”.***

***“The government is looking for signs of “empowerment”, but will not assist us financially or support our efforts!”***

In addition to this participants felt that their own management needs to be clear on the direction of their approach to poverty alleviation, job creation and overall community development. In the literature reviewed, Cronje (1998: 106) referred to the contribution of Abels and Murphy in outlining the key principles pertinent to the development of empowering management practices. According to Abels and Murphy (in Cronje, 1998: 106) agencies should have a clear vision of their aims and solutions to organisational and social problems. In Cronje's opinion (1998: 107) welfare agencies are rethinking their intervention strategies and philosophies. In his view it is no longer acceptable for an organization to be a closed system, separate from and unresponsive to its environment. The present situation demands that agencies be open to new policies, which emphasises the participation and involvement of staff, client constituencies and key community people in decision-making.

With regard to the plans and strategies in place to enhance people's participation in projects to improve sustainability, one of the participants voiced the following perception:

***“The decision is with the group. Ownership is important.  
Give them the option – they must buy into the project – ownership” .***

Another participant expressed the opinion that a change in service delivery strategy needs to be in place before the sustainability of projects can be ensured. The following quotations reflected this sentiment:

***“The question whether a project is sustainable or not,  
cannot be answered. It is a question of trial and error!”***

***“It is really about a paradigm shift. We have to provide  
a service but also be able to provide people***

***with life skills so that they can contribute to the business side”.***

From the data it appeared that participants were of the opinion that without a sound organizational foundation and solid structure they have great difficulty in making meaningful contributions to communities. In their opinion all services needed to be streamlined. These questions drew a number of substantial comments and ideas from participants. The following quotations reflected the views and perceptions of the participants:

***“In one organization where I spent a year, things have not changed in 30 years! Very often the same forms are used! New, enthusiastic workers are confronted by social workers with an uncompromising, rigid approach. I have personal knowledge of two very big traditional welfare organizations where the social workers are extremely rigid in their thinking. They have done things in a particular way for many, many years and want things to remain the same!”***

From the data it appeared that an openness and readiness to embrace change from the management of organizations seemed to be very important for some of the participants. The following quotations reflected these perceptions:

***“NGOs, social service organizations and others should be flexible. You have to keep pace with change. We do experience resistance from our own management from time to time and then you have to convince them to make certain changes”.***

***“The future is not “welfare”. We need to combine social work skills with those skills needed in business.***

***A “welfare approach” will not satisfy employers and companies in the future. Companies want some return on their investment when they employ people; able-bodied or people with disabilities. Companies want to know what they can get from the “deal”.***

***We can no longer afford to beg! In all partnerships the question is: What are you doing from your side for job creation? NGO’s should have a service unit on the one side and a business unit on the other side”.***

***“We need so many things to make our projects work-money, transport, job creation, permanent jobs and other professionals to help!”***

The picture that seemed to emerge from the data was that participants recognized that small-scale employment, i.e. micro-enterprises can contribute significantly to poverty alleviation. It must be stressed that participants also expressed the view that the encouragement of entrepreneurs was only one avenue of addressing large-scale unemployment. A number of participants expressed the view that government should support any large-scale employment opportunity, i.e. factories and public works projects in order to create employment opportunities on a large scale. Participants wanted to see evidence of good collaboration between government departments and the private welfare sector.

With regard to networking it became clear to the researcher that the participants were not involved in networking or collaboration to a great extent. A review of the literature in this regard revealed that collaboration is to work with another person or professional in order to achieve set objectives jointly. According to Woods (1998: 204) there is the need for coordination of resources in communities as well as having a regularly updated directory of services. In his opinion effective

coordination depended on professional workers having contact with each other, including formal conferences, workshops and forums. Rogge and Darkwa (1996: 402-403) were very clear on the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and for the social work profession to become informed about the physical, mental and economic consequences of environmental problems. Dominelli (2002: 125) contributed to this debate and stated the following: “Social workers can form alliances with others concerned about enfranchising marginalized people to hold governments and corporations accountable. They can also engage in consciousness-raising endeavours that are aimed at ensuring that the population more generally accepts the idea of being responsible for others unknown to them as part of their own explication of citizenship”.

The picture that seemed to emerge from the data was that participants for example were not aware of literacy projects in their area and did not know where to turn for help in setting up literacy training for illiterate clients. The significance of adult literacy training and the important role for the social work profession in addressing the backlog in adult literacy training and lifelong learning was discussed in detail in chapter four of this research report. A review of the literature reflected the general consensus that social workers need to collaborate with other professionals in various fields. Participants did not indicate any collaboration with professionals from the health profession regarding support for people living with HIV/AIDS. Woods (1998: 208) made a valuable contribution in this regard: “In addition, HIV/AIDS in South Africa is dealt with not only by social workers operating directly in the health sector, but also by those working in the spheres of welfare, social development, education, employment and law. If social workers work together and focus on networking, then social work as a profession can make a worthwhile contribution to the war against HIV/AIDS”. Batschari (2002: 72) emphasized that HIV/AIDS is one of the biggest challenges to sustainable development, not only for communities but also for all stakeholders involved in development work. The scourge of HIV/AIDS with particular reference to Southern Africa was discussed in great length in chapter three of this research

report. The poverty implications of this disease and the impact on the lives of children and young adults were highlighted in chapter four of this report. From the literature reviewed it was clear that HIV/AIDS require responses from multiple pedagogical, organizational and developmental frameworks simultaneously (Walters, 2001: 3).

Participants did not indicate that they were involved in any collaboration with education authorities, including schoolteachers and headmasters, as far as financial or social support for learners in primary and secondary schools were concerned. No indication was given that any collaboration existed with the criminal justice system and law enforcement agencies. Shapiro (1998: 152) expressed the following in this regard: "To date probation has been the traditional area of social work involvement within the criminal justice system. Increasingly, however, social workers are changing to a people-centred developmental approach. Social workers have the capacity to organise community safety initiatives, to contribute to crime-prevention programmes and to provide advocacy and leadership in creating a strong, safe and free alternative to fear-filled lives which many South Africans lead". (Compare Charities Aid Foundation, [sa]: 1.) According to Shapiro (1998: 168) social workers have an important role to play in dealing with the causes of crime and can engage in crime-prevention work on different levels of intervention: through direct service, by strengthening networks and through advocacy. Venter (2002: 161) supported this perspective without reservation and stated the following in this regard: "High levels of crime lead to lower levels of financial investment in an economy; this leads to fewer resources, which increases conflict and induces higher levels of social stress, which produces damaging childhood environments and upbringing practices, which create a more violence-prone society, which becomes conducive to rising authoritarianism, which stifles the human spirit, which inhibits enterprise, which produces poverty, which takes one back to the crime you started with.... For the chain reaction to begin again, soon becoming a downward-spiralling vortex". Social workers in collaboration with other role-players could lobby for changes in

legislation that could lead to a greater emphasis on preventative work, for example in school settings.

Gray (1998: 72) made a valuable contribution in this regard: “At the same time, however, we must remember at all times that community development is an intersectoral, multidisciplinary approach. The community development worker has to learn how to network and interact with other role-players involved in the development of the community”. Co-operation, information exchange and collaboration can enrich a person’s understanding and awareness and encourage projects and initiatives vital to the positive development of social work practice. Popple (2002: 156) added his voice to this debate and contributed the following valuable perspective on community work: “We must remember that community work is about working with people in ways to encourage and empower them to do things for themselves. Therefore, the role of the worker centres on helping people to learn new skills, build self-confidence and develop talents and abilities. A good deal of community work focuses on gaining and disseminating information that can be applied by the neighbourhood or community”. Popple further stated that this kind of information is usually concerned with welfare and housing but may include strategic information about local authority plans for the area. In Popple’s (2002: 156) opinion community work has often been associated with the slogan “information is power”. He emphasized the fact that with adequate and appropriate information, communities can make informed decisions and take action. The perspective voiced by Popple is of particular significance in the context of this research study. Social workers need to harvest the efforts and contributions of local voluntary organizations, as well as organizations with a national profile to maximize the amount of information available to all stakeholders concerned with community upliftment. The direction advocated by Bailey and Brake (in Langan, 2002: 213) as far back as 1975 rings true today: “We are supposed to “help” our “clients” by making them “accept responsibility” – in other words, come to terms as individuals with basically unacceptable situations. We must counterpose to this

the possibility of changing their situation by collective action. We can only do this by acting collectively ourselves”.

In summary Mackintosh (1998: 135) provided valuable insight when he stated that the challenge for social work in South Africa is to develop, to the fullest possible extent, a range of appropriate responses to the most critical and difficult issues that face South Africa at this time. (Compare Drower, 2002: 9-10; Sewpaul, 2001: 320.)

The researcher is of the impression that a combination of a lack of recognition for accomplishments from their own management and from various government departments, coupled with the demands and work-related stress, created a mindset with the participants that very little can be achieved to uplift the standard of living in poor communities in a sustainable manner.

## **5.9 CONCLUSION**

Following the focus group discussions, the data was organized around emerging themes and subsequently examined in relation to the literature reviewed in chapters two, three and four. The four themes discussed above were the most prominent ones identified throughout the focus group discussions. The focus group discussions provided opportunities for participants to express their perceptions and ideas regarding sustainable development and the role of the social worker within the sustainable development paradigm. As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, this research was an exploratory study and resulted in a process of discovery regarding the frame of reference, perceptions and ideas of the participants concerning sustainable development.

The following chapter will focus on the conclusions drawn from this study as well as recommendations for possible future action.