

**SOCIAL WORK AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:  
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY**

by

**IRMA MCKINLAY**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

for the degree

**DOCTOR PHILOSOPHIAE  
(SOCIAL WORK)**

in the

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

at the

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

PROMOTER: PROF. DR. A. LOMBARD

MAY 2004

*“Inability to change the system is not necessarily one’s weakness; to do nothing, however, is a sign of intellectual cowardice”. (Mohan, 1999: 133)*

*“Joblessness is more fundamental than homelessness. Solve the former and automatically you’re on your way to solving the latter”. (Sunter, 1997: 82)*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere appreciation to:

Prof. Dr. A. Lombard, my promoter, for her guidance, support, expertise and understanding.

My family and friends for their unwavering love and support.

**Irma M<sup>c</sup>Kinlay**

May 2004

## **ABSTRACT**

### **SOCIAL WORK AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY**

by

**IRMA MCKINLAY**

PROMOTER: PROF. DR. A. LOMBARD

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

Sustainable development aims at improving human well-being, particularly by alleviating poverty, increasing gender equality, and improving health, human resources, and stewardship of the natural environment. Sustainable development is based on three pillars, namely, environmental protection and social progress and economic development.

This study intended to contribute to sustainable development in the area of developmental social work practice by addressing the issues of new conceptualisations of social work practice, and in particular of intervention strategies, within the paradigm of sustainable social work practice.

The purpose of this study was to explore and construct a foundation of general perceptions and tentative theories with regard to sustainable development and the position and value of the social work profession within the sustainable development paradigm. The goal of this research 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 researcher utilised focus group discussions as a method of generating data and 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.

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 qualitative research the emphasis was on understanding the experiences, attitudes, assumptions and perspectives of the participants.

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 it pertained to sustainable development. The data was organised around emerging themes and subsequently examined in relation to the literature.

Based on the findings and conclusions drawn, the following recommendations were made:

- The social work profession needs an information-sharing platform.
- Collaboration and cooperation are crucial components in the process of sustainable development.
- Social work practitioners have to become self-directed and lifelong learners who will be able to adapt to the changing circumstances in society.
- Social work practitioners need to develop creative strategies within a multidisciplinary approach to address the issues of poverty, underdevelopment and unemployment in a sustainable manner.

- Social work practitioners need to actively contribute to processes and structures that support the delivery of adult literacy and skills training efforts.
- Social work practitioners need to explore ways and means of facilitating economic opportunities by addressing the obstacles and/or regulations that prevent people from accessing available markets.

### **Key Terms**

Sustainable development paradigm

Social work

Social development

Environmental protection

Economic growth and development

Social progress

Poverty

Underdevelopment

Unemployment

Human capital

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### CHAPTER ONE - GENERAL OVERVIEW

1.1	INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.2	MOTIVATION FOR THE CHOICE OF THE SUBJECT .....	5
1.3	PROBLEM FORMULATION .....	8
1.4	PURPOSE, GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH STUDY .....	10
1.4.1	Purpose of the study .....	10
1.4.2	Goal of the study .....	15
1.4.3	Objectives of the study .....	15
1.5	RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR THE STUDY .....	15
1.6	RESEARCH APPROACH .....	16
1.7	TYPE OF RESEARCH .....	19
1.8	THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY .....	21
1.8.1	Data-collection method .....	25
1.8.2	Data analysis .....	29
1.9	PILOT STUDY .....	30
1.9.1	Pilot testing of data-gathering instrument .....	31
1.9.2	Feasibility of the study .....	32
1.9.3	Literature study .....	33
1.9.4	Consultation with experts .....	33
1.10	THE RESEARCH POPULATION, SAMPLE AND SAMPLING METHOD .....	34
1.10.1	Sample and sampling method .....	34
1.11	ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS .....	36
1.12	DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS .....	38
1.13	CONTENTS OF THE RESEARCH REPORT .....	41

### CHAPTER TWO - THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM

2.1	INTRODUCTION .....	43
2.2	DEFINING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT .....	46
2.3	THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE .....	51
2.4	SUMMIT 2002, JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA .....	69
2.4.1	An overview .....	69
2.4.2	Key commitments, targets and timetables – Summit 2002 .....	73
2.5	CONCEPTUALIZING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT .....	77
2.5.1	Principles of a sustainable society .....	78
2.5.2	Sustainable development: A holistic approach to sustainable living .....	83
2.6	SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AS AN INTERDISCIPLINARY SCIENCE .....	87
2.6.1	The environmental dimension of sustainable development .....	92
2.6.2	The economic dimension of sustainable development .....	97
2.6.3	The social dimension of sustainable development .....	100
2.6.4	The institutional dimension of sustainable development .....	123
2.7	INDICATORS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT .....	126
2.8	SUSTAINABLE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT .....	135
2.9	CONCLUSION .....	141

## CHAPTER THREE - POVERTY, UNDERDEVELOPMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT

3.1	<b>POVERTY: AN INTRODUCTION</b> .....	143
3.2	<b>DEFINING POVERTY</b> .....	149
3.2.1	Poverty is multidimensional .....	156
3.2.2	Poverty and material well-being .....	159
3.2.3	Poverty and psychological well-being .....	161
3.2.4	Poverty and state-provided infrastructure .....	166
3.2.5	Assets of the poor .....	170
3.2.5.1	Physical capital .....	170
3.2.5.2	Human capital .....	171
3.2.5.3	Social capital .....	176
3.2.5.4	Environmental capital/ Natural capital .....	177
3.2.6	Assets and vulnerability .....	181
3.3	<b>THE SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE</b> .....	184
3.3.1	Poverty and exclusion .....	188
3.3.2	Characteristics of chronic poverty .....	189
3.4	<b>UNDERDEVELOPMENT</b> .....	190
3.4.1	The human capability concept .....	192
3.5	<b>“THE STATE OF THE NATION”: POVERTY, UNDERDEVELOPMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT WITHIN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT</b> .....	199
3.5.1	The scourge of HIV/AIDS .....	201
3.5.2	The New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) .....	205
3.5.3	The legacy of apartheid .....	206
3.5.4	The state of the economy .....	207
3.5.5	The informal economy .....	210
3.5.6	Changing post-apartheid South Africa .....	212
3.5.7	Transition but not transformation, yet .....	217
3.6	<b>THE VALUE OF WORK</b> .....	224
3.7	<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	225

## CHAPTER FOUR - SOCIAL WORK WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

4.1	<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	227
4.2	<b>SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE</b> .....	230
4.3	<b>A DEVELOPMENTAL SOCIAL WELFARE APPROACH</b> .....	232
4.3.1	Social development .....	232
4.3.2	Social development and community development .....	236
4.3.3	Social welfare and economic development .....	238
4.3.4	The emergence of developmental welfare .....	240
4.4	<b>ENTREPRENEURSHIP</b> .....	251
4.5	<b>STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTING DEVELOPMENTAL SOCIAL PROGRAMS</b> .....	261
4.5.1	Increasing cost effectiveness in social welfare: waste, inefficiency and corruption .....	262
4.5.2	Enhancing human capital investments .....	266
4.5.3	Promoting social capital formation .....	272
4.5.4	Developing individual and community assets .....	275
4.5.5	Expand job training and placement to include the disabled, the mentally ill and substance abusers .....	280
4.5.6	Facilitating economic participation through productive employment, self-employment and	

	the creation of cooperatives .....	286
4.5.7	Removing barriers to economic participation .....	297
4.5.8	Creating a social climate conducive to development .....	301
4.6	<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	304

## CHAPTER FIVE - EMPIRICAL STUDY AND FINDINGS

5.1	<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	307
5.2	<b>RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</b> .....	308
5.2.1	Research approach .....	308
5.2.2	Type of research .....	309
5.3	<b>THE RESEARCH STRATEGY</b> .....	310
5.4	<b>FOCUS GROUPS AS A DATA-COLLECTION TECHNIQUE</b> .....	311
5.5	<b>POPULATION AND SAMPLING</b> .....	313
5.6	<b>PILOT STUDY</b> .....	317
5.7	<b>ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF EMPIRICAL DATA</b> .....	318
5.7.1	Analysis phase .....	320
5.8	<b>CONTENT ANALYSIS FROM FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS</b> .....	322
5.8.1	Demographic profile of the participants .....	322
5.8.1.1	Gender of participants .....	322
5.8.1.2	Field of experience .....	323
5.8.2	Themes .....	324
5.9	<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	367

## CHAPTER SIX - CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1	<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	368
6.2	<b>PURPOSE, GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY</b> .....	368
6.2.1	Purpose of the research study .....	368
6.2.2	Goal of the research study .....	369
6.2.3	Objectives of the study .....	369
6.3	<b>KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY</b> .....	374
6.3.1	The concept "sustainable development" .....	374
6.3.2	Entrepreneurial activities/ entrepreneurship .....	375
6.3.3	Training and education of social workers .....	379
6.3.4	Networking and partnerships .....	382
6.4	<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	384
6.4.1	Information management .....	384
6.4.2	Continuing professional development .....	386
6.4.3	Areas for further research .....	387
6.5	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	388

## LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1	Empowerment .....	122
TABLE 2	Social indicators .....	130
TABLE 3	Principal health and productivity consequences of environmental damage ....	134
TABLE 4	Poverty as multiple deprivation .....	198
TABLE 5	Core components for a comprehensive literacy programme .....	271
TABLE 6	Organisations represented by participants .....	323

## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1	Fundamental dimensions of the sustainable development paradigm .....	91
FIGURE 2	Gender of participants .....	322

## LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1	Semi-structured interview schedule
APPENDIX 2	Invitation
APPENDIX 3	Informed consent/Confidentiality agreement
APPENDIX 4	Reminder