

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In South Africa the scale of required change and development is so great that problems of prioritizing, coordination and cooperation across political, social and economic barriers are bound to be enormous. A number of authors were of the opinion that changing social conditions need responding to without delay (Compare Roberts, 2001: 18; Mulholland, 2002; Potgieter, 1998: 66 and Department of Social Development, Strategic Plan 2002/03-2004/05, 2002: 16). Barberton, Blake and Kotze (1998: 37) articulated this challenge as follows:

“The most fundamental challenge in South Africa today is to achieve a reduction in poverty and inequality. This will require substantial changes in the distribution of incomes, wealth and economic power between men and women, between rural and urban areas, between white and black and between capital and labour. Clearly, a dramatic restructuring of the economy needs to take place. The question is: How can this be achieved?” A follow up question is required, namely: How can an enabling socio-economic environment be ensured?

Bartle (2003a: 2) defined an enabling environment as follows: “This is an environment (political, regulatory) around a community that enables the community to unite, identify its own resources, engage in self-help activities, and become self reliant”. The environment around each community, not only its ecological but also its social-economic-political environment, affects its level of community empowerment. Bartle (2003a: 2) further elaborated on this concept by stating that the practices, attitudes, behaviour, rules, regulations and laws, of

leaders, civil servants and politicians, of central and district governments, all contribute to the degree of enablement around a community.

The present government is struggling with the task of delivering the “promised land”. After the 1994 elections, expectations were high, delivery of development and services slow, and tainted by accusations of maladministration, corruption and gross inefficiency. The dilemma facing this Government, after the 2004 elections, is still one of managing to reconcile the increasing escalation of needs with the practice of responsible budget control.

The White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) was formulated with a new policy approach based on social development. This approach is generally regarded as a paradigm shift from the existing social welfare approaches namely, the residual and institutional models. It is presently regarded as a possible means of resolving these problems in a sustainable manner. It is stated emphatically in the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) that welfare should contribute to the eradication of poverty through a developmental approach (Gray, 1998: 24). The paradigm incorporated the following mission of social welfare (White Paper for Social Welfare, 1997: 15):

“To serve and build a self-reliant nation in partnership with all stakeholders through an integrated social welfare system which maximizes its existing potential and which is equitable, sustainable, accessible, people-centered and developmental”.

It is in this context that the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) reflected the following important issues:

- Welfare cannot function effectively in isolation from the other forces which influence the well-being of people

- a comprehensive approach is advocated with the coordination of social services, facilities, programs and social security in order to enhance social development, social justice and social functioning of all people
- addressing social problems in a sustainable manner
- acknowledgement of the important link between social development and economic growth.

It is within this framework and philosophical context of social development that the sustainable development paradigm emerges. The concept of sustainable development has received much attention and raised a great deal of controversy. Sustainable development is defined as “development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising that of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Development Report, 2003: 14). This means that a balance must be maintained between economic development and its environmental and social impacts. To this end, sustainable development is a continuous process and not an end point. MacDonald (1998: 25) contributed a well-defined description of social development. She stated the following: “Social development refers to how well societies are meeting basic human needs such as food, shelter and clothing. It also involves providing the support services that can make or break the quality of life, including health care, education, culture and human rights”.

The Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (in Bloem, Biswas and Adhikari, 1996: 141) stated in 1991 that sustainable development is seen as a process of holistic transformation of the society for self-reliance and the well-being of all people. At the heart of this concept is the idea of ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come. The process is essentially related to all spheres of human existence. As such the process of transformation will have to ensure social, cultural, economic and political sustainability together with ecological and environmental sustainability. Achieving this, will ultimately lead to a holistic development of society.

Sustainability is related to the quality of life in a country, a community, a group of people, and directly related to the quality of economic and natural resources and the functioning of social systems. An overview of the literature confirmed that sustainable development is based on three pillars, namely, environmental protection and social progress and economic development. (Compare Dixon and Pretorius, 2002: 3; The Payson Center for International Development and Technology Transfer, 2002: 4; United Kingdom, Sustainable Development Commission, 2004 and Dobriansky, 2002: 1.) Effective pursuit of sustainable development requires a balanced approach, integrating all three components. These are issues directly related to the field of social welfare and social work as a profession. It is crucial to address issues of poverty as it has a direct impact on people's access to the most basic resources, which in turn affect their social functioning. The basis for job creation and poverty eradication is sound economic policies, and solid democratic institutions that are responsive to people's needs, and improved infrastructure. Dobriansky (2002: 2) stressed the importance of an enabling domestic environment for sustainable development. She wrote as follows (2002: 2): "Freedom, peace and security, domestic stability, respect for human rights, the rule of law, gender equality, market-oriented policies and an overall commitment to just and democratic societies are also essential and mutually reinforcing. Operationally, five of the key elements that are critical to creating an enabling domestic architecture that makes sustainable development possible are: effective institutions; education, science, and technology for decision-making; access to information; stakeholder participation; and access to justice". Sound, progressive and healthy social systems support healthy economic systems. Economic activity in turn, has significant impacts on global and local human well-being.

In 2002 the World Summit on Sustainable Development was held in Johannesburg, 10 years after the Earth Summit was held in Rio de Janeiro (June 1992) and 30 years after the United Nations Conference on Human Environment in Stockholm (June 1972). Much of the attention in the build-up to this new

Summit has been an assessment of the global progress made since 1992. While the 1992 Rio Summit emphasized environmental protection, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) was pursuing an integrated approach to the three pillars of sustainable development: environmental stewardship, economic development, and social development (Brackett, 2002: 61; Kakabadse, 2002: 1; Moosa, 2002: 8). MacDonald (1998: 25) emphasized the very crux of the sustainable development dilemma, namely integrating social development with wise ecological management and sustainable economic development, is vital for achieving sustainability.

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

1.2 MOTIVATION FOR THE CHOICE OF THE SUBJECT

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, very little has been written about the social work profession and sustainable development. This is particularly applicable to the significant role that could be played by social workers. This study was motivated by the researcher's personal interest in sustainable development coupled with a number of years of practical experience in previously disadvantaged communities. From the researcher's experience as a coordinator of various projects it was found that the sustainability of these projects was a perpetual problem. Daily newspaper reports and articles stress the dire need of millions of people in this country to make ends meet. By addressing the issues of poverty, underdevelopment and unemployment, the researcher was of the opinion that new conceptualizations of social work practice in South Africa would emerge.

Mark (1996: 2) contributed a concise motivation as to the reasons why research should be done, namely: “Why do research? Although there are many reasons for doing research, the primary one is that there is a need to further the knowledge of the profession. Thus, if research was never done, the social work profession would be based merely on guesswork and speculation. Research must continually be conducted to provide answers to complex questions related to understanding human behavior and establishing effective social work programs and practices”.

The choice of the subject therefore stemmed primarily from the researcher’s own experience in trying to deal with the magnitude of problems facing a community in a sustainable way that would ensure growth, progress and stability for the community. However, welfare organisations face the same challenges and social workers will therefore have to find intervention strategies that contribute to sustainable intervention and development.

The democratization of South Africa, with the increasing demand for the transformation of welfare services, coupled with an alarming social instability experienced in the whole country as a result of poverty, unemployment, crime and the legacy of apartheid in general, requires a dramatic shift in thinking and approaching intervention strategies. Welfare agencies find themselves in a situation where they are expected to cope with enormous numbers of clientele with multi-faceted problems and very limited resources, both human and material. This situation holds an enormous challenge for the social work profession. Gray (1998: 24) contributed to this debate and emphasized the following: “The central question is whether social workers are able to adapt themselves and their profession to meet the changing needs of the South African sociopolitical and economic context. The way in which social workers respond will determine the degree of confidence people will have in them in the future”. A spirit of constant innovation and of adaptability to constantly changing

circumstances needs to be fostered to allow for the stimulation of new intervention strategies.

An approach where sustainable development is the key concept, strives to address the important issues of poverty and under-development. Social work as a profession is well situated to play a significant role in this effort. However, for this to be realized, social workers as part of the professionals in the social welfare field should develop a framework of South African social problems within a global context. Coates (2000: 1) was of the opinion that social work needed to become involved in the movement towards a sustainable society and therefore a paradigm shift would be required. Social work must move beyond modernity and build its interventions on a very different ideological foundation. This kind of foundation calls for new roles as it focuses on interdependence and collectivity rather than individualism, on connectedness rather than dualism, and on holism rather than reductionism (Coates, 2000: 1). Osei-Hwedie (1995: 21) contended that there were calls for the radicalization of social work practice in Africa. This was based on the argument that current social work practice in Africa was irrelevant, inappropriate or ineffective. The argument is that social work should adopt a more pragmatic approach marking a departure from traditional formulations and procedures. Osei-Hwedie further emphasized the calls for social work practice to move from remedial services to a focus on structural change, inequality and social disadvantage and thereby taking a preventative stance. This positions social work in the context of capacity building and empowerment.

In summary, the motivation for the study stemmed from personal experience and the lack of literature specifically related to sustainable social work practice within the sustainable development paradigm. It was in this area that the research study made its main contribution.

1.3 PROBLEM FORMULATION

The realities of poverty, unemployment, social maladjustment and relationship problems are relevant to the present and future social and political stability in this country. To stay relevant to the needs of the people they serve, social work has to position itself in a way that addresses poverty, unemployment and lack of basic economic resources in a most fundamental way. These issues pose a major challenge to social workers to address not only unemployment but also the hardships that is central to the lives of so many in this country. It is important that these are considered as inter-related parts of the sustainable development paradigm. In this regard the Department of Social Development emphasized the following: “Access to quality employment is critical to achieving sustainable livelihoods and thereby reducing poverty and inequality. Poor people are faced both with unemployment and the low quality of the jobs they otherwise occupy; the challenge is thus to create more and better jobs” (Department of Social Development, Executive Summary, 2002: 6).

In post-apartheid South Africa, where historically marginalized populations still face extreme poverty, the struggle to provide employment opportunities now includes other segments of the population, i.e. those not previously disadvantaged by the apartheid political system. Job losses can, to some degree, be attributed to corporate downsizing (falling formal sector employment), globalization, affirmative action, privatization and a myriad of other factors. Joblessness in South Africa affects a staggeringly high 35-47% of the economically active population, with the black majority, and women in particular, most seriously at risk. According to the Department of Social Development, poverty in South Africa was critically linked to the labour market (Department of Social Development, Consolidated Report, 2002: 70). The report continued to stress the importance of jobs for the unemployed to allow them to participate in society, to contribute financially to their families and to increase self-worth (Consolidated Report, 2002: 73).

Unemployment is more than the absence of a job. It is associated with several social problems and affects social, economic and psychological functioning. It affects life expectation and well-being. It has become a question of fundamental human rights. For this and many other compelling reasons it is a central social work issue because of its effects such as lack of income, deprivation of adequate housing, health provision and education.

Social work has a diffuse professional identity, in that it is a profession that deals with a wide range of tasks, including clinical practice, therapy, counselling, community organization and planning, social action, and administration of social service delivery systems (Feit, Ramey, Wodarski and Mann, 1995: 90). Social workers need to determine their roles within sustainable development. The researcher is of the opinion that social work is called upon to be proactive in addressing underdevelopment and poverty issues by actively becoming involved in job creation and stimulating entrepreneurial thinking. Mulholland (2002: 70) emphasized the importance of this viewpoint and stated in this regard: "Sustainable, meaningful jobs are created not by government but by the natural drive of individuals to better themselves".

One of the objectives should be to promote the conditions necessary for the growth and development of enterprises, thereby increasing the access to income-generating activities. Social work should position itself to identify small-scale operations in order to ensure lasting social and economic progress to achieve a degree of self-reliance for the client population. Assisting clients to regain initiative, choice and responsibility for own development is of the utmost importance. A new view of social work practice should be explored. This should be a view that seeks to equip the client population with the ability to contribute towards raising their standard of living, improving their day-to-day existence and finding greater fulfilment in life.

By having a clear, relevant and appropriate conceptualization of sustainable development, it is possible to identify those opportunities which could be used in social work practice to become proactively involved in the economic development of communities, groups or individuals (the client population). Social work should be instrumental in creating a supportive environment where skills development, entrepreneurship and knowledge foster sustainable income generation, job creation and social empowerment.

According to the researcher's knowledge, not much research has been done on sustainable development as a concept within South African social work, and further research will assist in establishing a sound theory base for this approach. This research study therefore sets out to clarify the concept of sustainable development as an integral part of social work practice.

1.4 PURPOSE, GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

1.4.1 Purpose of the study

According to Fouché (2002a: 107) there is some confusion about the exact meaning of the concepts "purpose", "goal" and "objective". Fouché (2002a: 107) stated the following in this regard: "The terms goal, purpose and aim are thus often used interchangeably, i.e. as synonyms for one another. Their meaning implies the broader, more abstract conception of the "end toward which effort or ambition is directed", while "objective" denotes the more concrete, measurable and more speedily attainable conception of such "end toward which effort or ambition is directed". The one (goal, purpose or aim) is the "dream"; the other (objective) is the steps one has to take, one by one, realistically at grass-rootslevel, within a certain time-span, in order to attain the dream". It is for this reason that Fouché (2002a: 109) stated that the typology of exploratory, descriptive and explanatory be regarded as objectives of professional research. Fouché (2002a: 109) further added to the previously mentioned three objectives

a more comprehensive list that includes research with the objective of exploring, describing, explaining, correlating or evaluating, for instance, a social or educational programme; developing an intervention; initiating participatory action; or conceptualising or utilising exegetical methodologies. According to Fouché studies may have multiple objectives, but one objective is usually dominant.

The purpose of this research study was exploratory as little was known about the position, role and function of social work practice within the sustainable development paradigm. Exploratory research is often conducted because a problem has not been clearly defined as yet, or its real scope is yet unclear. It allows the researcher to familiarize him/herself with the problem or concept to be studied, and perhaps generate hypotheses to be tested (Joppe, [sa]: 1).

The Management Decision and Research Center ([sa]: 22) described qualitative research as follows: “Qualitative research is characterized by an emphasis on describing, understanding, and explaining complex phenomena – on studying, for example, the relationships, patterns and configurations among factors; or the context in which activities occur. The focus is on understanding the full multi-dimensional, dynamic picture of the subject”. Hayes (2000: 169) clarified this perspective and stated that qualitative research emphasises validity. This author (2000: 169) contributed the following in this regard: “The main goal of the researcher is not to produce results which can be replicated, but to develop a true understanding of what is going on. As a result, the emphasis is on the communications which come from research participants and the social processes which are taking place”.

According to Fouché (2002a: 109) exploratory research is conducted to gain insight into a situation, phenomenon, community or individual. The need for such a study could arise out of a lack of basic information on a new area of interest, or in order to become acquainted with a situation so as to formulate a problem or develop a hypothesis. (Compare Bless and Higson-Smith, 1995: 42-43.)

Exploratory research does exactly what the name says, research is done in a particular field or topic in the social sciences on which no or limited research has been done. The results of exploratory research are not usually useful for decision-making by themselves, but they can provide significant insight into a given situation. Although the results of qualitative research can give some indication as to the “why” and “how” and “when” something occurs, it cannot explain the “how often” or “how many”. The implication of this is that the results cannot be generalized, the reason being that they are not representative of the whole population being studied (Joppe, [sa]: 1).

Oliver and Linkon (2003: 1) added to this debate and stated in this regard that qualitative research is especially useful when a topic cannot easily be quantified and variables cannot easily be identified. In their opinion qualitative research can help to identify variables or develop theories. Merriam (2002: 5) contributed to this discussion in the following way: “In attempting to understand the meaning a phenomenon has for those involved, qualitative researchers build toward theory from observations and intuitive understandings gleaned from being in the field”.

De Vos (1998: 124) further reflected the following aims of exploratory research, namely:

- To gain new insights into the phenomena,
- To undertake a preliminary investigation prior to a more structured study of the phenomena,
- To explicate the central concepts and constructs,
- To determine priorities for future research,
- To develop new hypothesis about an existing phenomenon.

According to Mouton and Marais (1990: 43), De Vos (1998: 124), Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999: 39) and Bless and Higson-Smith (1995: 42-43) the objective in exploratory studies is the exploration of a relatively unknown research area. Exploratory studies employ an open, flexible, creative and inductive approach to

research as they attempt to look for new insights into a particular problem. With exploratory research an inductive approach is adopted as the researcher makes a series of particular observations, and attempt to patch these together to form more general but speculative hypotheses. Inductive reasoning moves from the particular to the general, from a set of specific observations to the discovery of a pattern that represents some degree of order among all the given events (Babbie, 1998: 35). Aims in such studies may be for example to gain new insights and comprehension into the phenomenon, rather than the collection of accurate and replicable data, and

- to undertake a preliminary investigation prior to a more structured, systematic study or investigation of the phenomenon (Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 1999: 39)
- to explicate the central concepts and constructs (Mouton and Marais, in De Vos, 1998: 124)
- to determine priorities for future research (Mouton and Marais, in De Vos, 1998: 124)
- to develop various ideas, tentative theories and postulations (Babbie, 1989: 80)
- to develop new hypotheses about an existing phenomenon (hypotheses tend to develop as a result of such research rather than research being guided by hypotheses) (Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 1999: 39)
- exploratory research investigates the “what” of the matter, but seldom gives a final answer (Bailey, 1982: 38 and Babbie, 1989: 81)
- to uncover generalizations, propose research questions which can be investigated at a later stage with more precise and complex designs and data-gathering techniques (Grinnell in De Vos, 1998: 124).

In exploratory research information is obtained through questions and recommendations provide the basis for a meaningful research design so that further research can be done. Subsequent research could be more systematic and extensive in nature. It is an important approach to develop various ideas,

tentative theories and postulations. A valuable concise description of this process was obtained from CERIS ([sa]: 61): “A qualitative study is not an impressionistic off-the-cuff analysis based on a superficial look at a setting or people. It is a piece of systematic research conducted with demanding, though not necessarily standardized, procedures. The study of human behaviour is time consuming, intellectually fatiguing, and depends for its success upon the ability of the investigator”. Hayes (2000: 194) echoed this sentiment and emphasized that one of the greatest advantages of qualitative analysis is that it allows researchers to recognize that the research participant isn’t just a passive provider of data, but a living person, with ideas and opinions of their own. Hayes (2000: 194) stated in this regard: “As a living human being, they will be making their own sense of the situation, and acting according to their understanding of what is going on”. Qualitative methods are thus used to build up a theoretical understanding of an area or topic so that the end process will result in a theoretical overview which is a reasonably thorough reflection of the data which have been collected, and which can serve as the basis for future research into the area. (Compare Hayes, 2000: 170-171 and Fossey, Harvey, McDermott and Davidson, 2002: 7.)

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, which paved the way for more in depth research processes later. Furthermore the purpose of this study was to discover the issues and challenges faced by the social work profession with regard to sustainable development and to develop guidelines and intervention strategies to address the issues of underdevelopment, poverty and unemployment. This research study involved a process of building a complex and holistic picture of sustainable development and an indication how and where social work fit into this picture.

1.4.2 Goal of the study

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.

1.4.3 Objectives of the study

- To explore, through a literature study, the theoretical framework of the concept sustainable development and its applicability in social work.
- To explore the perceptions, attitudes, frame of reference and knowledge base of social workers and social work administrators towards the concept sustainable development and social work practice.
- To make recommendations, based on the findings of the study for sustainable social work practice, social work education and training, as well as influencing policy-making decisions and processes.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR THE STUDY

An exploratory study using qualitative methods usually does not have a precisely delimited problem statement or precise hypothesis. One purpose of qualitative methods is to discover important questions, processes and relationships, not to test them (De Vos, 1998: 104; Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 1999: 39).

As a result of researcher's interest in sustainable development, exploratory discussions with a variety of professionals and extensive literature study, the following research questions were formulated for this study:

- How do social service providers, social workers and administrators address the concept of sustainable development?

- Do social workers acknowledge the need for the development of new paradigms for sustainable social work practice and reconceptualizing social work?
- Are social workers initiating processes for clients to develop knowledge and skills and therefore providing the stimulation to develop entrepreneurship to address poverty and unemployment?
- Do social workers understand the holistic concept of social development, meaning social and economic change as clearly outlined in the basic tenets of sustainable development?
- Do social workers understand and acknowledge the link between sustainable development and social work?
- Do social workers actively encourage, motivate and assist clients to explore sustainable economic activities and opportunities, and thereby proactively seek to achieve a higher level of economic functioning for client population?
- What are the perceptions of social workers with regard to a business focus in social work? Are social workers prepared to explore/extend the core areas of knowledge and skills to include business skills?
- Are social workers equipped to deal with the changes brought about by a new dispensation in South Africa?
- What are the implications for social work curricula and field practica with regard to the paradigm of sustainable development?

1.6 RESEARCH APPROACH

This research study was of a qualitative nature. Qualitative research interprets data by giving meaning to it, translating it or making it understandable. Denzin and Lincoln (1994: 2) defined qualitative research as “a multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter”. The research purpose in research of a qualitative nature is to study phenomena as they unfold in real-world situations, without manipulation. Furthermore, to study phenomena as interrelated wholes rather than spilt up into discreet predetermined variables.

To achieve this, an inductive, qualitative approach is required. Thomas (2000: 3) explained it as follows: “The researcher’s role is to gain a “holistic” (systemic, encompassing, integrated) overview of the context under study: its logic, its arrangements, its explicit and implicit rules”. The Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement (CERIS) ([sa]: 11) expanded on this perspective: “When we reduce people’s words and acts to statistical equations, we can lose sight of the human side of social life. When we study people qualitatively, we get to know them personally and experience what they experience in their daily struggles in society”. CERIS ([sa]: 12) further stated that qualitative methodology is commonly used on questions such as: what is happening, what are people doing and what does it mean to them? Patton (in CERIS [sa]: 57) explained that the holistic perspective, the detailed qualitative descriptions that give attention to nuance, setting, interdependencies, complexities, idiosyncrasies, and context of programs and situations (social and political context), is essential for overall understanding.

Qualitative researchers collect data in the form of written or spoken language, or in the form of observations that are recorded in language, and analyse the data by identifying and categorizing themes. Qualitative methods allow the researcher to study selected issues in depth, openness and detail as they identify and attempt to understand the categories of information that emerge from the data. In a quantitative study one of the main objectives is to discover facts and findings which are relevant to the participants who did not participate in the study, in other words to discover facts that could be generalized.

In a qualitative study, the goal is to understand the unique and personal experience of each participant. For this reason qualitative research studies focus on fewer participants who match the characteristics of the field with less importance on being able to generalize the study findings (Grinnell, 1997: 142-147). For qualitative researchers knowing about social reality is rooted in understanding, and this understanding flows from the shared meaning generated

by experiencing social reality. The researcher starts developing concepts to describe what is experienced in the context. As these concepts develop, they are linked to each other and this forms the basis of the theory that is formulated. Qualitative researchers take the actual social context into consideration to develop an understanding of events or actions (Pope and Mays, 1995: 5; Thomas, 2000: 3-4). CERIS ([sa]: 57) stated that data collection is not constrained by predetermined categories of analysis that contributes to the depth and detail of qualitative data. The researcher searches for the unifying nature of particular settings. This holistic approach assumes that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Gubrium and Holstein (in CERIS [sa]: 57) explained this as a commitment to studying social life as it unfolds. Seeing people as active agents of their affairs, qualitative inquiry has traditionally focused on how purposeful actors participate in, construct, deeply experience, or imagine their lives. Pope and Mays (1995: 3) supported this viewpoint and contributed the following: "The goal of qualitative research is the development of concepts which help us to understand social phenomena in natural (rather than experimental) settings, giving due emphasis to the meanings, experiences, and views of all participants".

Schuerman (1983: 107) identified the following characteristics of qualitative research:

- It is more a process of discovery than testing hypothesis.
- As a naturalistic approach it is sensitive, holistic and ecological as it is engaged in complex interactions which are more likely to capture the rich texture of life.
- Qualitative research focuses more on understanding of social events from the point of view of persons involved rather than explaining why things happen.
- Since the world can be designed as a world of qualities, the naturalistic approach tends to emphasize description and generalization rather than statistics. (Compare Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 1999: 47; Schurink, 1998: 241-243; Rafuls, [sa]: 1 and Preissle, [sa]: 4.)

Rafuls ([sa]: 3) stated that qualitative research methods are best suited for research intended to provide an understanding of processes occurring within particular contexts and of the beliefs and perceptions of the participants involved in the processes being studied. Ruskin ([sa]: 2) contributed to this discussion by adding that qualitative research examines the patterns of meanings that emerge from the data and these are often presented in the participants' own words. The task then of the qualitative researcher is to find patterns within those words (and actions) and to present those patterns for others to inspect while at the same time staying as close to the construction of the world as the participants originally experienced it. Ruskin ([sa]: 2) concluded by emphasizing that what can be discovered by qualitative research are not sweeping generalizations but contextual findings. This process of discovery is basic to the philosophic underpinning of the qualitative approach. Thomas (2000: 3) stated that the main task of qualitative research is to explicate the ways people in particular settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situations.

In the context of this study the researcher utilized the qualitative method to discover and uncover the ideas, perceptions and frame of reference and experiences of social service providers, social workers and administrators with regard to sustainable development and the position of social work practice within the sustainable development paradigm.

1.7 TYPE OF RESEARCH

Research can be divided into categories – that is, according to what it is used for. The tendency can be either to expand on fundamental knowledge or to solve specific problems, resulting in the following two types of research:

1. Research that tends to expand on fundamental knowledge is called basic research (sometimes also called “academic research” or pure research”).

2. Research that tends to solve specific problems is called applied research. Applied research is designed to solve practical problems of the modern world, rather than to acquire knowledge for knowledge's sake. The goal is to improve the human condition (National Berkely National Laboratory, [sa]: 1).

The findings derived from applied research have a practical application. Applied research aims to contribute towards practical issues of problem-solving, decision-making, policy analysis and community development (Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 1999: 41). In other words, researchers using applied research try to solve specific problems or, if necessary, try to make specific recommendations. Applied research involves problems that need to be solved in order to aid decision-making at line levels, managerial levels or policy levels. Such studies are designed to directly benefit a specific system, be it a national organization, an agency or an individual (Williams, Tutty and Grinnell, 1995: 52). Applied research generally is descriptive in nature and its main advantage is that it can be applied immediately after having obtained the results (Neuman, 1997: 21-23). Although research can be classified as either basic or applied research, these categories are not mutually exclusive. All research can be classified on a continuum between these two poles. If the tendency is to concentrate more on a contribution to knowledge, the research is more basic in nature, and if the tendency is for the research to be more practice-oriented, it is more applied in nature.

In this research study the researcher utilized applied research. Within this study the focus was on achieving a clearer understanding of the role and functions of social work practice within the sustainable development paradigm, and to use this to devise new applications for the pressing problems in communities and broader society.

1.8 THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Ruskin ([sa]: 1) stated that the design of a research study begins with the selection of a topic and a paradigm. A paradigm is essentially a worldview, a whole framework of beliefs, values and methods within which research takes place. It is this world view within which researchers work. Leedy, Newby and Ertmer (1997: 5) described research as a systematic process where, through the support of data, the answer to a question, the resolution of a problem or a greater understanding of phenomena is sought. It is thus a process following orderly procedures for problem solving or creating new knowledge. Meulenberg-Buskens (1996: 44) added to this perspective and stated that research is a process of knowledge construction and does not take place in a vacuum but is the result of raising and trying to answer questions. This type of structure requires a specific plan of procedure. The research process is therefore the orderly procedure of solving problems or creating new knowledge.

Fouché (2002b: 271) used the term “strategy” for the equivalent of research design in the quantitative approach. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999: 52) stated the following with regard to research design: “A research design is a plan for action that is developed by making decisions about four aspects of the research: the research paradigm, the purpose of the study, the techniques to be employed and the situation within which observation will take place”. These authors (1999: 483) were of the opinion that research design was a strategic framework or plan that guided the research activities to ensure that sound conclusions are reached. They continued to stress that the research design served as a bridge between research questions and the execution or implementation of the research. The research design provided a plan that specifies how the research was going to be executed in order to provide answers to the research questions.

Schuerman (1983: 21) provided another perspective: “The design for a research project is the plan for answering the research question. It specifies what

information is needed from whom, and when it is to be gathered". The author further stated that the design specifies the unit of analysis, the sampling procedure, the variables on which information is to be obtained, the data collection and measurement procedures, and the plan for the analysis of data. The purpose of a research design is to provide a plan for answering social questions (Schuerman, 1983: 148). A research design is therefore a set plan to answer important questions about a research topic or test a hypothesis. Durrheim (1999: 30) was of the opinion that a research design should provide an explicit plan for action and should include the techniques that will be employed in the implementation or execution of the research, i.e. sampling, data collection and analysis.

According to Fouché (2002b: 272) researchers undertaking qualitative studies have a great number of choices of strategies. Fouché further stated that qualitative researchers will during the research process, create the research strategy best suited to their research, or might even design their whole research project around the strategy selected. Creswell (in Fouché, 2002b: 272) made a contribution by identifying five strategies of inquiry, which, according to him, represent different disciplines, have detailed procedures and have proved to be popular and were frequently used. (Compare Oliver and Linkon, 2003: 2.) The five strategies are as follows:

- Biography
- Phenomenology
- Grounded theory
- Ethnography
- Case study

According to Creswell (in Fouché, 2002b: 275) a case study can be regarded as an exploration or in-depth analysis of a "bounded system" (bounded by time and/or place) or a single or multiple cases, over a period of time. The case being studied can refer to a process, activity, event, programme or individual or multiple

individuals. Fouché (2002b: 275) stipulated that the product of this type of research is an in-depth description of a case or cases. The researcher situates this system or case within its larger context, but the focus remains on either the case or an issue that is illustrated by the case. Merriam (2002: 8) stated that the case study is a vehicle for in-depth description and analysis. The Management Decision and Research Center ([sa]: 24) added the following statement to the discussion: “Case studies are the preferred strategy when “how” or “why” are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context. The case study is especially appropriate when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”. Hayes (2000: 131) contributed to this discussion by emphasizing that case studies are an approach to psychological research, which do not try to gather information from large numbers of research participants, instead they focus on single cases and explore them. According to Hayes case studies allow a researcher to investigate a topic in far more detail than might be possible if the researcher was trying to deal with a large number of participants.

The focus in this study was on sustainable development and the contribution, place and value of the social work profession within this contemporary issue.

Babbie (in Fouché, 2002b: 275) made a valuable contribution when he stated that case study researchers, in contrast with grounded theorists, seek to enter the field with knowledge of the relevant literature before conducting the field research. Mark (in Fouché, 2002b: 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 used the instrumental case study. The instrumental case study is used to elaborate on a theory or to gain a better understanding of a social issue.

Stake (in Sánchez and Chaminade, [sa]: 8) described an instrumental case study as follows: “A particular case is examined to provide an insight into an issue or to

test a theory. In this case, both the phenomenon and its context are analysed in detail". Hayes (2000: 133) elaborated on this aspect and stated the following in this regard: "Because they are so rich in information, case studies can give us insights into phenomena which we could not gain in any other way".

According to Mark (in Fouché, 2002b: 276) the instrumental case study merely serves the purpose of facilitating the researcher's gaining of knowledge about the social issue. In Stuart's opinion (2003: 1) if the researcher focuses on a specific issue, the case must illustrate that issue; this is an "instrumental case". Hannibal ([sa]: 1) contributed a description of the instrumental case study by stating that instrumental case studies constitute exemplars of a more general phenomenon. According to Hannibal they are selected to provide the researcher with an opportunity to study the phenomenon of interest. The research question identifies a phenomenon and the cases are selected in order to explore how the phenomenon exists within a particular case. Hannibal ([sa]: 1) stated in this regard: "In this design, individuals who are experiencing the phenomenon under investigation are all suitable cases for analysis". Hannibal ([sa]: 1) further added that case study research allow details of the subjective aspect, such as feelings, beliefs, impressions or interpretations.

Yin (1994) and Kingsley and Bozeman (1997) in Sánchez and Chaminade ([sa]: 7) summarised the main advantages of case study as a research method:

- Case studies provide the researcher with a high quantity of data on how and why a process is occurring.
- Although case studies are useful for any stage of the research, they are strongly recommended for the analysis of new phenomenon as well as for theory building.
- Case studies are considered to be a good tool for learning about a specific phenomenon that is to be analysed.

- Case studies are a very flexible method, as it allows the researcher to change the research procedures along the case, as a result of the interaction with the interviewed.

In this 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 with regard 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.

1.8.1 Data-collection method

In this research study, qualitative information (data) was collected through a series of focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with social workers from a variety of social service organizations and NGOs, as well as various local and provincial government departments. Gibbs (1997: 1) stated that focus groups are under-used in social research, although they have a long history in market research, and more recently in medical research. Gibbs (1997: 2) contributed to the description of focus group interviews by drawing on the work of a number of authors: "There are many definitions of a focus group in the literature, but features like organized discussion (Kitzinger, 1994), collective activity (Powell et al, 1996), social events (Goss and Leinbach, 1996) and interaction (Kitzinger, 1995) identify the contribution that focus groups make to social research". According to Goebert and Rosenthal (2002: ix) focus groups and qualitative research "zero in on the fuzzy, ill-conceived ideas that deserve to be tossed into the discard pile. Or they indicate which fork in the road makes the most sense". Goebert and Rosenthal (2002: ix) further elaborated that focus groups have more to do with concentrated and creative listening than with numbers and projections.

CERIS ([sa]: 24) added to the discussion and stated that in a focus group interview, participants get to hear each other's responses and to make additional

comments beyond their own original responses as they hear what other people have to say. It is not necessary for the group to reach any kind of consensus, nor is it necessary for people to disagree. The object is to get high quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others. CERIS ([sa]: 24) stressed the fact that focus group interviews are different from discussions, problem-solving sessions or decision-making groups. CERIS ([sa]: 24) claimed that focus group interviews provide some quality controls on data collection in that participants tend to provide checks and balances on each other, which weed out false or extreme views. Focus groups allow for in-depth probing and quality solutions.

A focus group can be defined as a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions, views and experiences of a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment. (Compare Bloor, Frankland, Thomas and Robson, 2001: 90; Bless and Higson-Smith, 1995: 113; Gibbs, 1997: 1-2 and Greeff, 2002: 306.) Focus group interviewing is particularly suited for obtaining several perspectives about the same topic. It is conducted with approximately seven to ten people by a skilled interviewer. The discussion is relaxed, comfortable, and often enjoyable for participants as they share ideas and perceptions. Group members influence each other by responding to ideas and comments in the discussion (Krueger, 1988: 18).

Millward (1995: 275) added to the discussion and described the focus group as a discussion-based interview that produces a particular type of qualitative data. This author further described the purpose of the focus group as getting closer to respondents' understanding and perspective on certain issues. It allows for respondents to become aware of their own perspectives when confronted with active disagreements of others and be inspired to analyze their views more intensely than during an individual interview. Millward (1995: 276) drew attention to the fact that focus groups function on two levels, the intra-personal level and intra-group level. The intra-personal level refers to the thoughts, perceptions,

attitudes and values of the individual and the intra-group focus on the communication and interaction with each other in the group. The main purpose of focus group research is to draw upon respondents' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions in a way in which would not be feasible using other methods. The opinion of Goebert and Rosenthal (2002: 3) was refreshing and valuable: "But focus groups are a qualitative research technique that lets you dig past the measurements. If you want to know how many jelly beans are in the jar, or how many are red, yellow, orange, or pink, then quantitative is your game. If you wonder how each jelly bean tastes, or how the colors may or may not relate to flavor, then qualitative is what you need". According to Goebert and Rosenthal (2002: 4) qualitative research, mainly focus groups, is where a story unfolds, a hypothesis develops, and an explanation emerges. These authors (2002: 212) emphasized that focus groups are useful to diagnose, examine, explore, think about, and directionally understand the probable success of ideas and new thinking. In their opinion the directional advice is the most important end product of focus groups.

Gibbs (1997: 3) made a particularly valuable contribution to the discussion with regard to focus group interviews. This author (1997: 3) postulated the following: "The benefits to participants of focus group research should not be underestimated. The opportunity to be involved in decision making processes (Race et al 1994), to be valued as experts, and to be given a chance to work collaboratively with researchers (Goss & Leinbach 1996) can be empowering for many participants. If a group works well, trust develops and the group may explore solutions to a particular problem as a unit (Kitzinger 1995), rather than as individuals. Not everyone will experience these benefits, as focus groups can also be intimidating at times, especially for inarticulate or shy members".

Goebert and Rosenthal (2002: 48, 72) contributed the following pertaining to focus groups:

- “Qualitative research (mainly focus groups) is where a story unfolds, a hypothesis develops, and an explanation emerges.
- What qualitative research does is add depth and context.
- Focus groups don’t provide solutions. They help you form a picture that reveals your possibilities and limits.
- A good focus group will yield better questions, not definite answers.
- Don’t go in looking for answers. Go in looking for possibilities and hints and clues about your business.
- Dig deeper and you will be rewarded with deeper truths.
- Employ creative techniques to jump-start thinking along different paths.
- You are delving into the consciousness and unearth the underlying reasons for their actions and form reasoned impressions about what’s really going on”.

Semi-structured interviews (guided interviews) were conducted with social workers and social service organization administrators. Greeff (2002: 302) stated that researchers use semi-structured interviews to gain a detailed picture of a participant’s beliefs about, or perceptions or account of, a particular topic. In Greeff’s opinion (2002: 302) this method gives the researcher and participant more flexibility. The researcher is able to follow up interesting aspects that emerge during the discussions. Greeff (2002: 302) further emphasized that with semi-structured interviews the researcher will have a set of predetermined questions on an interview schedule but the interview will be guided by the schedule rather than dictated by it. In this research study the researcher prepared an interview schedule that consisted of a set of questions. (See Appendix 1.) It enabled the researcher to pose questions regarding specific issues, while allowing participants to respond with knowledge and experiences from their own working environment, and to add whatever other issues they deemed relevant within the context of the questions raised by the guided interview schedule.

Qualitative research can provide insights into how people perceive services and their beliefs regarding different interventions. The outcome of this research study will hopefully lead to improved efficiency and effectiveness of social work interventions. The data revealed and generated new knowledge and information, leading to more flexible, effective, and acceptable solutions to the challenge of sustainable development for the social work profession.

1.8.2 Data analysis

According to Millward (1995: 288) content analysis comprises both a mechanical and an interpretative component. The mechanical aspect involves physically organizing and subdividing the data into categories while the interpretative component involves determining which categories are meaningful in terms of the questions being asked. Millward stated that the mechanical and interpretative are inextricably linked in a cycling back and forth between the transcripts and the more conceptual process of developing meaningful coding schemes.

Underlying the qualitative method is the assumption that research is based on inductive forms of logic and categories of interest emerge from informants or subjects, rather than being identified by the researcher. The goal is to uncover and discover patterns or theories that help explain a phenomenon of interest. CERIS ([sa]: 29) stated that data from qualitative methods are raw descriptive information including: direct observational descriptions of activities, behaviours, actions and the full-range of human interactions that can be part of case experiences; written notes including open-ended written responses to questionnaires, program records, data “in the head” – drawn from the researcher’s personal research, and literature-reading experiences. Oliver and Linkon (2003: 1) stressed that in qualitative studies there is a need for a detailed view of the situation. Data analysis means the categorizing, ordering, manipulating and summarizing of data to obtain answers to research questions. According to De Vos, Fouché and Venter (2002: 223) the purpose of analysis is

thus to reduce data to an intelligible and interpretable form so that the relations of research problems can be studied, tested and conclusions drawn. The process of data analysis in this study was as follows:

- Focus groups were conducted and the audiotapes of the discussions were transcribed.
- The text was read through as a whole and patterns/ themes were noted that were recurring in the data.
- The data was re-read.
- A number of key themes/categories emerged from the data.

1.9 PILOT STUDY

Strydom (2002: 210) emphasized that in order to undertake scientific research on a specific problem the researcher should have thorough background knowledge with regard to the selected topic or research problem. The pilot study forms an integral part of the research process. Its function is the exact formulation of the research problem, and a tentative planning of the modus operandi and range of the investigation. (Compare Barrett, 1995: 27.) Strydom (2002: 211) suggested a broad outline of the pilot study that commences with a literature study. Thereafter, the experiences of experts are gathered, and subsequently the researcher should obtain an overview of the field of investigation and conclude with a thorough study of a few cases.

The researcher realized that apart from a literature study and interviews with experts, a picture of the real practical situation where the prospective investigation was executed had to be obtained. Strydom (2002: 213) emphasized the special importance of preliminary exploratory studies in order to plan the research project in a practical way. Strydom (2002: 214) further stated that the researcher should undertake a thorough study on a small scale of the real total community where the investigation would take place. Researchers could in this way become aware of possible unforeseen problems, which might emerge during

the main investigation. Macleod (in Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 1999: 298-299) was of the opinion that pilot studies are used to identify possible problems with proposed research, using a small sample of respondents before the main study is conducted. She continued this discussion by stating that a way of conducting the pilot study is more “free range” in style. Open-ended questions are asked and participants’ opinions about the study are used to improve the research. This type of pilot study is useful in exploring the potential issues pertinent to the study prior to a more structured format being put into place. The rationale of a pilot study is to save time and money in the main study. It allows space for revision, reworking, complete overhaul or, potentially abandonment of the project.

Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001: 4) recognized that pilot studies might also have a number of limitations. These include the possibility of making inaccurate predictions or assumptions on the basis of pilot data and problems arising from contamination where data from the pilot study are included in the main results. These authors (2001: 4) further emphasized the contamination of data that could occur where participants from the pilot study are included in the main study and “new” data are collected from such participants. Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001: 6) concluded their discussion of pilot studies by stating how important the processes and outcomes from both successful and failed pilot studies are to other researchers. These authors (2001: 6) stated in this regard: “This is particularly important because pilot studies can be time-consuming, frustrating, and fraught with unanticipated problems, but it is better to deal with them before investing a great deal of time, money, and effort in the full study”.

1.9.1 Pilot testing of data-gathering instrument

The researcher invited participants, who were not part of the main study, for a discussion with the view to testing their ideas and opinions regarding this research study, as well as testing the questions contained in the interview schedule. This was done to enable the researcher to reformulate the questions, if

necessary. The wording and order of the questions contained in the interview schedule were of particular significance to the researcher to prevent any misconception when collecting data during the main study. Logistical and practical issues with regard to the venue and gaining access to the participants were finalized. Furthermore, the researcher was able to develop adequate technical skills for recording the interviews.

1.9.2 Feasibility of the study

Rubin and Babbie (1993: 81) drew attention to the importance of the feasibility of a research study. Research problems should not be too narrow so that they are not worth doing, or too grandiose that they are not feasible. In Strydom's (2002: 213) opinion preliminary exploratory studies are especially important with a view to the practical planning of the research project, e.g. the transport, finance and time factors. For this research study, the researcher was occupied for many weeks compiling an extensive list of all welfare and non-governmental organizations in and around the Pretoria area. This task was necessary to ascertain the number of organizations doing developmental work, job creation and community development. This proved to be a rather costly exercise because of the number of telephone calls, electronic mail and faxed messages.

As previously mentioned the researcher invited a selected number of participants to participate in a pilot test for the focus group interview. Written permission and co-operation from organizations were obtained by contacting the management of the various organizations, clarifying the nature of the research study and the importance of securing the participation of social workers at all levels. (See Appendix 2.) Organizations were selected on grounds of their accessibility that simplified logistics for travelling and conducting the focus group interviews.

1.9.3 Literature study

Fouché and Delport (2002: 127) emphasized that a review of literature is aimed at contributing towards a clearer understanding of the nature and meaning of the problem that has been identified. Bless and Higson-Smith (1995: 23) and Berg (1995: 256) highlighted the following functions of a literature review:

- It gives a comprehensive review of previous work on the specific topic considered in the report.
- It describes to the reader the state of existing literature, limitations and research directions.
- It allows the researcher to challenge previously accepted ideas or findings, or improve the use of theory or method.
- It serves as a kind of bibliographic index and guides the reader.
- It provides a solid foundation for a researcher's report.
- It allows the researcher to study the advantages and disadvantages of the research methods used by others.
- It allows the researcher to discover connections, analogies or other relations between different research results by comparing various investigations.

The researcher supported this overview of the functions of a literature study and consulted a variety of literature sources relevant to this study. It was essential that researcher consulted sources beyond the literature of social work, since societal problems do not confine themselves neatly to the various human and social science disciplines. Literature from the fields of business and economics, agriculture, law, education, theology, psychology, gender studies, geography and natural sciences were all relevant for this research study. A literature study of the general fields as well as the focused subject was therefore done.

1.9.4 Consultation with experts

Strydom (1998: 180) recommended that a literature study background as well as the researcher's own ideas and basic knowledge on the specific research subject

should be in place before experts are approached. The researcher gained insight and information from a wide variety of experts and professionals from different disciplines over the course of the research period. Researcher selected experts from different organizations, which operated on a national, provincial and regional basis, who contributed value to the study in view of their experience, knowledge and skills.

1.10 THE RESEARCH POPULATION, SAMPLE AND SAMPLING METHOD

Bless and Higson-Smith (1995: 87) described a well-defined population as the set of elements that the research focuses upon and to which the results obtained by testing the sample should be generalized. Babbie (1989: 170) stated that the study population is the sum total of elements from which the sample is selected. Grinnell and Williams (1990: 118) described the concept “population” as “the totality of persons or objects with which the study is concerned”. (Compare Fife-Schaw, 1995: 338.) The population in this respect was all social workers in and around the Pretoria area that did development work.

It was not feasible to utilize the whole social work community; therefore a sample was selected from different social work organizations and NGOs, in and around the Pretoria area.

1.10.1 Sample and sampling method

Grinnell and Williams (1990: 118) defined sampling as a process of selecting people to take part in a research study, and units or people picked out are samples. The ideal situation is to study the entire population, to give more weight to the findings. It is, however, not possible to study the entire population and the researcher has to settle for a sample. Arkava and Lane (in Strydom and Venter, 2002: 199) stated that a sample comprises the elements of the population

considered for actual inclusion in the study. The sample is included in an effort to understand the population from which it was drawn, therefore not describing the sample as an end in itself, but as a means to understanding facets of the population (Strydom and Venter, 2002: 199).

The sampling technique for this research study was purposive sampling. Babbie (1989: 207) stated that purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling method in which the researcher uses his or her own judgment in the selection of sample members. It is sometimes called a judgmental sample. Bailey (1982: 99) added to this by concluding that in purposive or judgmental sampling the investigator does not necessarily have a quota to fill from within various strata, as in quota sampling, but neither does he or she just pick the nearest warm bodies, as in convenience sampling. Rather, the researcher uses own judgment about which respondents to choose, and picks only those who best meet the purposes of the study.

According to Strydom and Venter (2002: 207) with this type of sampling method, the sample is composed of elements, which contain the most characteristic, representative or typical attributes of the population. Kelly (1999: 388) stated with regard to the constitution of a focus group, that it is typically a group of people who share a similar type of experience. CERIS ([sa]: 30) stated that the power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which the researcher can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. CERIS ([sa]: 30) postulated that when using qualitative methods, the samples are relatively small, thus the heterogeneity might be considered problematic, because individual cases are so different from each other. CERIS ([sa]: 30) stated the following in this regard: "Purposive sampling turns that apparent weakness into strength by applying the following logic: any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the

core experiences and central, shared aspects or impacts, as well as in outlining the range of differences”.

For the purpose of this research study, the researcher consulted with the management of various social service organizations and NGOs in and around the Pretoria area, as well as various local and provincial government departments, 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, and
- human development programmes, namely skills development and adult basic education.

The purposive sampling method in this research study was based on the aforementioned criteria and on the researcher’s judgement regarding the characteristics of a representative population.

1.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Bailey (1982: 427) defined ethical conduct, according to Webster’s Dictionary, as conforming to accepted professional practices. Strydom (2002: 63) provided the following comprehensive definition: “Ethics is a set of moral principles that are suggested by an individual or group, are subsequently widely accepted, and offer rules and behavioural expectations about the most correct conduct towards experimental subjects and respondents, employers, sponsors, other researchers, assistants and students”. According to Hayes (2000: 53) modern ethical guidelines recognize the rights of the research participant as an autonomous active individual who has chosen to participate in the study, and whose participation gives them certain rights – for example, the right to be fully informed

about the study, the right to withdraw if they so choose, and the right to make informed choices. Strydom (2002: 62) further stated that ethical issues for social researchers are pervasive and complex, since data should never be obtained at the expense of human beings. It is therefore very important for the researcher to be familiar with ethical principles such as obtaining the participant's informed consent, designing the study in an ethical manner and ensuring that the research findings would be reported in an honest way.

Gibbs (1997: 5) stressed that the ethical considerations for focus groups, as was the case for this research study, are the same as for most other methods of social research. Gibbs (1997: 5) made it clear that when selecting and involving participants, researchers must ensure that full information about the purpose and uses of participants' contributions is given. Participants in this research study were encouraged to keep confidential whatever came under discussion during the focus group interviews. The following ethical principles received particular attention in this research study:

- *Informed consent* according to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999: 479) and Strydom (2002: 65) is the process of seeking the explicit and uncoerced agreement from a subject to participate in a research project, based on their full understanding of the procedures involved and their likely efforts. For example, participants were made aware of the use of audio-recording devices and were verbally informed about this before every focus group discussion. Gaining informed consent is essential for all sorts of research. It has to reflect an awareness of what the research is all about and the level of commitment required from participants. Researcher obtained informed consent from all the organizations and the participants for the focus group discussions. (See Appendix 3.)
- *Confidentiality* implies an undertaking by the researcher to protect the anonymity of the research participants. (Compare Strydom, 2002: 67.) Few people would willingly express their most private details, opinions and emotions in public knowing that their names would be published. Thus,

confidentiality is a vital requirement for credible research (Oka and Shaw, 2000: 15). In this research study participants were given the assurance that personal names, and the identity of the social service providers would not be mentioned in the research report.

- *A confidentiality agreement* outlines all possible information on the voluntary participation of the respondent and the liberty to withdraw from the study at any time. Researcher prepared confidentiality agreements for all participants (those participating during the pilot project and the main study). The researcher and each individual participant signed these documents. (See Appendix 3.)
- *Reporting results:* Results of studies should be published with careful attention to the rights of participants. Care should be taken to protect the identities of individuals and groups, especially if anonymity was guaranteed in the consent agreement (Terre Blance and Durrheim, 1999: 70). Strydom (2002: 72) emphasized that an ethical obligation rests on the researcher to ensure at all times that the investigation proceeds correctly and that no one is deceived by the findings. In this study, research findings will be made available to respondents as a form of recognition and gratitude for their participation in the research project.

1.12 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

The following key concepts were relevant for this research study:

Sustainable development

In coming to understand sustainable development, the starting point for most people is the definition prepared by the World Commission on Environment and Development, the Brundtland Commission, (World Development Report, 2003: 14 and Ife, 1995: 45): “*Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*”.

To be sustainable, development must improve economic efficiency, protect and restore ecological systems, and enhance the well-being of all people. Sustainable development addresses three major elements: environment, economy and community. The different elements of development are brought together and stress the interconnectedness of each (they are integrally linked to each other and require a balanced approach). Sustainable development indicators measure sustainability or sustainable development performance: i.e. environmental, economic and social indicators. The concept of sustainable development goes beyond linking environmental considerations to economic growth. Sustainable development encompasses vital issues such as human development, social and economic justice, and advancement of democracy. In applying sustainable development principles the focus is on social and cultural change without which sustainable development is unattainable. The links between poverty and environment arise in terms of three vitally important dimensions of poverty reduction, i.e. livelihoods, health, and vulnerability. The poor are strongly dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods (Munro, 1995: 28, MacDonald, 1998; Fakir, 2002: 14).

For the purpose of this research study, sustainable development implies a multi-sectoral, holistic approach whereby the prevailing conditions of communities, groups and the individual are improved upon, utilizing economic, human and environmental resources in order to attain an adequate degree of health and well-being, economic security and empowerment, while maintaining the integrity of the ecological systems on which all life and production depends. Social work is closely interlinked with all of these issues.

Social work

“The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilizing theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work

intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work” (International Federation of Social Workers, 2000).

This new definition of social work, adopted by the International Federation of Social Workers, at the IFSW General Meeting in Montréal, Canada (July 2000) and in June 2001 by the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), stressed the importance of social work addressing the barriers, inequities and injustices that exist in society. The holistic focus of social work is universal, but the priorities of social work practice will vary from country to country from time to time depending on cultural, historical, and socio-economic conditions.

In this research study, the researcher focused on the role of the social work profession in addressing those barriers and difficulties preventing communities, groups and individuals from participating in all aspects of community life, in particular in relation to people who are unemployed, in poverty and homeless. Widespread economic insecurity and increasing vulnerability are obstacles to achieving sustainable development.

Social work intervention strategies

Intervention is defined as “the professional behaviour of a social worker to bring about change in the person-environment situation to achieve the objectives of the agreement of cooperation (contract) which has been entered into with the client” (New Dictionary of Social Work, 1995: 35).

Weyers (1991: 127) referred to the opinions of diverse authors in defining “strategy” as “a predetermined comprehensive course to be implemented in action, to attain a specific aim”. It is furthermore stated that the formulation of a strategy is a thought process that has to be completed by the social worker before actions are executed. Strategies are always aimed at achieving the ultimate objective, aim, destination or result, which is to be reached through

bringing about change in people and/or their circumstances. (Compare Weyers, 1991: 127.) Intervention strategies could be directed at any one or at all levels, these being micro, mezzo and macro levels depending on the nature of problems experienced by the client population (Gray, 1998: 16; Sturgeon, 1998: 31). For the purpose of this research study intervention strategies imply economic restructuring, preventative educational campaigns, skills development and the strengthening of community resources.

In summary, intervention strategies with an ecological approach where the emphasis is on transactions between people and environment, stressing the importance of linking social development and economic objectives, would be most suited to alleviating poverty. Within a sustainable development paradigm a comprehensive and integrated socio-economic strategy is advocated.

1.13 CONTENTS OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

The contents of this research report are divided into six chapters. The outline of these chapters is as follows:

Chapter One provides a general introduction and orientation to the study.

Chapter Two conceptualizes and contextualizes the concept “sustainable development”.

Chapter Three discusses the phenomena of underdevelopment, poverty and unemployment.

Chapter Four discusses social work within the context of the sustainable development paradigm.

Chapter Five reflects the findings and interpretation of the empirical study.

Chapter Six presents the summary, conclusions and recommendations of the study.