

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapter five the qualitative data was presented and discussed. The purpose of this final chapter is to focus on the conclusions drawn from the study and to offer recommendations for a future research agenda. The conclusions and recommendations made in this chapter are based on the literature study and the findings of the empirical research. In order to determine whether or not, and to what extent, the research has achieved what it set out to achieve, it is necessary to compare the qualitative data against the objectives of the research, which is directly linked to the research questions as formulated in chapter one. The researcher will therefore indicate how the objectives of this study were achieved. First, the researcher will indicate conclusions with regard to the broad, overall sustainable development paradigm (Objective 1). Thereafter, the researcher will indicate the conclusions drawn from the perceptions, attitudes, frame of reference and knowledge base of social workers with regard to the concept of sustainable development and the application of social work practice within this paradigm (Objective 2). Finally, based on the key findings and conclusions of the study, recommendations are made (Objective 3).

6.2 PURPOSE, GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

6.2.1 Purpose of the research study

As stated in chapter one of this research report, 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.

6.2.2 Goal of the research 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.

6.2.3 Objectives of the study

In the following discussion the respective objectives of the study will be given with a brief indication of how they have been achieved in this study.

Objective 1: To explore, through a literature study, the theoretical framework of the concept sustainable development and its applicability in social work.

Chapter One highlighted the broad theoretical framework of this research study. Included in chapter one were the definitions of the main theoretical components used throughout the study.

Chapter Two “The Sustainable Development Paradigm” focused extensively on the exploration of the concept sustainable development. The history, development and various descriptions of the concept were thoroughly explored. The various perspectives regarding the sustainable development paradigm were described in detail. The very essence of the sustainable development paradigm, namely, the three pillars of sustainable development: economic development and growth, social development and progress (encompassing cultural and political aspects) and environmental protection and conservation, and the

interconnectedness and interrelationships between the three dimensions were of particular significance in the context of this study.

Chapter Three of this research study focused extensively on poverty, underdevelopment and unemployment as the most important elements/phenomena to be addressed in the process of working towards achieving sustainable development.

Chapter Four dealt with the discipline of social work within the context of the sustainable development paradigm. A number of innovative intervention strategies to address the problems of poverty, underdevelopment and unemployment, were discussed.

The first objective was achieved and in summary the following conclusions were reached evident from the reviewed available literature, with regard to the broad, overall sustainable development paradigm:

- A significant number of crucial environmental, economic and social issues confront most communities all over the world today. The situation is no different for South Africa as a society and part of the world. Critical environmental threats together with persistent poverty need to be addressed without delay.
- From the literature survey, detailed descriptions of the concept “sustainable development” were derived. The literature study indicated that there indeed exists a wide spectrum of different understandings regarding the sustainable development paradigm.
- Sustainable human development, sustainable industry and sustainable agriculture are all related to the quality of life in a community. Sustainable development implies that the economic, social and environmental systems

that are integral parts of the community are providing a healthy, productive and meaningful life for all community residents, present and future.

- The economic, social and environmental dimensions are inextricably linked and inextricably interconnected.
- The literature study further indicated that a great number of economists, environmentalists, community developers and politicians are actively supporting sustainable development because of the promise of a better world that it holds.
- In the context of sustainability, economics is about the material goods and services necessary in the lives of people, from basic necessities to those goods and services that make life more enjoyable and serves as a means to a better life for people everywhere.
- All countries, rich and poor, face environmental problems that are often closely linked with efforts to reduce poverty and thereby improve the standard of living of communities.
- The relationship between economic development and the environment is indeed a complex issue and the escalation of economic activity can both cause environmental problems and, with the appropriate policies and institutions, help solve them.
- Economic development is a crucial component of the sustainable development process to enable communities to progress. Economic growth and development is necessary to generate the resources needed for all kinds of development. The increasing level of unemployment, the lack of job security, an increase in the cost of utilities such as sanitation and water services, electricity, telecommunications and transport, have resulted in

increased levels of frustration for many millions of people living in sprawling townships and underdeveloped rural areas.

- Greater economic strength and higher standards of living in all countries contribute to a healthy, vigorous and competitive world economy.
- The increased interdependence among countries that accompanies economic growth and development can be of benefit to all countries.
- The transfer of entrepreneurial skills and business knowledge to unemployed people and disadvantaged communities is essential to break the cycle of economic dependence and deepening poverty.
- A great need exists for innovative social architects. There is a need for reshaping social, cultural and physical existence to better the lives of millions of people living in squalid conditions.
- Communities must be tied to place and the sense of social responsibility for creating healthy, supportive surroundings. A community torn apart by fear and mistrust or exposed to undue hazards from inadequate housing, uncontrolled pollution, environmental destruction and degradation, crime or violence can only lead to more hardship and social instability. Any community finding itself in this kind of predicament cannot establish a sense of cohesion needed for the process of sustainable, comprehensive community development.
- The preservation (or acquisition) of basic human rights and the fulfilment of basic human needs are the fundamental driving forces behind economic transactions, social interactions, and resource consumption. When people are operating under duress in any of these areas, concern for immediate needs overwhelms any consideration for long-term needs, thereby underpinning the whole principle of planning for the future.

- The mission of social workers with regard to sustainable human development should be to widen every possible economic and social development opportunities available to individuals.
- The lack of education facilities and opportunities, coupled with undernourished individuals and inadequate housing contribute to a process of eroding human capital. The development of human capital is a crucial component in the process of sustainable development. Education, skills training, and comprehensive health care contribute significantly to an increase in human capital and subsequently to an increase in social capital.
- A community that allows the quality of its social interactions and networks to decline through lack of trust, respect, and tolerance is eroding its social capital.
- A community that allows its buildings, roads, parks, power facilities, and waste processing capability to decay is eroding its built capital. Social destitution occurs when decay, neglect and waste of resources are not adequately addressed.
- The social and economic realities of people cannot be separated and social workers need to deal with such problems on a multiple system level.

Objective 2: To explore the perceptions, attitudes, frame of reference and knowledge base of social workers and social work administrators towards the concept of sustainable development and social work practice

This objective was achieved through the qualitative study. The empirical study, through a series of focus group discussions, allowed the researcher to identify the perceptions, attitudes, frame of reference and knowledge base of social

workers with regard to the concept of sustainable development and the position of social work practice within this paradigm. Linking the findings of the literature survey and the empirical research led to a number of key findings and conclusions regarding the current position of the social work profession within the paradigm of sustainable development. The participants were not representative of the entire population of social workers involved in community development, job creation initiatives and the establishment of social networks, and therefore, the findings cannot be extrapolated to the universum.

Objective 3: 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.

This objective is met in this chapter (see 6.4 Recommendations).

6.3 KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

In the following discussion the major findings of the study will be synthesized and highlighted as a guiding framework for the conclusions of the study. Four themes emanated from the process of data-analysis. The themes identified were:

- The concept “sustainable development”
- Entrepreneurial activities/ Entrepreneurship
- Training and education of social workers
- Networking and partnerships

6.3.1 The concept “sustainable development”

The key findings indicated that there were general uncertainty amongst participants as to what sustainable development entailed, and more specifically

as to the position, place and value of social work practice within the sustainable development paradigm. It was clearly shown, though, that the participants were aware of some concepts related to sustainable development, but within their working environment had no focus on sustainable development as such. An overview of the literature reinforced the now widely accepted holistic conceptualization of sustainable development, by defining it as a complex, varied mixture of economic, social, political, cultural and environmental aspects that are interacting and interdependent. This broad description is in line with the perspective adopted by the Department of Social Welfare in the promotion of a developmental approach to social welfare. This description also recognized the very important holistic, multisectoral approach to community development. The different dimensions are not neatly packaged separate aspects of community life, but interrelated, enmeshed components of society. Integrating social development with responsible ecological management and sustainable economic development is undoubtedly necessary for achieving sustainability.

The following conclusions were drawn with regard to the key findings:

- Many of the participants perceived sustainable development as something “different” or separate from social work practice.
- This narrow view is partly responsible for the lack of knowledge, insight and understanding as to a true implementation of a developmental approach within the social work profession.

6.3.2 Entrepreneurial activities/ entrepreneurship

An overview of the available literature indicated that the economic dimension of sustainable development (economic growth and development) is a crucial component in the fight against poverty, underdevelopment and unemployment. Economic progress for all people is undeniably a key component of poverty

alleviation. The development of small, medium and micro enterprises are an integral part of an overall economic strategy to advance the progress of all people in South Africa.

The available literature indicated the importance of stimulating entrepreneurial activities as a potential source of income for the unemployed and as a measure to counteract the cycle of dependence and despair. From the research findings it was evident that most participants in the focus groups discussions recognized that entrepreneurial activities could make a substantial contribution to the creation of financial income within a community. Most participants also acknowledged that stimulating entrepreneurial ventures could enhance the empowerment process of individuals and communities. It became clear from the empirical data that the participants were inadequately skilled to effectively assist the client population in economic empowerment.

The research findings indicated that a lack of knowledge and skills regarding entrepreneurship, business development and marketing characterized the frame of reference of the participants. It is clear though that supporting economic activities based on small and medium enterprises and social economic activities are an essential part of the role of the social worker in the new South Africa. This perspective was supported by Ncube (2004: 58) when he emphasized the following: "It is vitally important that South Africa attacks unemployment and social destitution and the only way to do that is education and, of course, economic growth". The growth of formal employment will increase resources for poor communities, but unfortunately the outlook is not that optimistic. The perspective of Ntombazana Botha, Deputy Minister for Provincial and Local Government (2003: 8) further supported these findings. The Deputy Minister believed that her department had an important role in the battle to eradicate poverty and offered the following advice to all stakeholders in addressing the challenges with regard to poverty alleviation: "We need to tackle them on many fronts. We have to support the farmers in every way that we can. We also have to

encourage people to start enterprises of their own. People who start small enterprises that employ only themselves are encouraged, but we particularly like people to start enterprises that function as co-operatives. In this way more people will be employed and more homes will receive an income. An example of this that is already taking place is groups of women doing high quality beadwork for the tourism industry. We have to rekindle the spirit of enterprise in areas where it died during the years of repression". The Deputy Minister (2003: 10) further emphasized that the main challenge facing South Africa is the alleviation and ultimately the eradication of poverty. She stated the following in this regard:

"We have no choice but to improve the quality of life for those of our people who are impoverished. Jobs are getting fewer. The only answer is to redirect people into their own enterprises. To do this, we have to see that our skills base grows. The purpose of the national skills development programme, led by the Department of Labour, is to make people employable both in the job market and in their own enterprises. This is part of the challenge that lies ahead". Small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) are important vehicles to create jobs and promote growth and equity. According to Cross (2001: 1) home-based small businesses form the largest part of the entire informal sector. These alternative employment options outside the formal sector are already providing income to unemployed people and this trend needs to be supported and enhanced. In this regard Cross (2001: 2) emphasized that the success of informal enterprises depends centrally on the capacity of the person at the centre – the business operator. Ramarumo (2001: 5) confirmed this viewpoint and stated emphatically in this regard: "The role of poverty alleviation, in close co-operation with other social sectors, is crucial. There is no single country that has succeeded without educating its people. Not only is education an important element of sustaining development but inevitably, it is also a key to wealth creation". The immense task of creating an economic model to combat and overcome the historical challenge of social exclusion demands the active participation of many actors. The effects of poverty and material deprivation confront social workers daily. The destructive effects on the individual's self-esteem, the limitations placed on community

participation and the consequent reduction in the quality of life have been discussed at great length in previous chapters.

The following conclusions were drawn with regard to the abovementioned findings:

- Enterprise development is not only necessary to create more income but serves the important purpose to educate people about their options and different opportunities and encourage the taking of responsibility for their own lives. Intervention strategies have to focus on creating job opportunities through self-employment and small enterprise support. Small, medium and micro-enterprises have the capacity to contribute significantly to South Africa's macro-economy.
- In addition to a more proactive role in the achievement of the objectives relating to the creation of income generating activities, supporting co-operatives, and small and medium enterprises, social workers will have a strategic role to play in advocating for the provision of infrastructure.
- Social workers need to be at the forefront of educating disadvantaged people with low levels of education to become more economically aware and develop the skills to participate and contribute to the economy. This implies not only education at the level of basic numeracy and literacy, but also training that focuses on the needs and problems of micro, small and medium enterprises. Further training courses are needed for semi-literate and literate adults to accelerate learning and overcome low levels of literacy and language problems.
- Social workers cannot limit their actions and responsibilities to short-term interventions. Sustained growth and improvement in the lives of poor, struggling people will ensure a better future for all.

- A lack of knowledge regarding entrepreneurship prevented participants from initiating and stimulating business ventures as an integral part of an economic strategy to address poverty and unemployment.
- There is a need to develop appropriate courses to enhance the economic and financial literacy of social workers.
- The social work profession needs to actively contribute to processes and structures that support sustainable economic progress and development in communities. Social workers need to participate in initiatives aimed at strengthening and stimulating economic power in communities.
- A basic knowledge of economics and market forces could serve the social worker well in planning and executing economic activities for the client population. Very often unemployed people have existing skills and resources. Social workers are often responsible for managing and allocating resources. Social workers are responsible for the assessment, planning and monitoring and liaising with other organizations with regard to the implementation of job creation projects and income-generating activities. The social worker needs to have a sound knowledge base of entrepreneurship to motivate the individual to direct his or her efforts to income-generating activities.

6.3.3 Training and education of social workers

Most participants in this research study agreed that there was a need for business skills training and further education with regard to important economic principles for all social work students. The research findings indicated that there was overall agreement as to the importance of social workers being able to construct a business plan. There was also agreement as to the importance of having the necessary business knowledge in order to empower clients. The

research findings further indicated 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 emphasized 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 was to shift the emphasis from social work intervention on an individual basis to more holistic strategies that can reach the broader community. The paradigm shift in social work service delivery towards developmental social work practice has increased the responsibilities of social workers placing more demands on them for effective and efficient service delivery.

Communities are facing multiple adversities and it is within that context that social workers are needed to assist communities to create better living conditions.

The following conclusions were drawn with regard to the abovementioned findings:

- There is a need for more knowledge regarding sustainable development and the application thereof within the social work domain. Social workers can contribute significantly to the process of equipping people to enable them to claim their rightful place in the economy. Social workers need to recognize not only the multiplicity of causes but also the many interrelationships between and among such causes.

- Social workers need appropriate skills and knowledge to integrate social development with responsible and wise environmental management, coupled with sustainable economic progress and growth. These are the essential components of a holistic approach for sustainable social work practice in an ever-changing society.

- Specific knowledge regarding entrepreneurship, skills development and the creation of income-generating activities are urgently needed. The researcher is of the impression that continuing professional development for social workers in the field of community development could contribute significantly to improved services in all communities. Continuing professional development would improve the social workers' theoretical and practical knowledge. Social workers should be empowered through continuous ongoing education so that they in turn can be actively involved in capacity building in communities. A key learning area would be to facilitate the implementation of sustainable integrated socio-economic development strategies. Social workers need to develop the skills and knowledge to integrate creative solutions and opportunities with available resources. The South African Council for Social Service Professions initiative to launch a pilot project for continuous professional development in 2004 with a view to implement the policy in 2005 is a huge step forward for learning through accredited service providers.

- The challenge remains to develop a “culture of continuous learning” whereby social workers upgrade their skills and extend their knowledge to include business studies and entrepreneurship training. The willingness and ability of social service providers, traditional welfare organizations and non-governmental organizations to respond to the dramatic changes affecting their services will determine whether these institutions and organizations will survive and prosper.

6.3.4 Networking and partnerships

The research findings indicated that participants were often frustrated with the perceived lack of support and continuity in services from various government departments.

The following conclusions were drawn with regard to these findings:

- Social work services are fragmented to the point where social workers find it extremely difficult, or at times, impossible to render effective services to clients.
- The perspective of the participants stemmed from the failure between organizations and various government departments to communicate and collaborate as to what constitute effective service delivery.
- There is a need for focused efforts in the areas of collaboration, the exchange of information and effective coordination of available resources. Procedures to obtain resources and support needed to be streamlined and communicated clearly.

From the perspective represented by the participants the research findings further indicated that community work service delivery were negatively influenced by the lack of synergy and cooperation between various government departments and social work organizations.

The following conclusions were drawn with regard to these findings:

- Participants felt apprehensive and unmotivated to “experiment” with new ideas and strategies to address the social and economic issues confronting communities.
- The challenge remains to develop better ways of cooperation and collaboration between all stakeholders in the social welfare field.

- Networking and effective partnerships are crucial elements in successful service delivery. Networking facilitates exchanging essential knowledge and information. This is not only for the own benefit and career enhancement of social workers, but is in the best interest of communities. Sustained efforts in this regard are necessary to address the vast number of social and economic issues as integral parts of sustainable development.

- Collaboration and cooperation as crucial components in the process of sustainable development are particularly needed in the following areas:
 - The **HIV/AIDS pandemic** is a cross-cutting issue in that it impacts on just about every aspect of a community’s life. Social workers need to collaborate and exchange information within the profession and with other disciplines with regard to a holistic approach to address the many issues confronting families living with the disease. Walters (2001: 1) emphasized that the HIV/AIDS pandemic is one of the greatest educational challenges facing Southern Africa.
 - **Adult Basic Literacy and Training:** literacy promotes citizenship. Education plays an undeniable role in the development of a community. It enables people to demand from governing institutions and lawmakers to act against conditions of poverty and underdevelopment. Literacy is a crucial part of real empowerment.
 - Places of learning (**primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions**) should be encouraged to **promote partnerships** that will increase parental and community involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional,

and academic growth of children and young adults. The **development of human capital as a crucial part of a developmental approach** needs to be recognized by social workers. Social workers need to be proactively involved in places of learning to promote the development of much needed skills and knowledge with regard to entrepreneurship and business development.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

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

6.4.1 Information management

- The social work profession needs an information-sharing platform. Networking facilitates the sharing of individual and institutional experience and learning as an element of capacity building. Networking implies information communications technology, in addition to seminars, conferences, discussion groups and the development of practice communities.
- Collaboration is essential and must be reinforced. Social workers need to collaborate with established entrepreneurs and business leaders. There is a need for social workers to have a more thorough understanding of the technical and business aspects of entrepreneurship which will form the basis of improved decision making skills and innovation.
- Social work practitioners have to become self-directed and lifelong learners who will be able to adapt to the changing circumstances in society. Furthermore, social workers in South Africa have to keep up with developments in the profession and have the necessary motivation to develop the relevant specialized skills and qualifications to fulfil the needs of the country.

- A system of sharing best practices and building networks of excellence in targeted research areas can facilitate the advancement of the social work profession. An enabling environment to facilitate sustainable development, require the full involvement of national and local government, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and civil society. This will require all stakeholders to actively contribute to strengthen the “tools” in the armour of the social worker.
- The extent of poverty, despair and misery in many of the communities in South Africa today, compel social workers to deliver the best possible solutions without delay to individuals and communities. Exchanging valuable experiences, strategic information and ideas about working solutions prevent the same mistakes being made. It saves valuable time and enhances people’s creativity.
- Social work practitioners as service providers are in a position to create links between various stakeholders that can be of benefit to both. It is only through supportive and continuous feedback processes that successful implementation of projects and programmes can become reality. 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.
- Policy decisions should reflect a holistic, multi-sectoral, integrated process of social and economic development within a sustainable development paradigm. Policy regarding sustainable social work practice needs to allow for more investment in social and human capital.

Information management can be achieved through the establishment of an independent non-governmental organization to facilitate a system of information sharing for the social work profession. All stakeholders in the social and health

service delivery field on a national, provincial and local level need to contribute to the establishment of such an organization.

6.4.2 Continuing professional development

Deliberate educational and knowledge distribution strategies are needed within the social work profession to facilitate the core issues within the sustainable development paradigm.

Extensive emphasis on education with regard to the following areas are needed:

- Within the social work profession a greater emphasis should be placed on, and the redefining of strategies with regard to **Adult Education and Training**. Adult Education and Training serves to strengthen social relations and networks, and the building of cohesion and involvement by individuals. Social work practitioners need to actively contribute to processes and structures that support the delivery of adult literacy and training efforts. Social work practitioners need to provide the impetus for the development of literacy and lifelong learning programmes as a gateway for individuals and communities to fuller participation in social, economic and political life. How people participate in the development process is an important component of sustainable community development.

- **Entrepreneurship knowledge and skills:** Employment training and job creation, is more than ever of great importance in South Africa. Knowledge and skills with regard to promoting the development of small, micro and medium enterprises for the creation of employment is a necessity. 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.

6.4.3 Areas for further research

It is recommended that each of the themes which emerged from the process of data analysis are the subject of further investigation and therefore contribute to a more holistic, integrated socio-economic process within the sustainable development paradigm.