GOVERNMENT-SPONSORED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS AS POVERTY ALLEVIATION TOOLS? EVIDENCE FROM MDANTSANE, EAST LONDON

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A mini dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements for Master of Social Science (Rural Development) at the University of Fort Hare, South Africa.
DECLARATION

I, Ntombebhongo Gedze, hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work. All ideas and words that I have borrowed from other sources have been correctly and completely referenced. The responsibility to adhere to the ethics of originality and proper referencing, as advised by my supervisor, remains mine and mine alone.

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ABSTRACT
The study investigates whether government-sponsored community development projects in the township of Mdantsane, Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality, South Africa, have achieved the intended goal of alleviating poverty among the beneficiaries. The specific outcomes of poverty alleviation are: improved income, acquisition of new skills, reduced dependence on welfare grants.

Four urban farming projects were selected, namely: Buffalo City Organic Producers, Sakhisizwe Nursery, Lusindiso Farmer’s Trading Co-operative and Mbombela Co-operative. Focus group discussions and a mini survey were conducted with project beneficiaries, while relevant government officials were interviewed. Conceptual insights were drawn from community development theory.

The findings showed that the broader context within which the projects occurred was characterised by a pro-poor social policy, relative availability of resources with which to translate it into action, and a measure of entrepreneurial potential amongst community members. However, while one of the projects showed some promise (in the sense that beneficiaries acquired new skills and had a generally positive attitude despite not enjoying any improved income status), all the others appeared doomed and trapped in dynamics such as: excessive government control of the management of the initiatives, ineffective project monitoring, and the mischaracterisation of the initiatives by both the government and the beneficiaries. A distorted sense of ownership and perverse community participation seemed to prevail, which in turn robbed the initiatives of their poverty alleviation potential.

The study thus concluded that specific benefactor-beneficiary dynamics are crucial for the success of a given anti-poverty intervention. A robust pro-poor social policy, availability of resources with which to translate it into action, and local entrepreneurial potential do not in themselves bring about success; they must operate in a certain way and be undergirded by certain principles for them to become a powerful mechanism for alleviating poverty. It is against this background that the researcher offers some recommendations.

KEYWORDS: Poverty alleviation, community participation, Mdantsane Township, South Africa.
DEDICATION

To my family
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank God, the Almighty, for giving me strength and courage to complete this study and my dream of making my Masters a reality.

I fall short of words when I think of my supervisor, Professor Wilson Akpan. He made the completion of this study possible through his continuous and tireless guidance, advice and support. Without him the study would not have been completed.

I will not forget the amazing support I received from all the community development projects beneficiaries in question, Community Development Practitioners and project managers who willingly gave some of their valuable time to respond to the questionnaires and interviews.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family and friends for their assistance and support in times of need during the study.
ABBREVIATIONS

**BCOP** - Buffalo City Organic Producers

**BUPP** - Bangalore Urban Poverty Alleviation Programme

**CDP** – Community Development Practitioner

**DPLG** - Department of Provincial and Local Government

**ECSECC** – Eastern Cape Socio-Economic Consultative Council

**EPWP** - Extended Public Works Programme

**FGD** - Focus Group Discussion

**ICMM** - International Council on Mining and Metals

**LFTC** - Lusindiso Farmer’s Trading Co-operative

**PIR** - Poverty and Inequality Report

**PRS** - Poverty Reduction Strategies

**SWOT** - Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

**UNCTAD** - United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

**WDR** - World Development Report
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CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction
The study investigates whether the implementation of government sponsored community development projects in Mdantsane, South Africa’s second biggest township, after Soweto, have achieved the intended goal of alleviating poverty in the area. It looks specifically at aspects that have a direct bearing on poverty, namely: skills acquisition, income, and social grants dependency.

The Eastern Cape Province is steadily instituting programmes and strategies to address underdevelopment, unemployment and poor services while harnessing the enterprise and skill of rural households in the former homeland areas. Its geographic location, sea and airport, abundance of natural resources and world class infrastructure bode particularly well for growth of export oriented industry. The province is using innovative ways to draw rural people, who survive mostly on subsistence agriculture, migrant labour and welfare grants, into the mainstream economy. Unemployment remains a challenge, but as the economy has grown, improvements have been evident (Klassen, 2011).

Mdantsane Township is situated between East London and King William’s Town. It is part of Buffalo City Municipality\(^1\) in the Amatole District of the Eastern Cape. The languages spoken in Mdantsane are IsiXhosa and English. The majority of the residents subsist below the living wage, according to government economic classifications (Mase, 2008).

As part of efforts to combat poverty in the townships, the government introduced community development projects in 2007. The main purpose of the projects is to facilitate social development and access to resources that would empower marginalized communities and poor households. Aligned with these objectives is the imperative of making sure the targeted

\(^1\) The Municipality was in mid-2011 upgraded to Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality. The old name (Buffalo City Municipality) is maintained in this dissertation since the new name came into effect just as this project was being finalized for examination.
communities participate in their own development. The projects are also designed and implemented to facilitate the empowerment of the marginalized youth (Social Development Bulletin June/July 2007).

In the Eastern Cape, the Department of Social Development sponsors many of the poverty alleviation programmes. Self-employment opportunities are created through projects for youth, and those directed towards food security, among others. In other words, each programme is translated into specific “projects” which are implemented in the communities. The Department forms social partnership with the communities who are involved in the various development programmes. As a way of ensuring that the communities are in control of how the resources meant for them are utilized, they reportedly participate in the relevant formal decision-making processes and are trained so that they can run their development projects (Social Development Bulletin June/July 2007).

According to Department Bulletin (June/July 2007), emphasis is on partnership between government and communities. The government believes that in the long run, such projects should be able to make a dent on the high unemployment levels. Through these projects, the Department of Social Development aims to restore the dignity of the people and improve their living standards.

Research shows that there is a link between community projects of this nature and poverty alleviation. In Brazil, for an example, a development project for Rio Gavião Region (PROGAVIAÖ), in the Southern Central part of Bahia, was found by researchers to boost animal production and lead to improved family nutritional status (Arrante, 2003). These achievements were broadly in line with the project’s objectives of increasing local income and improving the living conditions of local residents. The achievements were particularly important in that at the inception of the projects, 65% of the families in this rural region lived below the poverty line. The knowledge and skills imparted and acquired during training – which rural residents’ value - were another asset generated by the project. The success of the project is based on the co-operation of local residents, government, and other stakeholders (Arrante, 2003).

In 2004 the International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM) commissioned independent research into ways in which it could enhance the mining sector’s contributions to poverty
reduction. The objective of the ICMM’s research was to identify the critical factors that have allowed some countries to benefit from their substantial resource endowments and to avoid the so-called ‘resource curse’. The idea was to identify practical steps that might be taken by the mining industry and others, such as government, local communities and development agencies to enhance the positive impact of mineral resource investment. ICMM has undertaken a research in Chile as part of its Resource Endowment Initiative – this was launched in 2004 in partnership with United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the World Bank Group, with the goal of understanding and enhancing the contribution of mineral wealth to economic growth and poverty reduction. It was found that multi-stake partnerships can be a powerful way to overcome development challenges and maximise positive impacts, thus avoiding the ‘resource curse’. A key finding was that mining has contributed to improve economic policies (The Analytic Framework, August 2006).

In Lithuania, an evaluation of the provision of government sponsored Community Day and Home Care Services has been conducted to ascertain the extent to which these services were a viable alternative to residential institutions in terms of caring for vulnerable individuals, including children, young adults, handicapped, disabled and the elderly. The Ministry of Social Security and Labour together with the World Bank and Swedish Development Agency (SIDA) established 14 social services centres in six different municipalities in Lithuania. Establishment of Day Care Centres in Lithuania was a very important step in providing the community with a new model of social services, a model that is oriented towards a more open and cohesive society. It is important to point out that the public was involved in the innovation process to become supportive. At the same time, a lack of resources was noted as a strong barrier to project effectiveness. The important finding was that the level of readiness for change played a crucial role in the development process (Staroňova and Maliková, 2005).

In one mining company-sponsored project in Ghana, it was found that while the level of multi-stakeholder involvement in the project was expected to become the benchmark for the future, there was discontent with the way the benefactor was relating to the communities. An assessment of the projects in 2005 revealed that the project did not provide adequate measures for the restoration of livelihood for physically and economically displaced persons. Overall, the project could not make a contribution to locally sustainable development (International Finance Corporation, 2005).
Breadline Africa is involved in a number of community development projects that aim to uplift disadvantaged communities to become self sufficient. The projects that they support tend to fall under different categories; namely, skills development, assisting youth and children in poverty, health and nutrition. Breadline Africa reported that a project was designed for equipping men and women to do basic plumbing. The project was adjudged successful as it had rescued six men and six women from unemployment and poverty (Titus, 2006).

An evaluation of community relations in mineral development projects has been conducted by Guerra (2001). The study attempted to see whether traditional methods of managing problems in the minerals industry would be adequate to address social issues affecting mineral development projects. The objective was job creation an increase in income. The findings were that reasonable and good relations with local communities, right from the very early stages of the project, can potentially reduce the sources of conflict and prevent delays in project development. Public participation throughout the project made the project a success.

It is against the background of these findings that the present study interrogates the effectiveness of government sponsored community development projects in Mdantsane. The study defines effectiveness as the outcomes of the development projects in terms of alleviating poverty. Poverty alleviation is in turn defined as freeing the poor from welfare dependency and enhancing their participation in wealth creating economic activities. In other words, the study is about the extent to which people have been freed from dependency on social grants as a result of these projects. Other criteria are skills acquisition and effect on income levels. The criteria are in line with Kwakani and Subbaroa’s (1992) argument that, to analyse poverty, the economic welfare of each individual in the society needs to be measured.

1.2 Statement of the problem
Recent interest in poverty and poverty relief has included debates that have moved beyond narrow concerns about consumption and income generation. Amartya Sen’s work in the 1980’s has made a major contribution to the study of poverty. In West Bengal, India, for example, elected local government have played an important role in the implementation of various poverty alleviation programmes. The programmes include land reform and local
infrastructure projects designed to generate employment for the poor. In a nutshell, the projects have been effective because several programmes that were initiated to alleviate poverty helped to eliminate famines, cut absolute poverty levels by more than half and reduced illiteracy and malnutrition (Williams, 1998).

For many good reasons there is much interest in issues of participation and empowerment, and, more recently and more broadly, in participatory governance which includes special attention to structures and relationships that make participation possible (de Wit, 2000; Schneider, 1999). A related field of enquiry involves the requirements for local government to create conditions under which communities are enabled to participate in the production and delivery of services and in meeting the basic needs of citizens. This has been termed ‘enhancement’ (Helmsing, 2000). It is about the ‘conditions for facilitating’ rather than ‘providing’. Efficiency and effectiveness are achieved by delegating tasks to communities and letting them identify and prioritise their needs so that a better match between what people need and what they actually obtain is achieved. According to Ostrom (1996), involving people in policy formulation and implementation makes excellent sense, especially for developing countries and in the context of poverty reduction strategies.

A relevant example, in the case of South Africa, is the Urban Renewal Programme, a government initiative, announced by former President Thabo Mbeki during the 2001 State of the National Address. It was aimed at speeding up service delivery and improving the quality of life of the communities. The key focus was to fight poverty and underdevelopment through job creation, infrastructure development and the stimulation of growth. One of the nodes selected was Mdantsane township. The programme is run under the auspices of the National Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG) to promote co-ordinated service delivery in Urban Renewal Nodes in the country.

It targets urban communities, with a special focus on vulnerable groups such as women, youth, the aged and the disabled.

Mdantsane has an estimated population of 175 990 and 45 384 households. Like other townships in Buffalo City, it faces challenges such as high unemployment and few job opportunities. The key focus of the Urban Renewal Programme, in this township and
elsewhere, was to alleviate poverty and accelerate access to social facilities and economic opportunities.

It is a common phenomenon in Mdantsane to find a whole household of five to seven people (comprised of immediate and extended families) depending on social grants for livelihood. In some instances it might even be one or more members of the household receiving a grant such as Child Support Grant, which is R250 per month (Mase, 2008).

According to Mase (2008), Mdantsane residents are mostly unskilled and, therefore, are not ‘marketable’ and cannot generate funds for their daily needs. However, this grant does not seem to achieve its objectives of alleviating poverty amongst its intended beneficiaries. This is why the government has intervened by implementing projects so that the people’s lives can be improved. There seems to be a suspicion, however, that although the government puts in huge resources to develop projects in the community, little empirical evidence exists to attest to their success. The present study seeks to investigate the extent to which these projects could be considered viable poverty alleviation tools – or, for that matter, failures.

1.3 Research questions
The study aims to assess the effectiveness of government sponsored community development projects in Mdantsane Township, within the specific context of poverty alleviation. The following questions, therefore, guide the study:

- What were the government’s objectives for establishing the development projects in question and to what extent have the objectives been met?
- How is the effectiveness of the projects measured by the government?
- What are the beneficiaries’ narratives regarding the benefits, or otherwise, of the selected development projects? In particular, how do their narratives speak to issues such as skills improvement, income status and social grant dependency?

1.4 Aim and objectives of the study
The study investigates whether the government has achieved its objectives of initiating community development projects and to the extent to which the development projects meet
the needs of the impoverished communities. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- To examine government’s objectives for establishing the development projects in question and to what extent have the objectives been met.
- To find out how government measures project effectiveness.
- To examine the beneficiaries’ narratives regarding the benefits, or otherwise, of the selected development projects, and in particular, how their narratives speak to issues such as skills improvement, income status and social grant dependency.

1.5 Significance of the study
There is a need to continuously assess the implementation of community development projects. This is for the purposes of ascertaining their effectiveness. This is one area in which the present study derives its significance. At the scholarly level, community development remains an enduring subject of interest. Why should a process that continues to attract huge public resources, and to which everyone seems committed, remain in the main a ‘pipe dream’ for many? This research hopes to make some modest contribution to the community development debate.

1.6 Theoretical framework
This study draws on community development theory and specifically, the strand that emphasises community participation. Basically, public participation is about allowing people to execute their basic human right- the right to participate in decisions affecting their future.

In international development, participation has been recognised as an important end and means in development interventions for quite some time. Participation is first of all promoted as an answer to problems of exclusion. Participation and participatory approaches in other words, intend to create and expand possibilities for individuals (Brookling et al, 2007).

According to Nelson and Wright (2007), participation is a means to accomplish the aims of a project more efficiently, effectively and cheaply. The authors argue that participation involves shifts in power and this occurs within communities, between people and policy
making. The principle of participatory approach is that people become agents rather than objects of development projects.

Community development is a learning process; for this reason Swanepoel (1992) argues that it is of utmost importance that the people participate fully in any project. He further states that the involvement of the action groups at the early stage of the project ensures continuous involvement that will come to a peak when the people themselves will finally assess their own performance. He also states that another very good reason for participation in the project is that the beneficiaries know their circumstances and their environment best. Participatory process can lead to a consensual mission statement for which there is wide support and ownership (Chambos, 2005). For the present study, the question is: could evidence of failure or success in the selected projects be attributed to participation – and if so, to what extent?
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction
Poverty and hunger eradication has been tagged as one of the major United Nations Millennium Development Goals in 2000. South Africa as a developing country is also grappling with the problem of poverty. This has been exacerbated by the impact of the former apartheid laws and policies. As a result, the post apartheid government has committed itself to follow a range of community based strategies in an effort to counter the negative impact of past imbalances in resource distribution.

This chapter examines the following pressing issues vis-a-viz the debate about whether community projects are capable of alleviating poverty in our present day South Africa: (i) the concept of ‘community development’, (ii) community development and its impact on poverty, (iii) creating a conducive environment for community development, (iv) social policy versus community development, and (v) thoughts on the South African social policy.

2.2 What is community development?
The discourse on community development revolves around processes, programmes, methods and movements that are meant to improve the quality of life for residents of a particular community (Cary, 1983). However, the conception of community development by Ferguson (1999) emphasises capacity building both inside and outside neighbourhood boundaries or communities. Capacity building has been defined as an investment made in people, institutions, and practices that will, together, enable communities to achieve their development goals (World Bank, 2005). Capacity building has recently manifested in a number of ways not limited to empowerment, grassroots and participatory approaches. In the process, community development tends to produce assets vital to upgrade lives of people in communities (Ferguson, 1999).

Ferguson (1999) defined the term ‘community’ as the residents of a particular geographic neighbourhood or multi-neighbourhood area. In this definition,
Ferguson disregards how the term ‘community’ is sometimes interpreted, when individuals draw its meaning from the way people relate with one another, forgetting that the social-structural aspects of a community vary from one place to another, and therefore should not be used as a yardstick to demarcate a community. This ‘geographic’ definition of community is adopted by the present researcher.

In Bangladesh, Ganokendras (community-based educational centres) have been established to facilitate the process of community development. According to Alam (2006), Ganokendras are people’s centres that address the need for literacy training, continuing and lifelong education, and poverty alleviation in the countryside. The initiative was a response to Bangladesh’s Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), which saw human development as a crucial ingredient for community development to take place.

By 2006, a total of 807 Ganokendras had been established over seven districts of Bangladesh, benefiting 80,700 families (Alam 2006). As earlier suggested by Ferguson, Ganokendras in Bangladesh facilitated the building of assets for community development in the form of physical capital, intellectual and human capital, social capital, and financial capital. This facilitated employment creation and credit support, advancement of information and communication technology, a boom in literacy, social awareness and survival skills, general community needs were being addressed and the government also adopted the Ganokendra model (Alam 2006).

The thrust of community development is not only in building a strong asset base, but also in addressing the question of who owns and controls those assets (Ledwith, 2005). In other words, community development loses its meaning when local people are treated as common subjects, incapable of owning, controlling and managing the available assets.

Furthermore, Ferguson (1999) argued that there is a need to increase people’s access to the available assets, so as to expand their opportunities. Thus, an effective community development mechanism should begin with people and even transcend beyond the symptoms of injustice to its root causes such as the oppressive political structures that perpetuate discrimination (Ledwith, 2005).

According to Cary (1983), the direction of the process of community development should be derived from within the community, and not the other way round. Cary contested that people from within the community must occupy the centre stage of community development by getting involved and participating extensively.
Rose and Lappin (as quoted by Cary, 1983) state that “development of a specific project is less important than development of the capacity of people to establish that project.” Based on this philosophy, Cary suggests that people need to be trained in cases where they are not prepared to assume roles in the process of community development.

Community development also depends on the availability of opportunities both from within and outside the community (Cary, 1983). A proper strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis within the community and in its neighbourhood would be crucial to establish the kinds of development programmes necessary and attainable. Cary (1983) emphasised that effective community development programme would require the community not only to draw on its strength but to also consider various forms of assistance available from beyond the community boundaries.

2.3 Community development and poverty

Until 2004, the South African government was focused on strengthening the formal economic base, with little attention being given to the informal sector. A ‘revolution’ took place in 2005, when former president Thabo Mbeki started emphasising the ‘second economy’ which constitutes the structural manifestation of poverty, underdevelopment and marginalisation (State of the Nation Address, 2005: paragraph 76). In his speech, Mbeki noted that a critical element in assisting those in the second economy is provision of information, particularly regarding how they can access economic opportunities. In this regard, the targeted communication campaign on economic opportunities occupies a central place. To assist in this regard, Mbeki pointed out, 500 Community Development Workers were enrolled as learners in Gauteng, North Cape, the North West and the Eastern Cape; and management structures were also put in place to ensure the optimal utilisation of the Municipal Infrastructure Grant.

In South Africa, the second economy is usually referred to as the ‘informal sector’. More than 75 percent of the South African population earn a living through the informal sector (Khosa, 2001). Most informal sector participants are women who depend on hand to mouth small businesses that generate very small incomes. As a result, many people have been trapped in the cycle of poverty. However, one may want to dig deep into the concept of poverty.
In 2000, the South African Poverty and Inequality Report (PIR) defined poverty as:

The ability to attain a minimal standard of living, measured in terms of basing consumption needs or the income required to satisfy them. It includes alienation from the community, food insecurity, crowded homes, usage of unsafe and inefficient forms of energy, lack of adequately paid and secure jobs, and fragmentation of the family. Poverty is not a static condition: individuals, households, or communities may be vulnerable to falling into poverty as a result of shocks and crises (uncontrollable events which harm livelihoods and security) and long-term trends (such as racial and gender discrimination, environmental and macroeconomic trends).

Similarly, the 1990 World Development Report (WDR) defines poverty as the inability to attain minimal standard of living, measured in terms of basic consumption needs or income required to satisfy them. Poverty is thus characterised by the inability of individuals, households or entire communities to command sufficient resources to satisfy basic needs.

The question of poverty is not that simple. One has to probe a number of questions to clear any confusion around the subject. Thus the question of where poverty is, sources of income among the poor, and access to basic services, may help to eradicate this confusion. The South African Poverty and Inequality Report (2000), generated the following data on poverty:

Table 1: The rural/urban Poverty distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Population share (%)</th>
<th>Poverty share (%)</th>
<th>Poverty rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>50,4</td>
<td>71,6</td>
<td>70,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>49,6</td>
<td>28,4</td>
<td>28,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>49,9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As shown in Table 1, population distribution in South Africa is high in rural areas (50.4%) as compared to urban areas where the figure was a staggering 49.6%. Even more significant is the poverty distribution gap between rural areas and urban areas, which was 71.6% and 28.4% respectively.
The distribution of poverty is deepest in the Eastern Cape Province with a proportion of 24.8%, followed by KwaZulu-Natal which recorded 19.9%. A very small share of poverty was recorded in Northern Cape Province which was marked with only 1.9% and Western Cape Province which indicated only 3.4% poverty share. Why is poverty share huge in the Eastern Cape Province whilst small in the Northern Cape Province? This question is addressed presently.

The discourse on community development and poverty is incomplete whenever the notion of how the victims of poverty eke out a living is not explored. Surely, the difference between the non poor households and the poor households in terms of their sources of income speaks to the issue of poverty and community development. The South African Poverty and Inequality Report (2000) gives an indication of the economic activities undertaken by both the poor and the non poor.

This is summarised in figure 2.
The pie charts reveal that 40% of the poor households were depending on wages, whilst 72% of the non-poor households were earning a living from wages. This means that unemployment is very high among the poor households. Poor households were receiving state transfers of about 26% which is against only 3% state transfers among the non-poor communities. On the other hand, capital income among the poor was only 8% which is smaller than 13% of the non-poor households. Remittances also distinguished the poor households from the non-poor households, with 17% and 2% respectively.

Thus, for the purpose of describing poverty in the Eastern Cape Province, four indicators that address some aspects of the quality of life were identified by the government in 2004 as household income, unemployment, notifiable diseases and HIV/AIDS prevalence. In this case, community development provides some of the key strategies to fight these popular characteristics of poverty.

However, community development has been demonstrated in KwaZulu-Natal through the Utrecht Arts and Crafts Association. The initiative was established in June 1998 in line with willpower of the disadvantaged community to manage their own future by creating jobs and business opportunities (Binns & Nel, 2003). The initiative attracted a good amount of
external funding, which Binns and Nel largely attributed to the publicity officer’s skills in compiling applications and formulating business plans.

The success of the Arts and Crafts Association, and the local collaboration involved, has yielded the multiplier effect by encouraging the community to embark on other tourist-related initiatives. According to Binns & Nel (2003), the Game Farm was started among others in Utrecht on 13 July 2000, which specialises in the selling of wildlife products such as hides, hooves, horns and dried meat. These indigenous participatory projects have positively impacted residents of KwaZulu-Natal in multiple ways. This include job creation, employment of natural resources that have been lying idle for years, a noticeable improvement in infrastructure to consolidate tourism industry in the community and a strong emphasis given to community education.

2.4 Creating a conducive environment for community development

The internal and external environments of a community ideally determine the extent to which community development will occur (Swanepoel & De Beer, 2006). It should be noted that each environment has stumbling blocks to community development, yet both the inside and outside environments of the community contain resources that need to be identified and exploited for development to commence.

According to Swanepoel and De Beer (2006), the government is responsible for putting in place structures or mechanisms that regulate the environments and to create circumstances that will enhance or facilitate community development to occur. In other words, environmental aspects such as policy and regulatory frameworks determine the extent to which developmental initiatives are able to positively impact communities. Community development is further characterised by environmental factors such as the prevailing educational system, culture, religion, physical environment, economic conditions and the organisational and institutional strength (Swanepoel & De Beer, 2006). All these environmental features may either propel or hinder community development.

Aliber (2010) assets that the greatest challenge in community development is to turn the high-level conceptual frameworks provided into phased programmes that are well resourced and more practical, in a given environment. According to Aliber, this challenge is exacerbated by the uncertainties around the ability to stimulate the creation of appropriate economic opportunities in local communities.
South African political leaders have acknowledged that the government has not done enough to eradicate poverty especially because of the existing problems of governance and particularly, lack of capacity (Aliber, 2010). In fact, the prevailing situation was summarised by President Jacob Zuma in 2010 when he stated that local government and municipalities needed to work in order to improve infrastructure provisioning (Aliber, 2010). The implications of poor capacity on community development demonstrated to be severe and these needed robust measures to counteract the situation. In this regard, Aliber suggests that the government need to improve its delivery performance by being more accountable, better organised and increasingly intolerant of inept managers and bringing to book all corrupt officials.

2.5 Social policy and community development

Social policy is defined by Baldock, Manning and Vickerstaff (2007) as a deliberate intervention by the state to redistribute resources among its citizens. Baldock, Manning and Vickerstaff further clarified the term ‘citizens’ as a composition of families and the community networks in which the family exists, the market, the charitable and voluntary sectors, the social services and benefits provided by the state and increasingly organizations and agreements.

According to Triegaardt (2007), social policy is rather a practice of social intervention aimed at securing social change to promote the welfare and well being of citizens. Social policy entails various interventions which affect directly the transformation of social welfare, social institutions and social relations in communities (Aliber 2010). Thus, social policy as a positive instrument of change can play a huge role in facilitating community development in marginalised communities.

A number of social policy tools have been deployed to address the problem of poverty in South Africa since 1994. According to Triegaardt (2007), the South African Social Security System stands out to be the most powerful poverty alleviation mechanism. This may be in the form of social grants (for example the Child Support Grant) and any other forms of social security and social support for households and individuals who are in dire need. The 2011 Budget Speech by Eastern Cape MEC for Social Development revealed that more than a quarter (26.4%) of households in the Eastern Cape rely on government grants as the main source of income. Nationally, youth employment rate is estimated at nearly 35% with more
than 3 million young people out of work. Youth employment in the Eastern Cape has averaged 41.4%. A total of 695 175 young people were without work every year in the Eastern Cape in the past decade, according to an Eastern Cape Socio-economic Consultative Council (ECSECC) report released in August 2010. There is a noticeable increase in the uptake of social grants and mainly the Child Support Grant (CSG).

The second Social Policy poverty alleviation mechanism is the ‘micro-enterprises’ instrument, with its emphasis on self-employment for the disadvantaged (Triegaardt, 2007). The micro-enterprise mechanism was mooted in Bangladesh and has achieved noteworthy results among the landless poor women (Margolis, 1996). It increased food production and opened opportunities for the poor to earn a living from income generated from small businesses which received capital injection from cheap micro-credit. The question is whether the micro-enterprise instrument has produced results in the South African context.

The third social policy poverty alleviation mechanism is the Extended Public Works Programme (EPWP) which in the South African context was introduced in 2004 (Triegaardt, 2007). The purpose of EPWP has been to create public works projects that utilise labour intensive methods rather than capital based technologies, so as to reduce unemployment amongst uneducated and poor individuals. The Development Bank of South Africa (2005) noted that EPWP was created for job creation, training and skills development, infrastructural development and service delivery. As a result, the EPWP mechanism has both direct and indirect returns for the community.

Moreover, one of the anti-poverty initiatives, promulgated in 2008 as part of social policy, was the ‘War on Poverty Campaign’. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the then Deputy President spear-headed the campaign, which she explained as follows:

Field workers of the campaign will carry a list of all existing products and services to which individuals are entitled from national, provincial and local government as well as state-owned entities. They will enquire whether there are any members in that poor household who do not receive the support they are entitled to. They will identify the support that must be provided to a member or members of that household from the least of all government support services and inform that household about such support. They will also agree on the actions the household must take and be assisted to get support. They will then convey the information to the department or agency that must undertake follow-up action. The ‘War Rooms’ at the municipality, district, provincial and national levels will then monitor the implementation of anti-poverty programmes (Aliber, 2010:40).
‘War on Poverty Campaign’ was an important move towards eradicating poverty in South Africa. However, the initiative remained unrealistic and unfeasible, as it placed a high level of demand on government’s limited capacity. This suggests that breaking the cycle of poverty is more complex and demanding, and goes far beyond the mobilisation of local resources. This is why the external environment, such as foreign aid, plays a crucial role in fighting Poverty.

2.6 Thoughts on the social policy mechanism

In South Africa, the government produced a coherent poverty reduction policy only in 2007 (Aliber, 2010). The poverty reduction policy is comprehensive, thoughtful, and is a conceptualisation of the various ways through which different types of interventions can address poverty. According to Aliber (2010), social policy mechanism appears to be realistic in its realization over aspects which the government has the most control; aspects which unfortunately have the least self-sustaining impact on the poor.

This can be illustrated as shown in figure 3.

![Figure 3: Anti-poverty Strategies](source: Aliber (2010:38))

Figure 3 shows that government expenditure on anti-poverty strategies is skewed towards those interventions over which it has greater control. Thus, the government spends much
more on social grants, with very little amounts being allocated towards full-time employment, which, on the other hand, is the most potent means of helping people out of poverty.

The South African social policy mechanism has put much attention on how to support the poor. This is what Triegaardt (2007) calls a maintenance-driven strategy, where only secondary effects of poverty are addressed at the expense of its root causes. Triegaardt argues that a more appropriate strategy would incorporate economic development and other support services that equip the poor to stand their ground against poverty. This calls for a radical movement in the society that presses hard for participatory community development programmes that can accommodate the marginalised groups to participate in community building.

Academics have since expressed their concerns about the social grant system which they believe is approaching its demise in the near future due to the increasing pressure on the limited government revenues (Hibbard, 1986). Social grants are believed to cripple creativity and entrepreneurship and create dependency among the poor. Midgley and Tang (2001) suggest that social grants are a channel through which resources are transferred out of the productive economic system into unproductive social expenditures that rob the country of its growth and development potential.

Furthermore, social development proponents argue that when given an opportunity, most people are keen to participate in productive community development initiatives (Triegaardt, 2007). As a result, it would make more sense if social grants are channelled towards human and social capital formation as a way of empowering the poor and disadvantaged. According to Midgley and Tang (2001), communities with a low degree of social capital are more and above grapple more with the question of community development as compared to communities with high social capital.

However, Midgley and Sherraden (2000) suggest that social programmes and economic growth endeavours should be integrated in order to enhance both economic participation and community development. The underlying argument behind this notion is that the integration of social and economic policies equally form an important aspect of the development process. Midgley and Sherraden (2000:247) suggest that integrating social and economic policies requires:

i. Organisational and institutional arrangements at the national government level which gives a voice to the integration of economic and social development policies.
ii. Macro-economic policies that promote employment and attain people-centred economic development outcomes. This calls for programmes that provide for the inclusion of people in the development process by creating employment and self-employment opportunities. Thus emphasis is put on investments in human and social capital and the provision of credit and other forms of economic assistance that facilitate maximum economic inclusion, incorporating even the marginalised groups.

iii. The productivist or investment-oriented approach which promotes economic participation which yields positive returns for the whole economy in the future.

Investments made in basic needs and human capital will yield positive social returns in the form of increased participation, social connectedness and social stability; whilst economic returns will include increased productivity, economic growth and reduced income and asset inequality (Triegaardt, 2007).

Thus integrating social and economic policies enhances social capital formation, increased opportunities for the poor and marginalised and fosters asset accumulation in deeply impoverished communities.

Midgley and Tang (2001) defined social capital as all social networks and institutionalised social relationships that promote community integration. These authors argue that communities with a high degree of social capital formation are more prosperous than those with a low degree of social capital. Going by this logic, low income communities with high levels of crime, social disorganisation and despair have low levels of social capital.

In such circumstances, Midgley and Tang (2001) proposes the application of traditional community development skills to strengthen social networks and promote the integration of social and economic policies. For this to happen, Midgley and Tang argue for the need to invest into programmes that mobilise local people to get involved in community development initiatives both directly and indirectly. Brake and Opladen (2008) noted that the weakest group must be able to take part in preparation, implementation and evaluation of measures taken in their interests. A platform has to be put in place to facilitate interaction between community development practitioners and members of the local community.

For example, in Bulgaria, the Ministry of Culture facilitated the execution of Community Centres to promote community participation and development between 1997 and 2001 (Brake & Opladen, 2008:38). By 2004, the second phase of this project known as
“Community Development and Participation through the Chitalishte Network”, was completed. It was the collaboration between the Ministry of Culture of Bulgaria and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), with the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The second role of the project was focused on strengthening the community role of Chitalishte as traditional, cultural and educational centres and offer working models for modernisation and participation that would facilitate community development in the local area (Brake & Opladen, 2008).

Advocates of asset building policies argue that asset building programmes are more effective than traditional income maintenance services (such as social grants) that maintain the poor at basic subsistence levels (Triegaardt, 2007). It is like saying: provide individual and community assets to the poor and watch them begin to accumulate resources, get a lift out of poverty, and break into a better citizenship experience.

2.7 Conclusion

What the foregoing literature illustrates is that to achieve a reduction in poverty and inequality requires substantial changes, especially within the context of income maintenance and asset-building in both rural and urban communities. The question, however, remains: How can this be achieved in reality?

The literature also indicates that a clear definition of poverty would help to identify the best intervention strategy in the fight against poverty, such that effort and resources are directed where they are most likely to be effective (Van Der Walt, 2004). The Eastern Cape Department of Agriculture, Buffalo City Municipality and the Department of Social Development appear determined to improve economic development in areas such as Mdantsane. The aim of this study, therefore, is to examine the extent to which government sponsored community development projects are an effective tool for poverty alleviation.
CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction
The chapter discusses the research methodology employed in collecting empirical data that would assist in answering the research questions outlined in chapter one. The central aim of the study, as stated earlier, was to examine the effectiveness of government sponsored community development projects as a poverty alleviation tool. In the study, ‘effectiveness’ is defined as the extent to which the projects had helped beneficiaries to rely less on social grants, earn more income, and acquire new skills that could enable them to stand on their own – to use a popular cliché.

The rest of this chapter is organised into five sections, namely: study area, research design, data collection instruments, sampling procedure, and ethical considerations.

3.2 The study area
Mdantsane is a South African township situated between East London and King William’s Town in the Eastern Cape Province. It is reputed to be the second largest township in South Africa after Soweto and houses one of the biggest shopping mall, in the Eastern Cape (Mdantsane City, opened in April 2008). Mdantsane is divided into 18 ‘Zones’ which are still expanding, with the newest unit known as Unit P. There is a vibrant social life with many social activities. However, according to Statistics South Africa (2008), the area still has a very high unemployment rate. The township is part of the Buffalo City Local Municipality in the Amatole District of the Eastern Cape. The majority of Mdantsane residents subsist below the living wage, according to the government’s economic classifications (Creative Commons Attribution, 2010).

The data collection took place in Mdantsane. Four government sponsored community development projects were included in the study. The selected projects were Buffalo City Organic Producers at N.U.18, Lusindiso Farmer’s Trading Co-operative at Fort Jackson,
Mbombela Co-operative at N.U.10 and Sakhisizwe Nursery at N.U.6. (For the profiles of these projects and why they were included in the study, see chapter 4).

3.3 Research design

As summarised in Table 2, the study utilised a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques, with the dominant approach being qualitative due to the nature of the research questions and the empirical field. The qualitative techniques used were in-depth interview and focus group discussion (FGD), while the quantitative technique consisted of standardised questionnaire administered to the project beneficiaries.

The three research questions guiding the study, research methods, as well as justifications for the methods are presented in Table 2. The aim is to demonstrate the appropriateness and validity of the chosen data collection techniques vis-a-vis the research questions.

The selection of respondents for the in-depth interview, focus group discussion, and questionnaire survey is dealt with in a separate section (See Section 4.5)

Table 2: Research questions linked to research methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESEARCH QUESTIONS</th>
<th>METHODS</th>
<th>JUSTIFICATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What were the government’s objectives for establishing the development projects in question and to what extent have the objectives be met?</td>
<td>• In-depth interview of officials in the Eastern Cape Department of Social Development, Buffalo City Municipality, and Eastern Cape Department of Agriculture who were directly involved with the projects or had oversight/supervisory responsibility over the projects</td>
<td>• In-depth interview helped the researcher to gain deeper insight into government’s expectations of the projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is the effectiveness of the selected development projects measured by the government?</td>
<td>• In-depth interview of selected Eastern Cape Department of Social Development, Buffalo City Municipality, and Eastern Cape Department of Agriculture.</td>
<td>• In-depth interview helped the researcher to gather rich data and gain deep insight into the officials’ understanding of effectiveness and its measurement with regard to the selected projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the beneficiaries’ perceptions and narratives regarding the benefits, or otherwise, of the selected development projects? In particular, how do their</td>
<td>• Focus Group Discussion and in-depth interview • Mini survey using questionnaire Respondents were project beneficiaries</td>
<td>• Questionnaire helped the researcher to gather standardised information from the project beneficiaries. • FGD helped the</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
narratives speak to issues such as skills improvement, income status and social grant dependency? researcher to access the beneficiaries’ perceptions towards the projects - especially in a group discussion context.

### 3.4 Data collection instruments

In line with the research questions, the study identified three respondent categories. These were: project beneficiaries (or project members), senior officials of the Eastern Department of Social Development (DSD), senior officials of the Buffalo City Municipality (BCM), senior officials of the Department of Agriculture, and Community Development Practitioners (CDPs) - officials of the Department of Social Development attached to each project to ensure its proper implementation. The CDPs are the link between the community and the government department as far as government-sponsored community development projects are concerned.

Four FGDs were held with project beneficiaries. This number of FGDs ensured that the four selected projects were represented (See Annexure 3). The FGDs were recorded on tape and later transcribed for purposes of analysis. In addition to the FGDs, a mini survey was conducted with the project beneficiaries using a questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered by the researcher in person. This ensured a 100 percent completion rate. The questionnaire had both open and close-ended items (See Annexure 2).

Officials of the Eastern Cape Department of Social Development, Buffalo City Municipality, Eastern Cape Department of Agriculture were interviewed (using the same interview guide - see Annexure 4 and Annexure 5), and so were the CDPs (see Annexure 6 and Annexure 7).

### 3.5 Sampling procedure

To enhance validity and reliability, the researcher surveyed all 40 project beneficiaries from all the selected development projects in Mdantsane. The researcher surveyed every beneficiary because she was not dealing with a large number of beneficiaries (see Table 3). This obviously enhanced the validity and reliability of the findings. Reliability means that the measurements made are consistent; if the same experiment is performed under the same conditions, the same measurements will be obtained. Validity means that the measurements are correct (Melville, 1996).
Table 3: number of members included in the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME OF PROJECT</th>
<th>NUMBER OF PROJECT MEMBERS (BENEFICIARIES)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Sakhisizwe Nursery</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Mbombela Co-operative</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Lusindiso Farmer’s Trading Co-operative</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Buffalo City Organic Producers</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (Beneficiaries)</strong></td>
<td><strong>40</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interviewing of the Government officials was based on the willingness and availability to participate in the study – but also, more importantly, on their relevance, since, as stated earlier, these were the officials that had direct oversight/supervisory responsibility over the projects. The interviews were conducted in the respondents’ offices. The officials were from the Department of Agriculture, Department of Social Development and Buffalo City Municipality. The same applied to the two CDPs (one male, one female) interviewed for the study. They were, in theory at least, the ones most conversant with the projects.

The data were collected over two weeks, especially because the researcher was given different dates by the relevant government officials. Some project managers were difficult to find as they had tight schedules, but eventually the interviews and survey went successfully.

3.6 Ethical considerations

The study envisaged no serious ethical issues - such as those that could result in physical or psychological harm to participants. The researcher did reckon, on the contrary, that a study on the effectiveness of government-sponsored community development projects as a poverty alleviation tool could be of benefit to both the community and the state. Appropriate permissions were sought, starting with an official letter of introduction and data solicitation from the Department of Sociology, University of Fort Hare.

Informed verbal consent was obtained from each respondent, and respondent anonymity and restricted (academic-only) use of volunteered information were guaranteed. This was important given the possibility (as envisaged by the researcher) that beneficiaries of government support could express not just praise but also strong negative sentiments towards
the benefactor. The purpose of the study was clearly explained both verbally and in writing (on the first page of all questionnaires and at the start of all interviews and FGDs).
CHAPTER 4

PROFILES OF THE SELECTED COMMUNITY PROJECTS

4.1 Introduction
As stated earlier, the projects selected for the study were: Buffalo City Organic Producers, Sakhisizwe Nursery, Lusindiso Farmers’ Trading Co-operative and Mbombela Co-operative. They are all government-supported but community-driven initiatives that seek to develop farming skills, fight poverty, improve the beneficiaries’ income status and create job opportunities for the members of the community. The brief profiles presented in this chapter were constructed from information obtained from the project beneficiaries, the government officials interviewed for the study, and relevant government publications.

4.2 Buffalo City Organic Producers
Buffalo City Organic Producers (BCOP), Mdantsane, was initiated by Buffalo City Municipality in June 2006 as part of the Mdantsane Urban Agricultural program, which in turn formed part of the Urban Rural Programme. It was funded through European Union Farms by the Department of Economic Development and Economic Affairs. At the time of the data collection the project was going through growing, picking and planting cycle. As expatiated later in this section, FE Investments, the appointed project mentors, together with government officials from Buffalo City Municipality (BCM) who oversaw the project, encouraged the beneficiaries to acquire knowledge and experience of growing new types of crops.

The aim of the project was to improve job creation and contribute to poverty eradication in Mdantsane (NU 18). This section of the Township, like everywhere else in the sprawling settlement, is mired in poverty, with limited opportunities for livelihood improvement. BCM encouraged the project beneficiaries to take to farming so as to gain sustainable skills, be self-employed, and reduce dependency on social grants (Mdantsane URP Newsletter, 2009).

Beneficiaries were given hydroponics tunnel to grow tomatoes. The initiative itself was part of BCM’s bigger strategy of promoting agriculture as an economic activity in the city, a strategy driven by the municipality’s Agriculture and Rural Development Department.
Tunnel farming is seen by the Municipality as a suitable option for urban areas like Mdantsane due to limited natural resources in the area.

The hope, according to BCM, is that urban farming would create income-generation opportunities for the unemployed, and ultimately make it possible for township residents to actively participate in local economic development (BCM Ward Update, Issue 2, December 2011).

The project was established by 16 unemployed members of the community, and was run and managed by a ‘democratically elected’ executive committee comprising five members, namely:

- Chairperson
- Deputy Chairperson
- Secretary
- Deputy Secretary
- Treasurer

The project members had a bank account operated by three signatories, two of whom were from the executive committee while the third was a manager from the municipality.

According to BCM, R1.5 million had so far been spent to stimulate tomato planting at the tunnel. While the focus was currently on tomatoes (Plate 1), other vegetables such as green peppers and beans (Plate 2) were gradually being introduced. Indeed, as hinted earlier, the project was on the path of crop diversification as at the time of the study (BCM Ward Update, Issue 2, December 2011).

A member of the NU 18 hydroponic tunnel told this researcher that the project was a “welcome relief” in the fight against unemployment and poverty in the area. Overall, the beneficiaries felt that the project’s produce was of a “very high quality” and this was what was being delivered for sale to the public.
Plate 1: BCOP member tending tomatoes

Plate 2: Green Beans grown at BCOP farm
4.3 Sakhisizwe Nursery

Initiated in 2004 as a poverty relief project focused on the production of vegetables, Sakhisizwe Nursery originally had 44 members. Since then, the researcher learnt, 22 members had left the project as a result of disillusionment (as expatiated later). The fortunes of the Nursery had met further setbacks as the building, irrigation equipment and tools were vandalised by “unknown persons”. Indeed, according to the members’ accounts, the project for a time stopped operating.

After the vandalism incident and dwindling fortunes of the Nursery were reported by a local newspaper, the Eastern Cape Department of Social Development provided the project with a R700 000 lifeline. Vegetable production and sales resumed not long afterwards. However, at the time of the study, Sakhisizwe Nursery earned no income of its own. The project members reported that they were gaining valuable knowledge and experience in vegetable production although they had so far received no “proper training on crop production”.

When the researcher inquired why half of original members left the project, she was informed that members (all members, and not just those who had left) had joined the project with hopes that the project would generate enough revenues to be able to pay each one a monthly income. However, when this did not materialise, many of them were disillusioned and that was why so many members withdrew from the project. As word spread across the community about the poor state of the Nursery, people were discouraged and the project failed to attract new members. At the time of the study the project had 22 members.

Plate 4: Vegetables grown at Sakhisiswe Nursery

4.4 Lusindiso Famers’ Trading Co-operative
Lusindiso Coop was established in 2007 by previously unemployed members of the community. Its objectives were:

- To cultivate and develop farming among the members
- To produce and sell fresh and healthy vegetables
- To alleviate poverty
It was funded by the Eastern Cape Department of Social Development (DSD). Funds received from DSD helped members to fence the project site as well as buy garden tools, a tractor and office equipment. The farm’s produce included potatoes, cabbages, spinach, beetroot and butternut (Plate 5). These were sold to Fruit and Veg, a local franchise of a popular South African grocery chain by the same name. The project had since its inception generated some revenues – or, more precisely, money from produce sales had been deposited in the project’s bank account “two times”, according to the members. This had helped them to service the tractor (which was not brand new at the time of purchase), and to buy seedlings.

The researcher learnt that since 2009, no new money had been deposited into the project’s bank account. As the members explained, one of the main challenges the project faced was lack of water for irrigation.

Plate 5: LFTC’s vegetable garden affected by drought

4.5 Mbombela Co-operative
Located near Imiqhayi High School, Mdantsane (NU 10), this project was established in 2008 by 12 previously unemployed members of the community. Its aim was to:

- Alleviate poverty through income generation
- Develop farming skills
- Cultivate vegetables within the community

The project was funded by the Eastern Cape Department of Agriculture, which, besides direct funds, provided the cooperative with seedlings and a piece of land near Imiqhayi High School. The farm products included spinach, cabbage, onion, potatoes and beetroot. These were sold directly to members of the community. According to the members, produce from the farm were sold from wheelbarrows, which were placed at different points in the community. Advertising was done by word of mouth.

When the researcher asked about the overall economic performance of the project, she was told:

You can judge that for yourself! This project started with 12 members, now only five of us are left. That should tell you about how well we are doing financially.

4.6 Conclusion
Even from the brief profiles presented in the foregoing sections, the key questions of this study are inescapable: are these government-sponsored community projects capable of reversing the spiral of poverty and social grants dependency among the beneficiaries? To
what extent have the projects enhanced the livelihoods of and bestowed dignity on their beneficiaries? With specific regard to being income sources and spaces for the acquisition of sustainable farming skills, how have the projects performed? Indeed, how does the government measure success or failure when it comes to investments of this nature?

In the next chapter, the researcher marshals mini-survey, interview and FGD data to address these questions. Thereafter, the findings are discussed with a view to making specific deductions and drawing conclusions.
CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction
As stated earlier, this study addresses three interrelated questions, namely:

- What were the government’s objectives for establishing the development projects in question and to what extent have the objectives been met?
- How is the effectiveness of the projects in question measured by the government?
- What are the beneficiaries’ narratives regarding the benefits, or otherwise, of the selected development projects? In particular, how do their narratives speak to issues such as skills improvement, income status and social grant dependency?

To answer these questions, the chapter marshals empirical data obtained through in-depth interview, FGD and questionnaire, as described in Chapter Three. The presentation of the findings is done under themes. These are: government’s attitude towards the development projects as gleaned from interviews with the selected government officials (in line with the first research question), measurement of project effectiveness by government (based on the second research question), and the narratives of the beneficiaries with regard to how the projects actually deliver when it comes to poverty alleviation (based on research question three).

The thematic treatment of the data is preceded by demographic information about the respondents against which specific findings are cross-tabulated in the course of the data presentation, where appropriate.

5.2 Respondent demographics: gender, age and education
Figure 4 to 8 are graphs depicting the gender composition of the memberships of the four projects.
Figure 4: Gender breakdown of respondents in the four projects

Figure 5: Gender composition of Sakhisizwe nursery

Figure 6: Gender composition of Mbombela Co-op
Table 4 summarises the age distribution of the sampled project beneficiaries.

**Table 4: Age distribution of sampled project beneficiaries**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>No. of Beneficiaries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-29</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-40</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-45</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-50</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-54</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 and above</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5 shows that in two of the projects (Mbombela Co-op and Lusindiso Farmers Co-op), most of the members were aged between 55 and 64 years. All of Lusindiso’s members were above 50 years of age, while 80% of Mbombela Co-op’s members were over 50 years of age. Six of the 13 members of Sakhisizwe Nursery were aged 51 and above, with three being in the 55-64 age cohort. While Buffalo City Organic Producers was the only project with the highest number of relatively young members (three of its 12 members were under-30s), it was also the only projects with members who were over-65s. This detail is important, for as the reported presently, people of different ages reacted differently to the poor performance of the projects.

Table 6 summarises the educational levels of the project beneficiaries.
Table 6: Educational attainment of project beneficiaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL OF EDUCATION</th>
<th>NO. OF PROJECT BENEFICIARIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary level (up to Grade 7)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary education (Grade 8 - Grade12)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never attended school</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3 Government’s objectives in initiating/supporting the selected community development projects

Government’s sponsorship of community development projects arose out of the need to create a better life for residents of South Africa’s low income communities, which are known to be characterised by high levels of social grant dependency, high illiteracy levels, high unemployment and very low skills levels. When the researcher asked the government officials associated with the projects what the specific objectives of the selected development projects were, one of them stated that the projects were introduced mainly for the purpose of creating “sustainable employment opportunities through job creation and empowerment” and that they were “mechanisms for combating poverty”. This response was echoed by another official (in the Department of Social Development), who stated that the projects were a “means of alleviating poverty in the poor communities by reducing unemployment and securing the future of their children”. The government officials underlined the point that the goal of poverty alleviation in “South Africa’s inner city communities could only be achieved through active community participation”. Yet, as reported later in this chapter, the attitudes and narratives of the beneficiaries revealed that though “sustainability” and “active community participation” were constantly emphasised by the government, the operation of the various projects and the nature of the members’ involvement had serious questions.

The project managers were then asked to explain what they meant by the term “poverty alleviation”. One of them commented that poverty alleviation was making sure that a household had “at least three square meals a day”. Other officials echoed a similar remark.
Obviously, this remark reflected an important assertion made in the South African Poverty and Inequality Report, which included among its definition of poverty, the ability to have food security. But even from the government officials’ minimalist definition of poverty alleviation, it was clear that sponsorship of the various projects was motivated by a need to ensure that beneficiaries could afford “three square meals a day”. This did suggest access to income on a sustainable basis, skills with which to continue farming and generating that income, and a meaningful level of reliance on that income as proof that farming was indeed a sustainable income generating activity.

However, as focus group discussions with the project beneficiaries revealed (and this is reported in detail later in this chapter) the government officials’ focus on “three square meals” ignored the fact that the beneficiaries had needs that went beyond food, and that even if the projects did perform well enough to guarantee “food security”, unless it could help the beneficiaries to meet other household needs (such as children’s school fees, and warm clothing and blankets during winter), the projects would still be perceived as a failure.

When asked how the beneficiaries were assisted to achieve the specific objective of “food security”, one of the government officials pointed out that project members were assisted to acquire relevant skills in crop production:

> We have conducted workshops with them and advised them on how to take care of their crops. The Municipality [BCM] has provided skills on how beneficiaries can nurture their crops without incurring high costs and still produce high quality produce.

The researcher found, however, that the pursuit of the objectives through skills enhancement varied across the four projects. Indeed, it was only BCM Organic Producers that had a clearly defined programme of skills enhancement. One member of this project attested to this thus:

> Yes, I have been trained in book keeping, farming, marketing and even how to make business cards.

Another respondent (also from Buffalo City Organic Producers) stated as follows:

> We have small gardens in our homes because of the skills that we acquired from the projects.
The researcher found no clear evidence that beneficiaries of the other three projects were exposed to structured skills enhancement programmes that could ultimately impact on the performance of the projects. Two members of Sakhisiswe Nursery made the following relevant remarks:

The Department of Social Development never trained us in any skill.

The skill that I use for this nursery is a traditional one, I acquired it from my parents.

However, even in the one project where beneficiaries were exposed to skills training, the objective of alleviating poverty seemed far-fetched considering the scale of the project. The researcher found that the Buffalo City Organic Producers Co-op, which had 12 members as at the time of this study, had only one half-hectare vegetable tunnel. This tunnel, however, did not produce all-year-round, and so (even if it did generate revenue during the months of harvest) could not guarantee income for the 12 beneficiary’s all-year-round. One project member alluded to the problem of scale thus:

At least if we can get a second tunnel, that would make a big difference, because we will work it in such a way that whilst vegetables are still growing in one tunnel, on the other one they will be ripe to be harvested so that at least we get some income in each month.

This remark was corroborated by a government official. According to her, even if the one tunnel were to operate maximally, it could only sustain four beneficiaries (that is, a third of the number of members currently on the project). As it stood, the project only provided “seasonal relief”, according to the respondent. The government official also pointed out that the municipality was making plans to increase the scale of the project by expanding the tunnels.

The problem of scale was equally a concern in the other three projects, one of which had 13 members. This clearly suggested that the core objective of poverty alleviation appeared poorly linked to project scale. Partly as a result of scale, the researcher encountered during interactions with the project beneficiaries strong complaints about “irregular income” and “lost hope”.

The researcher also found that the objective of poverty alleviation was not rigorously carried through in a number of other respects. For example, beneficiaries did not know whether they
were working for themselves or for the government – a finding which suggested that (even in the one project that had an active skills enhancement component) there was no “beneficiary enlightenment”. The mode of interaction – and sometimes the lack of it – raised expectations among project members that they were somehow “government employees” or “special employees” – or at least should be treated as such. The researcher found little or no feeling of “ownership” among project members (ownership being a key element of sustainability). Responses such as the following underscored this confusion:

The goals and objectives of the project are good, but people who are responsible and are in charge of the project are not doing well. They don’t listen to our grievances and suggestions in terms of income as we have recommended that Social Development should give us a stipend each month and give our children bursaries to go to universities as we do not get income from the project (FGD participant).

Sentiments such as these are presented in greater detail later in the chapter. What seemed to further reinforce this sense of alienation and the confusion about whether beneficiaries were “owners” of agricultural co-operatives or “employees” of government was the ubiquitous reference to the various community development initiatives as “projects”. While this nomenclature was perhaps appropriate from the point of view of government (in the sense that its sponsorship of, and involvement in, the initiatives was not to be in perpetuity), it seemed like an alienating misnomer when viewed from the perspective of the community members who were to depend on the co-operatives more or less perpetually. This seemed to be further complicated by the fact that the co-operatives did not have full control over their bank accounts, as the accounts were operated jointly with government. Money seemed only to be “deposited” into these accounts and “not withdrawn” to pay members so as to somehow “ameliorate their plight”. Thus, when project members felt frustrated with the performance of the co-operatives, as reported later, their frustrations were directed at government:

The project has enough funds as we are committed to making sales but Social Development is using us and gives us nothing back (FGD participant).

Social Development does not care about the project beneficiaries but likes the money that is generated by the beneficiaries (FGD participant).
Strikingly, during interviews with the government officials associated with the projects, the researcher found that their definition of poverty alleviation did not emphasise other facets of the “poverty problem” as witnessed in the communities where the projects were located.

5.4 Government’s measurement of project effectiveness

The second research question sought to investigate how the effectiveness of the selected projects was measured by the government. The researcher relied on interview responses from the selected government officials as well as on insights gained from the FGD sessions with the project beneficiaries. In relying on qualitative data from these two categories of respondents, the researcher was particularly interested in finding out the extent to which the claims made by the government officials were corroborated by the project beneficiaries.

One of the key findings of the study, as reported earlier, was that the projects were established with the primary aim of helping beneficiaries to improve their income status, “put food on the table”, and gain valuable farming skills. In other words, these were “poverty alleviation” projects. However, with regard to the measurement of effectiveness, the researcher found that apart from routine project reports submitted by the government officials supervising the various projects – none of the projects benefited from consistent and systematic impact evaluation. In other words, there was no evidence that the above-stated goals were consistently measured by the project sponsors, despite the existence of mandatory monitoring visits.

However, specific responses from the government officials indicated that government had an interest in knowing how the project impacted the communities.

For instance, a BCM official was of the view that, in relative terms, the Buffalo City Organic Producers Co-operative could be regarded as a success story, despite its “small scale” (as reported earlier). In her words:

> the project has to a certain extent managed to give the beneficiaries money for some months. The beneficiaries are reaping good rewards from the tunnel. Besides, the project has created 40 direct jobs and a further 60 during picking and harvest. We know that the project is succeeding.

This assertion was corroborated during the FGD with the beneficiaries. One member of the co-operative referred to above stated that they had gained in more ways than simply the
“occasional income” they received from the project: “we have acquired important agricultural and business management skills. In fact, we have been consistent in producing Grade A quality veggies”. This confirmed an assertion by a government official that members of this project have gained skills pertaining to, among other things, how to nurture the crops and produce high quality vegetables without incurring high costs.

Despite a claim by a government official in charge of one of the other three projects that they did provide skills enhancement workshops and that there were regular monitoring visits to the project, this claim was refuted by one beneficiary of the project in question. According to this beneficiary, “our project manager last visited our site a year ago”. Another government official (speaking in relation to two of the four projects) stated that there were regular monitoring visits, but that these had little to do with facilitating skills development. This was echoed in a remark made by one of the beneficiaries that “we survive here by utilising our previous knowledge in crop production”. The researcher found that, perhaps as a result of the application of enhanced skills, the Buffalo City Organic Producers vegetable tunnel looked well tended and productive – the only one of the four projects that could be described as “doing relatively well”.

The government officials had a common understanding of what skills development entailed and the role it could play in making the projects effective.

According to one of the officials, it entailed training all the project members in whatever skills they needed as far as agriculture was concerned:

In crop production it is essential to know when to use fertilisers, when to harvest the crop, or to prune depending on the crop. Such knowledge should not be taken for granted as it is the key to successful crop production.

According to Lonely et al (as cited by Nqodi, 2006) training and capacity building are essential tools for achieving sustainability in community development.

The researcher’s inquiry began with the assumption that a systematic programme of evaluation and effectiveness (or impact) measurement would necessarily include an understanding of the extent to which the projects have helped the beneficiaries to lessen their dependency on social grants by improving their “earned income” status. The cohort of beneficiaries that one could focus on in this regard would be the under-60s, since old-age
(government) grant was automatic for people aged 60 and above. In the absence of such a systematic measurement, the government officials supervising the projects appeared to rely on anecdotal evidence of effectiveness. The researcher found that even though most of the members of the Buffalo City Organic Producers Co-operative expressed relative satisfaction with their project, none of them – and none of the members of the other three projects – relied solely on income from this project for their daily sustenance. They all still depended either on social grants or on financial support from family members.

An effectiveness measurement would also necessarily entail an understanding of why some members had left the project and why others have stayed on. Unable to obtain such information from the government officials, the researcher raised this question during the focus group discussion with the project beneficiaries. One interesting finding was that while those that had abandoned the project did so out of frustration – as their expectations of financial returns were not met – some of those who stayed behind did so because, for them, farming was either a “hobby” or a way of “keeping active” in old age. Two FGD participants put it thus:

No, I’ll never quit the project because it’s my source of exercise. It keeps me busy, as I’m old and on pension.

There is no difference that the project is making besides that it keeps me busy instead staying at home doing nothing as I am on pension.

Official responses with regard to the project beneficiaries’ income levels gave little indication as to the extent to which the projects could be considered as poverty-alleviating. For instance, one government official (speaking in respect of the Buffalo City Organic Producers Co-operative) said that the project members had been receiving wages since the project began, but would not disclose the actual amounts involved. Official responses in respect of Sakhisizwe nursery and Lusindiso Farmer’s Trading Co-operative equally did not indicate what actual income beneficiaries earned from the projects. An official response in respect of Mbombela Co-operative indicated that the projects – at least in their present state – were probably only able to “augment” the beneficiaries’ social grant income. This could mean that the goal of bringing an end to grant dependency through the projects under study was still far-fetched.
An analysis of the mini survey and FGD data showed that although five of Lusindiso Farmers’ Co-op, two of Mbombela Co-op, three of Sakhisizwe Nursery, and three of 12 Buffalo City Organic Producers Co-op members subsisted on government grant, the other members who were not depending on social grant were not necessarily depending on income from the projects either. These other members subsisted on financial support from family members and other sources. The following responses give an indication of the income status of responses relative to their involvement in the projects:

**Buffalo City Organic Producers:**

No, income is not consistent (we do not get it every month)

No, the money that we get does not meet all my needs so I fully rely on social grant

Not exactly, but it’s better than nothing; if we can get it monthly that could be better

**Lusindiso Co-op**

I cannot rely on the project because there is nothing I get from the project

My old age grant is my only source of income and I rely on it, not the project

I rely on my spouses’ old age grant and it also sustains the project as we contribute R200 each month to look after the project

No funds are generated by the project

**Sakhisizwe Nursery**

The project generates funds but not for beneficiaries, but for [the Eastern Cape Department of] Social Development

In a week, the project generates R1500 but as beneficiaries we don’t have access to the funds; all we do is deposit it to the Department’s bank account and nothing else

**Mbombela Co-op**

I rely on my old age grant and this catering business that we have started
I can’t rely on the project because it does not pay me anything; I rely on my social grant.

The researcher gathered that Mbombela Co-op, Sakhisizwe nursery and Lusindiso Farmer’s Produce beneficiaries lacked the necessary skills such as financial management, business planning, administration, marketing and gardening skills. These projects used unskilled staff and there was inadequate equipment to operate the projects. The three projects therefore showed less affirmation of the government’s objectives for these projects as the objectives placed emphasis on the creation of sufficient jobs for communities, generating income for project beneficiaries, fighting social grant dependency to community members and sustainable economic growth.

5.5 Beneficiaries’ narratives regarding the benefits of the projects
The third research question sought to examine the narratives of the beneficiaries vis-a-vis their perceptions of benefits, or otherwise, of the community development projects. Specifically, the researcher sought to assess how their narratives spoke to issues such as skills acquisition, income status, and social grant dependency. In other words, how have their social conditions changed since they became part of the projects?

An important starting point to analysing how members’ perceptions of benefit – or the lack thereof – is to focus on one survey question that required respondents to state why they joined the projects (see Table 7)

Table 7: Why respondents joint the projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REASON FOR JOINING PROJECT</th>
<th>NO. OF RESPONDENTS*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income generation</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent was recruited</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project was seen as a means of poverty alleviation</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills acquisition</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Respondents were free to choose more than one option on the questionnaire

From the responses in Table 7, the reasons given by beneficiaries for joining their respective projects corresponded with the government’s stated aims for starting the projects in the first
place. From the responses, it could be inferred that the project members had high expectations, and perhaps made initial mental commitments, towards the success of the projects. One Programme Manager at BCM informed the researcher that the urban farming initiative was a response to the need for viable income-generating projects for the unemployed – a view corroborated by one Buffalo City Organic Producers member, who said that the project was “a welcome relief in the fight against unemployment and poverty in the area”.

Seen against this background, it might well be an index of dashed hopes that a project member (from Sakhisizwe Nursery) said she had become fed up with the mention of the word “project”. For her: “project” had become something of a swear word:

It makes us to be laughed at, as we work for nothing... I can’t even tell people to join projects because of the embarrassment that this one has made me.

Although the projects did generate some income for the beneficiaries, the researcher found that the income was far below their actual needs, let alone their initial expectations. Besides, even this meagre income was not earned regularly. For instance, members of Buffalo City Organic Producers only received the income “after harvest”; it was not enough to sustain them until the next harvest. A member of another project made a similar attestation: “Money comes when we harvest, then during the other months we don’t get anything”.

Beneficiary attitudes towards the projects appeared to stem from their disappointment with the income situation, but also by their disappointment with the way their involvement in the projects was structured and managed. The following summary of responses highlights these and related issues:

**Sakhisizwe nursery**

I don’t get a cent from the project but I work for it.

Social Development uses us for its benefit. We sell seedlings almost every day and make at least R1500 a week from the sales but there is nothing that we get in return”.

The goals and objectives of the project are good, but people who are responsible and are in charge of the project are not doing well. They don’t listen to our grievances and suggestions in terms of income as we have recommended that Social Development should give us a stipend each month.
The government is not doing enough as long as we don’t get income; yet we are making sales each day.

All I need is to go to the media [and bare my mind] so that people know what is happening in this project.

**Mbombela Co-operative**

There is no difference in terms of income generation at all, except for the very first produce where we managed to raise R600 which we deposited it to the Department of Agriculture’s bank account, and that was the first and the last income raised.

Of course, the projects are good but they need officials who are committed.

The government is not doing enough: it leaves everything to the beneficiaries. We last saw our government officials responsible for our project a year ago.

I can’t rely on the project because it does not give me anything; I rely on my social grant and the money I get from this catering business”.

No, the project does not generate any funds any more.

No, the project has not brought me any betterment since I joined
When we started the project at least we got vegetables to take home but now there is nothing”.

In fact I’ve already quit [and joined a] catering company”

The project does not have the potential to give me the required skills and income. [But perhaps it would] if the department of agriculture could be serious about the project; that is, visit, monitor, and so on.

**Lusindiso Farmer’s Produce**

There is nothing that has changed in my life since I joined the project.

There is no difference that the project is making other than the fact that it keeps me busy. I would otherwise be staying at home and doing nothing as I am on pension.

The survey data revealed that only 12 participants (30%) out of 40 had received some income from the projects. On a project-by-project basis, only the Buffalo City Organic Producers indicated that they had generated an income from the project, even though they said this was
far below their needs. One interesting finding was that a majority of the project members who received no income from the projects said that the only reason they stayed on in the projects was that they were pioneers of the projects.

When members of the various projects were asked if they had been assisted to acquire any skills, the responses were mostly negative:

The project has not just provided income for us but also helped us to acquire more important agricultural and business management skills.

With assistance from the municipality and our mentor, we have been consistent in producing quality tomatoes.

The Department of Social Development never trained us in any skill.

The skill that I use for this nursery is a traditional one, I acquired it from my parents.

I have not acquired any skill, we use our own knowledge in farming hence the produce is not of good quality.

There is no skill that I have acquired; I am using my old way of farming.

Respondents who said that they had acquired no modern farming skills also attributed the “poor quality” of their vegetables to their continued reliance on farming skills they acquired from their parents. Those that reported good quality harvests attributed this to the skills and capacitation they gained from the government. However, only members of one project had this “positive” experience in terms of skills. Overall, most participants (70%) were not receiving sufficient skills development on producing their crops, or were not receiving any training at all. Even so, Community Development Practitioners from the Department of Social Development and Buffalo City Municipality also said that they were not trained or capacitated with any skill to manage and supervise the project.

With regard to the issue of dependency on social grants and other forms of non-project income, only members of Buffalo City Organic Producers shared narratives that could be considered relatively positive during the FGD sessions:

**Buffalo City Organic Producers**

Yes, I am now able to pay my children’s school fees.
Yes, I am able to buy food for my family but it’s not enough. If we can get [a monthly stipend], that would be much better.

Yes, I am able to pay my debts, although it is not enough. If only I could get R2500 a month.

There is a difference [to my financial situation], but we don’t get enough money. [What we get] is better than nothing.

There is a difference though not that big, because in some months we don’t get any income as the plants are still growing.

*Sakhisizwe Nursery*

I will never rely on this project; [that would be] a big risk.

I am sustained by my old age grant; without it, I would have been broke.

I rely on my child support grant; I use the money for my own needs and ignore my child because she is still young and cannot demand it

I can’t even tell people to join projects because of the embarrassment that this one has made me.

From the survey and the FGDs the picture that emerged was that none of the project members depended, for daily sustenance, on income from the projects. Even members of Buffalo City Organic Producers, who generally had a positive assessment of their project in terms of income generation, still depended on social grants. Overall, members of Buffalo City Organic Producers expressed relative satisfaction with both the performance of their cooperative and their involvement in it, whereas the opposite was the case with the members of the other three cooperatives. Furthermore, while members of Buffalo City Organic Producers reported that they had acquired skills through the project – and attributed some of the success of the project to this fact – the opposite was the case with members of the other three projects.

These and other findings reported in this chapter are discussed in Chapter Six. This is done in an attempt to relate the findings to the theoretical and practical issues raised in the previous chapters, but more importantly, in an attempt to answer the research questions outlined in Chapter One and draw some concrete conclusions.
6.1 Summary of findings

In line with the three questions guiding the study, a number of important findings emerged, and they are summarised below.

6.1.1 What were the governments’ objectives for establishing the development projects in question and to what extent have the objectives been met?

- The four urban farming projects were sponsored by the government as poverty alleviation tools.

- The mechanism for achieving poverty alleviation was income generation and skills acquisition, with one observable result being a reduction of dependence on social grants.

- Within the context of the projects, a minimalist definition of “poverty alleviation” seemed to prevail; namely, ensuring that beneficiary households had “at least three square meals a day”.

- The minimalist definition was predicated on the South African Poverty and Inequality Report which regards “food security” as a crucial index of poverty alleviation.

- While the emphasis on “food security” underscored the need for farming skills to be imparted to the project members, it appeared to ignore the fact that beneficiaries’ definition of poverty included the inability to afford warm clothing during winter and school fees for children.

- The relatively small scale of the projects (such as a half-hectare vegetable tunnel “employing” 12 people, who each had a household to support) seemed to contradict the emphasis on food security and income generation.

- The objectives for establishing the projects appeared largely unmet, especially when viewed from the performance of three of the four projects selected projects (see the next findings summary).
6.1.2 How is project effectiveness measured by the government?

- Besides defining effectiveness in terms of how the projects could help beneficiaries to generate income, gain farming and farm management skills, and reduce their dependence on social grants, the researcher found no coherent mechanism for measuring effectiveness.

- While Community Development Practitioners (CDPs) had been appointed to monitor the execution of the projects and provide data to the sponsors on the effectiveness of the intervention (CDPs report to Managers), an overall assessment of this mechanism revealed critical weaknesses.

- There were no regular project visits by the appointed CDPs/Project Managers. Even when visits occurred, the government representatives relied on anecdotal evidence of project effectiveness rather than on a rigorous and systematic measurement.

- Project members’ frustrations and negative sentiments appeared not to have been picked up or addressed.

- Only one of the four projects (Buffalo City Organic Producers) appeared to be “doing relatively well”, in terms of generating occasional income and enabling the project members to gain vital farming skills.

- Whereas Buffalo City Organic Producers appeared to be succeeding, the other three projects appeared doomed and were losing members. The success ingredients of Buffalo City Organic Producers appeared not to have been identified and replicated in the other projects.

- It seemed evident from the existing monitoring mechanisms that the problems of project scale, beneficiary-government relations, expectations management, low material return and other contradictions (such as continued total reliance on social grants - see the third findings summary below) were not noticed by the project sponsors.

6.1.3 What are the beneficiaries’ narratives regarding the benefits, or otherwise, of the selected development projects? In particular, how do their narratives speak to issues such as skills improvement, income status and social grant dependency?
The researcher found beneficiaries’ narratives to be, for the most part, a lesson in dashed hopes.

While the beneficiaries’ reported reasons for joining the projects were broadly in line with government’s objectives for establishing them, the overall sentiments expressed about the management of the projects bordered on total disdain of the ethos of project-based community development, and embodied doubts about the sincerity of government in sponsoring the projects.

Only members of one of the cooperatives (Buffalo City Organic Producers) expressed positive sentiments about the performance of the project, benefits derived, and their overall involvement.

Only members of Buffalo City Organic Producers reported having acquired skills through the project; members of the other cooperatives reportedly gained no new skills related to the projects.

Beneficiaries attributed the relative success/failure of the projects to the problem of skills, amongst other factors.

The projects had no impact on social grants dependency, as no beneficiary received a project-related income that was large or regular enough to lessen such dependency. All the beneficiaries still relied, for their daily sustenance, on income from family members and social grants.

6.2 Discussion
Defined as a process whose primary aim is the improvement of the quality of life of, and the broadening of choices for, members of a particular community (Cary, 1983), community development is underpinned by a number of principles. Some of these have been highlighted in the first and second chapters of this dissertation. They include community participation, the will of community members, a conducive social policy, government support for productive micro-ventures, and an emphasis on ownership and asset-building (as opposed to merely welfare grants). From the profiles of the four selected urban farming initiatives and the research findings presented in the fourth and fifth chapters respectively, these principles are evident in one form or the other in the selected projects. For example, judging from the
responses of both project members and project managers, there is little doubt that the various projects were initiated with the sole aim of alleviating poverty. The relative enthusiasm of members of the Buffalo City Organic Producers (regarding, for example, their involvement in the project and their hope that an expansion of the project would bode well for future financial success) indicates that community members are willing to invest their energy in initiatives that could bring about a positive change in their social conditions.

However, the overall findings reported in the previous chapter, and summarised in the above section, speak to a project-based community development intervention that is riddled with contradictions. Interestingly, these contradictions relate to the principles highlighted above and speak to the challenges of converting community will, a conducive social policy, local participation and government support into a vibrant mechanism for social upliftment in poor communities.

While the government’s measure of “poverty alleviation” as improvement in income status and community skills levels and reduced dependency on welfare grants may be seen as practical and theoretically tenable, it seems odd that in practice, there is too much emphasis on “food security”. The findings of this study clearly show that poor people value “three square meals a day” as much as they value their ability to pay children’s school fees and provide warm clothing for their households during winter. Ironically, for most of the respondents, it seems the projects cannot sustain their food needs, let alone be a meaningful source of income for meeting other needs.

But, as the findings also show, whether defined narrowly or broadly, poverty alleviation can hardly be achieved with projects of the scale of the four initiatives selected for the study, and the mode of community involvement in them. First, as shown in the findings, none of the projects is big enough to sustain the financial needs of the number of members that currently run them. Therefore, requiring the project members to depend on them for their financial needs – or even “food security” needs – might seem over-ambitious.

But why do these initiatives continue to be referred to as “projects”? As stated in the last chapter, this nomenclature reflects the way government dispenses funds to tackle specific challenges in communities. Thus, for the Eastern Cape Department of Social Development, Department of Agriculture (funders of Mbombela Cooperative) and their CDPs and Project Managers, there is a clear justification for referring to them as projects. Unfortunately, community members, for whom the initiatives ought to be (micro) agri-businesses that should
be sustained in perpetuity, the “project” nomenclature creates a completely different set of
dynamics and expectations. From the remarks of many of the respondents, there is a clear
possibility that the beneficiaries see themselves as “working” for government – an
involvement for which they believe a regular wage (monthly salary?) be a more appropriate
compensation. From a community development standpoint, one would see this as a symptom
of perverse participation.

The fact that some of the respondents silently desire bursaries for their children speaks to a
number of other issues. First, obviously, is the confusion introduced by the “project
nomenclature”. Second is the weak or non-existent sense of ownership. It is unlikely that the
beneficiaries would have expressed a desire of this nature had they seen the initiatives as their
own and as something they must nurture until it reached a scale where more substantial
returns were possible.

What further complicates the distorted sense of ownership is the role of government in the
overall financial management of the initiatives. Why do beneficiaries feel they only “pay
money into the bank and never get anything out”? Why do they see the Department of Social
Development as “using” them? Why such a profound sense of distrust? If the amount
invested in the initiatives was a loan from government – a loan which the beneficiaries must
repay over time – it is either that the respondents were unaware of this fact or that the
implications of such obligations did not yet sink in. But this raises an even more important
question: could a poverty alleviation initiative be operated in such a way that the beneficiaries
are left with such a distorted sense of responsibility and obligation? For this researcher,
beneficiary sentiments appeared to highlight a need for clarity in government-community
communication, greater local ownership and control of the initiatives, and the need to handle
money matters more carefully when dealing with the poor – or even the rich.

The absence of a clear, purposeful routine of monitoring only made matters worse. The
relative success (especially, that of beneficiary enthusiasm and skills acquisition) of Buffalo
City Organic Producers has not been replicated in the three other projects. This is despite the
fact that the beneficiaries attribute their relative success to, among other factors, “close
monitoring”.

6.3 Recommendations

In the light of the findings and the foregoing discussion, the following recommendations may
be made:
i. While it is important that government support for poverty alleviation is properly and carefully focused, it is crucial that such support is underpinned by a clear understanding of the multi-faceted nature of human needs. Where poverty alleviation interventions are too small in scale, they are bound to fall short of community expectations. Such projects should therefore be tagged “experimental” and the context of community members’ involvement appropriately defined and demarcated.

ii. There is a need for effective information-sharing and communication between community members and project sponsors, such that community members do not co-opt the nomenclature of government without understanding the wider implications. In the case of the four community development initiatives, the term “project” seems to mean different things to the benefactor and the beneficiaries, with beneficiaries believing that involvement in it confers special benefits.

iii. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are crucial mechanisms for assessing the effectiveness of poverty alleviation interventions. The fact that one of the four projects is relatively successful, and yet the success ingredients are not picked up and replicated in the other four projects, is indicative of an M&E devoid of a clear purpose.

iv. Financial accountability is important in projects, whether sponsored or not; but so also is a proper sense of “ownership” and “community participation”. In the four projects studied, financial accountability seems to be emphasised (by government) at the expense of a proper sense of “asset-building”, ownership and participation. This contradiction underpins the negative beneficiary sentiments about “only paying money into a bank account and not getting anything out”, and the utter beneficiary frustration denoted by remarks like: the Department of Social Development are “using us”.

v. It is important at all times to conduct a proper assessment of which community members are genuinely interested in what initiatives/projects and in what (new) skills before enlisting them in a particular project. While the reported high member-attrition in some of the projects is attributable to unmet expectations, it may also be a result of a lack of interest in farming by some of the (erstwhile and present) project members.
6.4 Conclusion

Taken together, the findings of this study demonstrate that while a vibrant, pro-poor social policy, availability of resources with which to translate it into action, and the will (entrepreneurial potential) amongst community members to break free from poverty are important ingredients for the success of a poverty alleviation intervention, these ingredients must operate in a certain way and be undergirded by certain principles for them to constitute a powerful mechanism for alleviating poverty. Even so, the fact that a benefactor defines an intervention as “poverty alleviating” does not mean that the poverty alleviation credentials of such projects are self-evident. Careful attention must be paid to specific benefactor-beneficiary dynamics, such as those highlighted so far in this chapter.

The four community projects have not led to any meaningful improvements in income for the beneficiaries, nor have they helped to enhance the skills of the majority of the project members. No dent has been made on social grant dependency. Worst, apart from members of Buffalo City Organic Producers, who held a generally favourable view of their project and of the benefactor, members of the other three projects appeared to now be quite disdainful of both the projects and the benefactor. Such a contradiction sums up to one thing: whether in terms of improvement in income status, skills enhancement (see Ferguson 1999) or the breaking of dependency on welfare grants, the projects could not yet be regarded as effective poverty alleviation tools. What remains is for a study of this nature to be broadened, such that more projects are evaluated, as that will yield results that can be deemed generalisable.
REFERENCES


Mase, B.B. (2008). **An assessment of the child support grant as the poverty alleviation intervention in South Africa: The case study of Mdantsane in the Eastern Cape.** Master’s dissertation submitted to the University of Fort Hare, Alice.


**Social Deveopment Bulletin.** 2007.(Accessed 21 March 2011)


APPENDICES

8.1. A letter from the Department of Sociology requesting assistance for data collection from project beneficiaries, Government Officials and CDP’s

8.2. The researcher’s introductory letter

8.3. QUESTIONNAIRES

Annexure 1: Project beneficiaries’ questionnaire (Biographic information)

Annexure 2: Project beneficiaries’ questionnaire

Annexure 3: Focus Group Discussion

Annexure 4: Government Official’s questionnaire

Annexure 5: Government Officials’ interview

Annexure 6: Community Development Practitioners’ questionnaire

Annexure 7: Community Development Practitioners’ interview
Dear Respondent I am a post graduate student at the University of Fort Hare. I am conducting a study that seeks to understand how government sponsored community development projects are helping the community to tackle the problem of poverty.

This is to kindly request you to assist me in gathering information that will make this study a success.

I hereby confirm that all information collected will be treated confidentially and used anonymously. The data will be used only for academic purposes.

Thank you for your assistance

N. Gedze (Researcher)
ANNEXURE 2:

1. BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION
   PLEASE TICK IN THE BOX PROVIDED

1.1. Gender
   Female
   Male

1.2. Which of the following best describe your current marital status?
   Single/ Never Married – No children
   Married/ with no children at home
   Married/ with children at home

1.3. Which of the following age groups do you belong to?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-29 Years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29-34 Years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-40 Years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50 Years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-54 Years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64 Years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 + Years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.4. Level of Education

   Primary Education – Grade 1-7
   Secondary Education – Grade 8-12
   Never Attended School
ANNEXURE 2: PROJECT BENEFICIARY QUESTIONNAIRE

2.

2.1. How long have you been in the project? [ ] Years/Months

2.2. Did you have farming experience before joining the project? [YES] [NO]

2.3. What was your reason for joining the project?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To be able to generate income for my household.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saw the project as a means of poverty alleviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because I was unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was recruited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wanted to acquire skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Specify)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.4. What is your income from the project (Rand) per month? [R]

2.5. Have you ever received training since you joined the project? [YES] [NO]

2.6. What do you think about the project?

[ ] It’s the best ever.
[ ] It’s the worst.
[ ] It’s above average.

2.7. Are you on grant?

2.8. If "Yes" which grant are you on?

2.9. Were you on grant before the project started?
ANNEXURE 3: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

3.1. Do you think that your lives have changed since being involved in the project? Explain

3.2. What difference is the project making to you as beneficiaries in terms of income generating?

3.3. In your own opinion, is the government doing enough to sustain you?

3.4. Have you acquired any new skills through being involved in the project? Explain

   YES  NO

If 'Yes', what specific skills?

3.5. If 'Yes' would you say these skills would still be useful to you even if you were no longer in the project?

3.6. In what ways would the skills be useful to you?

3.10. Can you rely on what you get from the project even if the grant is not there?

3.11. Does your project generate enough funds for your living?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.12. Have your expectations been met in terms of acquiring skills and generating income?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.13. Have you been better off since you joined the project?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.14. Would you quit the project if anything comes up?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.15. If &quot;Yes&quot; why?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.16. If ‘No’ why?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.17. Do you think the project has a potential to give you enough skills and income?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.18. Do you rate your income from the project as making profit?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.19. How much do you generally spend? (In buying seeds, fertilizers, etc)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.20. How much do you generally gain from the project per month?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.21. How do you share the profit amongst you as beneficiaries?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTORY LETTER

Dear Respondent

I am a post graduate student at the University of Fort Hare. I am conducting a study that seeks to understand how government-sponsored community projects are helping the community to tackle the problem of poverty.

This is to kindly request you to assist me in gathering information that will make the study a success.

I hereby confirm that all information collected will be treated confidentially and used anonymously. The data will be used only for academic purposes.

Thank you for your assistance.

N. Gedze (Researcher)
ANNEXURE 4: GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS QUESTIONNAIRE

4. Project Specific questions
   4.1. When was this project established?

   4.2. Who initiated the project?

   4.3. How the project did starts?

   4.4. By whom was the project funded?

   4.5. What was the purpose of the project, Explain.

   4.6. How many members were there initially when the project started?

   4.7. How many are they now?
       No. of women
       No. of men
       No. of youth
       No. pensioners
       No. of disabled

   4.8. What was the qualification for membership?

   4.9. What challenges have you come across during the implementation of this project?

   4.10. Which skills have the government developed to the project beneficiaries?
ANNEXURE 5: GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL INTERVIEW

5. Project Management

5.1. Does the project have a management structure?
   Yes  No

5.2. If, YES, how is the structure?

5.3. If, YES, how is the structure elected?

5.4. What kind of training did the project beneficiaries?

5.5. What is poverty alleviation in your understanding?

5.6. How often do you visit the project?

5.7. What challenges are found by the project(s)?

5.8. What kind of assistance has the department offered to the project(s)? Explain.

5.9. Do you think the projects have achieved what they have been intended for?

5.10. If, YES, how?

5.11. If, NO, what do you think the government should do?

5.12. Do you think that the government is taking agricultural development as serious economic development strategy as well as poverty alleviation? YES or NO
5.13. If, YES, how?

5.14. If, NO, what should the government be doing to support agricultural development?

5.15. How would you rate the quality of service of the government towards the project.
   Very Poor
   Poor
   Good
   Very Good
   Excellent
INTRODUCTORY LETTER

Dear Respondent

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This is to kindly request you to assist me in gathering information that will make this study a success.

I hereby confirm that every information collected will be treated confidentially and used anonymously. The data will be used only for academic purposes.

Thank you for your assistance

N.Gedze (Researcher)
ANNEXURE 6: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONERS QUESTIONNAIRE

6. Project management

6.1. What is your designation in the project?
   - Extension Officer
   - Manager
   - Community Development Facilitator
   - Community Development Practitioner
   - Other (Explain)

6.2. How are you involved in these projects?
   - Offering agricultural advice
   - Offering project management advice
   - Monitor and evaluate progress
   - Facilitator or co-ordinator
   - Other (Explain)

6.3. How often do you visit the projects?

6.4. How many hours per day do you spend at the project?
   - 0-4 Hours
   - 4-8 Hours
   - More Than 8 Hours
   - Other (Specify)

6.5. How many days per week do you spend at the project?

6.6. Have you ever received training since you joined the project?

6.7. If, YES, give details.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of training</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.8. If, YES, to 2.9, have the training that have been received assisted you in the project?

[ ] YES

[ ] NO
ANNEXURE 7: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONER’S INTERVIEW

7. Impact of the project
   7.1. What challenges are faced by the project(s)?

7.2. In your view, working with the project beneficiaries, do you think that the project has made an impact in the lives of the people involved in the project(s)?

7.3. If, YES, how?

7.4. If, NO, why not?

7.5. Do you think the project(s) have achieved what they have been intended for?

7.6. If, YES, how?

7.7. If, NO, what do you think the government should do?

7.8. How committed are the project beneficiaries to the project? Explain.

7.9. Do you think the skills that the project beneficiaries acquired from the project can sustain them in terms of alleviating poverty even if the projects are not there?

7.10. If, YES, how?

7.11. If, NO, why not?

7.12. How would you rate the quality of service rendered by the project beneficiaries?
      Very Poor
      Poor
      Good
      Very Good
      Excellent