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Congregations in communion with the poor

ABSTRACT

In this article the writers demonstrate that congregations can and should get involved in poverty-stricken communities. That they should, is taken for granted based on the Biblical imperative. How to get practically involved is in many a situation an obstacle. The article therefore, first deals with an understanding of poverty from the evangelical and ecumenical perspectives. Subsequently, as it is not wise to deal with the results of poverty alone, the article also endeavours to spell out the causes of poverty, the challenges of development and the church's role in confronting social injustice. The article finally demonstrates that a church or a Christian organisation can get involved by following certain developmental models, which would vouch-safe relative success for the empowerment of the poor. For this purpose a case study is described and analysed to illustrate integrated self-reliant people-centred participatory development.

1. UNDERSTANDING POVERTY

The fact of poverty is of real concern to the church. Today the worldwide church seems to be stepping up its fight against this evil. Ecumenicals, Evangelicals, Protestants and Catholics are joining the fight and looking at addressing the problem together. It is no wonder then that much deliberation has gone into addressing the phenomenon of poverty over the past forty years from a variety of perspectives, be they academic, developmental or denominational.¹ This article is specifically concerned about the church's niche in the practical implementation of efforts to combat poverty in communities, without losing sight of the macro environment.

1.1 Ecumenical view of poverty

Santa Ana (1977:2-6) indicates that poverty is an evil and should be considered as abnormal especially if the rich are getting richer and the poor poorer. In our efforts to eradicate poverty we need to understand what must be changed. And it becomes very necessary to strike at the roots of poverty – whatever those may be in our community or country. Therefore, the problem of poverty cannot be faced solely by alleviating the consequences of poverty (Santa Ana 1977:101). The matter is so vast and we need to organise ourselves as the church to help the victims of this injustice and attack the causes of this evil. The concern is about “a more human condition of life for many nations” (Bennett, 1969:1).

1 Cf Sodepax Report (1969) of the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace, the Evangelical position as clarified in the Wheaton Statement (1983) and the Ecumenical Foundation of South Africa (EFSA) Studies and Reports (1992&1995), to name but a few.

We are challenged by Santa Ana (1977:102) as believers in Jesus Christ to reflect on our own contribution to poverty. The sin factor is something that we need to understand. Sin is both the cause and the effect of poverty in our opinion. Sinful humankind is a creature of selfishness and greed. Humans struggle to share their wealth with others. Why? Because of a sinful nature! What then is needed to change this crisis? Santa Ana (1977) rightfully argues that this scandalous condition ought to be eliminated through a continual struggle for justice, equality and well-being for all which demands a sustained effort over several generations.

1.2 Evangelical view of poverty

Samuel & Sudgen (1987:12) indicated that by the year 2000 the future of the global poor would have worsened. During that time they showed deep concern for the church and Christian organisations' inadequate mobilisation and response to the growing issues of hunger and poverty. Disappointingly today we can still see a large number of local churches going about their business unconcerned about the plight of the poor. How then can we make the church and all Christians aware of the growing challenges and then motivate them to mobilise their resources to provide a more adequate response to future needs?

As part of a global community engaged in the struggle against poverty, Evangelicals like the Ecumenicals and academics such as Wilson and Ramphela (1989:302) believe in partnering with others. If people were to become effective in service to the poor it would be wiser to network with like-minded folk who have the passion for this task. We believe that not only will this promote a sense of unity and community but it will also show an increasing solidarity with the poor.

The various authors mentioned in this paper are unanimous about one thing: *the eradication of poverty from our society must receive priority*. It is thus very encouraging to note that people from across the globe and from a broad spectrum of religious and political persuasions are not just talking about the problem but are actually initiating programmes to provide sustainable solutions for the marginalised poor. As local congregations we must therefore continue to be hopeful that poverty can be eradicated. This hope must spur us on to meaningful participation in this struggle for social justice.

1.3 Causes of poverty

The causes of poverty around the world are numerous. For instance, Hughes & Bennett (1998:x) indicate that the economy, culture, religion, society, politics and structures (especially governmental) are most often the causes of poverty. As in the case of South Africa, the apartheid structure that existed between 1948 and 1994 has been the major cause of the current poverty situation in our country (cf Wilson & Ramphela (1989:203-227)). People were dispossessed of their land. They were denied education. Many people had to travel tens of kilometres to the nearest school that made learning very hard or nearly impossible. As a result many people became illiterate and could hardly hold down jobs with a living wage. Therefore they could not afford food, housing, and other basic necessities for life. All of this contributed to the increase in the crime rate as people now needed to steal in order to survive.

From an Evangelical perspective, the chief cause of poverty is sin (cf Samuel & Sudgen (1987), Santa Ana (1977) as well as Hughes and Bennett (1998)). They believe that sin has corrupted humankind's heart. It is this sin that causes people to live selfishly, exploit others and accumulate wealth in order to have a "fulfilling" life. Sin prevents people from experiencing the abundant life that God offers humankind through his son Jesus Christ. It is sin that causes people to oppress others and institute laws that deprive millions of their basic human rights. This is why

transformation of the human heart becomes so important. When people's lives are changed through the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ they will begin to see the need to help others in need – especially the poor. We must uproot poverty and address its prime cause so that more people can participate harmoniously in the Kingdom of God today.

2. CONFRONTING SOCIAL INJUSTICE

Some of the root causes of poverty today are the structures that institutionalise oppression at world level. Work must be done to transform these institutions so that justice can be extended to all in society. The growing gap between rich and poor is another area of major concern also contributing to social injustices. The wealthy Western world, with a very significant materially rich "Christian" population ought to think about its role in perpetuating social injustice. Is it possible to work out a strategy that can help the poor people in the rest of the world? Can the global church play a bigger role in making the Kingdom of God a distinct reality for the billions of suffering poor?

The affluent of this world are challenged by Santa Ana (1977:96) when he remarks that "the road to the Kingdom, at least for the rich, is signposted by the search for justice, in whose service they must offer their possessions as a sign of charity and solidarity with the less privileged." Amongst the affluent one finds first world churches of the same confession that profess to be confessionally one with their members in the third world. The same is also true for the third world context between the affluent and the poor, existing in the same town or belonging to the same church confessionally. Is the general Christian conscience still concerned about the special identity of the church as a caring community?

The challenge for the church is to be a strong leader in the fight against social injustice. The church must address exploitation of people and natural resources, low wages, child labour, and corruption. It should also seek to challenge all types of economic, religious and political structures that contribute to the suffering of the poor. But how can it be an effective leader if it does not lead by example? By this is meant that Christians in the wealthy countries and centres must look at how they can share their resources with the rest of the people whose very lives are threatened by poverty.

We need visible Christian participation in the struggle against injustice. Christians have to come into the open to showcase their concern and solidarity with a view of influencing the public sphere (cf Santa Ana 1977:107; August 1999: 40-44; Swart 1997:42-44, 56-58).

From our understanding then, the worldwide church has a significant role to play in addressing the social injustices of our time. "Precisely, in our time," as Santa Ana (1977:106) would say, "it is a matter of seeing if *all* the churches and *all* Christians ... cannot try to formulate a consistent and unbroken line of action in their efforts to combat poverty, which is equivalent to saying combating injustice, oppression and inequality." It is time to mobilise and examine ways to bring about the qualities in our society that represent the presence of the Kingdom of God. Qualities such as justice, peace, equality, hope and righteousness are what we need to push for. People, rich and poor, are crying out for this. And the church has a great opportunity to introduce Kingdom principles that the world so desperately longs for.

The church's involvement in poverty was seriously discussed since the 1960s by the ecumenical church when Roman Catholics, and members of the World Council of Churches engaged in the deliberation of combating poverty by means of development programs and projects (cf Dunne 1969:I). This was followed by the World Evangelical Fellowship who, when meeting in Lausanne in 1974, had affirmed the place of socio-political involvement in the mission of the church (cf Samuel and Sugden 1987:ix).

But what should we understand under development: What are the possibilities and the limitations of development for poverty alleviation or eradication? What is the church's niche in development work?

3. UNDERSTANDING DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Academic perspectives on development

Chambers (1997:162) is convinced (just as all the other authors) that *participatory* approaches and practices is what are needed in the development of the poor. Participation by the *lowers* (subjects) is the first step that the church or non-governmental organisations must consider when serving the poor. This respect for poor people in general is vital and this in itself is already a step towards their empowerment.

Wilson & Ramphele (1989:262) continue and emphasise that “genuine development work is that which *empowers* people; which enables them to build organizations that ... pool their resources and generate power where previously there was none”.

Burkey (1993:35-39) provides a comprehensive list of definitions for the term “development”. First he speaks of a *human or personal development* (the foundation of development) that implies that the motivation to change must come from within an individual. This is the first prerequisite for *sustainable* development. Secondly, he mentions that *economic development* is a process by which people through their own individual and/or their joint efforts boost production for direct consumption and to have a surplus to sell for cash. Thirdly, *political development* according to Burkey is a process of gradual change over time in which the people increase the awareness of their own capabilities, their rights and their responsibilities and use this knowledge to organise themselves so as to acquire real political power. Lastly, *social development* refers to those investments and services carried out or provided by a community for the mutual benefit of the people of that community whether as a village, a district or a nation. Burkey (1993:39) admits too that development is a complex and slow-moving process but emphasises that it should be sustainable.

Burkey, who is a development consultant, presents an interesting and practical model on development (above). However he, for obvious reasons, does not have a “spiritual” approach to development. As we write from a Christian perspective we are concerned about, what the “Evangelicals” call “the spiritual transformation” of people. Our point of departure is that if people are to experience holistic development (development of the whole person) they need spiritual transformation. God cannot be excluded from the equation because humankind is not only a physical, economical, political and social creature but is also a religious being. Therefore consideration to the spiritual aspect of development cannot be overlooked. However, if poor people do not want the church to discuss the spiritual aspect, church development workers should nevertheless still continue to assist with helping to empower these folk to become self-reliant as development of people is not about “church-planting”, but about restorative justice, about restoring² personhood and human dignity. It is about providing for the basic human needs (BHN) of people.

2 The International Labour Organisation adopted in 1976 the following definition of BHN: First, they include certain minimum requirements of a family for private consumption: adequate food, shelter and clothing, certain household equipment. Second, they include essential services provided by and for the community at large, such as safe drinking water, sanitation, public transport, health and educational facilities (Burkey 1993:31). Compare also Max-Neef 's analysis of the fundamental human needs (1991:32-33).

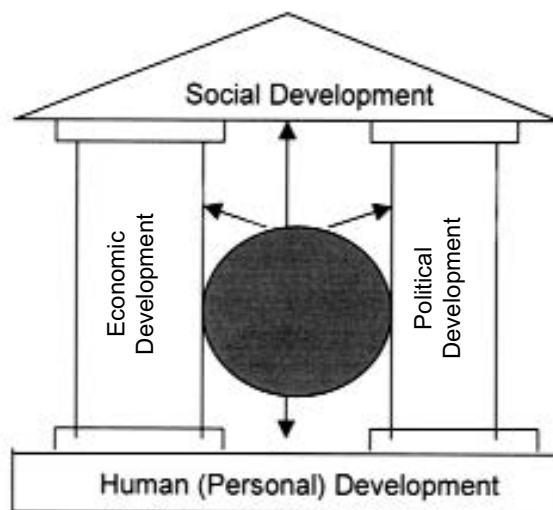


DIAGRAM 1

We have adapted Burkey's model (diagram 1) to show our personal view in this matter. The oval with the four arrows pointing at each of the four development levels represents the important "spiritual development" aspect and the positive impact it can have on the rest of a person's process of development. In the light of holistic development of people it therefore becomes necessary to consider the vital spiritual aspect of development.

3.2 Potential dangers to consider in development

There are many dangers that incorrect perceptions about development can bring about. Based on the materials that we are covering in this article, the following is a short list of some:

- Overemphasis on the spiritual aspect of development while paying less attention to the other needs of poor people (Evangelicals);
- Too much emphasis on the "self" (Humanists) because of the "sin factor" (Humans need the transforming power of the Holy Spirit to help us);
- Exclusion of God from the development equation;
- Churches in the same community working separately from one another and duplicating or competing about services amongst the poor;
- NGOs, churches and other organisations not moving beyond *1st generation* development strategies.³

3 First Generation strategies, according to Korten (1990:115), grew out of a long tradition of international voluntary action aimed at providing welfare services to the poor and assisting the victims of wars and natural disasters. They involve NGOs and or churches in the direct delivery of services to meet immediate deficiencies that are experienced by the beneficiary population, such as food, health care or shelter – thus relief and welfare (cf Swart, 2000:108).

These are only some real dangers and should help development agencies to think about their approach as role-players in the struggle against poverty.

3.3 From development to transformation

To speak of development of people in the holistic sense we would like to take up a position in line with Samuel & Sudgen (1987:39). The topic here is “transformation” in order to add value to “development”. They indicate that transformation is a part of God’s continuing action in history to restore all creation to Himself and to its rightful purposes and relationships. The oppression, injustices, hatred, selfishness, and exploitation caused by sin places man in need of restoration and transformation. This involves a transformation of the human condition, human relationships, and whole societies and is applicable not only to the poor but also to the rich.

This idea of transformation is not an alternate development plan but is a Christian framework for looking at human and social change. If we want to uproot poverty and participate in effective development then we need to investigate the root cause of poverty. We are convinced that deeper investigation into the matter will reveal that sin in all its forms is the issue that needs to be addressed.

From this perspective of development (transformation) then, Samuel & Sudgen (1987:40-47) present an interesting list of principles against which any theory of development may be measured. These principles are life sustenance, equity, justice, dignity and self-worth, freedom, participation, reciprocity, cultural fit, ecological soundness, hope and spiritual transformation.

Some evangelicals speak of development as “transformation”. They believe that holistic development can only be called just when people have a spiritual transformation. This transformation refers to the “new birth” spoken of by Jesus. They claim that no development theory that ignores our relationship with God can give us a true picture of what a meaningful human life is.

3.4 Development and participation

A common observation made by most of the authors referred to in this article is the fact that poor people must participate in their own development. In other words they must become part of the process in which they analyse their problem, act upon the problem, and finally reflect on whether or not the process of development is working for them. This is our position too because we have learned through years of community development work that poor people must play the key role in their own empowerment process.

An assertion made by Chambers (1997:157) with regard to principles for participatory learning and analysis is to encourage organisations to “hand over the stick”. This implies that poor people must be allowed to participate in their own development and ultimately become self-reliant. These local people must facilitate investigation, analysis, presentation and learning themselves so that they can generate and own the outcomes, and also learn. They have to be guided to the point where they are able to do things on their own, “run with the stick”, and then finally pass it on to the next generation. This is what is crucial for sustainable human development.

Burkey (1993:56) contributes extensively to this subject and emphasises that participation by the poor in their own development have been measured by other researchers as a key factor in the success of projects. Participation is an essential part of human growth, that is the development of self-confidence, pride, initiative, creativity, responsibility and cooperation. He goes on to state that meaningful participation is concerned with achieving power: that is the power to influence the decisions that affect one’s livelihood. Participation in this sense leads to greater control by the poor

over their own life situation. Therefore, the essence of development is the process whereby people take charge of their own lives and solve their own problems (cf Burkey, 1993: 56).

This is indeed a challenge for the contemporary church. When we begin to use participatory methods in our ministry to the poor in our own community we will begin to see phenomenal results. The challenge however is for us to change our perspectives on community outreach and to give up some of the “power” that we so often cling to, very often at the expense of the poor and marginalised amongst us.

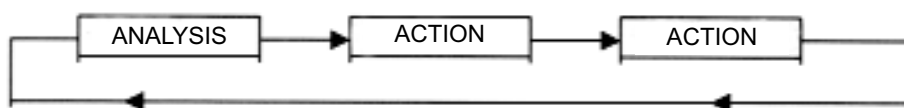
4. DEVELOPING A PROCESS FOR POVERTY ALLEVIATION

To develop a strategy for poverty alleviation in our community there are several approaches that could be taken. Dudley (1991) presents an outline of some basic steps of how to do community ministry. Before it engages in a practical sense in community ministry, and more specifically in poverty alleviation, a church needs to *analyse its community* or its social context. The next step is to *determine its congregational identity* in which the local church’s Biblical foundation, heritage, history and strengths and weaknesses are examined. The last step is the practical step where, after the organisation has been built and resources have been developed, the local church can then begin to *engage in practical ministry*.

Throughout his work Dudley (1991) provides several guidelines and examples of how such ministries should be organised. In developing a process for poverty alleviation in its own community, one or two individuals in a local congregation may be especially burdened to get involved. However, they must gather others around them who would share their hopes for touching individuals, changing systems, and empowering people (Dudley 1991:xii). In the initial stages of community analysis, Dudley proposes that the local church first defines the boundaries of its community and then describe the people living in it. It should then gather more objective information (through surveys for instance), reflect on and probe this information, and then decide upon its focus of ministry. Indeed Dudley’s logical approach and easy to understand explanations would be of great help to churches wanting to initiate a social ministry.

However, without intending any discredit to Dudley, the process of participatory development as proposed by Burkey offers a more logical way for churches and NGOs to consider. Burkey (1993:64) argues that a true development process is based on a continuous series of analysis-action-reflection-analysis.

This ongoing process can best be summarised in the form of his diagram (Burkey 1993:64, Diagram 2) below:



In this process there is no room for the faint-hearted social ministry or community worker. That is why Burkey (1993:68-70) warns that the development process evolves in stages and is a long process of awakening, organising and patiently learning to adjust to the dynamics of democratic group activities. Also, a successful participatory development process should become a continuous process with no visible end to it.

A crucial aspect of Burkey’s philosophy agrees with that of Korten’s and the other authors such as Wilson & Ramphele, Santa Ana, and Hughes & Bennett and is evidenced in the following quotation:

“We desperately need to expand our vision. Our short interventions would only have been a success if the children’s children of today’s poor also benefit from what we did. The only way that we can achieve this is to help the people alive today to acquire the skills to keep their own development process alive for future generations” (Burkey 1993:70)

Burkey’s logical arrangement and explanation of his proposed development process is extremely helpful. For this reason we will now look at the important points that will be helpful for our local congregation as it looks to implementing a process for poverty alleviation in our poor community. Although he writes from a secular point of view we will present an adapted outline composed of certain principles that would be helpful for the establishment of our local church’s social ministry in Facreton, Kensington, Maitland and Garden Village.

4.1 Step 1: Analysis

- ☐ Define the physical boundaries within which ministry will be done.
- ☐ Describe the people living in the community.
- ☐ Define the problem and the causes.
- ☐ Understand what self-reliant participatory development is.
- ☐ Determine what resources are available for the intended social ministry.
- ☐ Reflect on God’s mission for the church through the ages.
- ☐ Reflect on the Biblical requirements for service to the poor.
- ☐ Consider the prospect of networking with organisations already active in the community.

4.2 Step 2: Action

- ☐ Understand one’s role and requirements as a change agent.
- ☐ Obtain the support from church leadership and leaders of the community.
- ☐ Involve the congregation.
- ☐ Plan and strategise.
- ☐ Participation.
- ☐ Empowerment.
- ☐ Networking.

4.3 Step 3: Reflection

- ☐ Evaluate if objectives have been met; discern *when* the right time would be for the change agent to step out – but would this be a good discipleship principle?

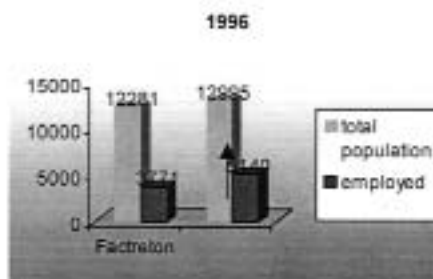
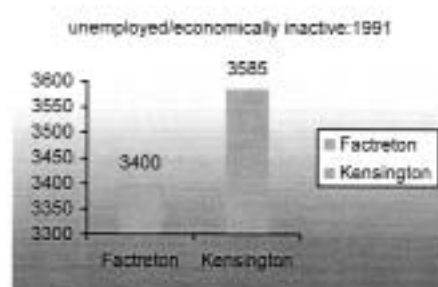
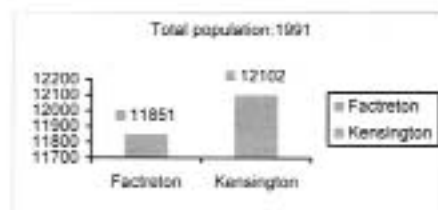
5. CASE STUDY

The following is a case study of an organisation called Life Zone Ministries that was essentially born as an extension of the local church’s ministry. It was initiated in 1998 by three persons who had a passion to work with the very poor people in the Facreton community. The organisation is still functioning and continually reviewing its work amongst the children, youth and adults in this sector of the community. The primary aims of the Life Zone are to address the causes of poverty and to help people to become empowered and self-sustainable.

Here is the process that we followed in addressing the evil of poverty in Factreton.

5.1 Analysis

We collected data from the Central Statistics Department (1996 census) to assess the total population, education, unemployment and income levels of households in the Kensington and Factreton suburbs. This information was then used to determine whether there were any links with the causes of poverty and crime so rife in the community since the first inhabitants moved in during the early 1960's. Below are some of these recorded statistics.



Kensington

5.1.1 Collecting information and data

Total population in 1996: 12,281.

40% of population were under 20 years old.

919 people between the ages of 15 and 65 were unemployed (20% unemployment rate).

21% (1701 people) were/are illiterate (i.e. schooling up to grade 6 only).
8.8% (1079 people) have a matric or higher education level.

5.1.2 Analysis of Community

We obtained information about our community in several ways:

- ☐ Data collection (Census 1991 and 1996).
- ☐ Observation (driving and walking through the area).
- ☐ Interviewing local people.
- ☐ Newspaper clippings.
- ☐ Pupils from local schools.
- ☐ Staff from local schools.
- ☐ Police Services, local clinic.

Although the Life Zone Ministries serves people in both areas most of the work is done in Factreton. We work from W D Hendricks Primary School in the heart of the neighbourhood where most of the people whom we serve are living.

Factreton's geographical position

Factreton is roughly 10 km outside of Cape Town and situated next to the N1 freeway directly opposite Century City. To the north it is bordered by Wingfield Air Base (18th Avenue); to the east Voortrekker Road and the Maitland Cemetery; and to the south, Kensington (with 13th Avenue serving as the border).

Brief history of Factreton

Most of the people who first came to settle in Factreton in the early 1960's were people who were victims of forced removals under the National Party government of the day. People were evicted from District Six, Goodwood, Maitland and other suburbs later classified for "whites" only.

Previously, Factreton and Kensington used to be known as Windermere, a community where Bantu and Coloured people co-existed. When coloured families were forced into Factreton during the 1960's the Bantu folk were forced out by the government and had to resettle in other communities.

As time passed by certain "hubs" in Factreton became stigmatised as no-go areas due to constant violence. The area became synonymous with gangsterism, crime and anti-social behaviour. Houses became overcrowded, alcohol and drug abuse were the order of the day, unemployment increased, violence became "normal", and many other negative things contributed in giving this community a very bad reputation. These are some of the reasons for a certain part of Factreton being called "Die Kreefgat".

Thus when we thought about a name for our organisation we decided to give it a name that would imply a contradistinction to what Factreton was notorious for – a death zone known as the ugly "Kreefgat". Life Zone Ministries is therefore based on pointing people to the Source of life – abundant life!

The following is a list of some of the characteristics of Factreton:

- People: predominantly Coloured and very religious.
- Overcrowded homes (60-75% of the semi-detached Municipality houses have 10-20 occupants); few have hot water or are able to afford electricity, food, paraffin and clothes.
- Displacement disrupts family structures and children's education.
- Good public transport access.

- Crime, gangsterism, multi-faceted violence, substance abuse, ill-health (especially children and the elderly).
- Most families have lost at least one member due to violence.
- Some families have lost two or more family members for the same reason.
- Many live in fear.
- Early school drop-out rate is high.
- Fragmented families; many single-parent families and some orphans.
- Few role-models, especially males.
- Average low monthly income per person.
- Many children go to school hungry and are generally malnourished.
- High unemployment and increasing loitering.

Schools in Factreton (1996)

<i>Names of schools in Factreton</i>	<i>Number of learners</i>
Windermere High	617
W D Hendricks Primary	420
Wingfield Primary	258
Sunderland Primary	449
Factreton Primary	480

There are five additional schools in Kensington and Maitland that service a small percentage of the children of Factreton. These are Kensington and Maitland High and Windermere, Kenmere, and St. John's Primary.

Sports and recreation

- 3 registered soccer clubs and many social "Sunday league" teams for all ages.
- 1 swimming club.
- 1 rugby club.
- 1 cricket club.
- 1 baseball club.
- SHAWCO community centre (linked to UCT).
- Seniors' fitness classes.
- 4 social netball clubs.

Religious institutions

- 1 mosque.
- 1 Anglican Church.
- 1 Roman Catholic Church.
- 2 New Apostolic Churches.
- 20 Evangelical/Pentecostal/Reformed Churches (only 7 have their own building).

Other meeting places and public services

- General dealer shops and other businesses (mostly Muslim-owned).
- Shebeens (taverns), public bars.
- Library.
- Day clinic.

- Civic centre.
- Police station.

These are some of the trademarks that Factreton is known for.

5.1.3 Analysis of data and information

The effects of apartheid on our people are still being felt today. Poverty – the result of apartheid, low education, illiteracy, unemployment and violence. There are simply too many unemployed and lowly educated people in our community. This has minimised their own and their families' chances of having a fairly reasonable lifestyle.

Most of the people live in poverty and struggle to survive. Some households are supported only by a grandmother's pension or by a family member's casual-workers' wages. The causes of poverty appear to be the legacy of apartheid, low levels of education, illiteracy, and unemployment. Many of the children's parents themselves are illiterate and unable to help them with their homework. Some children are not being monitored when they have homework to do because of parents' lack of interest, literacy problems, absenteeism (many fathers are imprisoned or have been killed in violence), or mental condition as a result of substance abuse.

Many people have also become accustomed to receiving welfare from the state (such as disability and *dependant* grants) as well as "hand-outs" from churches, community organisations and others. People have become dependent on these types of assistance and often abuse government welfare services. One example, told by a school principal, related to an unemployed mother who applied for *dependant* grants from the Department of Social Services for her two sons. Although she knew that her children always played truant during the school year and never really attended school, she would register them each year just so that she could obtain a monthly income from government.

Wrong as it may have been, this was *her* fight for survival. Because many of the children and their families are so poor, they resort to stealing in order to "survive". We have also found that many have given up hope of finding good jobs because of their low levels of education or their criminal records. That is why some are looking at making a living even if it means breaking the law.

With our analysis now completed, we then considered the course of action to be taken.

5.2 Action

5.2.1 Philosophy of ministry

Love has hands to help others. It has feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men. This is what love looks like (St. Augustine).

5.2.2 Primary objectives

Our primary objectives were to contribute to the spiritual, physiological, intellectual, emotional and social development of children and youth in Factreton, Kensington, Maitland and Garden Village.

5.2.3 Methods

- Initiate skills development programs and projects for self-sustenance.
- Introduce ABET programmes for the illiterate especially for the parents of the youth and the elderly.
- Reintroducing school "drop-outs" into the educational system (facilitation).

- Assisting with welfare and relief aid.
- Creating playing opportunities with professional soccer clubs for primary school children.
- Offering professional soccer coaching to schools.
- Teaching morally sound life-skills in schools.
- Partnering with other community organisations in the area.
- Interviewing people to find out what their biggest needs are.
- Providing services such as venues and transport for funerals.

5.3 Reflection

Within a few months we evaluated our programmes and noticed the immense physiological needs of hundreds of the children. The Friday afternoon Bible Study Club that we were facilitating at W D Hendricks Primary School was a huge outlet of energy for these lively children. We would all play soccer or netball together or dance to the tunes of upbeat gospel music. The children were also provided with a meal or a snack every week. In totality, our programmes were mostly geared to the holistic development of the participant i.e physiological, intellectual, social, emotional and spiritual aspects.

Sometimes we would take them for an outing to the beach, the mountain, the aquarium or the Waterfront. Very often we would interact with their parents and siblings to build relationships. Some of them were later entrusted with leadership responsibilities – tasks that they revelled in! One could see their self-esteem just getting better and better as we began to entrust them with simple tasks.

The children also found a sense of belonging in the Life Zone Ministries. To many children the ministry workers were considered as people whom they could trust. These workers were their role models and were always a sign of hope to many of the children.

Here are some services that we provided during 2002:

- Four children were reintroduced into the educational system.
- We organised a High and Primary Schools' tournament at Ajax Cape Town professional football club.
- Conducted life-skills at two primary schools (Grade 7).
- Liased with companies and individuals to finance education and schools soccer projects.
- Built relationships with community leaders, schools, youth, and parents.

With regard to financial support, there were individuals who contributed on a few occasions but they stopped giving after a while. We are now looking for ways to keep our projects sustainable for many more years to come. We realise now more than ever that we need to partner and network with people who are of the same purpose and determination to uproot poverty in our community. Currently we are doing a feasibility study on opening a grocery store to sustain the organisation and our community development programme. The bulk of the profit will be used to help finance our education programmes and to pay workers for administering Life Zone Ministries.

Our projects will now be more educationally based. We have decided to ensure that more children complete their primary schooling and that significantly less “drop-out” before grade twelve. Right now we are in the process of negotiating with a top accounting firm to finance this education project for 2003 and beyond. Based on our 1991 and 1996 census statistics we have been reminded that a low level of education generally results in less employment opportunities later. This is exactly why we are taking this matter very seriously. We want to assist in the empowerment of children and youth from Factreton for *life* through uprooting the real causes of poverty in Factreton.

This is what the Life Zone is all about. We want people to experience the *abundant life* that

Christ offers them, so that they in turn can become agents of change and hope in their very own community.

CONCLUSION

The essence then of self-reliant participatory development is exactly what the Life Zone is striving for. Burkey's outline of how this can be done is truly exceptional. He helps us to examine our own strengths and weaknesses as change agents. Yet he gives us hope that it can be done successfully if our foundation is well grounded. But for the Christian there is an added advantage in that we find ourselves in a unique position to be guided by the Holy Spirit and can ask him to partner us in this awesome mission. The local church today is unique in its fight against poverty alleviation in that it engages in holistic human development that includes the spiritual transformation of people through the preaching of the Good News and the life-changing power of the Holy Spirit.

In conclusion, we want to refer to Burkey's definition (1993:205) about self-reliant participatory development: "Self-reliant participatory development is an educational and empowering process in which people, in partnership with each other and with those able to assist them, identify problems and needs, mobilise resources, and assume responsibility themselves to plan, manage, control and assess the individual and collective actions that they themselves decide upon."

This quote summarises the heart of this article. It gives us something concrete to refer to as we constantly reflect on our role as agents of transformation in our local communities. Nevertheless Christians should remember, that to contribute to the fight against poverty alleviation, we need to equip ourselves with relevant information (including his Word) and allow God the Holy Spirit to use it to full effect in our service to the poor.

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