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### FOCUS ON COMMUNITIES AND NOT PROJECTS: CHALLENGES FACED BY DEVELOPMENT CENTRES IN ATTAINING SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS IN TSHWANE, SOUTH AFRICA

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#### ABSTRACT

Community development interventions are welcomed in communities; however, their sustainability is often questioned. The goal of this study was to explore and describe the challenges faced in the development of community interventions by the development centres in the Tshwane region, Gauteng province, South Africa. The research study adopted a qualitative research approach. A non-probability sample was chosen, utilising a purposive sampling technique to select participants. The raw data were analysed and interpreted according to the eight steps outlined by Tesch. The article argues that top-down interventions can create dependency and hinder communities from achieving sustainability and self-reliance. More emphasis should be placed on facilitating a process in which community members take charge of their assets and strengths to mobilise local solutions and improve inward functioning.

**Keywords:** asset-based community development; challenges; community development; development centres; sustainable livelihoods

#### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Despite recent efforts to reduce poverty in South Africa, the nation continues to grapple with astonishingly high poverty levels when viewed against historical and international standards (Statistics South Africa, 2018). Significant progress has been made by the South African government in addressing poverty and ensuring a better life for all, according to the Department of Social Development (Department of Social Development [DSD], 2012).

One way the government has pursued poverty alleviation is through community development projects implemented by development centres. The development centre concept is based on best practices internationally. South Africa drew from the successes of countries such as

Singapore, Uganda and Nigeria to lay the foundation for the Gauteng province to implement the model. The Development Centre Impact Evaluation Report (DSD, 2010) highlighted the need to contextualise the model to avoid mere replication. According to the Poverty Reduction Strategy Report (DSD, 2000), the Development Centre approach was adopted and then launched in 2002 with the aim of funding programmes, as opposed to individual projects, to ensure sustainability and community ownership.

These development centres are non-profit organisations (NPOs) formally started with the objectives of creating community development and poverty alleviation interventions. Thus, given their multi-purpose nature, development centres deliver services to communities in a multifaceted way, taking cognisance of the multidimensional nature of poverty (DSD, 2007). Furthermore, the development centres emphasise an integrated approach that aims to assist poor individuals, families and communities to help themselves, thus aligning them with social development commitments, the Millennium Development Goals (United Nations, 2015) and the National Development Plan (NDP) (National Planning Commission, 2014).

While DSD monitored and evaluated these development centres, no evidence of improvement in the standard of living of poor people emerged. According to the Poverty Reduction Strategy Report (DSD, 2000:51), in response to this situation,

*the DSD placed a moratorium on the funding of all poverty alleviation projects towards the end of 1999. In 2001, the department commissioned the Kagiso Trust to audit all funded poverty alleviation projects.*

This compelled the DSD to undertake a review of its strategies for dealing with poverty alleviation (Koagetse, 2010). Given the findings, it was determined to implement an exit strategy for the current initiatives. A programme exit strategy is a plan describing how the programme intends to withdraw its assets, while ensuring that the achievement of the programme goals (relief or development) is not jeopardised and that progress towards these goals will continue. The audits undertaken by the Kagiso Trust and the DSD in 2001 reinforced the need to change and to manage poverty alleviation differently. This initiative further indicated that the DSD had to terminate all poverty alleviation projects that were not viable and consolidate them into programmes. DSD was compelled to exit 85% of all 368 poverty alleviation projects that had been funded since 1997 and to consolidate the remaining 15% into programmes (DSD, 2007). This was because most of these projects did not serve their intended purpose, but continued to operate as monopolies that benefitted only a few individuals.

This led to an exploration and description of the challenges experienced in the community development interventions by the development centres in the Tshwane region, Gauteng province, South Africa. To promote sustainable social change, a shift should take place in involving the communities in the implementation of community development interventions. The focus should be on discovering and strengthening internal assets, capabilities and strengths of community members and leveraging these assets with external assets to ensure sustainable livelihoods. This study contributes to the current literature on this initiative and provides valuable information to community development practitioners, social workers and academics on ensuring community participation using the strengths and assets of the community members

to empower the communities and ensure ownership and sustainability of their livelihoods. The article begins with a summary of the study, then moves on to the theoretical framework that guided the research, an overview of the research methodologies, findings, a discussion of the research findings, limitations and a conclusion.

### **THE DAWN OF DEVELOPMENT CENTRES IN SOUTH AFRICA**

The Departments of Health (DoH) and Labour (DoL), as well as the DSD, have developed and implemented strategies and programmes such as the establishment of development centres, aimed at bringing about social and economic development in poor communities in Gauteng. The Sustainable Livelihoods (SL) programme has been in operation since 2000/1, as part of the “Special Poverty Relief” programme funded by the National Treasury (DSD, 2012). In 2004 the first four development centres were established in Gauteng. The following development centres were registered as NPOs under the Non-Profit Organisations Act (Republic of South Africa, 1997): the Stanza Bopape development centre based in Mamelodi, the Tembisa development centre based in Tembisa, the Harambe development centre based in Boksburg, and the Alexandra development centre based in Alexandra. Of the four flagship development centres, Alexandra no longer exists. By 2009/10 the DSD, in partnership with NPOs, had rolled out a further 22 development centres, which brought the total number to 26. There are currently six development centres in Johannesburg, eight in Ekurhuleni, six in the North Rand, three in the West Rand, and two in the Sedibeng Region (DSD, 2012; (Koagetse, 2010). The focus of this study was on the two development centres in Mamelodi and Hammanskraal areas.

Additionally, the DSD (2005) report further states that the emphasis is on ensuring that all poverty alleviation programmes are holistic and include elements of people development together with skills development. The core mandate of development centres is that they should serve as “incubators”, in a transition from a state of poverty to a state of self-enrichment. This implies that there must be clear mechanisms to ensure that community members are not permanently trapped within the dependency syndrome, but can move towards self-reliance. There must be a clear-cut strategy for self-reliance. Similarly, the DSD (2007; 2012) ensures that the beneficiaries must be able to enter the development centre with a clear exit plan. In other words, instead of establishing a permanent relationship with the centre, beneficiaries make use of the services and then move on to the next level of self-reliance and independence to allow others to enter the system and benefit from the available services. The researchers maintain that this will decrease dependency and increase the independence of communities in ensuring sustainable livelihoods. Communities should be empowered not only to be beneficiaries, but also to be agents of development in their projects to ensure successful and self-sustainable projects.

### **CHALLENGES FACED BY THE DEVELOPMENT CENTRES TO ATTAIN SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS**

The sustainability of poverty alleviation projects is not a problem confined to South Africa alone; it is a global problem. Although South African communities have undergone some major changes and transformations during the past 30 years of democracy, they unfortunately are still

marginalised. Various communities still face glaring challenges such as inequality, economic instability, lack of participation and being powerless and voiceless, just to name a few. This is exacerbated by the fact that South Africa has not recovered from the symptoms of apartheid and thus has not gained sufficient direction to attain levels of economic viability and social stability (Patel, 2009; 2015). Communities had to adapt to changes occurring in a variety of urban and rural community environments in response to changes in legislation and policies, as well as economic and social factors (Nyathi, 2012). Consequently, the programmes offered by the development centres are still being underused and the sub-programmes are not equally accessed by all members of the community (Mokoena, 2016).

An interview with the director of the Sustainable Livelihoods (SL) section of Community Development Directorate (Mahlako, 2017) revealed that several factors contributed to the failure of many projects. Analysis of reports was also conducted to identify these factors. It became clear that the development interventions that were effective and achieved sustainable change were characterised by the participation of community members, the utilisation of existing local assets and partnerships between community members and other role players. However, not all development interventions led to effective and sustainable change for a number of reasons (Mahlako, 2017). The NPO milieu is characterised by stories of success and failure that are attributed to the quality of administration and management of the organisation. From the interview with Mr Mahlako, it is evident that the community development projects lack a long-term vision and are not truly inclusive of individuals across the whole community. The extent to which the projects are struggling to achieve sustainability confirms a lack of participation in decision-making and a failure to tap into internal local assets. In addition, many of the community development projects were devolved too early to the community and were under-resourced with no mentoring and coaching from the centres.

Another reason for the failure of projects was that different departments and private sector stakeholders intervened simultaneously but in an uncoordinated manner in the same community and these sectors utilised different approaches, confusing communities and creating even more dependency on the government (Mkhwanazi, 2012; Sherman & Ford, 2013). Some projects were closed because they did not meet the standards set by the SL principles and because community members continued to depend on the government, while those community members involved in projects showed limited signs of taking responsibility for their development, demonstrated poor management skills, mismanagement of assets and internal conflicts (Mokoena, 2016). Community development practitioners (CDPs) seem to find it difficult to facilitate a development process as there are no clear practice guidelines or models within the DSD to guide them (Mokoena, 2016; Venter, 2010). In such circumstances, the community's livelihood is continuously affected and this in turn perpetuates poverty.

Based on the above background and challenges faced by the community centres, the study aimed to explore and describe the challenges faced in the development of community interventions by the development centres in the Tshwane region, Gauteng province in South Africa. As such, this study offers effective ways to involve communities through the asset-based community-led and sustainable livelihoods approach. Furthermore, the study builds on

and contributes suggestions and recommendations for policy guidelines embedded in the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) and Sustainable Livelihoods (SL) approaches.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The study employed community-led approaches, namely ABCD and SL approaches, as theoretical frameworks. These approaches allow a better understanding of the strengths, knowledge and assets of the community members, which are the factors that ensure participation and the sustainability of community development programmes and interventions. The ABCD approach developed by Kretzmann and McKnight (2005) emphasises that communities can drive the development process themselves by identifying and mobilising existing (but often unrecognised) assets, thereby responding to and creating local economic opportunities. Such unrealised assets include not only personal attributes and skills, but also political, cultural, physical, economic and social assets (Friedli, 2013; Kretzmann & McKnight, 2005; McKnight, 2017; Owen & Kemp, 2012). According to Green and Haines (2016; 2012) as well as Moser and Dani (2008), the ABCD approach builds on the strengths perspective and uses indigenous human and community assets, strengths, capabilities and knowledge to build communities.

According to McLean (2015) as well as Morse and McNamara (2013), the SL approach is an integrated development method that brings various approaches together to promote sustainable development. It involves an assessment of community assets, adaptive strategies and technologies that contribute to livelihood systems as well as the analysis of cross-sectoral policies and investment requirements to enhance livelihoods. It is about working with communities and recognising their interests, expertise and experience as the basis for development (Midgley, 2017). The two approaches ensure that change is coming from within the community and that development is built upon the capacities and assets existing within the community. Change is relationship-driven, participative and oriented towards sustainable community growth. The researchers therefore conclude that these two approaches can form the backbone of community development and be a vehicle for sustainable community change through which the economic, social, psychological, political and physical concerns of the community are addressed.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research study adopted a qualitative research approach and an explorative and descriptive design (Creswell, 2016). The study was directed by the following main research question: *How can communities utilise their strengths and assets in the process of developing their sustainable livelihoods?* The goal of the study was to explore and describe the challenges faced in the development of community interventions by the development centres in the Tshwane region of the Gauteng province in South Africa. The objectives of the study were:

- To explore and describe the challenges faced in the community development interventions by the development centres;

- To describe the challenges faced in the community development interventions by the development centres based on how the community strengths and assets could have been utilised in changing their livelihoods.

The population of the study was comprised of 64 wards with a total of 26,000 poverty-stricken households in Gauteng. To date, nine out of the 64 wards are involved in the SL programme in the North Rand region and the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality. The nine wards are Mamelodi, Nkangala, Hammanskraal, Soshanguve, Mabopane, Ga-Rankuwa, Tembisa, the Central Business District (CBD) and the Centurion area. Within these nine wards, 18 NPOs function as community development centres, nine permanent CDPs and 12 contract assistant CDPs are involved in the community development projects under the SL programme.

The Mamelodi and Hammanskraal wards were used as the sample. One development centre was selected from each ward. The two wards were chosen with the assistance of the supervisor, based on the following criteria: ease of accessibility and the fact that they include both successful and less successful projects; this meant including projects that are sustainable and independent, as well as those that are on the brink of closing because of the mismanagement of funds and other factors. The development centres should be under the jurisdiction of the Tshwane Region and, finally, the development centres should have been affiliated with the SL programme for at least two years.

A non-probability sample was chosen, utilising a purposive sampling technique to select participants. The researchers involved nine participants from the four projects based at the two selected development centres. The participants consisted of the supervisor, two CDPs, two development centre managers and four project leaders. The researchers asked them in the semi-structured interviews to briefly analyse the situation to gain a broad understanding of the processes and practices of the development centres; this interview format provided the opportunity for the researcher to explore particular themes and responses in more detail. The supervisor and the two CDPs are the government officials, while the two development centre managers are appointed by the development centres. All of them are paid by DSD as the main custodian of the development centres. In terms of their job responsibilities, the supervisor is responsible for supervising the CDPs. The two CDPs are responsible for the weekly monitoring and evaluation of the projects within the development centres. In the context of this study, the two CPDs were responsible for making sure that the development centres adhered to the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the two parties and they reported to the supervisor. The last two participants were development centre managers, appointed by the development centres. The development centre managers are responsible for managing projects; they oversee all the projects within the development centres and manage the assets. The development centre managers work with the communities and report to the CDPs.

The criteria for inclusion were that they all had to be permanently employed and be attached to the SL programmes and should have been involved in the development of projects for at least two years.

Data analysis was undertaken to highlight important information obtained from a large amount of data and reduce the volume of information. The researchers transcribed the individual semi-

structured interviews and observations in the form of field notes. The raw data were analysed and interpreted according to the eight steps outlined by Tesch (as cited in Creswell, 2016).

The analysed data were compared with the literature on the topic; furthermore, to ensure the trustworthiness of the study the following strategies were employed: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Guba, in Krefting, 1991). To ensure that ethical principles would not be violated, an ethical clearance certificate (REC-01-0030-2018) was obtained from the Research and Ethics Committee of the University of Johannesburg.

## **FINDINGS**

The participants were asked to describe the challenges they experienced in the development of the projects. Though the focus was on challenges, the aim was to turn the negatives (challenges) into positives, that is, building on the strengths of the community. The strengths and assets of the community were taken into account, since the study focused on the ABCD approach which emphasises the move from a problem and needs-based approach to a strength and asset-based view of communities.

In response to the question about the challenges experienced in the development of community interventions by the development centres, eight themes were highlighted as representing stumbling blocks, namely mismanagement of funds, the community not being fully involved in the development of the projects, DSD not fully involved in the projects, qualifications not being accredited, board members not always competent, lack of interest and involvement by community members, ineffective exit strategy and inability to develop self-reliance, and lack of involvement of government departments.

### **Mismanagement of funds**

Among other challenges, mismanagement of funding and dependency were some of the factors considered a hindrance to the smooth running of the project. Sometimes the training that the centres professed to offer did not even take place; the development centres lied about the training and provided incorrect or even fabricated statistics. This happened regardless of officials from SL monitoring the projects by visiting them. The supervisor described the main challenge as the mismanagement of funds as well as dependency on DSD's funding. Dependency was one of the factors considered a hindrance to the smooth running of the projects.

*The main one is that of mismanagement of funds since the training would not be happening, and when they lie about training, it means that the stats that they provide are not correct.*

Later, a supervisor added:

*I even attended a workshop that addressed such things as mismanagement of funding. I can say the officials do the monitoring part, because there is an M&E unit; we do the funding and the M&E checks on finances used. On the issue of the mismanagement of funds, the NPOs misuse funds under the officials' noses.*

The main challenge is that these development centres are too dependent on DSD for funding. A key tenet of the ABCD and SL approach is for the government officials to step back from the outset to allow community members to propel their community-led development. Community disempowerment and dependency should be turned into stimulated community-driven development through ABCD (Field & Miller, 2017; Green and Haines, 2016). ABCD promotes the understanding that external funds should be used in addition to the internal community assets. This means funds are not simply the driving force, but assets of the community. The community-led development would help communities to reflect on previous endeavours and to identify community assets, leading them to be motivated to plan, design, implement and manage their development initiatives and thus become self-reliant (Cunningham, 2008; Mathie & Peters, 2014).

One CPD added that:

*You will find that in a centre, people who are working there are not necessarily professional facilitators. They are people who joined because they have a passion for the work; they are acting in those positions. NPOs need professionals and it is quite expensive for them.*

The development centres seem to focus more on getting funding without linking the needs of the community with their available assets. The ABCD approach emphasises that community development is an 'internally focused' process. This implies that issues to be addressed and the way that they need to be addressed are in the hands of community members and not in the hands of external community developers. Therefore, community members decide which areas of assets should be accessed and mobilised to respond to the challenges within the community. As such, community members organise and drive the community development process themselves (Green and Haines, 2016; McKnight & Russell, 2018). Furthermore, the ABCD approach moves beyond considering what communities lack and instead draws on the assets present within the communities.

### **The community is not fully involved in the development of the projects**

Another challenge identified was that of the community not being fully involved in the projects. The community members only visit the development centres occasionally. The owner of the development centre makes all the decisions. The following comments from the CDPs confirm the findings:

*Communities are not involved fully that is why most people are not interested in the project.*

*They only visit the development centre to get something out and not necessarily to be part of...or participate in the running of the centre. The owner of the development centre has more say than the community members.*

The lack of interest or involvement by the community members, according to the researchers' observation, was a result of the lack of input in the initial stage of the projects, since the current



projects did not meet their needs. In this case, all the projects were implemented top-down in that the community members were not involved in the inception of the projects. Government-funded community projects should be tailor-made to meet the needs of communities through participation. Based on the principle of empowerment, sustainability and self-reliance, individual and community assets need to be mobilised for development. The ABCD approach focuses on assets, capabilities, assets and skills within people and across systems, which could make a positive contribution and potentially be mobilised to address challenges (Green & Haines, 2016; Serrat, 2017). In summary, the focus should be on the strengths, assets and opportunities of community members to stimulate community-led development. The ABCD approach rests on two main pillars: to activate a type of development that is authentically community-driven through uncovering and reviving local assets and capacities, and to link community assets to larger structures which inevitably have significant influence over them (Kramer, Amos, Lazarus & Seedat, 2012; Petersen & Pedersen, 2010). The application of ABCD promotes self-awareness and self-reliance, which means that communities will be focusing on their assets. This could lead them to gain an objective view of their community and to identify assets that they were not aware of.

### **DSD is not fully involved in the projects**

In a similar vein, not only the community but the DSD was also cited as not being fully involved in the planning and implementation of the projects and this was identified as a challenge. From the findings, it was evident that the DSD was not involved in the development of the project, but just checked if the development centres are complying with their stated goals. The supervisor confirmed this on two occasions according to the following comments:

*We (DSD) are all not hands-on. There is a lack of participation since they decide on their projects and we just check if they comply with their submitted business plan and then we fund them.*

*...we have nothing to do with the running of the projects specifically.*

The fuelling factor was the top-down approach by government departments and the lack of involvement at the grassroots level. It seems that the government has done little in terms of meeting the immediate needs of the people, because they are not working with communities at the grassroots level. Within the community development approach, the development of projects should be well targeted and implemented through a joint effort by the government and the community. Community interventions should be community-led. The ABCD approach seeks to generate an inside-out process to development in which the community leads while the role of the government is that of facilitator. In support, Petersen and Pedersen (2010) emphasise this role reversal as one of the key tenets of the ABCD approach.

### **Qualifications not being accredited**

The development centres do not have qualified facilitators nor courses that are accredited. The CDPs indicated that the inability of the development centres to offer accredited qualifications to community members was a challenge.

The findings are echoed in the views of the two CDPs:

*The organisations are doing well in trying to alleviate poverty, but the challenge is to get accreditation of some of the programmes. For now, it is a catch-22 situation because other companies decline the current certificates that we are giving them because they are not accredited.*

*They struggle to give accredited qualifications. Therefore, you will find that most of them rely on external service providers. That means the organisations would find another company to train on their behalf.*

The above challenges are exacerbated by the fact that the DSD outsources its responsibilities of developing communities to the development centres, who in turn also outsource the skills development training to other external service providers. The findings reveal that the organisations struggled to give accredited qualifications, hence most of them outsourced the training of community members to external companies. They should adopt a partnership approach where programmes are co-produced and community members play a key role in the governance, design and facilitation of programmes (Brooks & Kendall, 2013).

### **Board members are not always competent**

The absence of communication between board members and government officials was cited as a challenge. The CDPs also identified the incompetent way in which management boards sometimes ran the development centres as a challenge. They explained it as follows:

*Later on, you may realise that even if there is a board, it is just a burden and it is not even assisting.*

*Sometimes you will find they [board members] did not sign a contract and they fire someone as they please. They hire in a manner that is not in line with HR policies. It is a problem for them to comply with their policies...*

The incompetence of board members was revealed in the lack of compliance with their policies, which was in turn identified as one of the limiting factors of community development of community centres. According to the development centre organogram, a development centre has a staff component of ten members in total. The director is at the top of the hierarchy. Below, are five board members, a centre manager, an administrator, a project coordinator and project facilitators. A centre manager is assisted by the project coordinator and an administrator. According to DSD (2007), the development centres are managed by board members who are not part of the project implementation. This exacerbates the challenges of running the development centres, since the board members operate as outsiders and they might not have the interest of the centre at heart. Those who subscribe to the ABCD approach argue that the strength of a community to act as a development leader can be identified in its recognition, value and use of local strengths and assets; strong communities are those in which capacities are identified, valued and utilised (Field & Miller, 2017; Garven, MacLean & Pattoni, 2016). When the capacities of individuals and communities are valued, there is a greater sense of

connectedness to collective efforts and fellow community members. Organisations and their projects have economic power over whom they hire, the supplies they purchase, the skills they teach and the assets they offer, as they all affect the local economy (Morse, 2013) hence the involvement of the board members is necessary in the execution of projects.

### **Lack of interest and involvement by community members**

One challenge is the fact that community members are not always interested in or involved in the projects; this may be because of the lack of input in the initial stage of the projects, because the current projects did not meet their needs, especially those of the youth. In line with this challenge, the project leaders said:

*Most of the projects that I have mentioned before had challenges such as manpower, in that most community members were not involved...There is a lack of interest among community members, especially the youth. We try to reach out to them, but they seem to want jobs more than the training.*

The second project leader also mentioned the lack of community involvement:  
*Another challenge is that we try to reach out to the community, but they are not easy to open up.*

It has been observed that the community members tend to lose interest and commitment towards the projects if they are made to be part of existing projects that fail to address their needs. The voices of the community members must be included in development activities to ensure such efforts reflect their expressed needs and priorities and are thus more likely to be efficient and effective. The ABCD approach to development is founded upon the philosophy that the communities can drive the development process themselves by identifying and mobilising existing assets, thereby responding to and creating local economic opportunities (Field & Miller, 2017; Morse, 2013).

The SL approach aims to empower the poor and help people achieve long-lasting improvements when assessing impacts using self-defined indicators (McLean, 2015). The community members should be part of the implementation of the development projects, which should meet their basic needs. This allows the community members to make their contribution toward their own welfare and sustained quality of life. By creating dependency, development centres are doing little to empower communities. Achieving sustainable livelihoods requires the integration of local knowledge and community strengths in meeting their basic needs. The SL approach acknowledges that communities are both subjects and objects of change, and that they have many strengths and a wide knowledge of their own situation (McLean, 2015; Nel, 2018).

### **Ineffective exit strategy and inability to develop self-reliance**

The findings show that challenges with the projects are enormous, since there is no exit strategy for community members; some members stay for years and do not move on, thereby creating dependency. Project leaders expressed the following sentiments in this regard:

*We are struggling to have an exit strategy for the community members; instead, we are creating more dependency.*

*We seem to have a problem with our exit strategy...the longer we keep the community members here, the more dependent they become.*

One development centre manager explained further:

*If we can check who was here before the project was funded, you will find that it is still the same people who are still here, who were here when the project started...The challenge is when we started there was no clear indication of when the project would end.... exit strategy.*

The lack of an exit strategy posed a huge challenge and it was not in line with the requirements of the development centre. The DSD (2007) emphasises that there must be a clear-cut strategy for mobility. The community members must be able to enter the development centre with a clear exit plan. In other words, instead of establishing a permanent relationship with the centre, community members should make use of the programme and then move on to the next level of self-reliance and independence. The lack of an exit strategy implied that the participants were not empowered and self-reliant enough to continue with the projects on their own.

There should therefore be a power shift through the development projects whereby the government officials and the development centre managers need to step back and let the community members lead their development. Currently, the efforts of the community members are not used to increase their economic, social, psychological and cultural capital. This is contrary to the tenets of the ABCD and SL approaches, which emphasise the importance of using locally available knowledge, unknown to outsiders, to reduce the costs of intervention and to attain sustainability. Furthermore, the SL approach identifies the strengths, assets, livelihood activities and opportunities that people have as well as the factors that shape those livelihoods (Mazibuko, 2013; McLean, 2015; Serrat, 2017).

### **Lack of involvement of government departments**

The top-down approach by government departments and their lack of involvement at the grassroots level was identified by the development centre managers as a challenge. The development centre manager was frustrated by the fact that the top-down approach did not yield fruitful results. Managers reported the following:

*If we can work with the departments from the lower level, we can curb most of the social ills. The departments must do away with board meetings and have meetings with real communities and deal with real needs as experienced by communities and do away with top-down.*

*Top-down is not working for us as NGOs because we have to comply in the name of funding.*

The partnership is created between the government and development centres, with the latter participating in decision-making and the implementation of responses to meet existing needs. The development centre manager was frustrated by the fact that the top-down approach did not yield fruitful results. From the findings, it appears that the development centre manager seems annoyed by the lack of involvement by government departments at the grassroots level. The types of projects imposed by the government officials were deemed by community members to be the responsibility of the government, hence community participation was nil. It is only when a project addresses the needs of the community members that there is a likelihood of collective action in support of the initiative. Participation is a fundamental component of the ABCD and SL approaches. Lightfoot, McCleary and Lum (2014) and Mathie and Peters (2014) acknowledge that a change in the attitude and behaviour of government officials is required; they must be open to working with and listening to communities.

## **LIMITATIONS**

Some development centres were closed as they dealt with various challenges, while some offered programmes that were not relevant to the study. The COVID-19 pandemic hampered the planned schedule as the researcher could not conduct final interviews because of lockdown restrictions. The researcher then decided to have the practice model reviewed online instead of conducting a face-to-face workshop. The researcher had to work at the pace of the community, since the participants were at times not available for the interviews. The sample size was too small. Only two out of the nine wards in Tshwane in Gauteng were selected, so the results cannot be generalised.

## **DISCUSSION**

From the above submissions, it can be concluded that the development centres failed to address poverty and unemployment, let alone being able to capacitate community members. Project failure and lack of capacity can often be traced back to development centres relying solely on government funding. To counter this, the researchers highlight the importance of involving and empowering communities in the approval, execution and evaluation stages. This approach is crucial to ensure successful outcomes and sustainable development. The ABCD approach does not ignore the fact that communities characterised by poverty experience challenges and difficulties, but it focuses on the strengths and assets in the community instead to address the challenges and difficulties faced by them (Foot, 2012; Foot & Hopkins, 2010; Kretzmann, 2010).

The findings show that the participants were enthusiastic about bringing change into the communities. Tapping into the available internal assets seemed to be a viable solution to enhancing the sustainability of their projects. The ABCD approach emphasises the importance of starting with available internal assets to ensure the sustainability of a project. DSD needs to make a paradigm shift from regarding themselves as the experts to allowing themselves to learn from the communities and help them reach solutions to their problems. Sustainability implies the return of control over local assets and information to the communities. The change that development brings should be economically, socially, institutionally and environmentally sustainable (Chambers, 2014). According to Green and Haines (2016), the sustainable

livelihood approach aims to put people and the households in which they live at the centre of the development process, starting with their capabilities and assets and not with their problems.

The findings highlight that the projects had problems with community participation as many of them were not coordinated effectively. Community members are primarily seen as recipients and not as owners of the projects. The researchers caution that problems should be expected in cases where communities feel that they have been excluded from the design of the project. Raniga's (2018) research revealed that the community felt that there had not been adequate community participation, as there was a feeling of a lack of transparency and information regarding how the project was identified in the first place.

Different role players play important parts in the development of the projects. Their role is to ensure that projects are developed in terms that meet the needs of the community members. From the findings, it appears that the government and other departments can help in the design and implementation of programmes. However, collaboration is essential for ensuring the effective performance of the development centres and for promoting cooperation and self-reliance. It also contributes to sustainable task performance and the sustainability of efforts. Mazibuko (2017) emphasises that any intervention must consider the range of coping strategies that communities have developed and that work for them, so that the organisations do not undermine existing solutions. The ABCD and SL approaches may therefore be seen to offer the prospect of improving support for excluded communities by adopting a collaborative approach.

In conclusion, to ensure sustainability, there should be collective action. There should be a collaboration between the DSD and the development centres. The monitoring and evaluation process should comprise external and internal participants. The SL approach allows communities to move beyond the poverty line through participation, by utilising their capital and responding to what they need for their development. The ABCD and SL approach value participation; thus they empower communities in developing projects that are sustainable in poverty alleviation. The integrated ABCD and SL approaches can be used as a strategy for sustainable community-driven development.

## CONCLUSION

The challenges outlined above indicate that there is a serious concern about the sustainability of community development projects after initiating agencies exit the project. As a solution, the researchers suggest the application of the ABCD and SL with the communities to advance poverty alleviation. This process must be given enough attention to reverse the top-down approach wherein communities are not given a chance to participate. To accomplish this, the government needs to take a back seat in community development, because their involvement creates a sense of centralised control and leads to apathy in communities. Additionally, there were clear indications of maladministration and mismanagement of funds, and many projects were generating little or no profit. The researchers contend that this is evidence of a lack of self-reliance, since communities were excluded from decision-making about their livelihoods. The communities are either not using the available assets effectively or not using them at all and, as a result, the sustainable objectives are not reached.

It can be concluded that development centres are struggling because of a lack of assets for the development of projects, which in turn contributes significantly to non-participation by community members. The DSD and the development centres seem unaware that communities are resourceful. The community's knowledge must be complementary to that of outside experts. The local knowledge and skills should be recognised and individual and community assets should also be mobilised to ensure that the principles of participation and empowerment are realised in practice. These principles highlight that for communities to participate in a project, they must be empowered. Once empowered, they will be able to take responsibility for the decisions, they have made for the sustainability of the development projects. Community participation will instil ownership of the projects. The researchers emphasise that empowerment implies a shift away from professional dominance towards collaboration and partnership, where all members participate as an integral part of the process taking their strengths and assets into consideration to ensure sustainable livelihoods.

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