

THE PROCESS OF DEFINING THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABILITY: A CASE STUDY OF THE “HOLDING HANDS” INCOME-GENERATING COMMUNITY PROJECTS IN THE NORTH WEST PROVINCE

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Abstract

The problem of poverty is multi-dimensional and has many facets and levels. In South Africa the lack of jobs is adding to this problem. Therefore, a strategy to alleviate poverty is through income-generating community projects. In the evaluation of community projects, it is always an issue to know when a project is sustainable. This study focuses on the “Holding Hands” income-generating community projects in the North-West Province of South Africa. The project team accepted the Brundtland definition of sustainability to plan the interventions. However it seems to be important to know what the understanding is of sustainability by the participants to be able to measure progress of the project. The aim of this paper is to establish a demographic profile of a typical member of an income-generating community project in the “Holding Hands” project and to describe their understanding of the concept of Sustainability. The “Holding Hands” income-generating community project developed over time since 2001 through Participatory Action Research, including quantitative and qualitative methods. It includes 5 groups of women from the previously disadvantaged communities in different districts of the North West Province of South Africa. A survey was conducted and information on rating aspects of the meaning of sustainability to the project members was collected. Statistical analysis included frequency distributions, correlations and comparisons between different geographical areas. This is the first analysis of this kind done in the “Holding Hands” project. This information creates knowledge about the viewpoint of the indigenous communities in an income generating project and can be used to guide other similar projects towards a realistic planning for success. It can also be useful to influence policy in terms of job creation and entrepreneurship.

Keywords: Assets, community development, community projects, disadvantaged communities, income-generating projects, indigenous knowledge, livelihoods, poverty, sustainability, sustainability indicators, skills development