

**ESTABLISHMENT OF A SERVICE CENTRE BY THE  
RURAL AGED**

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**ESTABLISHMENT OF A SERVICE CENTRE BY THE  
RURAL AGED**

by

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## **Abstract**

This paper describes a participatory action research project involving a group of the aged from the Makgoba community. The focus of this study was the establishment of a service centre by the rural aged. In the course of this project, the researcher discovered how the rural aged were empowered through the participatory action research process. This process enabled the aged to accomplish their goals, and so to grow and develop. In particular, they improved their lives, and enhanced their self esteem and dignity.

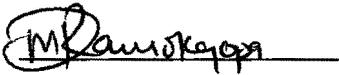
### **Key terms**

Participatory research; participation; the rural aged; the service centre; potential; development and change.

## Declaration

Student number: 648-481-6

I declare that ESTABLISHMENT OF A SERVICE CENTRE BY THE RURAL AGED is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



Ms M. D. Ramokgopa

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Orientation to the study**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents background information on the community in which the participants live and their pattern of life. In addition, reasons for the participatory action research are provided, and research questions, objectives of the study, research methodology, the value of the research and the stakeholders are outlined.

#### **1.2 Background information**

The aged of the Makgoba rural community in the Northern Province of South Africa have, for the past several years, contributed to the living conditions of the community by helping to establish a day care centre for children under the age of six. The motivation for this involvement in community development began when other members of the community participated in the development of a communal garden. This garden, which was started approximately 10 years ago, could not grow due to lack of water. Since then, efforts focused on the establishment of the day care centre, where the aged were involved in cleaning the yard on a monthly basis, as well as in producing bricks for an extension to the original structure.

The development of the centre was further motivated by a number of personal concerns. Apart from their involvement in the day care centre, the aged found themselves leading a dull life, that is, doing household work, ploughing the fields and looking after children. In addition, they were stressed by the economic burden of the entire extended family, and were

using their pensions to meet the needs of all members of the family, since most family members were unemployed.

The aged members of the community were viewed as role models by the family. In addition, they were in some cases the sole breadwinners for the family, with the result that most children were comfortably cared for by their grandmothers. With the establishment of the centre, the aged were able to regard themselves as fulfilling their potential since they contributed to the standard of living within the community and within the family. On the other hand, they also considered themselves lacking technical information on the administration of the projects since they cannot read and write.

The aged were dissatisfied with their daily routines. These were regarded as boring since they were repeating the same activities, not learning new perspectives. They developed the idea of establishing a day care centre in the hope that this would relieve them of the care of the young children. This idea arose from a visit by several aged members to the Kgautswane village, 160 kilometres east of Makgoba. They were accompanied by a volunteer, and learned that the aged in the other community were engaged in activities that made a real difference to their lives. They observed these activities and the service centre, and became enthusiastic about incorporating a similar structure and the same activities into their community. The Kgautswane aged had thus become a role model for them.

Following the visit to Kgautswane, they began to sell the idea to other aged within the community. They realised that, though they were regarded as old by the community, they could make life more meaningful for themselves. However, despite their desire to establish a centre, the aged had no real knowledge of what was required. They then approached me and requested that I explain the operations of a service centre, the activities related to a centre, and the resources needed to establish a centre.

I am a social worker employed by the State Department of Health and Welfare in the southern region of the Northern Province of South Africa. I have worked with the Mathabatha community for the past seven years, and am well known in the community. The

research was initiated after two contacts with the aged as the process of establishing a centre was of interest to both parties, that is, the aged and myself. After discovering that the participants would be engaged in a development process, I found that the participatory action research approach was best suited to the project.

The group of aged are referred to by means of the abbreviation 'P' in order to avoid specifically naming the group. The primary interest of the aged was to develop a service centre where they could engage in different activities. The 'P' group consists of 22 members, all living in the Makgoba community. This community has a total population of 1144, and is situated along the main provincial road from Pietersburg to Burgersfort.

### **1.3 Objectives of the study**

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To learn how the participatory process contributed to the development of the rural aged.
- To contribute to the body of knowledge of participatory action research.
- To reflect on the potential of the aged to change their life-style.

### **1.4 Research questions**

The questions to be addressed in this study are outlined below:

- How was participation among the aged established?
- How can the aged contribute to the development of a service centre?

## 1.5 Reasons for choice of participatory action research

Since I am a community worker who believes in human potential and the right of people to make their own decisions, this influenced my decision to conduct a participatory study. Secondly, I intended to explore the potential of the aged to act independently and to improve their financial situation.

According to Burkey (1993:56), “participation by the people in the institutions and systems which govern their lives is a basic human right, and [is] also essential for realignment of political power in favour of the disadvantaged groups, and for social and economic development”. I agree with Burkey’s ideas as the aged are one of the disadvantaged groups, particularly those in rural areas.

Collins (1999:20) states that “participatory research (PR) in community development enables the facilitator and communities to know one another, to identify strengths in the community, to decide what changes are to be made, to carry out certain changes and to monitor them according to the community’s own frame of reference”.

I also agree with the view presented by Freire (1994) and other theorists such as Chambers (1992) and Rahman (1993), who argue that people cannot be liberated by a consciousness other than their own.

In further support of participatory action research (PAR)<sup>1</sup>, Burkey (1993:35) states that “development in any meaningful sense must begin with, and within, the individual”. Furthermore, he argues that development is “a process by which an individual develops self respect, and becomes more confident, self reliant, cooperative, and tolerant of others

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<sup>1</sup> The terms *participatory action research (PAR)* and *participatory research (PR)* are used interchangeably in this study.

becoming aware of his or her shortcomings, as well as his or her potential for positive change". (Burkey 1993:35.)

After careful consideration, I decided that the use of a participatory approach would assist both the researcher and the aged in coping with the daily living situation during the project, and would allow for the sharing of ideas, and for the empowerment of the general community.

## **1.6 Research method**

There were 22 members of the participatory action research group in total. The five initial members who went to Kgautswane recruited other aged by relating stories of their experiences of the activities in a service centre. The dominant method used to collect data was through group discussions aimed at facilitating participation among members. I explained to the group that I would be facilitating the process, as requested by the members of the group, and each member would be expected to participate. The different techniques of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) were explained to them and demonstrated by means of role play. This method was accepted by the members as they felt that they would all be engaged in the process.

Mapping of the community and its resources was used to determine the environment in which members were lived. A ground plan of the community was laid out, with stones used to represent each household as well as the churches, schools, football grounds, cemetery and the police station. The ground plan or map was explained through story telling, in which the history of the community was discussed. Individual interviews were held with the aim of exploring the feelings and needs of individual members. The proceedings of each meeting were recorded in writing and confirmed by the group at the start of the next session.

## **1.7 Value of the research**

The study will explain the process of empowering the 'P' aged group through enhancing their personal capacity and self worth, and enabling them to become aware of their potential to meet their needs through participation and ownership of development.

## **1.8 Stakeholders**

Stakeholders, as defined by Collins (1999), are people not directly involved in the PR project, but who are influential in its decisions and activities. The 'P' aged group established links with stakeholders both within and outside the community. The identities and roles of the stakeholders are described below:

- (a) The church. The minister visited the members on a weekly basis to offer spiritual support. He also helped to construct the roof of the building.
- (b) The social worker. The local social worker visited the members on a regular basis, established links between them and resources such as the South African Council for the Aged, and offered counseling services.
- (c) The volunteers. Three volunteers worked in the centre. They assisted with the administrative work, attended meetings, provided training in the care of the frail aged, and facilitated the daily activities of the centre.
- (d) The youth. They assisted in the production of mud bricks and in the roofing of the temporary structure.
- (e) The tribal office. They were always supportive to the members and assisted in the allocation of the building site.

- (f) The agricultural officer. He assisted the members in their acquisition of land by processing the application for a site and following it through until it was approved.
- (g) The community and the families. All members of the community and the families of the aged supported the initiatives of the group. They assisted with household work when the aged were engaged at the centre, and were frequently spectators at the activities of the group.

All the stakeholders were supportive. Power issues did not dominate the process since people in the community still respect each other. As leader of the community, the headman was consulted on all issues affecting the activities of the participants. This contributed to the development of the process without undue influence from the stakeholders.

## **1.9 Punctuation of action and reflection cycle**

### **1.9.1 Initial phase**

Initially, the focus of the project was on establishing contact with members of the 'P' aged group. I introduced a period of reflection, during which members were encouraged to explore their needs. Finally, an action phase was established, which required members to rank their needs and to decide on an action policy on the basis of these needs.

### **1.9.2 Middle phase**

During this phase, the relationships and degree of participation among members developed through the facilitation of the researcher. At this stage, the reflection and action phases which had been initiated earlier in the project were continued. In the course of the reflection phase, the participants continued to explore options on how to implement the priorities they had set for themselves, while the action phase addressed the implementation of the action policies.

### **1.9.3 End phase**

The end phase was when members were able to implement most of the actions decided upon. At this stage, the reflection phase focused on the experiences they had had since the beginning of the process, and examined both the successes and failures. Since community development is a process, the action phase, at this stage, reflected on the implementation of the actions decided on by the participants. These actions were evaluated with regard to their role in achieving the goals which had been set, and in the general success of the project.

### **1.10 Structure of the dissertation**

This dissertation comprises:

- Chapter 1, in which background information to the research is outlined. This includes the research questions, the objectives of the study, reasons for conducting participatory research, research methods, the value of the research, the stakeholders and the research process.
- Chapter 2, in which the literature on the research approach and concepts to be explored in the empirical research are reviewed.
- Chapter 3, in which the participatory reflection and action processes are outlined.
- Chapter 4, in which the objectives and research questions are reviewed, and the conclusions drawn on the basis of the findings are considered.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature review**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

According to Collins (1999:42-43) a literature review is conducted to obtain current information on the problem area. It relates to information and aspects relevant to the context under study. In this chapter, further concepts which relate to the participatory research and the rural aged having the potential to establish a service centre will be examined so that these issues can be linked to the empirical research.

I found it difficult to obtain relevant literature on this topic as most of it relates to the American black aged community, and as such is not relevant to our situation. There appears to be less research on the empowerment and development of the black rural aged in South Africa, and more on the care and the needs of the black aged. This research, however, does not take into consideration the potential ability of this group to care for themselves.

The purpose of this study is to consider how the rural aged developed through participatory facilitation in the establishment of a service centre.

The following concepts are considered in this study:

- " Participatory research
- " Participation
- " Community development process
- " Aged/The elderly
- " Rural aged
- " The service centre
  
- " Realising potential
- " Development and change.

## **2.2 Participatory action research**

According to Collins (1999:18), participatory research starts with the concerns of the community. Fagor (in Burkey 1993:59), states that “broader participation can lead to stronger consensus for change, and sounder models arrived at through broader participation are likely to integrate the interest of more stakeholder groups”.

Burkey (1993:60) states that the first step in involving poor people in participation in their own development is what is most often called participatory action research (PAR), which is a process of conscientisation. He gives two preliminary objectives of PAR:

- " to increase the development worker's understanding of the local situation; and
- " to increase the insight of the local people, especially the poor, into what factors and relationships are the root cause factors, and contributing factors to their poverty.

### **2.2.1 Value principles of participatory action research**

According to McTaggart (1997:28), PAR is, in principle, a group activity. Participation in research is conceptualised, practiced and brought to bear on the life work. It means ownership, that is, responsible agency in the production of knowledge and improvement of practice.

Rajesh Tandon (1988, in McTaggart 1997:29) identified several determinants of authentic participation in research. These are outlined below:

- " people's role in setting the agenda of the enquiry;
- " people's participation in the data collection and analysis; and
- " people's control over the use of outcomes.

Considering the above determinants of participation, one may argue that the people are actually conducting the research for themselves and reflecting on its nature from their perspective.

McTaggart (1997:31) identified the following principles in relation to PAR:

### **2.2.1.1 Identification of the individual and collective project**

Mctaggart (1997) argues that PAR is concerned simultaneously with changing individuals on the one hand, and on the other, the culture of the groups, institutions and societies to which they belong. Individuals and groups agree to work together to change themselves, individually and collectively.

The individual is an actor, but his or her acts are framed and understood in a social context of interaction. Changing social action usually requires also changing the ways others interact with us, that is, patterns of interaction that are a second aspect of the culture of the group. Changing social relationships usually requires that others also change their perspective on the ways we relate to them and how our relationships with them fit into the broader fabric of relationships which structure the society (Mctaggart 1997).

### **2.2.1.2 PAR entails collective action**

According to Schenck (1996:196), PAR requires collective action by the community and the researcher and it becomes the learning process for both parties.

### **2.2.1.3 PAR is micro research**

Schenck (1996:197) states that since community development is micro development, PR is a micro study of what happens within a particular community. It is local and contextual and the results cannot be generalised to other communities.

### **2.2.1.4 PAR is cost effective**

Chambers (1983:62) says that, while it is easy to work out the cost of the research in terms of transport, paper, salaries, and so on, the actual yield of participatory action research is less tangible; things like growth and appreciation on the part of the community, and knowledge and insight on the part of the researcher.

### **2.2.1.5 PAR cannot be fully preplanned**

According to Schenck (1996:197), because the researcher plans and executes the study with the community, the method and contents of the study cannot be decided in advance.

### **2.2.1.6 PAR involves dialogue and interaction with the community**

Schenck (1996) further says that we hardly need to point out that PAR is a process that requires constant dialogue and interaction between researcher and the community. It calls for meaningful relationships built over a period. This kind of research cannot be rushed.

### **2.2.2 Research phases in PR**

Collins (1999:42-43) defined each phase of the research process, placing it in the context of participatory research (PR). These phases assist the researcher during the participatory process, and are as follows:

#### **2.2.2.1 Formulation of the problem**

In PR, we think together about the area to be investigated and we share the task of examining the literature. In addition the members' own experiences form part of the area to be investigated.

#### **2.2.2.2 Design of the study**

In PR, we plan how we are going to apply our own experience to answer our own questions and what action we are going to take to achieve our objectives. In our planning, we also look at the environment outside our PR group. We could decide on the design of a survey, case study or experiment for certain stages of the study.

In PR, the planning is done jointly by the group and regular, ongoing meetings are held throughout the research project.

#### **2.2.2.3 Collection of data**

In PR, members help to collect data based on their own experiences. Sometimes in PR the group may decide that additional data from outside samples and other stakeholders will be useful.

#### **2.2.2.4 Processing of data**

In PR, data are processed, presented and recorded at every meeting. They are usually generated by discussion, placed on a board or flip chart, and confirmed by general agreement within the group. This involves in-depth discussion of alternative ways of interpreting the results. The various interpretations are placed in the context of the situation from which they were obtained and where they will be applied.

#### **2.2.2.5 Writing the research report**

In PR, the initiator usually takes the responsibility for writing the report and then obtains feedback for modification of the report from members.

The report can be written in stages as the research proceeds, because data presentation with feedback occurs at every meeting in phase 4. Participants meet for reflection to discuss what is to be investigated (phase 1), how it is to be investigated (phase 2), which aspects of experience will be sought (phase 3), how this experience will be thought about (phase 4), and what perspectives are to be written up (phase 5). After the meeting, decisions taken are put into action for a period specified. The meeting of reflection is, therefore, influenced by the action which preceded it.

Action and reflection arise from and give rise to one another. This cycle is continued until the participants agree that sufficient reflection-action has taken place to make a difference to the research community.

### **2.3 Community development process**

The researcher was guided by Swanepoel's (1992) community development process which was integrated during the participatory action research.

Swanepoel (1992:31-106) explains the community development process that needs to be followed by the community worker when facilitating community work. These are outlined below:

### **2.3.1 Establishing contact**

According to Swanepoel, the contact-making phase is the most important in community development. It has two main goals: the people must get to know and accept the community worker, and the community worker must become aware of the prevailing needs in the area.

### **2.3.2 The survey**

The community worker and the people must establish what the needs are, how they are linked, and whether one need is the result of or leads to another need. Research may therefore be necessary to get absolute clarity on the needs to be addressed. Another reason for the community members to participate in research is that they are most familiar with their circumstances and their environment.

### **2.3.3 Needs identification**

The most important thing about needs identification is the absolute necessity that people forming the action group feel that need. The identified need must be a matter of grave concern to them. It is quite clear that needs identification is a critical phase in a community development project. In the first place consensus must be sought on the identified need, and in the second place everyone involved must know exactly what need is going to be tackled in a project.

### **2.3.4 Resource planning**

Human resource is one of the needs to be identified as human potential is necessary in certain programmes.

Manufactured, natural and organisational resources are also important. It is important to establish who has authority over manufactured resources to enable the community to make use of them. The societal structures influencing a society are very important organisational resources which make the utilisation of all other resources possible.

### **2.3.5 Planning**

Planning means bringing together three elements - needs, resources and objectives - and then relating them to a fourth element - that of action. Planning cannot provide a blueprint. It is instead a learning process where every decision or action is formulated in the light of an assessment of a previous action. Only in this way can the community development process be a continuous learning process for those participating in it. There must be short term and long term planning.

### **2.3.6 Implementation**

The implementation should take place according to a plan. Circumstances do change between the formulation of a plan and its implementation. The role of the community worker in this stage is to facilitate the group in translating decisions into actions.

### **2.3.7 Evaluation**

Without evaluation community development cannot be a learning process. As a learning process, community development needs course adjustment from time to time. The continuous evaluation will establish a critical disposition to the action which will enhance the learning process.

## **2.4 Participation**

According to Burkey (1993:56), participation is an essential part of human growth, that is, development of self confidence, pride, initiative, creativity, responsibility and cooperation. This is a process whereby people learn to take charge of their own lives and solve their own problems - it is the essence of development. He further states that participation is essentially a "learning-by-doing" exercise: plans are made, action is taken, results are studied, lessons learned and new plans and action take place.

Thurz, Nusberg & Prather (1995: 140) state that ideally, greater participation and empowerment of a group such as the older persons would only depend on their desire and strength to improve their situation. Organisations, even in the process of their initiation and development, enable older persons to define objectives and arrive at consensus.

## 2.5 Aged/Ageing

Lawton (1989:3), who writes on South African conditions, defines ageing as a social group, or even subgroupings within the aged segment. He further defines ageing as a period in the lifespan (Hurlock 1968:777) caused by physiological, occupational, social and psychological changes as a person reaches this stage in life. It may also be culturally determined.

Lawton further mentions four aspects of ageing, one of which is relevant to the rural aged, that is, social support. It is said that most older people are strongly integrated into the networks of family, friends and the larger social structure. If we look at the social relationships from the negative aspect, that is, isolation, old age as a time of isolation is a negative stereotype that has been repeatedly disconfirmed (Lawton 1989:3).

Lawton (1989) proposes that the way the aged are viewed by the larger society may have a major impact on how they share their country's resources. The generational equity movement promotes two opposite varieties of age stereotype: the aged as sick, and therefore high consumers of health care, and the old, on the other hand, as 'fat cats'. Eales (in Ntsoma 1991:20) points out that the stereotype and misconceptions that the elderly people in South Africa are useless, frail, sick, feeble-minded and unable to live independent and worthwhile lives are invalid.

## 2.6 Rural aged

According to Lawton (1989:41), the term *rural* refers to a community where tradition influences the attitude of people. Dubazana (1989:37) states that the elderly in traditional Zulu society formed an integral part of the extended family. They were highly respected and performed certain functions that were specifically assigned to them by tribal convention.

The elderly in traditional society formed an integral part of the kingship system which made full provision for them (Dubazana 1985:37). Within the extended family there was communal sharing and every person had a function to perform according to their age and status.

In the economic realm Dubazana (1989) states that the elderly coped with adjustment problems because they were relieved of some duties. Nevertheless, they contributed actively to the livestock and the children whose mothers were cultivating.

With regard to politics, Lawton (1989:38) states that elderly males played an important role in the affairs of the tribe. They assisted the Chief or headman and his counselors in reaching policy decisions on all matters. He further states that traditional black society in South Africa has been exposed to rapid social change since European colonisation and the discovery of diamond and gold in the latter part of the 19th century. The effect of this change on the elderly is outlined below.

The aged in rural areas face a number of economic problems as a result of poverty. The incidence of poverty, according to Lawton (1989:39), is interwoven with the decline in agricultural productivity which can be ascribed to such factors as poor land use, topography and a migratory system.

If they do receive some financial relief, for example, social pension, this amount appears to be shared by all members of the extended family (*personal observation*). Because of poverty, most of them suffer from deficiency-related diseases as they do not have a balanced diet. Their only diet is maize (Lawton 1989).

Lawton (1989:39) argues that black elderly persons in rural areas cope relatively well with interpersonal problems owing to the help provided by the supportive networks in the community. They receive support from neighbours and they extend support to each other. The community as a whole is helpful in that it looks after the elderly. In other words, there is community participation in the care of the elderly in rural areas.

## **2.7 The service centre**

According to King (1985, in Chikanda 1987:11), writing in a first world context, a day care centre includes the provision of service centres which offer social, cultural and leisure activities, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, pedicure, baths, meals, diet advice and social counseling. Day centres also take on post-hospital care, fulfil an alarm-monitoring function, relieve families, and provide a break for the elderly person from their family.

Conrad, Hanrahan & Hughes (1990:37) say that adult day care is a community-based group program that is designed to meet the needs of functionally impaired adults through an individual plan. It is a comprehensive program that provides a variety of health, social and related support services to groups of adult clients in a protective setting during any part of the day, although not 24 hours per day.

It is increasingly regarded as a promising long term care option because it provides regular and reliable respite to informal caregivers. It may also foster their continued workforce participation (Winfield 1987 in Conrad, Hanrahan and Hughes 1990:37)) while providing care for clients in a less restrictive setting than an institution. Furthermore, it provides important peer group support and social interaction benefits not associated with other types of care such as home care.

According to Chinkanda (1987:10), the concept 'service centre' is relatively new to the black urban aged in South Africa. She defined a service centre as a building where aged people go for different services such as meals, recreation, medical attention and social welfare services. A service centre provides a wide variety of services to meet the needs of the aged, the basic principle being to have a variety of services all under one roof and within easy access of the aged person.

The service centre at Mathabatha will differ slightly from the above description as the centre depends on resources in the community and on their life style. According to the participants, a service centre is a place where they share common interests and are occupied with different activities. Most of the services are designed by the aged, with the result that they are implemented without explicit guidance from other centres or from other aged groups.

## **2.8 Realisation of potential**

According to Strom & Strom (1992:35), some grandparents underestimate their potential. These persons have not given much thought to how they could contribute more to their family and the community. Strom & Strom (1992) suggest that a more respectful way to treat this talented group is to provide them with opportunities to learn how to succeed in their present role. Adults need to take the initiative for building close intergenerational relationships.

so that the ageing of the individual influences the context within which it occurs and vice versa.

Elderly people might possess unique skills, qualities and experiences that the society could use to its advantage. On the other hand, the society might provide opportunities for the elderly to cope with some of their needs.

Morris & Bader (1983:267) state that it has been clearly illustrated in the wealth of literature available that there is tremendous potential for learning in older people. Thurz et al. (1995:138) also argue that, for the elderly, self reliance involves the process of discovering and identifying their innate and potential strength, in addition to a growing sense of self worth and self confidence that it is possible to bring about changes in their personal lives, as well as in the conditions that affect them. It also includes the development of abilities to identify internal and external resources available to them, to learn to stand up on their own, to tolerate failures, and to move at their own pace. They further argue that the perception of the aged as a passive, consuming, and economically unproductive population persists even though research has shown that they potentially have a high degree of autonomy in decision making.

## **2.9 Development and change**

According to Burkey (1993:48), development is more than the provision of social services and introduction of new technologies. It involves change in the awareness, motivation and behaviour of individuals in the relations between groups within a society. These changes must come from within the individual and the groups, and cannot be imposed from the outside. Change will not take place unless there is concern among the group attempting to carry out the transformation. Burkey (1993) further states that through internal dialogue, the group must sort out the options available to it and choose those that are consistent with their own social framework. Changes must be socially acceptable to the group as a whole.

The United Nations defined development as the satisfaction of the universally "felt needs" of the communities, among which the following were identified (Harman 1988:29):

- " basic human needs (adequate food, shelter, health care, education and employment)
- " sense of dignity of being human

- " a sense of becoming
- " a sense of justice or equity
- " a sense of achievement related to something worth achieving
- " participation in decisions that affect the groups one's own destiny.

## **2.10 Conclusion**

The literature review was of importance as the concepts discussed relate to the process followed during the participatory action research. Swanepoel's (1992) community development process served as a guide for the work with the community that formed the basis of this study.

Collins' (1999) stages of participatory research were followed during the PAR process. These stages thus guided the approach of both the researcher and the participants, and served as framework for the writing of reports. The literature review provides the context in terms of which the concepts applied in the following chapter may be understood.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Participatory action research process**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The chapter will cover the data collected during each participatory meeting. The data was recorded by means of process notes taken during the contact periods with the participants. The record of what was discussed and observed during the meetings was confirmed by the participants.

This chapter provides a description of the theory on which the facilitation was based, the methods used and the ways in which concerns were addressed through facilitation and actions decided upon by the participants. In addition, this chapter explores three phases of the action reflection cycle. Background information on the community and the entering phase are outlined to enable the reader to understand the context in which this project is situated.

#### **3.2 Community profile**

The project was based on a community of 22 aged people staying in Makgoba village. They shared the need to come together with the common goal to establish a service centre. Makgoba is a rural community in which the members are held together by common values, affection, mutual dependency, respect and a sense of status hierarchy (Kramer & Specht 1975:28).

The Makgoba community is situated approximately 95 kilometers south-east of Pietersburg, along the Olifants river. The community seems to be culturally focused in the sense that people still adhere strongly to their cultural norms, customs and beliefs. As an example, the Induna is still regarded as the powerful leader of the tribe. During the mourning period, all the daily activities in the community are suspended until the burial has taken place. The aged, as the participants in the participatory action research, spend most of their time looking after children, ploughing fields and assisting with other household work in the family.

Their source of income is a pension grant received monthly from the Department of Health and Welfare. This money is utilised to buy food for the extended family and to pay school fees for the grandchildren.

### **3.3 Entering the community**

Although I met some of the participants for the first time at the beginning of the research process, I am known as a community worker in other sectors of the community.

I entered the community with the purpose of familiarising myself with the participants and the community. This aim was communicated to the participants, whom I then asked to tell me more about themselves and the community. In turn, I told the participants about myself and my role in the community. The participatory rural appraisal technique was used to break the initial silence among the members. During the first five contacts, members of the group were engaged in mapping their community and shared with me their goal to establish a service centre together. A great deal of discussion emanated during the mapping process which helped the researcher and the participants to become familiar with one another and to learn more about the community in which they live. As a result, relationships among members of the group developed during the entering phase as members began to know each other better during their discussions.

I learned more about different structures within the community, resources available and the concerns the participants had within their community. I was introduced to structures which came to be regarded as stakeholders in the participatory action research.

Through warmth, empathy and respect, I was able to establish a strong relationship with the participants and the community at large.

### **3.4 Theory**

I was guided by Rogers' (1987) theory of the person centred approach, where one needs to understand the community's frame of reference. The skills warmth, congruence and empathy were used for the project following Rogers' argument that the conditions for a warm climate promote individual growth and that the approach of the researcher to the community enables the community members to grow and develop.

Swanepoel's (1992) community development process also guided the facilitation of the research process. According to Swanepoel (1992:3), community development is a learning process, and through facilitation the participants are able to share their concerns, ideas and needs.

Participatory rural appraisal techniques were also used to facilitate the process in encouraging the participants to say more about their community through mapping, showing what resources were available, what interests them, and what the conditions of life in the community are.

Schenck (1996:96) states that participatory rural appraisal is an excellent method for getting to know the community, its context and its frame of reference. I used these techniques throughout the research process, with the person-centred theory as the base line approach.

The research phases described by Collins (1999:42-43) guided the research and were placed in the context of PAR throughout the research process. The phases were used in all the stages following Swanepoel's (1992) community work process.

Participatory principles were also of value as they help the participants and the researcher to understand the situation, to determine the needs of the community, and to plan how to meet those needs.

### **3.5 Initial phase**

#### **3.5.1 Formulation of the problem**

The initial phase of the participatory action research focused on the participants saying more about their needs.

During the first three contact periods, I facilitated the establishment of relationships with the participants with the aim of encouraging the participants to learn more about each other. I observed that more dialogue occurred during the third contact period, as the participants began to share more information about their community.

The themes identified in the course of these discussions are outlined below:

- To be together as aged with the purpose of reducing boredom.
- To gain self confidence, self esteem and self worth.
- To build relationships with other aged structures.
- To be respected and recognised.
- To address the lack of water in the community.

It was established that the participants experienced boredom as they were constantly engaged in similar household activities. In addition, they felt that members of the community did not regard them as having the potential to create their own way of life that would build their self worth and dignity.

### **3.5.2 Method**

The mapping of the community enabled the researcher to understand the needs of the participants and their environment better. As the themes emerged, the researcher probed further to understand the underlying messages more clearly.

The researcher was empathetic throughout the process so that the circumstances of the participants could be understood. The participants were encouraged to think positively about their abilities so that they could do something about their concerns and needs.

### **3.5.3 Findings**

As the themes were identified, members were challenged to come forward with ideas to meet their needs. Each theme was explained to members so that they could identify actions to be carried out in order to meet their identified needs.

The following activities were suggested and prioritised:

- forming an organised group
- identifying organisations with which to network
- learning the daily activities such as physical exercises, sewing and knitting
- identifying a site
- preparing the site and brick making
- fundraising
- building of the structures (service centre)
- making the centre known to the community.

The participants felt that, if they could implement the identified activities, they would be able to live an independent life and be respected in the community.

### **3.6 Middle phase**

#### **3.6.1 Formulation of the problem**

During this phase the participants were encouraged to come up with ideas on how to achieve the stated activities. Each activity was discussed and the following suggestions were made and later agreed by the participants as areas on which to focus:

- (a) The participants decided that, in order to be organised, they should form themselves into a group called the 'P' aged club; this group was to meet five days a week.
- (b) The structures with which they would network were identified as follows:
  - the Kgautswane aged club - formed in order to network and to learn the daily activities.
  - the South African Council of the Aged - in order to become affiliated and to learn new perspectives on ageing.
  - the Department of Health and Welfare - would provide counseling by a social worker and would facilitate the activities of the centre.
  - the churches - the minister would offer spiritual talks and weekly prayers.
  - the Department of Agriculture - to assist with gardening skills and with the allocation of a site.
  - the Department of Water Affairs - to assist with provision of clean water to the community.
  - the Tribal office - to offer support and provision of land.
  - the community youth structures - to assist with brick making.

- (c) **Learning the daily activities.** The facilitator was requested to share with the participants activities which she knew they could engage in. All activities relevant to the aged were identified and the participants decided on those with which they would engage. These activities were as follows:
- physical exercises
  - morning prayer
  - Bible study
  - arts and crafts
  - educational talks
  - home visits once weekly to support the frail and sick aged.
- (d) **Application for a site.** A site was identified by the participants near the Chief's kraal. The headman of the village was approached and the site was allocated to them. Formal application was done through the agricultural officer. The application was then sent to the Magistrate for approval.
- (e) **Preparation for a site.** The participants agreed to start preparing the ground of the site. Two weeks was allocated to clean the yard. During this time, the group decided to start making bricks with the assistance of the youth. The participants decided that they would divide themselves into two groups, one to fetch water and the other to mix soil for brick making.
- (f) **Building the structure.** The participants decided to build a one-roomed house as a temporary structure to accommodate their daily activities. They found that they were able to build the wall and the church minister assisted with roofing. The following resources were identified as available for the task:
- soil
  - water
  - brick making tools
  - people to make bricks and to build the structure

zink to roof the structure.

(g) **Fund-raising.** The participants realised that, to complete the structure, they needed to have funds as all the material was not available. They decided to contribute R12.00 monthly which would be used to buy additional material, tea and bread for their morning snack, and pay travelling costs. They also planned to register as a Non Profit Organisation to enable them to raise funds to build a permanent structure. In addition, they decided to sell lunch packs during pay days next to their meeting place. Each of them volunteered to contribute 4kg of mielie-meal and utensils. For any other needs they decided to use the funds that would be contributed on a monthly basis.

(h) **Awareness campaign.** The participants planned to organise a function to celebrate their success as soon as they had completed the structure. The purpose of this celebration was to make all community members aware of the potential of the aged people. They also planned to visit the local creches to embark on story-telling sessions which would raise awareness of their abilities.

### **3.6.2 Method**

All the above activities were discussed by the participants and ranked according to priorities that would suit their aspirations. The project plan was facilitated through discussion and drawings which fostered participation among the participants. The problem posing method was used to sensitise the participants and encourage them to explore options regarding the available resources to be used in the implementation of the project.

All the suggested activities and the implementation processes were written down and deliberated with the members to confirm what they had discussed.

### **3.6.3 Findings**

During this phase, the participants implemented the activities agreed upon. They started to meet on a daily basis, five days in a week in the Chief's kraal. They learned daily activities such as physical exercises for two weeks, after which they were able to do the exercises on their own.

Other activities like arts and crafts were implemented through their own creativity as they had more experience with handwork items. The facilitator learned more about the creation of traditional items that were made by the participants.

The volunteers were requested to inform all the identified stakeholders about the existence of the group and the intention of establishing a service. The contribution requested from each stakeholder was mentioned in the letters sent to them. Later they were invited to the kraal to observe the activities and to discuss the objectives of the participants in establishing a service centre.

The headman, the agricultural officer, the church minister and the local social worker were invited to contribute their skills and knowledge to the project and they all agreed to work together with them.

The researcher was requested to link the members with the South African Council of the Aged, and the participants were invited to monthly meetings and were informed about its activities. They were affiliated to the Council after a month, and became fully-fledged members. Their involvement as members of the Council benefitted them as they were trained in physical exercises suited to the elderly. They felt that they had been recognised by the Council on receiving a donation of sewing material. The result of this donation was an increase in enthusiasm as the participants were eager to know more about the activities of the Council. They then started to establish contact with other aged structures.

A daily plan was formulated and all the stakeholders taking part were given a copy. The plan was then implemented as intended. The members started to arrive at their meeting place at 08h00, and the first activities were the physical exercises learned from the researcher and the training organised by the Council.

The activity stimulated interest in the community members, with the result that they would come to observe the participants. This boosted the morale of the participants as they were venturing into a new life.

The morning prayer was also conducted daily and members resumed the responsibility of reading the Bible. In addition, they all sang Christian songs. The prayer by the participants was voluntary, with no persuasion from other members. The Bible study was conducted once in a week by the local church minister who also developed an interest in the activities of the participants. Initially, he would only come once in a week, but later joined them three days in the week if he was not engaged in the church activities in the community.

The morning tea was prepared for two months, but had to be terminated by the participants due to a shortage of funds.

Daily, after the Bible study, they would keep busy with their handwork and more discussion emanated from that session. They updated each other on the community news and shared their concerns about their families. These discussions helped them to develop strong relationships among themselves as they started to become familiar with each other. During the discussions they also identified those older people who should be visited, those who were ill, and the frail, and they practiced the songs to be sung during the visit.

Within three months, the participants felt that they had developed, and that they needed to start building the service centre. They identified a site next to the Chief's kraal. The Headman was approached for permission. He responded positively and gave them the go-ahead.

The agricultural officer was approached and he allocated the site to them. This was an achievement for the participants who expressed their happiness by demonstrating their activities to the agricultural officer. They also performed their favourite songs for him and praised him for the efforts had taken.

The participants became enthusiastic about preparing the site, and started to allocate roles to various members. They divided themselves into two groups, one to fetch water and the

other to make bricks. The yard was cleaned within two days and they started with their plan. Other activities were suspended and they engaged in brickmaking on a daily basis.

They continued to contribute R12.00 monthly, and during pay days sold lunch packs to other aged people. The funds raised helped them to buy material for the building.

They would reflect on the progress made on a daily basis, checking how many bricks they had made. On these grounds they decided to finish the task within three weeks.

Immediately after completing the brickmaking, the youth structure and the church minister were approached to assist with the building of the wall. The youth were excited about their role in the building, and it took two weeks for the wall to be completed. The participants' role was to mix soil for the building process and to hand over the bricks to the youth.

Members of the community were curious about the building and would visit the site regularly to see and understand what was happening.

The participants proudly informed the community members that the centre would allow them to learn and to implement all their activities under the roof. They received more courage from everyone as people wished them good luck.

It took two months to complete the building. The participants then began to carry out their daily activities. Within a month, the Council of the Aged also realised their potential and requested sponsors to build a modern service centre for the participants.

That was received with warm hearts and appreciation by the participants as they felt that their efforts had been acknowledged.

### **3.7 End phase**

#### **3.7.1 Formulation of the problem**

During this phase, the participants evaluated their activities with the purpose of reflecting on their successes and failures. They outlined their plans of action, and each activity was evaluated. Later the resources used to implement the action plans were also identified.

#### **3.7.2 Method**

The participants evaluated all the activities performed. The activities were ranked according to initial priority and evaluated once they were able to achieve the initial objectives.

The evaluation was done through group discussions in which members were sorted into five groups. Each group was allocated activities to evaluate. The researcher facilitated the evaluation process in which she questioned the participants on all the activities they had decided to implement during the beginning of the PAR process. The discussions were recorded by the researcher and later confirmed with the members.

#### **3.7.3 Findings**

The findings of the evaluation process by the participants are presented below:

- The participants were able to organise themselves as a group which has an identity as the 'P' aged group. This promoted their self worth and dignity in the community as far as they were concerned.

They successfully learned their daily activities which they then implemented on a daily basis to improve their health.

Figure 1: Participants demonstrating physical exercises in front of their mud-built service centre.



- They were able to build a mud-roomed house which served as a symbol of their strength and growth.
- Their communication with the South African Council of the Aged was effective as they were donated funds to erect a structure.

- They were also able to raise limited funds through selling lunch packs and the contributions of money on a monthly basis. They regarded themselves as having potential and creativity when reflecting on all that they had achieved since the beginning of the process.
- The contribution of other stakeholders was seen as a support of the elderly by the community, with the result that they felt respected, recognised, and loved.

#### **3.7.4 Planning for action**

The participants felt that, given the support they had received from the community, they needed to show their appreciation. They decided to invite all community members and the stakeholders to the official opening of the centre. They thought that this would be a way to thank the community. The date was set and different roles were allocated to members to make sure that the day was a success.

They felt that there was still more to learn as, during visits and contacts with other aged groups, new activities were observed. They realised that their potential for growth and development was endless.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Conclusion**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the conclusions drawn from the learning experiences by both the researcher and the participants of the project. The objectives and questions formulated at the beginning of the research process will be examined to verify that they have been answered by the participatory action research process.

#### **4.2 Objectives of the research**

- (a) To learn how the participatory process contributed to the development of the rural aged.

The Makgoba aged spent many years engaged in household work with the result that they found life boring and their self esteem was low. They did not realise that they could contribute more to the development and growth of their life style rather than being burdened by the household responsibilities of their children.

Collins (1999) mentioned that participatory research starts within the concerns of the community. The researcher's approach to the process was participatory, a view supported by Burkey (1993), who states that the first step in involving the people in participation in their own development is what is most often called participatory action research. This is a process of conscientisation.

Burkey (1993) further supports the view that broader participation leads to stronger consensus for change and the sounder model arrived at through broader

participation is likely to integrate the interest of more stakeholder groups.

This supports the findings of the participatory action research process. With the 'P' aged group as stakeholders, they participated in the development of the service centre and so played a major role in the process.

Through mapping of the community, the participants' communication and participation improved as they were able to share information. It fostered constant dialogue and interaction which contributed to sharing of ideas, common understanding and development in themselves. It was an interesting process to observe as the researcher probed in an attempt to understand the local situation, the experiences of the participants and how they view their situation.

The participatory action research with the 'P' aged group was found to be valuable for the disempowered community as it provided room for growth and development.

Through facilitation the participants were able to think differently. They used their talents and experiences to identify their needs, what was required to achieve these needs, and what resources were available for the implementation of their plan.

- (b) To contribute to the body of knowledge of participatory action research.

If one considers the process developed since the initiation of the project, the participatory action research with the 'P' aged group has contributed to the body of knowledge surrounding this approach. The research changed the perception of older people as dependent, isolated and a burden to the community. They were able to show their potential through participation and facilitation.

The person centred approach also contributed to the effective change made through the participatory action research approach as the researcher was empathetic

throughout the process. The learning experience of the research process will help other researchers and readers to see its value in empowering the communities to do things on their own.

- (c) To reflect the potential of the aged in changing their life style.

After realising their need to change their life style, the aged of Makgoba were able to come together and approach the researcher through the support of the volunteer to assist them in the facilitation of the group.

Through facilitation, they were able to identify their needs, prioritise them and develop a plan of action which enabled them to achieve their need to build a service centre. The potential among the aged confirms Strom & Strom's (1992) view that these persons have not given much thought to how they could contribute more to their family and the community. He further states that a more respectful way to treat this talented group is to provide them opportunities to learn how they can succeed in their present role.

The Makgoba aged were able to express what they know and their experiences in the community. Themes emerged during the process that helped them to identify their priority needs. Ranking and time use analysis also empowered them to decide on the action plans and the activities which would enable them to achieve their goal of establishing a service centre. They were able to decide on time frames, and during every process reached consensus which built strong relationships amongst them.

During the whole process of participatory action research, they were able to think differently and they used their talents and experiences to identify resources that they needed to achieve their plans, make their own decisions and display their unique skills that are not usually recognised in a community. They contributed a great deal and made a difference in their lives.

Thurz et al. (1995:138) confirm that, for old people, self reliance involves the process of discovering and identifying their innate and potential strength, and a growing sense of self worth and self confidence that is possible to bring about changes in their personal lives, as well as in the conditions that affect them. They further argue that the perception of the aged as passive, consuming, and economically unproductive population persists even though research has proved that they potentially have a high degree of autonomy in decision making.

In conclusion, the involvement of the 'P' aged in the participatory research process has fostered growth and recognition with the result that they felt respected in the community. This in turn boosted their morale and motivated them to make sure that they always implement what was agreed upon.

At the end of the research process, their way of life was different as they were engaged in different activities that made a change to their lifestyles.

#### **4.3 Research questions**

- (a) The first research question relating to the participatory action research process with the 'P' aged group to be addressed is how participation unfolded among the participants.

Ntsoma (1991) mentioned that we need to remember that elderly people are not simply passive figures in the process of ageing. This view was confirmed by the 'P' aged group as they were able to organise themselves and establish a service centre. Because of their enthusiasm, the 'P' aged group wanted to live an active life, like the aged of Kgautswane. They took the initiative of organising themselves and requested facilitation from the researcher to enable them to accomplish their

vision of building a service centre.

The participants showed a readiness to learn new perspectives that was demonstrated during the mapping process. They were able to understand the process of mapping and they were able to relate what the researcher was facilitating and brought that into the context of their environment.

Reflection on the process was done continuously. This gave the participants more strength to forge forward irrespective of the challenges of having only limited funds to complete their structure.

- (b) The second research question to be addressed is what potential was contributed by the aged in developing the service centre.

Once the participants started with the process of participatory action research, they were able to determine their needs, organise themselves and set goals to achieve their needs. They had spent many years engaged in household work and found life boring and their self esteem low without realising that they could contribute more to the development and growth of their lives.

They were able to utilise the available resources and their experiences to establish a service centre which provided them with the opportunity to spend most of their time engaged in their own creative activities.

The implementation of their action plan boosted their morale and self esteem, particularly when the larger Makgoba community started to realise the potential of the aged people. The researcher and the Makgoba community witnessed the realisation of the potential possessed by this advantaged group, and the community learnt to appreciate that they have desire and strength to improve their situation.

Their efforts were also acknowledged outside the community to the extent that the South African Council of the Aged donated funds to build a better structure for the participants.

#### **4.4 Recommendation**

As I was empowered by the learning experiences during the participatory research with the 'P' aged group, I would recommend examining the underdevelopment in many parts of South Africa. PAR could be utilised in conducting research and promoting development as it should empower most rural people and other aged who have the desire to participate in development. The rural people will be able to voice their needs and implement their own plans to suit their environment.

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