Religious Research as Kingpin in the fight against Poverty and AIDS in the Western Cape, South Africa

Johannes C Erasmus, H Jurgens Hendriks, Gerbrand Mans

ABSTRACT

This article describes a research methodology development process that took place in the Unit for Religion and Development Research (URDR). The URDR is part of the Department of Practical Theology and Missiology at the Stellenbosch University in South Africa. The process started by involving faith-based organisations (FBOs) in an interdisciplinary research process. The overall purpose of the research is to address poverty but the article focuses on the problem of the lack of a contextually adapted methodology in which different disciplines and role players are involved. From a methodological point of view, the article focuses on the shortage of accessible data, the participation by the local community in the research process and interdisciplinary co-operation in developing an applicable methodology.

It firstly gives an outline of these challenges, followed by a chronological account of how this approach was applied in two South African communities, Paarl and George as well as the Cape Peninsula. It concludes by describing the results of the research in which the FBOs, NGOs, business and government are working together.

1 Scope and research question

At the end of 2001 the Church and Community Research Project was launched at the Unit for Religion and Development Research (URDR), a Unit in the Department of Practical Theology and Missiology. The vision of the Unit is to empower faith-based organisations (FBOs) to play a positive and constructive role in society. 79.8% of the South African population are associated with the Christian religion (StatsSA Census 2001). Neither the government nor any other NGO can reach and influence the public more regularly and consistently than FBOs. In South Africa the Church is the strongest and most influential non-governmental organisation (NGO) reaching, on average, 63% of the Christian population weekly (World Values Survey 2000, Hendriks & Erasmus 2003). There is a growing consensus that the endemic problems faced in South African society cannot be effective dealt with without the cooperation or even leadership of the church.

1 This material is based upon work supported by the National Research Foundation under Grant Number 2054070. Any opinion, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author and therefore the NRF does not accept any liability in regard thereto.

Financial assistance is acknowledged from the following institutions: Anglican Church, Athlone Institute, BUVTON, DAWN Africa, Hannelie Rupert Getuienisfonds, Mergon Trust, Dutch Reformed Church in Western Cape and the Circuit of the Dutch Reformed Church in Paarl.

2 Prof. H Jurgens Hendriks, Chair Department of Practical Theology and Missiology, University of Stellenbosch, Private Bag X1, Matieland, 7602, South Africa. hjh@sun.ac.za; Dr Johannes C. Erasmus, the same address, is programme manager and researcher at the Unit for Religious and Development Research. egdn@sun.ac.za; Mr Gerbrand Mans, the same address, is research co-ordinator and researcher at the Unit for Religion and Development Research. gmans@sun.ac.za.
The root problem we are addressing is poverty and the different faces of poverty such as unemployment, AIDS, substance abuse, crime and violence, abuse of women and children, etc. This article, however, is focusing on the problem of adapting or developing methodology and methodological skills with which to address the poverty issue.

The purpose of this article is to address three challenges, namely:

- The shortage of accessible data in local communities;
- The participation of the local community in the project; and
- Interdisciplinary co-operation in the project.

The following research question was formulated: what are churches of all denominations in the Paarl and George communities doing to provide services regarding poverty alleviation and what networks exist through which they pursue their goals?

The article describes the theoretical and interdisciplinary research framework and then focuses on a chronological account of how this was applied in the communities of Paarl and George and how it led to a much bigger project, still in progress, in the Cape Peninsula.

2 Methodology

2.1 Introduction

When doing theological research in (Southern) Africa we cannot blindly follow the methodology developed in first world countries. Theology is by its very nature contextual (Hall 1991:69). Ten years after the 1994 miracle of South Africa’s peaceful transition to democracy our challenges are clear and a realistic appraisal of the importance of working together across whatever types of boundaries should be clear. There are limited resources and daunting challenges in Africa. This also applies to universities. Against this background the URDR has the following goals:

- We should strive to develop sustainable communities;
- In order to have sustainable communities, we have to network our resources and develop a holistic approach;
- Universities should play an integral part in interdisciplinary co-operation in the process of developing theory and methodology that is applied in its teaching, research and service.

---

3 Paarl is a prominent town in the Western Cape with 110,000 inhabitants; George is the “capital city” of the Southern Cape with 122,000 inhabitants. The Cape Peninsula is an area with 3.2 million people that we divided in 20 areas of approximately 150,000 people each.

4 After consultation with the community “poverty alleviation” was adapted to refer to more specific aspects of poverty, namely unemployment, HIV/Aids, sexual violence and crimes against women and children, and substance abuse.
2.2 Challenges

2.2.1 Practical Theology and interdisciplinary co-operation

The project is co-ordinated at the URDR, which forms part of the Department of Practical Theology and Missiology. Hence the project's theory is based on Practical Theology as a science and its methodologies. The next question, however, was: how should a project be managed in which theology, sociology and geography are involved?

Van der Ven (1998:1-89) and Heitink (1999:15-170) describe the history and development of Practical Theology. Within theology as a discipline, this sub-discipline may be described as a hive of activity ever since the Enlightenment. By and large one can describe the developments within theology as being the result of the modernisation of society, the influence of the hermeneutical approach and the fundamental philosophical shifts that took place affecting epistemology. Theology is no longer done exclusively in a deductive style with an authoritative ethos.

Van der Ven (1998:89-112) describes different ways in which Practical Theology can relate epistemologically to other sciences, namely in mono-, multi-, inter- and intradisciplinary ways. In a monodisciplinary approach Practical Theology is done in a deductive way, rather authoritatively and in a top-down style, applying theory in practice. There is very little dialogue with the contextual reality. In a multidisciplinary model several scientific disciplines work independently of one another to do research on a problem. Theology then uses the results of the “other social sciences” and becomes highly dependent on the work done by other disciplines. The interdisciplinary approach stresses interaction and co-operation between different social sciences where the researchers work together as a team. Van der Ven (1998:99-101) is doubtful whether this is a viable approach in his European context where the church and theology are experiencing a reality totally different from Africa. He therefore opts for an intradisciplinary approach in which theology has to master the different empirical research methodologies and instruments. We preferred not to take this road and opted for an interdisciplinary approach.

2.2.2 Participation of the local community

Research in South Africa is normally conducted on the basis of small samples taken from the entire population. These results usually do not paint the full picture on a local community level and even less of communities on the fringes of society. The end result is that these data sets are not useful in mobilising local communities for action.

Related to this problem is the unavailability of data and inadequate access to user-friendly data. A specialist researcher is normally expected to deliver a hard-copy report after the project. Such results are usually in technical language and inaccessible to the public. A second reality is that research projects are expensive and the funder tries to sell the data to cover costs. Consequently results are not available to local communities.

We believe that one cannot deal with poverty without involving local communities (Cochrane et al 1991). We needed a methodology that involves local communities. In implementing our approach, we struggled with several questions. What information is needed that will improve both the functioning of churches and the daily lives of people in the community? This question led to other even more pertinent questions. If we have gathered all the information, in what ways
do we make the information accessible to people in the community so that they can verify the results?

We wanted to know in what ways the local community could participate in the project and specifically in ways that would preserve the integrity of their contribution. We realised that the sustainability of the project would depend on the participation of all role players in both the planning and execution of the project. Thus the methodology had to contribute to a process in which the research forms part of the mobilising of the community for change. The research had to empower those involved to transform their communities with this newly acquired information. Since the project is co-ordinated from the Faculty of Theology, we were, at the beginning, mostly concerned with involving faith-based organisations (FBOs).

This way of thinking brought us to the research paradigm of Participatory Action Research (PAR). It was developed during the 1970s and 1980s alongside the two well-known paradigms, namely quantitative and qualitative research. The epistemological roots of PAR are found in critical theory. According to critical theory, the purpose of science is “uncovering the repressive conditions that leave people bound and alienated. [Brian Fay’s] plea is for a social science that will transform the human condition and empower individuals to emancipate themselves” (in Babbie & Mouton 2001:44).

The assumptions of PAR had important consequences for our methodology, the two most important of which are probably the shift in locus of control away from the specialist researcher to the local community and the participation of people from the community. In PAR the power moves from the researcher to co-ownership between researcher and subject of study. Those who are being researched and the researcher are now partners.

This was quite a step away from the modernist way of conducting research which basically follows a deductive style and addresses an academic public. It was a methodological challenge. We realized that we have to adapt basic PAR methodology to the context and challenge we face.

3 The research process

3.1 Conceptualizing the research

The research process started with consultations with several University departments, with executives from all the major denominations in the Western Cape, the Provincial Government (Department of Social Services, research and poverty alleviation directorates) and representatives of organisations and local authorities in Paarl.

During the conceptualisation phase we were interested in the methodology of two other research projects and we discussed the value of their approaches. The one project originated in Australia and was called the National Church Life Survey (NCLS – www.ncls.org.au) and the other Faith Communities Today (FACT - www.fact.hartsem.edu).

During 2001 NCLS was carried out internationally in 12 000 congregations amongst 1,2 million members of congregations. The project’s roots are in Australia (under the leadership of Peter Babbie & Mouton 2001: 313 ff.; Prozesky & Mouton 2001: 537-550; Schurink 1998: 405-418.

6 The literature discusses two traditions in PAR, namely the Northern and Southern traditions. See Prozesky & Mouton 2001:538 ff and Babbie & Mouton 2001:58 ff. For our own approach, see Hendriks 2004:216-221.
Kaldor), from where it expanded to England, New Zealand and the USA. In the USA, for instance, the project was called the *US Congregational Survey* and undertaken with 300,000 worshippers and more than 2,000 congregations in April 2001. Four aspects of congregational life came under scrutiny: *spirituality and faith development; activities and relationships within the congregation; community involvement; and worshippers’ vision for the congregation’s future.*

FACT, on the other hand, was conducted only in the USA in approximately 14,000 congregations (Dudley & Roozen 2001). The project was co-ordinated by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research at Hartford Seminary. Twenty-six different questionnaires were developed for different denominations and faith groups.

The Department of Geography at Stellenbosch University, suggested the possible integration of the global positioning system (GPS) and geographical information systems (GISs) into the project and how this could be done. After several discussions it was clear that we had to embark on the route of using GIS.

GISs are computer systems for capturing, storing, analysing, displaying and integrating spatial (geographical or locational) and non-spatial (statistical or attribution) information (Maguire 1995). There are a number of benefits in utilising GIS. For example, by putting the data into a spatial data base system, one is able to display the data visually on a map, providing a whole new way of looking at data. This often leads to discovering new information and patterns never recognised before. The GIS specialist played an indispensable role in the research.

The Department of Sociology at Stellenbosch University advised us on the use of questionnaires in our study. The purpose of the questionnaire would be to measure the impact of social services rendered by churches as well as community involvement in these services. At first we planned to distribute the questionnaire at church services to be completed by worshippers attending the service (as was done in the NCLS survey). The disadvantage of doing it this way was that we would only get access to the opinion of “church people”. We decided to distribute the questionnaire to households in the community. A 10% sample survey was done.

### 3.2 The launch

The research process followed in Paarl will now be discussed. A few observations from the George research project will be included, as it was mostly a duplication of the Paarl pilot project. The Cape Peninsula forced us to adapt even more since it was to be conducted on a much larger scale. Throughout the research process the methodology developed. The knowledge and skills of the interdisciplinary team was invaluable in this process but more than anything else it was the input from the community itself that challenged the process and the researchers to improvise and to adapt.

The Paarl launch was held on 26th March 2002 and various people from business, local government and denominations were invited. After visits to individual leaders, fraternities, NGO’s and local government departments, the first “official” meeting was held at the Faculty of Theology in Stellenbosch. The project was discussed and inputs from different people helped to streamline the initial process. It was decided that both primary and secondary data were to be used in the research. The primary data originated from a questionnaire survey, in which all places of worship were to be located and marked geographically by using GPS technology and from structured interviews with church leadership. The secondary data pertaining to the prevalence of
crime and the incidence of HIV/AIDS was obtained from the South African Police Service (SAPS) and the various health-related services in Paarl.

3.3 Questionnaire design

On 24th April 2002 an invitation was extended to all people in Paarl via the local newspapers to participate in a workshop for the design of the questionnaire. The workshop was attended by 20 representatives and held over two days, 13th to 14th May. During this workshop representatives from Paarl were led through various exercises by the Department of Sociology, in order to prioritise the most severe social and welfare issues in Paarl. The representatives constructed the first round of questions for the questionnaire. We took these identified problems and questions and from that compiled a comprehensive questionnaire.

A second workshop was held on 25th June to which the representatives were again invited. The questionnaire was scrutinised to see whether it reflected the process and content of the previous workshop. Some additional suggestions were made about the questionnaire. The researchers at the Unit developed a final version of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was self-administered and available in both Afrikaans/English and English/isiXhosa in order to make it accessible to everybody.

The purpose of the questionnaire was to establish the number of people involved in services rendered by the Church and other organisations, the number of people who receive assistance and the community’s perceptions concerning the Church’s involvement in social services.

3.4 GPS mapping

For a while the questionnaire survey and everything surrounding it moved to the background and we proceeded with the task of obtaining the other primary data, namely the location of the places of worship in Paarl. These places of worship did not include places where prayer meetings took place during the week – only venues for churches’ official meetings on Sundays, whether in a separate building, house, classroom in a school, etc.

The local co-ordinator organised 15 volunteers from local churches to be at a training session on the 29th July 2002 at a church in Paarl. These people were trained in the use of GPS handheld units. In this session Paarl was divided into 18 blocks through the help of the local residents using a map of the town. We had the advantage of having GIS technology available to us and a map of each of the identified blocks was produced on the spot. Each team then received such a map, which helped them to co-ordinate their investigations and prevented teams from duplicating work, thus saving time.

Each team was dropped off in their designated area and literally walked up one street and down the next to locate places of worship. Besides marking the places of worship, the fieldworkers also had to establish the name of the church, the size of the congregation and how regularly it met. The fieldwork was done from 30th July to 2nd August 2002.

The data were downloaded onto a computer and ESRI’s ArcView shapefiles created from the data. Approximately 120 venues of worship were marked.
3.5 **Questionnaire survey**

After the phase of locating the places of worship, it was time to carry out the survey of the questionnaire designed earlier. Conducting the survey was an enormous logistical challenge. Firstly, the question of the distribution of questionnaires had to be considered. After considering several options we decided to work with churches. Most of them have established infrastructures and access to households in their area.

The question of sample size was also considered. A 10% sample usually leads to good representation of the total population when doing sampling. Therefore, it was decided to draw a 10% sample taken from the total number of households in the study area for the questionnaire survey. To stratify the 10% sample in such a way that not only a certain group of people is targeted led to the use of the method of spatial stratification and taking a proportionate sample from that. Paarl, including the black township Mbekweni, was divided by spatial stratification into 30 areas. These 30 areas were created by grouping together enumeration areas, with the same demographic profile, using factor analysis of Census ‘96. The area was then further subdivided into smaller sub-areas, each having not fewer than 100 and not more than 200 households. This meant that between 10 and 20 questionnaires had to be distributed in each sub-area.

We wanted to use churches as instruments of research and we had 30 areas established through factor analysis. How do we link the 30 areas with their sub-areas with the church as instrument? How do we facilitate the church’s involvement in the project? The following strategy was designed. In each of the 30 sample areas a congregation that worshipped in the area was selected to take responsibility for the sample area. The choice of congregation depended on two factors: it had to be well represented in the area and there need to be an even representation of denominations. We approached the leaders of the churches either by telephone or by making an appointment. On 15th August we had a presentation for the 30 leaders. A folder was given to each containing a map of their area of responsibility, a document explaining the research process, another explaining what is expected of them and a third explaining the work of the fieldworkers.

---

7 Factor analysis summarises the important relationships between the variables in the form of a few basic patterns called factors (Davies 1984; Murdie 1969).

8 In the training document given to the leaders at the presentation we stated that we expect from them:

a. “That you recruit fieldworkers as many as indicated on the map (in most cases between three and seven).

b. That the fieldworkers are responsible people who attend the training on 31 August on behalf of your congregation.

c. That you pray for the project on 2 and 9 September during worship.

d. That you receive as many questionnaires as indicated on the map on Monday 2 September. Distribute them among the fieldworkers of your congregation.

e. That you receive the questionnaires from the fieldworkers by 10 September.”

9 These were the instructions:

a. “That you attend the training on 31 August at the Uniting Reformed Church (Sionskerk).

b. That you receive between 10 and 20 questionnaires from your leader on Sunday 1 September.

c. That you distribute these questionnaires at specific addresses from 2 September.

d. That you give a short explanation of the project at the address and arrange for a time to collect the questionnaire.

e. That you return the folder with the completed questionnaires to the leader on Sunday 8 September.”
The most important job of the leadership was to mobilise responsible fieldworkers from their churches, give each fieldworker’s folder to him/her and receive it back once the fieldwork has been completed. The leaders received the folders on Friday 30th August. Approximately 150 fieldworkers were trained on 2 occasions, 31st August in Paarl East and 3rd September at the Catholic Church in Mbekweni. Each fieldworker received a map of the sub-area and a map at smaller scale of Paarl for orientation. On the map of the sub-area, house numbers and street names were indicated. The location where the questionnaires were dropped was marked on this map in order to assist the fieldworker when he/she had to collect the questionnaires. Again the use of outputs from the GIS was crucial in assisting the fieldworkers in gathering the data. In the township of Mbekweni, where literacy was a problem, fieldworkers helped respondents to complete the questionnaire.

Through the local newspaper, the Paarl Post, and the local radio station, Radio KCC, the community was informed that fieldworkers might knock on their door with a questionnaire. Churches received an announcement to read on Sunday and leaders were asked to pray for the project on the two Sundays of the fieldwork.

Approximately 2500 questionnaires were distributed in the 30 sample areas. Only one area’s leadership did not co-operate. Approximately 1800 questionnaires were returned (72.9%). Two congregations managed a 100% return rate!

3.6 Interviews with leadership

The purpose of the interviews was to complement information gathered from the community with information from the leadership. Secondly, the purpose was to explore the partnerships within which churches operate. With this information we would be able to describe churches’ partnerships with other churches and NGOs in order to see the bigger picture of the faith-based social service network.

Initially we thought that an interview with all churches marked with the GPS would be done. This proved to be almost impossible. Instead it was decided to design a simple questionnaire and deliver it to a sample of 30 leaders representing both the demographics and the denominational spread of Paarl. The questionnaire consisted of questions regarding leadership (full-time/part-time, theological training, etc.), churches (members, age, etc.), ministries and partnerships. We received 26 questionnaires back.

3.7 Needs analysis

During the pilot project in the Paarl, we were approached by church and community leaders from George to do something similar in their community. Being contracted was helpful since it strengthened the PAR methodology. The initiative, agenda, ownership and responsibility of the project were strongly localized. In George we added another element to the research, namely a needs analysis. Following the Paarl pilot we felt that it was necessary to complement the results of our already tested process with qualitative data. Schutte (2000) developed a very simple way of doing a needs analysis. We used this instrument as part of our methodology.

The purpose of the needs analysis was to prioritise the social development needs specific to Thembalethu (the black township of George) by using the Priority Index (P-Index) research technique, i.e. a methodology that is strongly based on the principles of PAR and which directly involves individuals and target groups in the community in prioritising the community’s needs.
Secondly, the purpose is to draw community profiles of every selected community on the basis of
the P-Index data.

This technique has the following characteristics: (a) simplicity, (b) the ability to reveal and
prioritise a community’s actual needs, and (c) reliability regarding the information it elicits,
regardless of whether respondents are literate or illiterate.

The P-Index distinguishes between the importance of a need and its priority by surmounting the
respondents’ perception of the importance of a given facility to their current level of satisfaction
vis-à-vis that facility. “As a result of this technique, a facility which respondents regard as very
important while at the same time being quite satisfied with the current state of affairs, will occupy
a lower position on the P-Index than one sharing the same level of importance while being
regarded as highly unsatisfactory” (Schutte 2000:10).

The second phase of the needs analysis is to draw a community profile (C-Index) using the data
of the P-index. Firstly, the “bonding” of a community is measured by determining three elements,
namely:

1. Social support services available for those who need help;
2. Socialisation, i.e. friendship circles, existing within the community;
3. A sense of belonging or pride of belonging to the community.

The potential for community development thus depends on three issues. Firstly, the extent of
bonding in the community; secondly, the extent to which the individual’s basic needs are
satisfied; and thirdly, the extent to which the individual’s social needs are satisfied. Schutte
identified 13 facilities that are crucial to any community (Schutte 2000:23ff.). These are
considered to be the cornerstones necessary for the survival of any community. The first six refer
to individual needs for survival, while the remaining seven are social needs related to the
interaction of humans:


On Sunday 1 June 2003 a focus group session was conducted with a group of church leaders from
Thembalethu. This process was called meeting “groups with gatekeepers.” The purpose was to
take the leadership through the process and thus gain their support. It was, for us, an unbelievably
positive experience. Not only did we receive a 90% plus return rate on the questionnaires that
congregations distributed in Thembalethu, but we got the community’s wholehearted support in
everything we did. The needs analysis played an important role in this. People really felt they
were listened to. We are following the same methodology in the Cape Peninsula.

3.8 Secondary data

During the questionnaire design workshops the representatives identified specific problems
which were prominent in the community of Paarl and which they wanted to address. For some of
these problems other sources of data were already available, e.g. information pertaining to
HIV/Aids, unemployment, and sexual and/or violent crimes. Although the purpose was the same
they formulated a different questionnaire in George.
HIV/AIDS data was available from the various health-related services such as the local clinics and hospitals. The research group contacted the various institutions, asked permission and received the relevant data. Data related to unemployment was even more straightforward because we had access to data from Stats SA’s 1996 population census. Data pertaining to sexual and/or violent crimes was provided by the South African Police Service (SAPS). We approached the Crime Information Analysis Centre (CIAC) departments of the various stations, applied for permission to research the data and received the crime data we needed.

3.9 Dissemination of information

We wanted to report the results of the information gathered by the community in such a way that it was accessible to everyone. This is a key element of PAR methodology. Accessibility in our context means that people in the community should be able to understand and use the data. This will, we hope, lead to a better understanding of the problems which the local people identified; empower them to do something about these problems and bring them in contact, through networking, with the available resources. How do we reach this level of user-friendly availability and accessibility of data and resources?

The GIS played a key role in this process. GIS data allows the production of meaningful, attention-grabbing maps that visually illustrate important issues (Jones 1997 and Queralt & Witte 1998). The software also enables people to gain new insights into issues and enhance communication between them. Hence much attention was given to showing the research results visually with maps. When necessary, the maps were given on an aerial photograph background through which everything looked much more “familiar” and people could recognize what was well-known to them. This worked very effectively.

GIS combines non-spatial and spatial data. The prerequisite for this is that non-spatial data be bound to a specific geographical location. The way in which we spatially stratified areas for the questionnaire survey gave us this ability.

The SAPS data were also GIS data. Thus all the data we received from the SAPS qualifies in the sense that it was geo-referenced to a specific geographical location. The data from the health department were not that clear, because the anonymity of people had to be protected. However, we were still able, through the help of the people at the clinics and using advanced stratification methods (by which data can be extrapolated to neighbouring areas using certain statistical methods), to identify what the geographic extent of the data was.

The dissemination of the results was done differently in both communities. In Paarl the URDR formed a partnership with Valcare, a faith-based NGO. Together we organised one general feedback session in February 2003, followed by four workshops, one on each of the research topics: unemployment, HIV/AIDS, sexual violence against women and children, and substance abuse.

In George the feedback session was conducted during a week in August 2003. Nine workshops at various venues in the community disseminated the information. A presentation was held for the mayor of George, Municipality departments and business people. The community accepted and

---

10 A full report on the results of HIV/AIDS situation in the Paarl was published (Hendriks et al 2004:380-402)
trusted an NGO, the Christian Medical Service and Relief (CMSR) organisation to coordinate the process in George. This proves to be very valuable for the longer term results of the project.

3.10 Further developments
Towards the end of the basic research in George, we were approached by Transformation Africa (http://www.transformationafrica.org/) to do a similar research project in the Cape Peninsula.\(^\text{11}\) Christian leaders in the business community approached us to get the church, FBOs, other NGOs and the Government together to address poverty and its related problems such as unemployment, HIV/AIDS, sexual violence, crimes against women and children, and substance abuse in a holistic way. This project, which is well funded by the institutions involved, required a rethinking of our research methodology challenging us to address the issue of sustainable development and the challenge to reach a "Fourth Generation", Peoples Movement level (Swart & Venter 2001:482-495).\(^\text{12}\) This research is currently taking place and will only be completed early in 2006. Interim research results are available on the website (http://www.sun.ac.za/theology/egdn/trp/trp.htm).

The research partners in this project wanted a much broader spectrum of GIS information to be supplied by the congregational fieldworkers. Liquor outlets, shebeens (illegal liquor outlets), places where drugs are sold and where sex workers are active are all marked by GPS and downloaded on the maps. Places of worship should include all faith groups and should also accommodate the African Independent Churches (AICs, which have a 40.8% Christian Market Share in South Africa). In the Western Cape they basically gather as a myriad small house churches which imply that some ordinary households should be “mapped” as places of worship. Other info that are supplied by the different governmental institutions are police stations, hospitals, health clinics, crèches (where pre-school children are cared for) etc. The above mentioned website has the first layers of information that are publicly available. We found that the methodology developed in Paarl and George can be adapted to address metropolitan areas.

4 Conclusions

The Church and Community Research Project represents the Unit’s search for a methodology that would address the three challenges indicated above. We were especially successful in two regards. Firstly, the interdisciplinary approach was successful due to the consultations beforehand and the level of cooperation during the research. The positive cooperation between Practical Theology, Geography and Sociology can be attributed to the following reasons:

---

\(^{11}\) The results of this research project are published on an interactive website to which all participating institutions have a more detailed access than the general results. Several government departments have a specific interest in this data. We received all their data and created a system of layers of information which is geographically coordinated. Anyone of the partners to this research has access to the detailed data. The data can be updated whenever new info becomes available. By sharing our resources we prevent duplication of research. The interesting part is that FBOs and theology play an integral role in developing this interdisciplinary research methodology and in developing theory and action steps with the others sectors of society to address the endemic problems confronting all of us.

\(^{12}\) The Department of Practical Theology and Missiology at Stellenbosch University has a chair in Community Development. It is becoming very popular with a growing number of post graduate students. These students are not only ministers but people from all walks of life who want to make a difference in their communities. Their motivation is faith based and value-driven.
a) We are faced with the challenge of poverty which is such an enormous challenge that it was obvious that a holistic approach is necessary.

b) We do not have enough resource to duplicate our efforts.

c) The University encourage and rewards this type of project and interdisciplinary cooperation.

d) The disciplines need one another because of what their respective fields of expertise.

e) The disciplines communicate well with the different sections of a community. Practical Theology has influence and is trusted by the churches while the other sciences provide the type of balance and security that certain sectors of a community want to be assured of.

Secondly, we were successful in our efforts to involve the local community in a meaningful way. Valcare proved to be the anchor institution in the Paarl, the CMSR in George and the Transformation movement in the Cape Peninsula. They provided leadership and infrastructure to continue the process of community development without which poverty and its related ills will never be faithfully and effectively addressed. An interesting observation is that leadership from the business community proves to be a necessity to keep the different churches and other role players together and focussed. It became clear that a holistic approach, involving literally all sectors of a society, is necessary in order to make a difference and to effectively use the results of the research. A research institution like the URDR initially plays the role of a catalyst to draw the different institutions together. The fact that the URDR is basically an empirical research institution within the Faculty of Theology, places it in a position to get the different denominations and fraternities in a community to work together.

We were successful in making the results accessible to the community. GIS is a very useful tool. We created a webpage (http://www.sun.ac.za/theology/urdr.htm) for the data. Still, many people in the community do not have access to the Internet. We made hard copies of the research results for those who needed it. Adequate access to user friendly-data remains a challenge.

This study concentrated on the how the methodology of the participatory action research process developed in consultation with local communities. One cannot adequately describe contextualized PAR methodology development in the abstract. Every step was negotiated with the representatives of the communities. We called it the first phase. In secondary phases the URDR and other departments of the University continues to play a role but the “ownership” of the process and initiatives gradually shifts to the communities. Several institutions requested help in strategic planning sessions to address the issues that were important for them as well as specialized training empowering them to deal with AIDS, abuse of women and children, etc. Quite a number of projects are underway with considerably better networking between the institutions. In all instances we had local people registering to do post graduate work on issues that came to the fore during the initial empirical research phase. They are a valuable asset to these communities because they stay there and help to drive the processes that were initiated.

Bibliography


13 For a full report on the research at George with special emphasis on the situation regarding AIDS, see the URDR website http://www.sun.ac.za/theology/egdn/GeorgeAidsForumReport2003.PDF


