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Hand-outs vs hand-ups: a case study exploring the perceptions of the participants on the impact of a sewing project

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ABSTRACT

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Development has become a tool with which to tackle poverty and inequality globally with a recent focus in African development on concepts such as participation, community development and sustainability. Social development advocates for the harmonisation of economic and social goals to redress distorted development, although much attention and policies in South Africa have been directed towards social assistance and social insurance for the country's poor. While this may be helpful, concern exists about the creation of a 'hand-out' mentality and this study intends to explore the perceptions of participants involved in the Hope Training and Development sewing skills development project in order to understand this concern.

Qualitative investigation in the form of a case study was applied to help explore this topic. Semi-structured interviews were used to interview eleven participants selected with purposive sampling methods. Data was gathered using in-depth interviews and recorded, with participant's consent. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis, in conjunction with literature previously reviewed.

It was found that although the project was perceived positively by the participants, the sewing project has not yet led to a noticeable increase in the livelihood of most of the participants. The self-esteem and skill set of the participants was greatly increased while lack of job opportunities was outlined as one of the main challenges. It is envisioned that this study may provide social development practitioners with a better understanding of how development is being experienced by participants and how skills development has the potential to equip participants with the tools needed to tackle poverty.

Keywords: perceptions; participants; skills development; sustainable livelihoods