ABSTRACT

There has been a belief that conventional approaches to development failed for many years to reverse the trends of poverty in rural communities. As a result, the focus shifted to the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach that many development practitioners, policy developers and other players in rural development see as an alternative.

However, it appears that there is agreement from supporters of SLA that sustainable livelihoods in rural communities can be more realistically supported when social capital is built or/and strengthened from within. As a result, many livelihoods support programmes have been implemented across the world since 1992. Most of these projects were in rural areas of developing countries in Africa, Asia and South America (such as Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Gambia, Indonesia, Bolivia, Zambia, and Nepal as well as in South Africa).

In light of the above, the researcher has been prompted to investigate the relationship between Sustainable Livelihoods Approaches and social capital to find out if indeed the application of SLA in development programmes can facilitate building and/or strengthening of social capital in rural communities. Further, the research investigates to what extent the building of social capital contributes to the reduction of poverty and vulnerability in rural communities and households.

The research was undertaken in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. Two different rural villages were chosen as case studies because of their poverty levels and also because livelihood programmes had been implemented in the areas by the organization called Afesis-corplan.

The research concludes that Afesis-corplan has facilitated the strengthening of some social capital that existed and also built new networks. However, it is still to be seen if the work of Afesis-corplan will translate into an improved standard of living for those communities.