

University of Cape Town



School of Management Studies

A FORMATIVE EVALUATION OF THE POVERTY HEARINGS PROGRAMME  
IN SOUTH AFRICA, 2008 (PHPSA)

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**COMPULSORY DECLARATION:**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study is a formative evaluation of the Poverty Hearings Programme (PHPSA) that was conducted in the nine provinces of South Africa in 2008. The programme was a follow up to a similar one that was conducted in 1998. The 2008 poverty hearings were conducted in the context of Government and other stakeholders' failure to prioritise the poor in policy formulation and implementation of development initiatives (Programme Document, 2008). Despite the relative economic success of South Africa, the country continues to face escalating poverty levels and a widening gap between the rich and the poor (Adato, Carter & May, 2006). Among other factors, this expanding gap could have been exacerbated by the global financial crisis.

The PHPSA involved a coordinated process in which poor people gathered and voiced their experiences and concerns of being poor. Beneficiaries of the poverty hearings not only tabled their opinions but also provided suggestions on how to improve the process of service delivery. A selected number of people, called the Commissioners, presided over the programme. They were selected as a result of their social standing and therefore the ability and influence to engage with National Government on behalf of the poor. The issues that the poor raised were then collated into themed priority areas, with which Government was approached to detail a plan of action towards solving them. The programme also sought to enable poor people to form groupings within their communities in order to approach their Local Government about the same issues.

There are few published studies on Poverty Hearings. In a world where there is continued emphasis on the importance of participatory and empowerment approaches to poverty reduction, this study is relevant. The evaluation therefore aims to contribute to this relatively under-researched model of empowerment. Since the programme is conducted every decade, the study is formative in nature, with a view to contribute towards the improvement of future poverty

hearings. One of the issues that the Programme Concept Note (2008) of the PHPSA emphasises is that the programme has potential but that it is a continuous learning model which is being refined gradually.

A review of the programme records was undertaken in this evaluation. A sample of the programme's beneficiaries was also interviewed to gauge the usefulness of the programme. Programme staff and Government officials were also interviewed.

The results of the evaluation suggest that although there are modest successes, there could be more improvement in both the conceptualisation and implementation of the programme. First, it is essential for the programme stakeholders to review and strengthen the programme theory. This is important because any implementation of a programme is embedded in its logic. Secondly, the stakeholders need to strengthen communities' ability to advocate in their localities. This can be done through allocating resources and facilitating the formation of capable, ongoing advocacy coalitions.

The results however demonstrate that despite some limitations, the programme has potential to use advocacy, both at community and national levels, to contribute towards effective policy formulation and implementation. Ultimately, this could contribute to the eradication of poverty.

The evaluation is the first of its kind in that it dwells on an issue that has been under researched. There is paucity of studies on poverty hearings, let alone their evaluation.

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## ACRONYMS

CPRC	Chronic Poverty Research Centre
GAVI	Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisations
IDP	Integrated Development Programme
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NGOs	Non Governmental Organisations
PHPSA	Poverty Hearings Programme in South Africa
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Policy
RSA	Republic of South Africa
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Goals

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Poverty is a multi-faceted phenomenon requiring varied approaches to solve it. The term has multiple meanings and significance in the social realm. Internationally there are a number of campaigns and movements that seek to address different aspects of poverty and yet seemingly the problem is endemic. The 2008 global economic crisis and its subsequent effects could mean that there is a reversal on some of the strides towards poverty reduction that have so far been achieved. In South Africa, poverty remains prevalent despite the relative macro-economic success of the country.

Studies have been undertaken on poverty reduction initiatives. Too often, poverty related research tends to burrow down into debates and discussions on poverty reduction strategies, avoiding the more concrete issues of evaluating these initiatives. Evaluation is important in order to measure the extent to which these initiatives are valid and to identify areas of improvement. Various implementers of programmes claim that their initiatives are significantly contributing to poverty reduction efforts. This study focuses on one of those initiatives: the 2008 Poverty Hearings Programme in South Africa (PHPSA).

#### **The 1998 PHPSA**

In 1998 ten South African based non-profit organisations facilitated a process of nationwide public hearings that provided a platform for over 10 000 poor people to speak publicly about their experiences of poverty (Stuck, 1999). Dubbed the *Speak Out on Poverty* or *National Poverty Hearings*, this exercise, conducted in all nine provinces of South Africa was presided over by various key civil society leaders (Grey, 1998). According to the Programme Document (2008) this

resulted in a number of activities, including a report highlighting people's experiences, which was termed a Charter of Demands. The Poverty Hearings commissioners also used the outcomes of the exercise to engage with various governments departments and negotiate for change in development implementation.

## **The 2008 PHPSA**

In 2008, ten years after the first poverty hearings, various non-profit organisations working in poverty reduction sought to follow up with the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary National Poverty Hearings. This study focuses on the 2008 Poverty Hearings (hereafter referred to as the Poverty Hearings Programme in South Africa or the PHPSA).

### *Overall goal of the programme*

The underlying principle for a social programme is to address a social need. The relevance of an ongoing programme may be necessitated by the persistence of a social problem (Rossi, Lipsey & Freeman, 2004). A programme's rationale and actions should therefore be judged according to the needs of the society and the relevance for intervention. According to the Poverty Hearings' Programme Officer (*Personal Communication, December 2008*) and the Funding Proposal (2008) the programme was necessitated by findings that poor people's voices are the missing link in the development chain.

The design and conceptualisation of the programme is therefore rooted in this need to involve the poor and give them confidence to solve their own problems. The Programme Document (2008) also reveals that after consultations and considerations among some development partners, it was decided that one of the ways to address the issue was to replicate but adapt the 1998 Poverty

Hearings. The reason for doing so was to use the poverty hearings as a means of giving the poor a forum for sharing their experiences. The expectation was that this would facilitate their participation in development. The ultimate hope was that this type of empowerment will contribute hugely towards poverty reduction (Programme Concept Note, 2008).

The programme's overarching objective is to offer poor people in South Africa a forum to share their experiences of poverty so as to create spaces and opportunities for them. This would enable them to engage with their local government and other development practitioners on development initiatives. The programme also sought to use evidence from people's submissions to engage with national government in order to ensure that poor people's views in development programmes influence implementation. The distal vision of the programme was to improve the quality of life for poor people and ultimately reduce extreme poverty (Funding Proposal, 2008).

According to the Programme Document (2008) the objectives of the PHPSA are:

- To find out if the 1998 hearings had yielded any outcomes; if the government and stakeholders had implemented the programmes that they had committed to undertake so as to improve poor people's lives
- To understand the depth and breadth of poverty in South Africa, through qualitative techniques
- To understand the impact of poverty on the lives, aspirations and dreams of poor people
- To understand what interventions have been successful in addressing people's needs and why these have been successful
- To isolate the principles of success in previous development initiatives which could be used to engage with both state and non-governmental actors in future advocacy arising from the evidence from the hearings

- To give poor people a forum to express themselves and create opportunities for them to engage with their local government and other development practitioners
- To gain evidence on the extent of poverty in South Africa
- To use the poor people's views on what is of priority to them to approach the government and other development stakeholders. The ultimate goal being to influence policy, approach and practice and contribute towards the reduction of poverty.

### *Programme Theory*

There are a variety of ways in which to represent a programme's theory (Donaldson, 2007; Rossi et al., 2004). Rossi et al. define programme theory as an explanation of why the programme does what it does. A programme's theory hence gives the rationale for anticipating that undertaking certain activities would yield the expected outcomes. The Kellogg Foundation (2004)'s guide to developing a logic model also indicates that a programme theory is a basic logical sequence that defines the relationship among planned activities and the outcomes that the programme hopes to achieve. A programme theory also encompasses a description of the cause-and-effect elaboration that connects the programme's services and actions to proximal and distal outcomes (Donaldson, 2007).

There was no clear and graphical representation of the programme theory in the programme records. The theory however existed in the minds of the programme team. It was also embedded in the programme documents like The Programme Concept Note (2008), the Programme Document (2008) and the Funding Proposal (2008). Notably, however, these programme records only made imprecise reference to what the logic and theory behind the programme are. After consultations with the Programme Officer (*Personal Communication,*

December 2008) and a review of the above programme records, the programme theory emerged as follows:

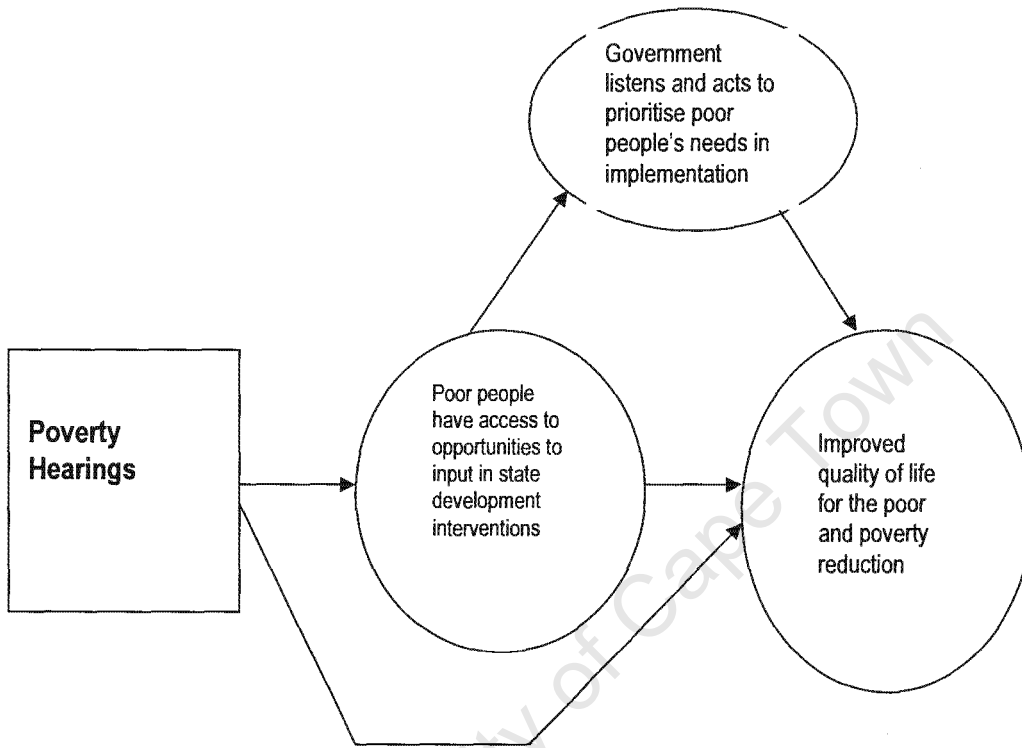


Figure 1. Programme Theory of the PHPSA 2008

According to the Poverty Hearings Funding Proposal (2008), the theory is that poverty hearings offer the poor an opportunity to contribute into Government and stakeholders' development intervention processes. As such, the hearings have the potential to drive the government to implement development programmes that are well-informed and therefore practical in addressing poor people's priorities. All this is presumed to lead to an improved quality of life for the poor and hence the reduction of poverty. The main thesis therefore is that lobbying and advocacy approaches can lead to effective reduction of poverty.

## *Defining a Programme Theory*

There is agreement that in evaluation, it is important to begin by clarifying the programme theory (Coffman, 2007; Davis, 2001; Rossi et al., 2004; Thomas, 2007). By so doing, the evaluator establishes a theoretical framework of what a programme seeks to accomplish, why and how it will achieve it and why this might or might not work (Donaldson, 2007).

Programme theory is advanced as an alternative to narrowly focused programme evaluations which may measure inputs and outputs (efficiency), without ever measuring the more important relation of causes to desired effects (effectiveness). Chen (1990) defines programme theory as theory-driven evaluation. Rossi, Freeman, and Lipsey (1999) elaborated a programme theory framework for programme evaluation. In this framework, organisational plan variables lead to organisational capacity. This leads to service utilisation by the target population, resulting in turn to desired change outcomes as predicted by impact (programme) theory. Impact theory variables are the change theory (programme theory) for the particular policy or programme at hand. Organisational plan variables include programme resources, personnel, administration and the organisation. Service utilisation variables include outreach, access, and agency-target relationships. A comprehensive programme evaluation must be a three-fold assessment (Rossi et al. (1999), looking at impact theory, the organisational plan and service utilisation.

Furthermore, according to Rossi et al. (2004), a programme's theory is one that is a causal notion illustrating a cause-and-effect relation in which certain actions result in certain effects in the social realm. As articulated by the Kellogg Foundation (2004), programme impacts are caused by a prior chain, which in reverse chronological order are programme outcomes, programme outputs, programme activities, and programme resources or inputs. According to the Kellogg Foundation's logic model, when presenting a proposed programme, each link in the chain must be reasoned as follows: Firstly, if certain resources are

provided, then the programme can undertake certain activities. Secondly, if activities occur, then there will be certain outputs and direct results. Thirdly, if outputs occur, the outputs will lead to certain outcomes (changes in attitudes, behaviors, knowledge, skills, status, or level of functioning). Fourthly, these outcomes will lead to the end impacts (organisational, community, and system level changes) desired. Thus, the purpose of a logic model or programme theory is "to provide stakeholders with a road map describing the sequence of related events connecting the need for the planned programme with the programme's desired results" (Kellogg Foundation, 2004, p.3).

### *Plausibility of the PHPSA Theory*

In order to evaluate a programme, it is necessary to first review and weigh the plausibility of its theory. A theory evaluation assesses whether the causal logic implicit in the programme is realistic and sound. Assessing the plausibility of the programme theory in this formative evaluation will help to assess the feasibility of the stated objectives embedded in the theory.

Assessing the plausibility of the PHPSA's theory is based on three assumptions that the theory makes. First is the notion of the need to understand, qualitatively, poverty in order to devise effective solutions to alleviate it. The reason for doing so is to ensure that poverty interventions are contextualised to the South African context where the poverty hearings took place. Secondly, the literature review focuses on the programme theory's assumption that beneficiary participation leads to poverty reduction. Thirdly, the review examines literature on advocacy and lobbying which the programme theory assumes can lead to poverty reduction. The three main assumptions of the programme theory are discussed below:

### *Qualitative Understanding of Poverty is Important*

According to the Programme Document (2008), poverty is complex and requires multiple methods to tackle it. The PHPSA is based on international norms and standards of reducing poverty (Funding Proposal, 2008). Halving the number of people living under abject poverty by 2015 is the key focus of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agreed to at the United Nations General Assembly in 2001 and subsequently adopted by development institutions, including governments (United Nations, 2005). The MDGs have motivated efforts to meet the needs of the poor and have drawn attention to the issue of poverty reduction including strategies to tackle the problem. However, despite the progress that has been achieved, estimates suggest that multi-millions (between 300 - 400 million) people in the world are living in chronic poverty (UN Human Development Report, 2009). The challenge of poverty and its prioritisation in development is however not as new as the MDGs. Rahman and Hossain (1995) argue that poverty reduction has been the priority development goal of most developing countries for the last 60 years. However, the interest of the international development community in poverty was renewed after the publication of the 1990 World Development Report (McKay & Lawson, 2003), stimulating the global prioritisation of poverty reduction (Morse, 2004). This commitment is evident in the agreement of the International Development Targets, which arose from UN conferences in the early 1990s (Chronic Poverty Research Centre, CPRC, 2005).

The dominant definition of poverty since World War II has been in monetary terms, using income levels and consumption levels (Grusky & Kanbur, 2006) and defining the poor by a headcount of those who fall below a given income or consumption level known as the poverty line (Lipton & Ravallion, 1993). However, this economic definition has been complemented in recent years by other approaches that define poverty in a more multidimensional way (Subramanian, 1997). These approaches include the basic needs approach (Streeten, Burki, ul Haq, Hicks, & Stewart, 1981; van der Hoeven, 1988), the

capabilities approach (Sen, 1999) and the human development approach (United Nations Development Programme, UNDP, 1990). In order to be able to assess poverty much more comprehensively than at a general level there is need for an understanding of poverty (Chronic Poverty Research Centre, CPRC, 2005). However, prior to this understanding, to be able to measure progress towards the set targets of reducing it, poverty needs to be measured. This would lead to a thorough understanding of poverty; what it is, who is affected and how it can be most appropriately measured and therefore tackled (World Bank, 1994). Secondly, to be able to help the poor break the poverty cycle, there is need to understand the poverty cycle in terms of how and why it affects. Additionally, it is important to analyse what opportunities can be used to plan interventions to improve poor people's conditions (Morse, 2004).

Consequently, two main approaches to the measurement of poverty have been identified. First, there is the economic approach to poverty, which focuses on poverty in quantitative terms like income levels and per capita consumption. Various macro-level institutions like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations apply such measures (Coudouel & Hentschel, 2000). The second approach is the sociological and anthropological one that employs subjective measures of poverty by focusing at the household or micro-level. This approach utilises qualitative ethnographic research, wealth ranking and other participatory methods (Bevan, 2004; Ellis & Freeman, 2004). Wood (2005) recommends that robust qualitative investigation be used to overcome poverty. Asset based approaches, drawing on the rural work of Robert Chambers and Amartya Sen have also become increasingly influential (Beetham, 2006). These approaches focus on the household as the primary unit of analysis. However, they also consider the disaggregated household unit and the relationship of households to the wider community and institutional processes. They assume that the poor can be resourceful and active agents of their own development.

Accordingly, Attempts have been made to combine both the quantitative and qualitative approaches to the measurement of poverty. The approach that the United Nations Human Development Report (2005) takes in assessing poverty is one in which both quantitative and qualitative analyses are used to determine the levels of poverty worldwide. Researchers claim that the poor benefit little from mere quantitative measures of poverty because these yield interventions that are focused on economic growth rather than individual households or communities (Chronic Poverty Research Centre, CPRC, 2005; Lisk, 1985; Mehta, 2005; Sen & Hulme, 2004). They therefore emphasise the need to give prominence to qualitative approaches to the measurement of poverty. The World Bank insists on the joint use of both macro-level indicators and household level approaches (World Bank Human Development Report, 2005).

Besides measuring poverty and the varied approaches of measurement suggested, there have been calls to measure the effectiveness of initiatives that attempt to eradicate poverty. The Bellagio principles were guided by calls for new ways of measuring progress that would surpass economic signals and capture a fuller sense of human and ecological well-being (Hardi & Zdan, 1997) resulting from development interventions. These Principles of Assessment hold that clear indicators and measurement criteria (Hardi et al., 1997) should guide the vision and goals of assessment of progress towards sustainable development. The Bellagio principles could provide a basis for measuring the extent to which programmes and efforts in development can claim successful outcomes, even in the smallest possible way (Hardi et al.). They are intended for use in starting and improving assessment activities of community groups, non-government organisations, corporations, national governments, and international institutions. The first principle for instance deals with the initial point in any assessment and calls for the establishment of a vision for sustainable development and clear goals. Principles 2 to 5 focus on the content of any assessment whilst Principles 6 up to 8 deal with steps detailing the whole programme assessment process. Principles 9 and 10 deal with the importance of continuous assessment and

emphasise on the need to establish clear causal links between programmes and the outcomes.

The above arguments demonstrate the need for thorough qualitative studies to promote a better understanding of poverty and deprivation so as to apply effective interventions. They also reveal the importance of assessing poverty beyond single-dimensional approaches. The argument of these researchers and institutions is that the qualitative approaches to the measurement of poverty, which for years had been neglected (Morse, 2004) are important in getting the experiences of those who actually live in poverty. The PHPSA 's use of people's experiences of poverty in order to determine the levels of poverty is another qualitative means of gauging and understanding poverty.

Conclusions can be drawn from the arguments above. Poverty has been understood to encompass broader aspects than just statistical measures. Defining poverty solely as being deprivation of money is, hence, not sufficient. Social indicators and indicators of risk and vulnerability must also be considered and understood to obtain a clear picture of poverty. This can be done through talking to the people who live in poverty. At the United Nations' World Summit on Social Development, the Copenhagen Declaration described poverty as "...a condition characterised by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information" (United Nations, 1995). When people are unable to eat, go to school, or have any access to health care, then they can be considered to be in poverty, regardless of their income (World Bank, 2005). Poverty can be seen as a human condition of deprivation of resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights (UNDP, 2005). Additionally, people's lack of opportunities to realise their full potential has also been defined as indicators of poverty (Programme Document, 2008). These views do not imply that quantitative measurements of poverty are not useful. For example, whether

or not a country has succeeded in combating poverty is measured by the percentage of poor people relative to the nation's population (World Bank). However, to measure poverty in any statistical way, more rigid definitions must be used (Chronic Poverty Research Centre, CPRC, 2005; Coudouel & Hentshel, 2000; Subramanian, 1997). Because of the complexity of poverty (Mckay & Lawson, 2003) there is need to rely on multiple methods of measuring it so as to reveal its varied dynamics. A lack of income combined with other deprivations affect poor people. This shared understanding of what poverty is and what it means to those who experience it is therefore critical to the development of effective poverty reduction strategies.

#### *Beneficiary Participation Leads to Poverty Reduction*

The programme theory also makes an assumption that beneficiary participation in development interventions leads to effective poverty reduction.

One of the effective strategies that are essential to the improvement of livelihoods of the poor has been identified to be beneficiary participation in development interventions. It has become a growing area of discourse among scholars, donor agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and development practitioners. Lisk (1985) defines beneficiary participation in terms of cooperation between decision-makers and those affected by their actions. He spells out the role of this participation:

The role of popular participation in the development process is closely related to possibilities for the broad mass of the population to influence decision-making in favour of popular needs and aspirations (1995. p.8)

This line of argument is complemented by increasing documentation of the impact of beneficiary participation. Researchers provide particularly useful evidence of the effectiveness of involving the poor people in their own development (Groenewald & Smith, 2002; Kehler, 2000; Stiefel & Wolfe, 1994). Beneficiary participation assumes a notion of people as active partners in the development process and not as mere objects (Groenewald et al.).

According to Kehler (2000) and the PHPSA Funding Proposal (2008), South Africa is characterised by extreme poverty and social disintegration, mass unemployment and the exclusion of the majority of people from socio-economic development and growth. The apartheid system pattern of socio-economic polarisation in which class and colour were almost perfectly correlated created a world of inequality (Adato, Carter & May, 2006). This contributed to a situation where the majority of the population remains poor (Human Sciences Research Council, HSRC, 2008). Despite the social grants which have proved vital in poverty alleviation (HSRC, 2009), there continues to be a wide gap between the few rich and the majority poor (Adato et al; Kanyenze & Martens, 2006). A number of government policies and programmes have been put in place since 1994, which attempt to promote popular participation in order to ensure that the poor participate in the development process (Adato et al.).

Two of those key policies are the Integrated Development Planning (IDP) and the Reconstruction and Development Policy (RDP). The central notion of the IDP programme in South Africa is that beneficiary participation is vital. It also reflects the concept of bringing government to the people as well as that people should actively participate in their own socio-economic development (Kehler, 2000). The RDP of South Africa, which was adopted by the government in 1994, is also noteworthy. It calls for the development of strong and stable democratic institutions and practices characterised by representativeness and participation. More relevant to the PHPSA, the RDP suggests that all areas of development

should be effected right through to the lowest levels of grassroots participation (RDP 1994).

In a study conducted by Kehler (2000), in the low income areas of Eastern Cape and Western Cape provinces in South Africa, 61% of the respondents indicated that the local council had not delivered any service in the last 12 months whilst 95% indicated that they had no knowledge about their council's planning process. The conclusions by the researcher were that if communities are not involved in the decision-making process surrounding service delivery, services would most likely fail to meet their needs. The results of the study also mean that in cases where the outcomes of existing government and stakeholders' interventions are difficult to measure, community participation is attractive because it is more likely to produce a set of outcomes that are realistic to the beneficiaries (Adato et al., 2006).

Researchers therefore remind that the best way to alleviate poverty is to empower citizens through genuinely participatory processes (Bevan, 2004; Butler, 1998; Chambers, 1995; Devas, 1999; Fishkin, 1995). This insight has even been emphasised in many proverbs and traditional approaches to poverty eradication, such as, "Teach a hungry man how to do fishing, rather than giving him only a fish" (Mhlabi, 2006). Major policy implications have been that solutions to poverty are about changing the poor to be different and better in some ways (Hong & Pandey, 2007). As a result, creating accountable processes, which can empower people to raise their voice and demand their right, can be useful in creating communities that will tackle poverty in a sustainable manner (Hawtin, Hughes & Percy-Smith, 1994; Kehler, 2000). Empowerment is a process through which people gain a momentum to actively participate in different social life arenas (Lisk, 1985), demand their own rights (Mitlin & Thompson, 1995), use the opportunities to make progress (Nelson & Wright, 1995), and develop their capabilities (Satterthwaite, 2007). Hong and Padney (2007)'s research show that relatively new approaches focus on public empowerment as a key alternative to

uproot poverty. This is because "...empowerment provides people with self-confidence to use situations rationally and have equal chances to access progress opportunities" (Hong et al., 2007, p.65)

These arguments support the programme theory's assumption that community participation is correlated to the reduction of poverty. They also suggest that beneficiaries possess experience and informational advantages unavailable to outsiders (Kehler, 2000), including the government. Poor people's participation offers the prospect of driving antipoverty interventions that are effective (Hawtin et al., 1994). Ultimately, this participation offers the potential for the design and implementation of interventions that reflect the preferences of the population they are designed to assist (Satterthwaite, 2007).

However, researchers like Fishkin (1995) have called for caution in assuming that beneficiary participation automatically leads to poverty reduction. Whilst beneficiary participation has been identified as vital, researchers acknowledge that it does not come automatically for the poor people (Fishkin, 1995; McKay et al., 2003). Government's lack of know-how to involve the poor has been cited as one necessity for the poor to take the initiative and demand space to participate in the development process (Kehler, 2000). Other reserachers like Stiefel et al. (1994) argue that there are other reasons for government's failure to involve the poor. They argue that besides lack of know-how, public institutions often lack both the resources and the willingness to adopt pro-poor policies in development. This is because beneficiary participation is about the distribution of power exercised by some people over others and, "...any serious advocacy of increased participation implies a redistribution of power in favour of those hitherto powerless" (Stiefel et al., 1994. p. 5).

These arguments suggest that it is essential for the poor to act in order to access opportunities to provide input into government and stakeholders' interventions (Hawtin et al., 1994; Kehler, 2000). The important point to be noted is that simply

providing access to voice may not be a sufficient condition for poverty reduction. Another notable argument is that of researchers who view participation as a process rather than a finite issue. Beetham (2006) writes about development as a process rather than a finite event. He argues that if poor people use their power to negotiate constantly, this would result in transforming the willing governments into implementing programmes that are pro-poor. In the end this would contribute towards the reduction of poverty. According to Rahman (2004) participation is a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over priority setting, policymaking and resource allocation. This view is understood against the notion that governments formulate and implement most development policies without the benefit of citizens' involvement (Programme Document, 2008; Sillitoe, 2002).

Additionally, Rahman and Hossain (1995) warn that because of lack of proper involvement and empowerment of the poor, participation is not always effective. It can be passive, co-optive and, in fact, forsaken. Complementing this view is Wilcox (2003) who discusses many types of participation, against which various participatory methods can be gauged. Table below 1 shows this typology of participation and how it relates to the PHPSA:

Table 1

*Typology of participation*

Typology	Components of each type
<i>Passive participation</i>	People participate by being told what is going to happen or has already happened. It is a unilateral announcement by an administration or project management without listening to people's responses.
<i>Participation in information giving</i>	People participate by giving answers to questions posed by extractive researchers and project manager using questionnaire surveys or similar approaches. People do not have the opportunity to influence proceedings.
<i>Participation by consulting</i>	People participate by being consulted, and external agents listen to views. These external agents define problems and solutions, and may modify these in the light of people's responses.
<i>Interactive participation</i>	People participate in joint analysis, which leads to action plans and the formation of new local groups or the strengthening of existing ones.
<i>Self mobilisation/ active participation</i>	People participate by taking initiatives independent of external institutions to change systems.

Using this typology of participation above to gauge the theory of the programme, one can classify it as *Participation by Consultation*, which Rahman argues is not adequate to increase the citizens' ability to own and control the priority setting in development interventions.

It can therefore be concluded that the programme theory's assumption that participation leads to poverty reduction is plausible but not without limitations. Participation remains the cornerstone for poverty eradication (Fishkin, 1995;

Kehler, 2000; McKay et al., 2003). This is because, ultimately, it is the empowerment of the poor that works for them (Satterthwaite, 2007). However, the role of participation in poverty reduction has several dimensions that emerge from the arguments presented here. The main way in which participation influences poverty reduction is when poor people mediate in the development process by working together to demand recognition and prioritisation in development programmes. The government's willingness, know-how and commitment to formulate and implement development policies and programmes that are responsive to the needs of the poor, also mediate between participation and poverty reduction.

Since participation does not come automatically, advocacy can be used as one of the transformational as well as instrumental strategies to ensure poor people's effective participation in the development process (Grey, 1998). The emphasis is on the need to undertake negotiation constantly so as to transform the government as well as build the poor's skills and know-how in negotiation.

#### *Advocacy and effective interventions*

A third aspect of the programme theory is the assumption that advocacy and lobbying can lead to government and other stakeholders implementing effective interventions to eradicate poverty. Strategies like advocacy and lobbying to empower the poor can ensure that there is pressure on the government to implement programmes that precisely benefit the poor (Grey, 1998; Nelson & Wright, 1995).

Some researchers extensively define advocacy and lobbying (Carden & Neilson, 2005; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2002). A review of the varied definitions is necessary. Advocacy and lobbying have been defined as processes of influencing policy and decision-makers. They also encompass fighting for social change and

transformation of public perceptions or attitudes (Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation, GAVI factsheet). The strategic use of information to change policies that affect the lives of the disadvantaged is also advocacy and lobbying (India HIV/AIDS Alliance, 2002). The World Bank (2005) argues that "...advocacy is about influencing or changing relationships of power" (2005, p.68). Advocacy is therefore a broad and more formal process that seeks to influence specific legislation or rules and regulations at various levels of government through, for example, the parliamentary processes (Carden et al., 2005).

Davies (2001) argues that effective advocacy work should influence the thinking and actions of the key targeted audience. In order for advocacy to target a particular audience, it is useful to divide your audience into the following groups:

- Stakeholders - individuals and groups who do, or will have an interest in what you advocate or want to change.
- Decision makers - key individuals that will bring about the change you want to achieve
- Influencers - people who can influence decision makers. Influencers can act on your behalf or against you

From these definitions it could be concluded that advocacy is about representation or speaking on behalf of the disadvantaged (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2002). It entails mobilisation or encouraging others to speak with you (Court et al., 2000). It is also about empowerment or supporting the poor to speak for themselves (Nelson et al., 1995). There is also a consensus in these definitions that advocacy necessarily involves a process of poor people's empowerment. The theory of the PHPSA uses the term advocacy in a broad sense to refer to a number of strategies devised, solutions proposed and actions taken to cause social change often by informing or influencing governance, institutions and policies (Programme Concept, 2008). The PHPSA Funding Proposal (2008) emphasises that the programme employs evidence to advocate. It defines

evidence-based advocacy as the application of developed knowledge to motivate reform or change.

NGO research for the purposes of advocacy for sustainable development has broadened and deepened with influencing strategies becoming more comprehensive and evolving over the years (World Development Report, 2000). In response to questions about NGO legitimacy, there have been calls to move from rhetorical advocacy that is based merely on criticism of government to advocacy that is backed by research, statistics, figures and people's voices (Carden et al., 2005). Researchers therefore argue that there is need to substantiate advocacy work with solid research in order to be taken seriously within the development arena (Court et al., 2006). This move from less rhetoric to more evidence has become the backbone of community-level development implementation. It has led NGOs to the conclusion that research on development effectiveness is important as a basis for campaigns to bring change in development implementation. Ultimately, this is expected to enhance the lives of people (International Development Research Centre, IDRC, 2000).

Carrying out research on poor people's experiences and using the findings for advocacy could contribute to effective development (Carden et al., 2005; Klijn et al., 2002). However, it is necessary to go further and explore how NGOs channel research findings to decision-makers and how these in turn translate to effective policy changes (Stiefel et al., 1994). Communication with power holders in development must be interactive, employing research messages that are packaged in appealing and intelligible ways (Klijn et al.). This suggests that there is need to consider the nature and level of dissemination of research findings and of advocacy efforts employed. Another angle added to these views is one by Klijn et al. They emphasise that it is important for NGOs to use research findings from the beneficiaries to alert not only governments but the poor themselves, about emerging issues. This would enable the poor to take action in their localities as a

way of ensuring that development initiatives are responsive to their circumstances.

There is consensus among researchers that advocacy programmes have the potential to bring poor people's issues to the attention of the power-holders. Researchers who hold this view (Baker, 2000; Beetham 2006; Carden et al., 2005; Coffman, 2007) argue that engaging government with evidenced-based implementation proposals could be an effective way to ensure that they prioritise the poor in development programmes. Other researchers show a number of case studies indicating the success of advocacy programmes (Carden et al., 2005; Court et al., 2006; Klijn et al., 2002; Stiefel et al., 1994). They argue that advocacy programmes could bring about the much-needed beneficiary participation. As a result, they highlight the grassroots participatory organisations as the very foundations of democratic society and they predict "a fundamental restructuring of the institutional field of development through advocacy" (Stiefel et al., 1994, p.197). Other researchers argue that beneficiaries' preparedness for action in development issues that affect them has grown and needs to be activated (Fishkin, 1995; Klijn et al., 2002).

Additionally, advocacy can have an impact upon the factors that cause poverty (Carden et al., 2005). These factors could be the power relations between the government and the poor (Court et al., 2006). Advocacy can also ensure that the processes of development are participatory. These participatory approaches start from the assumption that poverty can be defined as the lack of opportunity, capabilities, security and empowerment (Programme Document, 2008), caused at the macro-level by the impacts of exclusion in decision making and actual implementation (Carden et al.). The causes are also at the micro-level through the poor's lack of know-how to engage with the power-holders (Klijn et al., 2002). Influencing macro-level policy and regulatory frameworks is therefore essential in increasing opportunities and removing constraints at the micro-level (Carden et al.). A deconstruction of these constraints through advocacy and other similar

strategies will therefore ensure that the poor participate and that poverty is reduced in a sustainable manner (Grusky et al., 2006).

Ellis et al. (2004) use case studies in four African countries to argue that advocacy and lobbying result in the inclusion of the poor in development programmes. They argue that successfully tackling inequality and social exclusion can be achieved by creating policy frameworks that ensure that socially excluded groups benefit from development programmes. The creation of such frameworks can be achieved through various strategies, with advocacy and lobbying being at the top of the list (McKay et al.). Furthermore, it would also ensure that the poor gain access to effective services and development opportunities so that they are fully able to participate politically (Chronic Poverty Report, CPRC, 2005; Ellis et al., 2004; McKay et al., 2003).

Based on the arguments presented here, the following conclusions can be drawn. Poverty is complex, and cannot be easily addressed using simple single-dimensional approaches. The correct diagnosis of poverty is a crucial first starting point for any development intervention. Furthermore, assessing both the scale of the problem and nature of the poverty are essential if interventions are to be successful. Advocacy and lobbying can result in beneficiary participation in development programmes. However, although this participation is likely to be a prerequisite for sustainable poverty reduction, the two cannot be understood as having a simple automatic cause-and-effect relationship. The two are simply a correlation between two variables which are influenced by a multitude of other factors. Poverty reduction strategies therefore require cross-sectoral approaches. Advocacy has been identified as one of those approaches that can result in effective beneficiary participation and ultimately, sustainable poverty reduction.

However, given the complexity of the poverty problem, the multi-dimensional nature of its causes, and the unique circumstances of every location and community (Chronic Poverty Report, CPRC, 2005), it is likely to be difficult to

develop a blue-print which easily links advocacy and poverty reduction in a linear manner. A number of factors come into play to contribute towards poverty reduction. This is to acknowledge that although advocacy can lead to participation and sustainable development, it is just one of the many approaches.

Acceptance that poverty is complex and therefore requires multi-dimensional approaches to solve it is useful. It can help to ensure that interventions, like advocacy, are based on the specific needs of each community and that they are more likely to succeed as a result. If the PHPSA 2008 is viewed as one of those approaches and if assumptions are that the stakeholders studied the local context of the beneficiaries in order to partake effective advocacy, then the programme theory is plausible, but with limitations. Some of those limitations are discussed below.

### **Opposing views**

In assessing the plausibility of a programme theory, it is appropriate to consider different perspectives regarding the programme's logic. For this reason, it is necessary to examine views of critics who question the relationship between a programme's activities and the expected outcomes. These can subsequently be used to gauge the assumptions of the PHPSA's theory.

Researchers have advised caution when it comes to cause-and-effect relations embedded in programme theories. They argue that in many instances, the direct effect programme conceptualisation of programme theory alone should not necessarily assume a simple linear relationship in which a programme influences a result or results. More often, argues Patton (2006), this simple assumption can be problematic in instances where there is no overall effect or where there is a complex interplay of effects from various other sources other than a single programme. Donaldson argues, "...the researcher is not able to disentangle the

success or failure of program implementation from the validity of the conceptual model on which the program is based" (Donaldson, 2007, p. 27). This calls for thorough review of assumptions that are embedded in programme theories.

Duignan (2004) and Patton (2006) have noted that the activities-outcomes-impacts chain in many programmes, may be oversimplified. Reality could be better described as a system of outcome hierarchies. "An outcome hierarchy is a structured set of all the important short-term and intermediate outcomes, which lead to a final outcome or goal, that a programme ultimately seeks to achieve" (Duignan, 2004, p. 16). These views call for attention to the possibility of multiple levels of cascading outcomes and multiple effects for any given programme. They also suggest the existence of cross-over effects between different programmes and initiatives. This also implies that distal goals like poverty eradication could transcend organisational programmes and simple linear cause-and-effect relations.

Donaldson (2007) suggests that attention could be given to the necessary mediators of a programme. According to Baron and Kennedy (1986) mediator variables specify how or why a particular effect or relationship occurs. They describe the psychological process that occurs to create the relationship between a programme and intended effects.

These views imply that a programme affects a number of other players before it can achieve its final intended effects. It also means that a lot of other variables contribute to the outcomes of a given programme. Patton (2006) explains that the straightforward notion of cause-effect works well for simple, bounded, and linear problems, but does not work well for understanding complex programmatic systems. Complex programme encompass a variety of factors and variables interacting dynamically in an interconnected and interdependent manner. This therefore calls for a careful analysis of the PHPSA theory because as it is

presented here, without the requisite moderators and mediators, it makes debatable assumptions.

Questions of causal relations between advocacy programmes and changes in public policies culminating in the inclusion of the poor in sustainable development interventions, emerge from these views. The causal link between a given *lobbying or advocacy activity and a specific effect on the policy outcome is often difficult to ascertain* (Klijn et al., 2002). So is the link between interactive processes and political decision-making processes. Although participation increases interaction between local governments and civil society, it does not always result in inclusivity of the poor in governance or development processes (Devas, 1999; Stiefel et al. 1994). Mitlin and Thompson (1995) question the extent to which people-centred development initiatives provide inputs into higher structures for planning and policymaking. They argue that there are operational challenges facing NGOs particularly their ability to deal with the political processes of governance so that they are able to influence policy.

The programme theory's assumptions that the programme stakeholders are able to influence the government of South Africa, can also be questioned. Carden (2005) argues that single NGOs and individual programmes are somewhat limited in the use of formal state approaches in advocacy and lobbying. This is because in general, they are not admitted into formal state negotiations, like the parliamentary processes of policy and programme formulations. By the time policies are open to NGO and other entities' inputs, the governments would already have determined positions (Devas, 1999; Stiefel et al. 1994). This results in NGOs only being involved when policies and development programmes have little flexibility for amendment (Carden; Court et. al., 2006). Whilst it is logical, the programme theory of the PHPSA is rather simplistic for such a complex and multi-dimensional goal as poverty reduction. To assume that if poor people speak and if advocacy is undertaken, then there is effective input to state interventions

could be too basic. Again, to assume that the state would listen because poor people have given evidence also sounds contentious.

In conclusion, the PHPSA 2008's theory is plausible for the engagement of government and stakeholders' in development as shown in the research examined here. However, it is reasonable only in certain areas. Poverty remains a problem in South Africa. The notion of the importance of participation by communities in development initiatives is a credible one. So is the link between advocacy and poverty alleviation. There is however an apparent lack of clarity in the theory in terms of the various mediators that could be applied in order to ensure that the programme leads to improved quality of life for the poor and ultimately poverty reduction. An alternative programme theory is therefore suggested in Figure 2 below:

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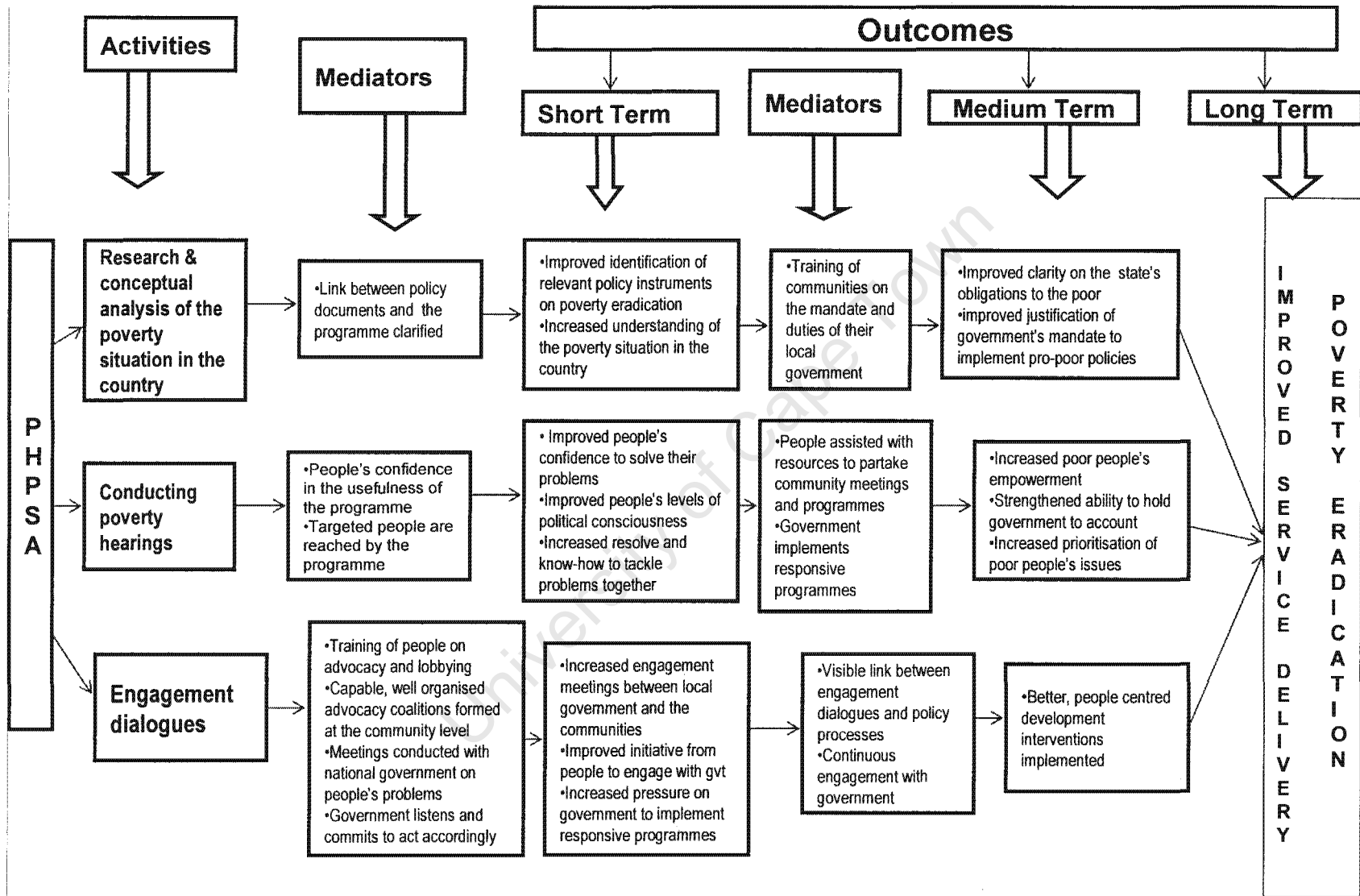


Figure 2. A Suggested Programme Theory for the PHPSA

The rationale of the suggested programme theory is incorporated under the Results and Discussion Section of this evaluation.

## **Evaluation Questions**

This short section describes the type of evaluation that was undertaken in this study. It also lists the Evaluation Questions that guided this research.

### *Why evaluate the programme*

This is a formative evaluation of the PHPSA. Formative evaluation seeks to strengthen or improve a programme by examining, among other factors, its delivery, the quality of its implementation and the organisational context (Patton, 1997). In formative evaluation, the evaluator also has to analyse the programme's logic. A programme theory is essential to help guide how a programme will be evaluated (Coffman, 2007). This is a change-oriented evaluation approach which is attuned to assessing in an ongoing way, any discrepancies between the expected direction and short-term outcomes of the programme. It compares the programme's expectations with the beneficiaries' reflections. It also analyses strengths and weaknesses in order to generate understandings about how the programme could be implemented better. As such, this evaluation focuses, first, on assumptions of the programme theory. Secondly, it assesses the alignment of the programme activities with the programme theory. Thirdly, it gauges the programme's relevance using the beneficiaries' views. Lastly, the programme assesses the extent to which planned activities were implemented.

The following are the Evaluation Questions:

**Question 1:** What were the programme activities of the PHPSA 2008 and are these aligned with the programme theory?

**Question 2:** What do we know about the participants and their views regarding the outcomes of the poverty hearings?

**Question 3:** Have the government and other stakeholders implemented the programmes for poverty reduction that they committed to undertake after the PHPSA 2008?

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## CHAPTER 2

### METHOD

This section presents the method used for the PHPSA formative evaluation and covers three sections, namely, the data providers, the materials and the procedures.

#### **Data Providers**

Five streams of data providers were used. These were programme staff, programme beneficiaries, programme sponsors, Government employees and the programme records. A summary of these is presented in Table 2 below.

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Table 2

*A summary of the Role, Role Players and Sample Data Providers for the PHPSA*

Role	Role player	Total number of possible data providers	Sample: June – September 2009
Programme staff	Programme staff who coordinated the poverty hearings	1 Programme Officer 1 Programme Manager 8 Research Assistants 10 Programme Commissioners	1 Interviewed 2 Interviewed 0 Interviewed
Government officials	Those who took part during the engagement dialogues	9 Local Government officials residing in the 9 provinces 2 Officials from the Presidency's Policy Unit	1 interviewed by email 1 interviewed by email
Programme sponsors	Donor	1 Funding Manager 1 Grants Officer	1 interviewed by email
Programme beneficiaries	Poor people who took part at the Poverty Hearings	2500 people took part at the poverty hearings	18 interviewed by telephone
Programme Commissioners	These presided over the poverty hearings and were tasked with engaging with the national government on behalf of the people	22 Commissioners, who were individuals of high social standing and who were able to approach national government on behalf of the people	0 interviewed
Programme records	Programme records that were used before, during and after the poverty hearings	Various documents filling up a room	PHPSA Concept Note, 2008 PHPSA Data Sheet, 2008/ 2009 PHPSA Funding Proposal, 2008 PHPSA Participants' Sheet, 2008 PHPSA Programme Document, 2008 The people have spoken, where do we go from here?, 2008 Minutes of meetings

As in most evaluations, it was not feasible to access all the stakeholders owing to the resource constraints. For the same reason, it was impractical to visit all nine provinces of the country to interview a big sample of the beneficiaries. Where it was feasible, convenience samples were used in line with the available resources, circumstances and context of the evaluation. Although the PHPSA Commissioners would have provided useful information for the evaluation, none of them responded to the numerous emails.

Except for the programme records (refer to Table 2), convenience samples were used for the data providers in this formative evaluation of the PHPSA. This was decided because of the resource limitations. It was also decided because efforts to secure interviews with a larger sample of Government officials, Research Assistants and the Beneficiaries were impractical and unsuccessful. Convenience sampling generally assumes a homogeneous population. This has caused significant debate about the validity of results (Marshall, 1996) As a result, caution should be exercised when interpreting findings from a convenience sample because they may not be representative of the entire population. However, given the context and the circumstances, the use of convenience sampling in this evaluation was essential in providing helpful information for the evaluation.

In terms of the interview questions, an interview schedule was used to interview the beneficiaries. This was different from the one that was sent via email to the Research Assistants, Government officials and the Donor employee.

Ethical considerations were applied to the evaluation. The evaluator completed an ethics declaration form which was approved by the University's Ethics Committee. This was adhered to throughout the evaluation.

Interviews with the Data Providers were conducted as described below.

#### *Interviews with the Programme Staff*

In terms of the programme staff, it was not possible to access all of them. Programme staff interviewed comprised only the Programme Officer who had coordinated the poverty hearings. Interviews with the Programme Officer were face-to-face and unstructured. They were conducted between December 2008 and June 2009. The purpose of the interviews was to understand the programme

in order to gauge whether or not it was evaluable. Later, it was to gain clarity on the many facets of the programme. In February 2009, the Programme Officer left the organisation and relocated to Malawi. After she had left, interviews were conducted telephonically, either to get further clarification on the programme or to locate the various programme records that informed the evaluation. Despite having initially committed to give interviews, the Programme Manager, however, later declined to take part in the evaluation.

Telephone calls were made to five Research Assistants whose contact details were found in the programme documents. The purpose of the calls was to seek their permission for the evaluator to email them a question on the poverty hearings programme.

After they had agreed, an open-ended question was emailed to them. Although five were telephoned and had agreed to answer the email question, only two of them responded. Follow up telephone calls were made to the other three who had not responded. Unfortunately they were not willing to answer the questions.

#### *Interviews with the Government Officials*

Of the nine who took part in the programme, five Government officials had agreed to answer the email question. Of these, only two responded. One was from National Government whilst the other was from Provincial Government.

#### *Interviews with the Programme Sponsors*

One Programme Manager from the Programme Sponsors was also interviewed via email and telephonically, using the same question that was emailed to the Government officials and the Research Assistants. Table 3 below shows the

interview schedule that was sent via email to the Research Assistants, the Government officials and the funding agency's Programme Manager.

Table 3

*Email Interview Schedule for the Research Assistants, Government Officials and Funder employee*

---

Dear .....

Our telephone conversation earlier, refers. As I said when we spoke, I got your name from the 2008 Poverty Hearings records. Thank you for agreeing to answer the following question regarding the poverty hearings. Please note that your name will not be used in anyway and please feel free to decline if you do not wish to take part.

What are your views on the 2008 poverty hearings; did you find the hearings useful to the beneficiaries? In which way were they/ not useful? What sorts of activities, if any, have resulted from the programme?

Thank you in expectation.

---

*Interviews with the Programme Beneficiaries*

The beneficiaries were all interviewed telephonically. The evaluator and a translator used a teleconference telephone to interview a convenience sample of 18 beneficiaries. Beneficiaries spoke various languages; English, Sotho, Afrikaans, Zulu, Xhosa, Pedi, Venda, Tswana and Ndebele. The translator translated the participants' views to the evaluator as well as the evaluator's questions to the beneficiaries. The interview schedule that was used for the beneficiaries is presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4

*Structured Interview Schedule for the Beneficiaries*

---

"I got your name from the records on the 2008 Poverty Hearings. May I please ask you a few short questions about these hearings? It will take about five minutes and I will not use your name in any way."

1. Do you remember the 2008 poverty hearings? [terminate interview if answer is no]
2. In what district do you live?
3. How old are you?
4. Gender [ask if not apparent from voice]
5. Do you have a job or are you unemployed?
6. Did you take part in the poverty hearings?
7. What part did you play?
  - a. I spoke during the plenary
  - b. I took part in a group discussion
  - c. I made a DVD
  - d. I wrote something for the hearings
8. Do you think the poverty hearings led to activities in your community? If yes, probe what these activities are.
9. Did you find the poverty hearings useful?
10. Do you think the poverty hearings have improved participation in your community?

Thank you very much for your time.

---

**Materials**

This section describes the materials that were used for the evaluation.

## *Programme Records*

Empirical and archival data were used in the evaluation. Different types of programme records were used to provide data and information for review, analysis and formative evaluation of the programme (refer to Table 3). The evaluator was allowed access to a room full of documents, however with restriction on copying or taking out some of the relevant documents. Most of the documents in the room though were not relevant for the evaluation. For the purposes of the evaluation programme records that were deemed relevant for the evaluation were selected. The list of documents that were accessed (refer to Table 2), including a summary description of what they were, is presented below.

- The PHPSA Concept Note (2008): A document outlining the ideas and philosophy behind the PHPSA.
- Data Sheets (2008) and Data Sheets (2009): There were two types of these. One type comprised different filed documents that included information on the beneficiaries, including their demography, their submissions and their contact details. Each beneficiary who made submissions had a sheet detailing this information. The second type encompassed summarised filed documents on the progress that the programme had made. These were done on a monthly basis. They also recorded meetings and any other deliverables that the programme had achieved. They also attached minutes of key meetings.
- PHPSA Funding Proposal (2008): This was the document that was sent to the sponsors and other potential donors of the programme.
- PHPSA Participants' Sheet (2008): These were filed documents that listed all the participants in the various provinces. Unlike the data sheets, these only had names and contact details of the beneficiaries.
- PHPSA Programme Document (2008): This document detailed the concept of the programme, the planned activities, the envisaged

resources needed to undertake the programme and the expected outcomes.

- *The People Have Spoken; Where Do We Go From Here?* (2008): This was the report of the PHPSA that detailed the issues that had been raised by the beneficiaries of the programme. It was distributed widely.

## **Procedures**

This section outlines the procedures that were undertaken in the formative evaluation of the PHPSA. It summarises, in Figure 2, the procedures that were undertaken for each evaluation question. It also describes in detail, the steps that were undertaken on the interview schedules, the programme records and the data gathering process. The procedures are summarised below.

### *Summary of the Procedures*

The evaluator used the programme records (refer to Table 2) and the following procedures for each evaluation question. Figure 3 below summarises the procedures that were carried out for each evaluation question.

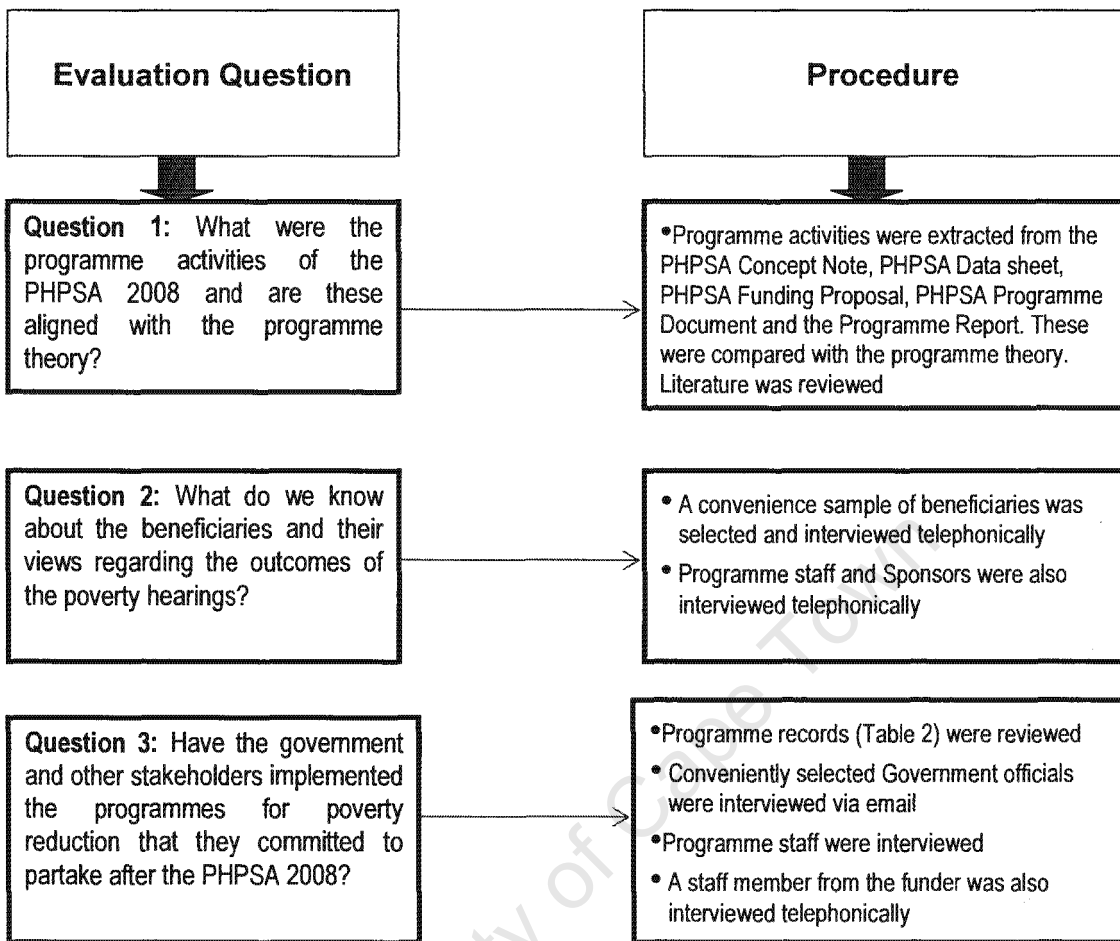


Figure 3. Evaluation Questions with Corresponding Procedures

The use of a range of materials strengthened the evaluation process as analysis of information provided observations based on many data sources.

Due to the small sample of the beneficiaries and the Government officials, a thorough procedure for data and information gathering through the Programme records was undertaken. For example, efforts were made to verify information from the Programme Report (2008), which was rather a summary of the issues that people had raised during the poverty hearings. Discrepancies and ambiguities in the programme records were also verified with the Programme

staff. This verification involved accessing Data sheets (2008; 2009), which were more detailed.

### *Interview Schedules*

Two interview schedules were developed (refer to Table 2 and Table 3). One was for the beneficiaries of the programme and the other was for the Government officials, Sponsors and the Research Assistants. Due to the qualitative nature of the evaluation, both interview schedules asked open ended questions. These were designed to encourage full and meaningful answers using the interviewees' own knowledge, reflections and feelings.

Each completed interview schedule was checked for quality of information, numbered and filed. On the first interview schedule, data on the demographics of the beneficiaries was summarised and the mean age calculated accordingly. Qualitative information from the beneficiaries was translated through a professional translator and the translations verified with other language translators. Efforts were also made to ensure accuracy of information in the interview schedules of the Sponsors, Government officials and Research Assistants. For example, in instances where there were ambiguities, follow up emails were sent to seek clarity. The information was then summarised and collated according to the evaluation questions. A Research Assistant was asked to assist with reading the interview schedules again in order to ensure that the summaries were reflective of the respondents' views. The Programme Officer was also telephoned to clarify some of the gaps that arose from the respondents' views.

### *Access and Review of Records*

The Programme Concept note (2008), Programme Document (2008), Data sheets (2008; 2009), Programme Report (2008), Funding Proposal (2008), meeting minutes and Participants' Sheets (2008) were accessed, copied where there was permission to do so and then arranged systematically. The Data sheets and Participants' Sheets particularly needed to be sorted by province, age group and priority areas. Some of the submissions in the Data sheets were in indigenous languages. The translator was asked to assist with the translations. Each of the programme records was vigilantly examined, read, assessed and analysed. In accordance with the evaluation questions, information from these records was summarised and the summaries filed. Information was also captured in notebooks for future reference, with important pieces of information highlighted. Where necessary, any gaps in information were followed up and sourced. The relevant information was then compared with the evaluation questions (refer to Figure 2).

Whilst every effort was made to access the relevant information, the room full of these documents had a poor filing system, which rendered the task overwhelming. As a result, it could be that some of the relevant documents were not accessed.

### *Information Gathering*

The data collection process started in December 2008, with a review of the evaluability of the programme. Intense data gathering was however done between June and September 2009, although a review of the Programme records was done throughout the year where there was necessity to refer back. Unfortunately, there were some confidentiality stipulations that had to be adhered

to. Although they were understandable, these could have hampered the information gathering exercise.

The interviews with the beneficiaries took place between June and September 2009. This became a lengthy exercise because some of the telephone numbers that were listed in the programme records had since changed. Some of the beneficiaries were contacted more than once to provide clarifications on their views. Each interview took about 15-20 minutes. An audio recorder was used to capture the people's views. A multi-lingual person assisted with the translations. The translations were two fold: translating the interview schedule to each participant and the answers to the evaluator.

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## CHAPTER 3

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses, concurrently, the findings drawn from a formative evaluation of the PHPSA. The results and the discussion are presented in terms of the three evaluation questions.

**Question 1: What were the programme activities of the PHPSA 2008 and are these aligned with the programme theory?**

This section of the evaluation focuses on whether or not the PHPSA's activities were in line with the theory of the programme. The question of whether or not the activities were conducted as scheduled is dealt with under Evaluation Question 3.

The programme activities, as presented in the Concept Note (2008) and Programme Document (2008) are presented in Figure 4 below:

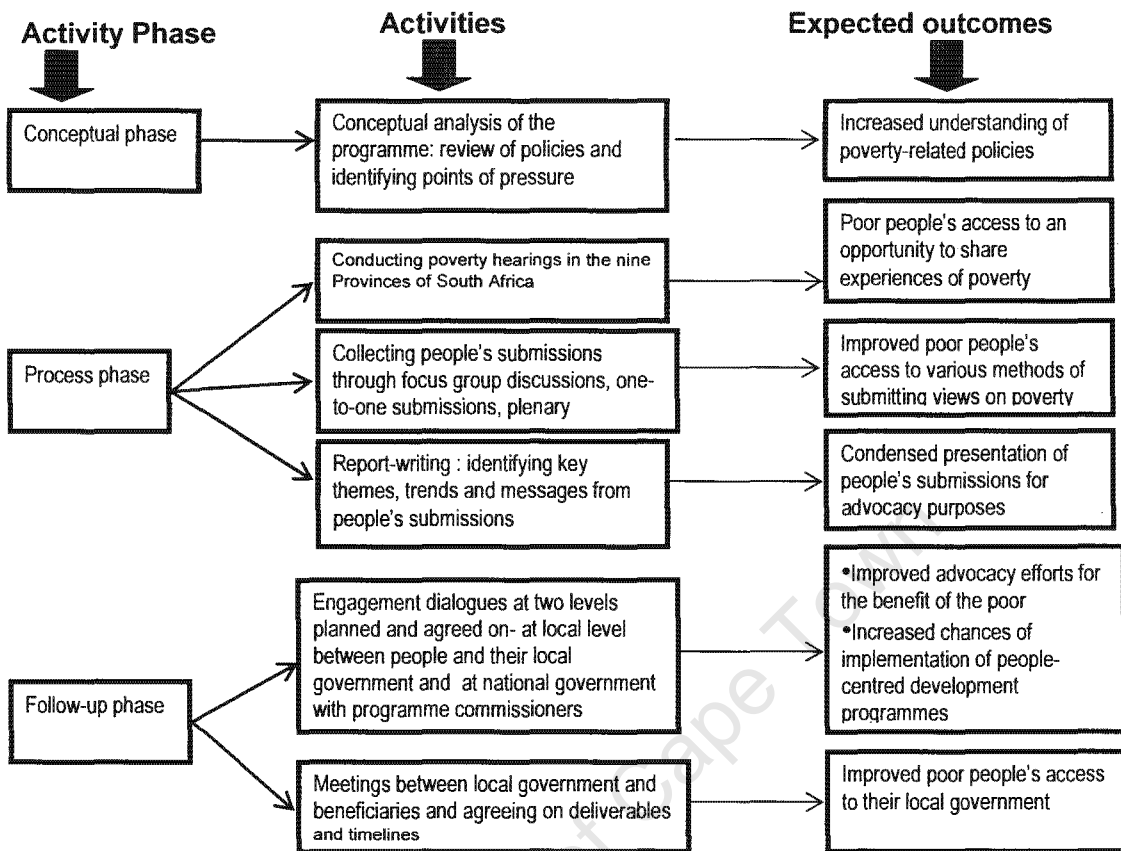


Figure 4. Programme Activities and Expected Outcomes

### Gauging activities against the Programme Theory

To review whether or not the activities of the programme were aligned to the programme theory, the three activity phases were compared to the assumptions of the programme theory. This is reflected in Table 5

Table 5

*Programme Activity Phases with Corresponding Programme Theory Assumptions*

<b>Activity Phases</b>	<b>Programme Theory Assumptions</b>
Conceptual activity phase	Understanding of poverty is important
Process activity phase	Poor people's participation leads to poverty reduction
Follow-up activity phase	Advocacy and lobbying leads to government and stakeholders' implementation of responsive and hence effective development interventions

*Conceptual Activity Phase*

According to the Programme Concept Note (2008) and the Programme Document (2008), the conceptual phase of the programme involved reviewing relevant South African policy documents. These include the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act, the White Paper on Local Government and the country's Constitution. This review was driven by the need to put the poverty situation in South Africa into perspective in order to link it to the State's responsibilities on poverty reduction. It was also aimed at justifying the programme and contextualising its activities (Funding Proposal, 2008).

A review of the policy documents mentioned here is necessary in order to gauge the relevance and alignment of this activity phase to the programme theory.

Firstly, section 153(a) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) states the developmental duties of a municipality. It stipulates that a municipality must structure and manage its administration and budgeting and planning processes to give priority to the basic needs of the community. The objective for this is to promote the social and economic development of the community.

Secondly, the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act (Act 32 of 2000) states the need to set out the core principles, mechanisms and processes that give meaning to developmental local government. This entails empowering municipalities to move progressively towards the social and economic upliftment of communities. Local government also provides basic services to all people, and specifically the poor and the disadvantaged.

Thirdly, the White Paper on Local government (RSA, 1998) Section B subsection 1 states that the reality in cities, towns and rural areas is that many communities are still divided with millions of people living in dire poverty, isolated from services and opportunities. It therefore underscores the importance of local government to exercise its power in a way that has a maximum impact on the social development of communities particularly meeting the basic needs of the poor. It also emphasises the importance to focus on the growth of the local economy.

This conceptual phase of the programme's activities therefore sought to give meaning to the PHPSA, with the view that understanding poverty is necessary in effective implementation of development initiatives. It also sought to set the backdrop and justification of why it is the primary duty and mandate of the government to ensure that all people in South Africa have access to the basic necessities of living and that poverty is reduced (Programme Concept Note, 2008). This phase is aligned with the programme theory, which underscores the

importance of understanding poverty both from an international perspective but more importantly from a South African standpoint.

The programme theory is embedded in the need to conceptualise the poverty situation within the international development framework. This encompasses the international instruments and conventions that guide poverty reduction processes. The activities under the programme's conceptual phase are aligned with the United Nations' MDGs. The quoted national policy frameworks indicate South Africa's commitment to fulfilling its constitutional obligations to deliver socio-economic rights within the context of its national plan of action and the MDGs. One of the indicators of progress towards the achievement of the MDGs is the effective and equitable delivery of public services (Human Development Report, 2005).

Criticism could however be leveled at this conceptual phase of activity. It is vital for the programme stakeholders to impart the understanding of the conceptual framework of the policies to the communities. The suggested programme theory (refer to Figure 2) identifies that training of communities on the duties and mandate of their local government is a mediating variable between this conceptual analysis and the long term goals of improved service delivery and poverty reduction. Researchers quoted earlier, for example Bevan (2004) and Devas (1999), have noted that communities need to be equipped in order to be able to engage with their local governments. One of the constraints identified is that poor people have limited knowledge of the operations and obligations of their local governments, which compromises their bargaining power in development interventions (Satterthwaite, 2007). The conceptual phase of the programme activities could therefore have included an activity of imparting the conceptual analysis to the communities. This could be done through training, with a view that in the medium term, communities will be better equipped to lobby their municipalities. Figure 2, which presents a suggested programme theory, highlights this issue.

### *Process Phase*

This phase of activity involved actual hearings in the nine Provinces of South Africa. It included collecting people's opinion of their experiences and on issues that affected them. It also encompassed writing reports and collating the issues that were raised by the people, under the various themes. The relevance of these activities needs to be gauged in terms of their alignment to the programme theory.

One of the assumptions of the programme theory is that it is crucial to involve poor people in intervention programmes. It also emphasises the need to assess poverty reduction efforts in order to remain relevant and effective. Researchers and views quoted earlier (under the review of the plausibility of the programme theory) underscore the need to support development of local assessment capacity within the beneficiary structures (Groenewald et al., 2002; Hardi et al., 1997). In line with the views of Lisk (1985) and Stiefel et al. (1994), the Programme Document (2008) emphasises that it is vital to capture the voices of the people because of the importance of using qualitative approaches to the understanding of poverty dynamics. As quoted earlier, the mere use of money-metric measures to assess poverty does not, on its own, capture the much needed understanding of the experiences of the people and the nuances that exist in communities (Bevan, 2004; Butler 1998).

The emphasis of the programme theory is the requirement to employ qualitative approaches to the understanding of poverty. This view is complemented by Kehler (2000) who argues that poor people possess the informational advantages to give evidence of their daily experiences of living in poverty. The collection of people's views in order to demonstrate assorted, individual understandings and experiences of poverty is therefore aligned to the theory of the programme. In addition, in conformity with the theory of the programme are the participants' Data Sheets (2008) (refer to Table 2), which place value on the

dynamics at the individual, household and community level, rather than merely on international poverty trend analyses. This is deemed vital for understanding poverty and therefore coming up with responsive solutions to solve it (Hong et al., 2007; Nelson et al., 1995).

The importance of involving the poor in planning and implementing development policies is the backbone of the programme theory. The theory's supposition is that significant beneficiary involvement in development initiatives increases the likelihood of success and sustainability. With broad participation, solutions to poverty challenges are generally more appropriate to the local setting (Groenewald et al., 2002). Moreover, when beneficiaries understand and take ownership of the development process they are more likely to remain actively engaged and therefore empowered (Beethan, 2006).

This process phase of activity also sought to involve the poor in local government's development initiatives in order to assist them to engage in their localities. This would ensure their continuous participation and ultimately, their empowerment. This assumption is aligned to the programme theory's assumption that if poor people are enabled, they could approach their local government in order to negotiate for responsive development interventions (Programme Concept Note, 2008). It is also aligned to the central notion of the Integrated Development Planning (IDP), quoted earlier. The emphasis of the IDP is that participation is vital as it can lead to citizen empowerment.

These activities also reveal the importance of assessing poverty beyond single-dimensional approaches. The argument of the researchers quoted earlier is that the qualitative approaches to the measurement of poverty, which for years had been neglected (Morse, 2004) are important to get the experiences of those who actually live in poverty. However, whilst qualitative approaches are valid and important this evaluation suggests that the quantitative approaches are still valuable. This is because income levels and per capita consumption levels, for example, remain valid approaches to the measurement of poverty (Grusky et al.,

2006). The programme therefore could have done well to also include quantitative approaches, particularly existing statistics and figures, for example from the World Bank and the South African Statistical Office. These could have been used to complement the people's voices. This approach could have been in line with the views of researchers and reports quoted earlier. The United Nations Human Development Report (2005)'s combination of both qualitative and quantitative analysis to measure poverty could have been adopted by the programme.

Whilst this phase of activity is aligned to the programme theory, both the logic of the programme and the corresponding actions in this instance could be criticised. Facilitating empowerment of the poor has the potential to ensure their participation in the development process. It takes more than potential and requires the development of sound and responsive programmes that will incrementally and gradually remove the social and political barriers to poverty reduction (Lisk, 2005; Mitlin et al., 1995). Various variables mediate between collecting people's voices and achieving empowerment, and ultimately, poverty eradication. The suggested programme theory (refer to Figure 2) identifies some of those mediators. People need to be assisted with resources; skills, financial and time, in order to be able to conduct community meetings with their local government. They also need to be equipped with skills to strategise so that these meetings yield the intended outcomes. Equity in access to services and programmes requires proactive efforts to reach out to the poor (Fishkin 1995; McKay et al., 2003). This calls for stakeholders of poverty reduction programmes to recognise that the poor have very limited capacity to organise themselves into advocacy coalitions, let alone engage with the government on an ongoing basis. Conversely, local government should comply, go beyond listening to the people and actually implement the requisite responsive development programmes.

### *Follow-up Activities after People's Testimonies*

This activity phase involved follow-up events that were undertaken after people had given testimonies of their situations. The Programme Report (2008) states that there were two levels of engagements under this activity phase. One was the formation of groupings at the community level and the subsequent engagements with local government and other local stakeholders. The other involved the engagement dialogues with national level government through the programme's Commissioners.

The logical cause-and-effect conception of the programme theory of the PHPSA is that there is need for mediation so that participation ultimately leads to poverty reduction. Researchers quoted earlier acknowledge that whilst beneficiary participation has been identified as vital, it does not come automatically for the poor people (Fishkin, 1995; McKay et. al., 2003). Government's lack of know-how and political will to involve the poor has also been cited as one of the reasons why the poor themselves have to take the initiative and demand space to participate in the development process (Kehler, 2000; Stiefel et al., 1994).

One of the expected outcomes of this level of activities was improved advocacy efforts for the benefit of the poor (refer to Figure 4). As noted by the researchers quoted in the preceding section, lobbying and advocacy can ensure that the poor are involved in development initiatives and that their priorities take centre stage in policy formulation and implementation (Baker 2000; Carden et al., 2005). This approach, encompassed in the programme theory, takes poverty to be a structural phenomenon which has to be tackled through active mobilisation of the poor (Court et al., 2000). The programme theory emphasises that facilitated advocacy benefits the poor and that it is a logical step in building better services and improving policies aimed at poverty reduction. This is a view that is shared by researchers like Carden et al. (2005) and Stiefel et al. (1994). They argue that

poor people's preparedness for action in issues that affect them has grown and therefore needs to be activated through advocacy and lobbying.

It is however necessary to look at the simplicity of the notions of this phase of activity in relation to the suggested programme theory (refer to Figure 2). The assumption of the PHPSA theory is that once the poverty hearings are held, advocacy coalitions at the local level will be automatically formed. Arguably, this is too simplistic. So is the notion that advocacy routinely leads to government implementation of responsive interventions. A number of mediating variables would have to come into play during this process. Firstly, it is important to train communities on advocacy and lobbying. Secondly, it is also important that this training translates to the formation of active, well-managed and capable advocacy coalitions at the community level. Thirdly, besides meeting with the people, government needs to implement development interventions accordingly so that poverty reduction is achieved. Fourthly, for advocacy coalitions to yield the desired results there should be continuous dialogues. Beetham (2006) emphasises that development is a process rather than a finite issue. Fifthly, there should be a visible link between engagement dialogues and policy processes. One of the issues that researchers like Mitlin and Thomson (1995) note is that there is a limit to the extent to which people-centred development initiatives provide input into higher structures of government's policy planning. They also cite operational challenges that NGOs and other initiatives face in trying to influence policy making through political processes within the government.

The weakness in the activities stems from the over simplified programme theory. The simplicity of the theory is that it assumes a simple cause-and-effect relation between activities and expected outcomes. For advocacy to lead to poor people's participation and empowerment, there is a requirement to go further than giving them a platform to address their problems emotionally. Arguably, a poverty agenda will often require interventions to focus initial emphasis on empowerment of the poor through building their capacity at individual and

institutional levels and building demand for services where there has been little in the past. The building of that capacity takes more than a single programme or project. There is hence a necessity for a carefully planned continuous advocacy and lobbying process. The programme stakeholders should recognise that the poor have very limited capacity to organise themselves into advocacy coalitions, let alone engage on an ongoing basis with the government.

**Question 2: What do we know about the beneficiaries and their views regarding the outcomes of the poverty hearings?**

This section presents information on the sample of the PHPSA beneficiaries. The demographics of the beneficiaries are presented in Table 6 below. It also compares the beneficiaries' views to those of the Programme Staff and the Sponsors.

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Table 6

*Beneficiaries' Demographics and Other Information*

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>
Males	9
Females	9

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<b>Age category</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>
20-30	10
31-40	4
41-50	1
51-50	1
61-70	2
<b>Average age</b>	<b>35</b>

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<b>Employment Status</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>
Formally employed	-
Self employed	2
Neither formally employed nor self-employed	16
<b>Of the unemployed</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>
Social grant recipients	10
No source of income	6

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Provincial distribution	2 people per province (1 male, 1 female)
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<b>Type of submission</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>
One-on-one	9
Plenary	2
DVD	2
Group Discussion	3
Just sat and listened to others	2

## *Beneficiaries' Views on the Outcomes of the Poverty Hearings*

In response to the question on the usefulness of the poverty hearings, the beneficiaries had the following views:

Firstly, 17 out of 18 thought that the programme was useful and should be taken forward. Some of the quotes below illustrate this:

*"...we managed to let our frustrations out and we managed to call 'a spade a spade' in terms of government's failure to end poverty....so yes, the poverty hearings were useful...."*

*"...the hearings gave us as people an opportunity to address issues that affect us as well as a chance to think together and find a voice to use to confront the government....they also made us begin to feel that things can change and poverty in fact can be ended...."*

*"...I found them useful because they allowed us to let out what has been boiling inside in terms of poverty in South Africa..."*

*"They were useful if viewed as part of the many initiatives that are trying to end a difficult-to-end thing such as poverty..."*

*"...Yes. People need to hear what others go through and share what they also go through so that together we can speak with one voice and force the government to listen and change."*

*"...we let out what was bothering us and we had people who were willing to listen..."*

Most of the views about the usefulness of the programme bordered on emotional expressions and emphasised the value of the space that had been offered to talk

about issues, the opportunities to share experiences with fellow citizens and the know-how that was cultivated to agree on what could be done. They were all based on the potential that the programme had, rather than what it actually did.

One respondent did not think that the poverty hearings had been useful because they had not changed his situation. The quote below illustrates this:

*“...you ask about usefulness! I am still poor, jobless and angry; there is your answer...”*

For this respondent, the issue was that the programme had not brought any change to his life and hence had not served the intended purpose.

#### *Poverty Hearings and Further Activities in the Communities*

In response to the question on whether or not the poverty hearings had led to further activities in the communities, the beneficiaries had the following views:

Firstly, 16 out of 18 thought that the poverty hearings had not resulted in further activities in their communities. The remaining two did not answer the question but rather emphasised that there were plans to start activities.

The selected quotes below illustrate the general view:

*“...Not really. They just happened and ended just like in 1998...”*

*“No. no money was given for activities...”*

*“...No. We are still trying to begin some activities but there are no resources to do so...”*

*“...No. We made plans but no-one was there to drive the planned activities...”*

*“...Yes we spoke out. But afterwards, nothing has been done to drive the kind of activities that were agreed on...”*

Only one beneficiary linked the poverty hearings to the broader government poverty reduction programmes. The quote below illustrates this:

*“...Yes. Government started again this emphasis on war on poverty immediately after the poverty hearings but in terms of our own activities, we are still trying to work on them. There is no money.”*

As illustrated by the beneficiaries' views, there were limited community level activities that took place after the people had submitted their views to the stakeholders. Most of the beneficiaries quoted above attributed the limited activities to lack of resources to facilitate the process.

Whilst this is a reasonable argument, the limited implementation of the planned activities could in fact be deeper than just lack of resources. For instance, there is no indication in the Programme documents that the stakeholders had staff that was put in place to oversee and coordinate the implementation of the planned activities. It is as if the expectation was that after people had submitted their views and thoughts, they would routinely form advocacy coalitions and engage with the local government.

#### *Poverty Hearings and the Improvement of Participation*

The beneficiaries also answered the question on whether or not they thought that the poverty hearings had improved participation in their communities.

Twelve out of 18 thought that the poverty hearings had contributed to improved participation, however underscoring the fact that participation is deeper than a once-off programme. The rest of the respondents thought that the programme cannot be said to have improved participation. Their arguments varied. Some of the quotations below illustrate their views:

*...It is not easy to judge with just the poverty hearings. The poverty hearings are just part of the many activities that can improve participation. On their own, they cannot be said to have changed people's participation levels...*

*...they were a once-off event and laid a good foundation for people to participate in development issues. I am afraid on their own they cannot be said to have improved participation...*

The rest of those that argued against the programme's improvement of participation felt that it was too early to judge whether or not the programme could be said to have improved participation.

#### *Programme Staff's Views on the Usefulness of the Programme*

In order to make a comparison with beneficiaries' views, Programme staff were also asked a similar question (refer to Table 3). The two Research Assistants asked also thought that the poverty hearings were useful. They both applauded the programme's application of multi-methods of collecting people's views and argued that this ensured that people were free to use whichever method they felt comfortable with.

### *Programme Sponsors' Views of the Programme*

The interviewed Programme Manager from the programme's Sponsors indicated that in her view, it was too early to gauge the effectiveness of the programme. However, she acknowledged that there had been minimal community level activities after the poverty hearings, contrary to the original projections stipulated in the Funding Proposal (2008).

One conclusion that could be drawn from the views of the beneficiaries and those of the staff is that the poverty hearings provided a space for the poor to emotionally express their frustrations at government's lack of service delivery and failure to implement effective development programmes. Some of the beneficiaries were angry and frustrated (Programme Report, 2008) because of their situation.

It can be concluded that the beneficiaries saw the programme as a conduit through which they could emotionally address issues that affected them. Their views do not reflect a deeper understanding of what an advocacy programme should achieve in the short, medium and long terms. Neither do their observations reveal an understanding that although still too early to gauge, the programme was a process towards altering their situation of poverty. They therefore needed to judge its usefulness on the short-term outcomes and the processes of the programme so far undertaken. The beneficiaries also needed to go deeper and compare the poverty hearings with other poverty reduction initiatives in their communities. This would reveal the value addition that the programme brought to their lives in terms of the potential to alter their situations, in conjunction with other initiatives.

**Question 3: Have the Government and other stakeholders implemented the programmes for poverty reduction that they committed to after the PHPSA 2008?**

According to the Programme Report (2008) the period after people’s submissions was characterised by policy engagement dialogues with Government officials. This was the follow-up phase of the activities of the programme (refer to Figure 4). The agenda for these meetings was guided by the seven main concerns that the people raised during the poverty hearings (Programme Report). Some of the agreed main activities for the Government as stipulated in the Programme Document (2008) are presented in Figure 5 below:

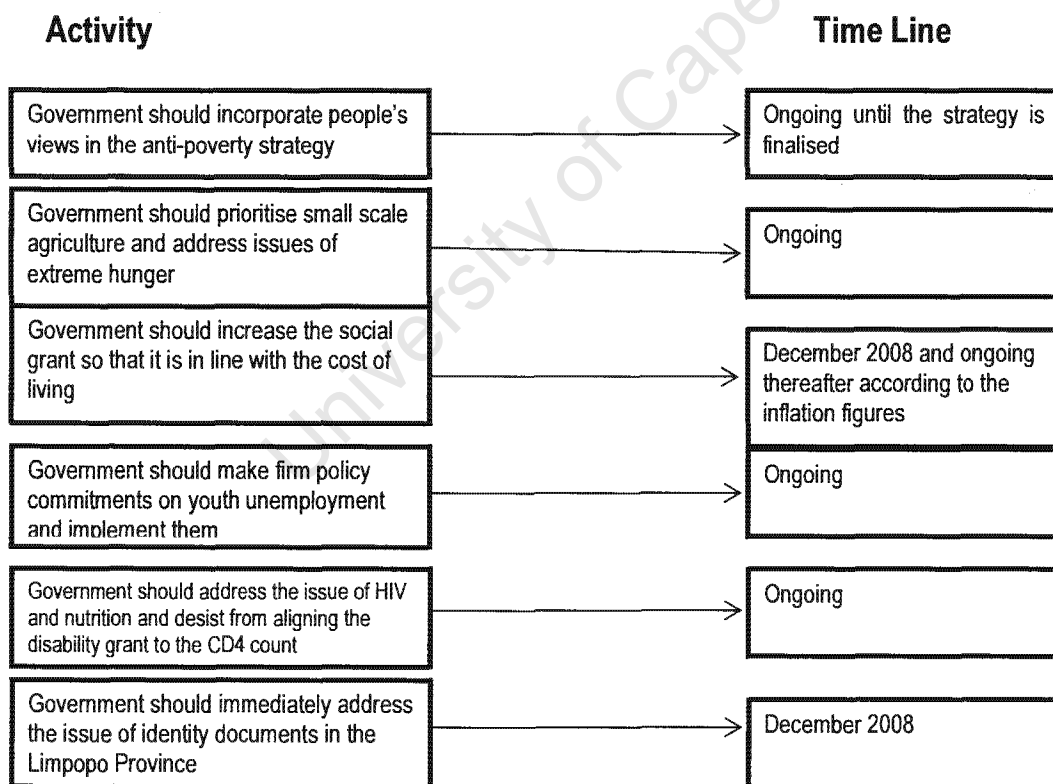


Figure 5. Activities for Government Implementation

On the first activity, the Programme Document (2008) stipulates that the organisations that conducted the poverty hearings were to be involved in negotiations with the government on the anti-poverty strategy. The background to this activity is that the South African Government had been in the process of developing a strategy to guide its poverty reduction work since 2007 (Programme Concept Note, 2008). The development of this anti-poverty strategy had been initiated by the government itself although the civil society had to suggest improvements to it. The objective of the strategy was to ensure that Government's work on poverty eradication is streamlined to meet the challenges posed by poverty in the country. As part of the poverty hearings' plans, one of the key deliverables of the programme was to ensure that the people's views and concerns are catered for in the anti-poverty strategy (Funding Proposal, 2008). The Data Sheets (2008; 2009) reveal that the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy was discussed with the Government and suggested areas of improvement of the strategy identified. These amendments suggested by the programme stakeholders were then debated in the South African Parliament. At the time of data collection for this evaluation, this was still an ongoing process.

The issue of extreme hunger which featured in all the provinces during the poverty hearings was also discussed extensively with the various Government Departments, particularly the Department of Agriculture (Data Sheets, 2008; Programme Report, 2008). Concessions were achieved in which the Government agreed in principle to invest resources in smallholding agriculture, training and land issues. The objective was to ensure that households achieve food security and are also able to grow more for sale to cater for other needs (Programme Report, 2008).

On the Government's increase of the Social Grant, the programme's Data Sheets (2008; 2009) indicate that there were considerable achievements. Three policy dialogues had been conducted by civil society organisations. The implementers of the poverty hearings took part in these negotiations with the Government. The

aim was to ensure that the Government increases the social grant in line with the macro-economic conditions like inflation and cost of living (Programme Document, 2008). One of the achievements that the Data Sheets (2009) cite is the announcement that:

As of April 2009, the maximum values of the old age, disability and care dependency grants will rise by R50 to R1 010 a month, while the foster care grant and child support grants will also increase, by R30 to R680 and R10 to R240 a month, respectively (Budget Speech, February 2009)

The Data Sheets underscore that this was an achievement made in conjunction with other organisations and networks. Agreed and signed minutes of a meeting held between a poverty hearings Commissioner and the then Finance Minister, Mr. Trevor Manuel, indicate that he had committed that the government would review the Social Grants (Meeting minutes, October 2008).

On the activity of the commitment to solve the high youth unemployment problem, the programme records were not clear on whether or not work had been done to lobby the Government. Instead, Data Sheets (2008) only indicated that this was work in progress without examples of either the work done or the short-term outcomes achieved.

The same observation was made with the activity to have the Government review its policy on HIV infection. The background to the issue was that HIV infected people were entitled to the Disability Grant only if they were worse, as indicated by a CD4 count of below 200. When their CD4 count improved (to above 200), the grant was discontinued. This led some people, desperate to earn an income, to stop taking their medication so as to continue qualifying for the Grant (Programme Document, 2008).

Another activity was that of the issue of Identity Documents (IDs) in the Limpopo Province. According to the Programme Report (2008) and the Data Sheets (2008), a large number of people from that province who took part at the poverty hearings indicated that IDs were difficult to get. This made it impossible for them to access the social services, particularly the social grants. The Programme Report (2008), the Data Sheet (2008) and Meeting Minutes (2008) showed evidence that Commissioners had held meetings with the local government and the Department of Home Affairs to ensure that the issue was solved. This was also indicated as work in progress but that some desperate cases had so far been attended to.

A Government employee, A Policy Analyst within the Presidency, was interviewed to find out if there had been interaction with the poverty hearings stakeholders (refer to Figure 3). He affirmed that the poverty hearings had assisted the ongoing process of the development of the Anti-Poverty Strategy. The quotation from the email below illustrates his view of the poverty hearings:

*...The poverty hearings were useful because not only did they confirm the situation of poverty in the country, but they also made us aware of the depth and extent of poverty....We have since been in consultation with civil society organisations, including the poverty hearings implementing organisations in order to ensure that the anti-poverty strategy is intricately linked to the people' priorities at the end of the day... .*

A contrasting view was given by the Local Government Official from the North West Province. He argued that the poverty hearings had come and gone without yielding any follow-up activities in his province. He argued that it could be that the idea was to hold them as a once-off event. His reason for saying so was that there had not been any resources allocated for follow-up local activities for either the local government or the communities.

## Conclusions

As noted earlier, most respondents who had participated in the poverty hearings indicated that minimal activities had since been undertaken within the communities. On the other hand, programme records reveal some successes at the national level with the government. It could be concluded that there were lobbying activities at the national level but none or very few within and by the local communities with local government. Evidence from the Data Sheets (2008; 2009) supports this view. These documents reveal that various national level dialogues and meetings were held but are silent on local level activities that had been originally planned. Even the national level interventions seem to have only ended in meetings and dialogues. Except for the achievement on Social Grants, the IDs and the Anti-Poverty Strategy, there is little evidence in the programme records to show clear evidence of policy or intervention outcomes in other areas.

A number of conclusions could be drawn from these findings. If the PHPSA is seen as part of broad and long term processes towards increasing participation of the poor in State interventions, then the programme is a process towards a long term goal. That process however, requires clear logical planning and strategy that goes further than plain assumptions. For a programme that started in 2008, the short term achievements with national government are commendable. So is the ability to collect and collate people's voices into priority themes for government action. The added angle that the programme brought to other development-related initiatives was the ability to capture the voices of the poor and use them to approach the State and negotiate for responsive implementation of programmes. This evidenced-based advocacy has strengths, particularly as it can build a strong case, backed by the people's voices. It can also effectively use people's views to negotiate for urgent actions, policy shifts and effective implementation of development programmes by the State.

The platform that the programme offered for people to discuss their problems openly was also useful. It ensured that the Government gets to know about people's thoughts and feelings on their situation of poverty. Some of the views could shape the direction of future policies and amendments of state plans in development interventions. The stakeholders' use of the findings from the programme to influence the content of the country's Anti-Poverty Strategy is an indication of the relevance of the programme. It is also an indication that the same approach could be replicated with other policies. It also indicates the weight of the programme to the State's socio-economic processes.

The programme's Commissioners did well to engage with the National Government on the issues that the people had raised during the poverty hearings. Although acknowledging that it was not solely a result of the PHPSA's effort, the policy shift on the Social Grants is an indication of the contribution of the programme to the broader national debates and subsequent policy changes.

The issue of IDs that was dealt with immediately in the Limpopo Province is also another indication of the programme's responsiveness to the beneficiaries' needs.

As such, if seen as part of the multi-faceted approaches to the reduction of such a complex and endemic phenomenon as poverty, then the programme served its purpose in specific areas.

The programme encouraged beneficiaries to form advocacy coalitions in order to approach their Local Government about service delivery. By so doing, the programme contributed to a process of raising communities' levels of political consciousness. However, this was not enough to alter the people's conditions of living. The programme fell short of not ensuring that advocacy coalitions were indeed formed and that the communities continuously engaged with the Government. Other weaknesses of the programme were the apparent over-

simplification of the theory. The supposition that beneficiary participation through voice routinely leads to their empowerment is a weakness in the programme. The assumption that national level advocacy would automatically trickle down to community engagements was another limitation. The idea that participation and advocacy would routinely lead to poverty reduction is too simplistic. These flawed hypotheses in the programme theory could have affected the implementation of the programme.

On the slow implementation of the programme's activities by the Government, some reflections could also be made. It could be that the failure is nothing peculiar to the PHPSA but is part of the broader aspect of Government's failure to implement programmes and policies adequately. This failure is also an indication of the importance of Government in development interventions. Whilst NGOs have a comparative advantage in understanding and articulating communities' needs, they need the State to implement programmes successfully. The reasons for the State's failure to implement NGO-recommended programmes could be varied. One could be that Government, particularly at local level, has inadequate capacity to implement its own programmes and policies. It could also be that whilst government appreciates the role of NGOs, implementation of development programmes is determined by the broader political, social and economic factors rather than NGO programmes. Programmes therefore need to fall within these broader perspectives in order to be acceptable and implemented by the Government.

There is always room for improvement and hence the programme could have gone further to ensure that the beneficiaries receive continuous support to carry forward the objectives of the programme even after the hearings. The minimal support of community initiatives by the programme is notable. The programme lacked the requisite resources that would have ensured that the activities after the hearings were undertaken as planned. An approach could have been collaborating with other complementary initiatives or donors that could have

ensured that the communities carry forward the activities to ensure that advocacy also takes place in their localities.

In conjunction with other stakeholders, the programme could also have engaged in a broader aspect of educating the local communities on the operations and mandate of Local Government. This could have been an effective starting point for continuous community engagement with Local Government.

The programme could also have involved the State from the poverty hearings' conceptual phase right through to the implementation of activities. This would have ensured that the Government is a stakeholder of the poverty hearings from the start to the end. Secondment of some trained Personnel to the Local Government as part of the initiative to ensure implementation of the programme activities, could also have increased the chances of implementation of the activities.

#### *Limitations of the Evaluation*

The findings and conclusions of this evaluation are made in the context of certain limitations. Time and financial resource constraints which hampered the possibilities to conduct it widely and comprehensively, are notable. Although there could be many, there were two main limitations:

- The small sample size was an apparent inadequacy. This limitation calls for carefulness in the extent to which these findings can be generalised beyond the 18 beneficiaries that were interviewed.
- Another weakness of the study is the over-reliance on purely qualitative information. This means that the results are based on self-report. Participants may be subjective or may answer questions positively for social desirability. It is difficult to generalise and verify results that are based solely on social desirability.

### *Contributions of the Evaluation to Knowledge*

Some of the limitations stated above can be seen as fruitful avenues for future research on this under researched subject - poverty hearings. First, the poverty hearings are a relatively new area in the academic field. Paucity of studies on any aspect of poverty hearings makes this evaluation's contribution to knowledge valuable.

Secondly, the evaluation also contributes towards the programme itself. It could be a guide which the programme stakeholders could learn from for future implementation. Since the programme is implemented every ten years, the evaluation's reflections on the efficiency and effectiveness of programme could be addressed in year 2018 when the next poverty hearings are conducted. This makes this evaluation a precursor for future evaluation and research on forthcoming poverty hearings.

Thirdly, the evaluation could also assist the stakeholders to address discrepancies between the expected direction of the programme and what happened in reality. For instance, the programme stakeholders could implement some of the recommendations of the evaluation. Training communities on the duties and obligations of their Government would be a starting point for local level advocacy. Assisting communities with resources like skills, finance, time and personnel would also ensure that the poor implement advocacy activities within their communities.

Fourthly, the evaluation could assist NGOs to reflect on their work much more critically. Often, NGOs assume that their programmes are contributing to poverty reduction, with no evidence to support such views. The issues raised in this evaluation could encourage them to think deeper about their work, particularly their assumptions on the usefulness of their programmes. Whilst there has been considerable work towards poverty reduction in Africa, evaluation of these initiatives has not been given adequate attention. This study is a contribution

towards evaluation of development programmes, specifically those that are seeking to eradicate poverty.

Reflecting on the results of this evaluation raises questions about how issues of participatory and top-down development approaches could be addressed. These questions relate to the capacity of single programmes to effectively empower communities and eradicate poverty. Although this evaluation is not an impact assessment, the focus on the implementation of the programme and its programme theory for formative purposes could be the backdrop for future impact evaluations in the area. Stakeholders of future poverty hearings and similar programmes could improve their initiatives and by so doing give value to the resources that are earmarked to change the lives of disadvantaged people.

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