

**NGOs AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: AN ASSESSMENT OF  
THE PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE EFFECTS OF  
WORLD CHANGERS ACADEMY'S LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION  
PROGRAM, ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY**

By

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# DECLARATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
of Masters, in the Graduate Programme in  
Development Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal,  
South Africa.

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. I confirm that an external editor was used and that my Supervisor was informed of the identity and details of my editor. It is being submitted for the degree of Masters in Development Studies in the Faculty of Humanity, Development and Social Science, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other University.

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Date: AUGUST, 10, 2009

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. Since my early childhood, they have always been my source of inspiration. Even far from them, I have always felt supported, cared for, and loved. Many thanks for your understanding, your prayers and patience. This project is also dedicated to the youth of 'Saint Albert le Grand' parish in Bafoussam, Cameroon. You were the cradle of my moral and spiritual growth, the architect of my personality. May this be your source of inspiration.

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## **ABSTRACT**

In South Africa, young people are faced with many challenges such as HIV/AIDS, unemployment, poverty, and access to secure education and skills. In that context, NGOs involved in youth development, through their social intervention programs, can serve as platforms that can help to mitigate some of these social scourges. This research was set out to assess the participants' perceptions of the effects of World Changers Academy's life skills program. World Changers Academy (WCA) is a local NGO that operates in the eThekweni Municipality with the aim of empowering young people for life success through life skills-based education. Data were collected through interviews and a focus group discussion at YMCA, Durban and at WCA's Leadership Centre in Shongweni. According to the findings, many participants perceived that the program was beneficial because it has helped them to increase their knowledge, to develop values and good attitudes, to acquire some job preparation skills, and some other critical skills that will potentially help them to cope better with the challenges they faced regularly.

## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

ANC	African National Congress
CA	Capability Approach
FBO	Faith Based Organization
GEAR	Growth Employment and Redistribution
KZN	Kwa-Zulu Natal
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Program
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SAP	Structural Adjustment Program
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
UDF	United Democratic Front
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNISA	University of South Africa
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
WB	World Bank
WCA	World Changers Academy
WHO	World Health Organization
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 BACKGROUND AND OUTLINE OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

In many countries, youth unemployment is reaching severe proportions due to the inability of the social policy, economic, and education systems to accommodate the increasing number of young people. In addition to the problem of high unemployment, many youth have to struggle with issues of HIV/AIDS, poverty, and many other challenges in accessing and securing a decent education and skills acquisition. In the context of these circumstances there are individuals who are struggling to adapt to stressors such as HIV/AIDS, poverty, crime and unemployment which is estimated at around 41 percent on a broad definition and 30 percent on the narrow definition (Kingdon and Knight, 2001 & 2004). According to Ebersohn & Eloff (2006), many circumstances in South Africa lead to cumulative risk<sup>1</sup> and require life skills education. There is always need for adaptation at home, in the community, at work and amongst peers. As a solution to the multiple risk factors facing young people, Ebersohn & Eloff (2006) believe that asset-focused life skills education is a possible way in which ‘cumulative protection’ could be developed. It would help to facilitate their adaptation, and create processes of awareness, identification, access and mobilization of human, social and material capital. They argue that life skills education programs could improve the capacity of individuals both to respond to threats and to modify the impact of threats on their lives. In reaction to these many challenges facing young people, governments, NGOs and other institutions are combining many approaches to tackle these issues, with various degrees of success. Youth development NGOs in the context of high unemployment coupled with many other cumulative risks can serve as platforms to empower young people in a holistic manner while making an impact on various aspects of their lives (Sangonet, 2009).

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<sup>1</sup> Ebersohn & Eloff (2006) define cumulative risk as the sum of the effects of multiple risk factors or the manifestation at a particular time of multiple risk factors. They suggest asset-focused life-skills facilitation as a way of establishing cumulative protection.

While the social involvement of NGOs is widely recognized and addressed in the literature, there are inadequate efforts in learning about their impact, effectiveness, and relevance through program evaluation (Chapman & Fisher 2000). This research project is a contribution to the latter concern because it seeks to assess the participants' perception of the effects of World Changers Academy's (WCA) Life Skills program. World Changers Academy is a local NGO based at Shongweni on the Western outskirts of Durban.

## **1.2 WORLD CHANGERS ACADEMY'S LIFE SKILLS PROGRAM**

World Changers Academy (WCA) is a local NGO founded in 2002 by a former teacher and business consultant from KwaZulu-Natal, Sizwe Mthembu, and an American national, Joe White, who lived in KwaNyuswa, a semi-rural Zulu community near Durban, for five years. Their desire to found WCA arose out of their shared desire to empower people from disadvantaged communities. Both were convinced that individual empowerment had to be based on a combination of social, economic and spiritual factors in a single all encompassing project. In that perspective they decided to found WCA, which started with a three month life skills empowerment course for 100 unemployed youth in August 2002.

World Changers Academy aim and vision is to change the minds and hearts of people and to empower them for life success through value-based life skills education. WCA is run as a Christian organization. This is due particularly to the fact that one of the co-founders of the organization is a pastor. However, despite its strong emphasis on Christian ethos and values, World Changers Academy is not a Faith Based Organization (FBO). Through its program, WCA hopes to make a valuable contribution in raising up emerging leaders who can positively impact their communities, the nation and the world. WCA runs life skills courses in over 50 different communities and schools within the Greater eThekweni municipality. The program targets principally high school students and unemployed people. It is divided into two components. The

life skills course is run at different venues- schools, community resource centers, community halls - while the leadership course is run at WCA's leadership center at Shongweni.

World Changers Academy is provisionally accredited with the Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA)<sup>2</sup> according to the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). World Changers relies on its funding partners for its financial viability. They are currently funded by Oaktree Foundation (Australia), Loving South Africa (USA), Foundation for World Changer (USA), Broederlijk Delen (Belgium), Ugu District Municipality (SA) and several individuals and churches in South Africa (WCA 2009).

### **1.3 STRUCTURE OF THE WCA'S LIFE SKILLS PROGRAM**

The life skills course focuses on 'changing the world within' (WCA 2009). It focuses on helping participants to grow socially, emotionally, mentally and spiritually in order to succeed in their own lives, thereby helping the world around them. This explains why WCA's core maxim revolves around its name: 'changing the world within us to change the world around us'. WCA's students are challenged to develop and nurture their inner selves in order to succeed and impact positively their families, their communities and the world. The course is mostly run free of charge in communities where people live, study or work. The life skills program targets principally unemployed, high school students and organizational leaders. It covers the following topic: vision and goal setting, healing of the past, African renaissance, relationships and interpersonal skills, communication skills, leadership skills, entrepreneurship, volunteerism and social issues, job preparation skills and opportunity awareness. This latter encompasses

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<sup>2</sup> SETA was established in term of Skills Development Act. SETA ensures that skills needs of the service sector are identified and addressed. Its has four main objectives: firstly ensuring that education and training is provided and is subjected to validation and quality insurance, secondly to ensure whether education and training meets the agreed standards within a national framework, thirdly ensuring that new entrants to the labor market are adequately trained, and acknowledging and enhancing the skills of the current work force (SETA 2009).

employment, learnerships, volunteering and furthering studies. The language used as medium of the course is generally English, sometimes mixed with isiZulu.

After Life Skills graduation, WCA's staff members select an average of 10 to 15 percent of the new graduates to participate in the residential leadership course for 11 weeks at WCA leadership center in Shongweni. The leadership course focuses on 'changing the world around'. The course is divided into two main components: 5 weeks of training within the center and 6 weeks of outreach (WCA 2009). It covers some of the topic already covered in Life Skills but in more depth. These are: vision and goal setting; African renaissance; relationships and interpersonal skills (with particular emphasis on HIV/AIDS); communication skills; leadership skills; entrepreneurship; volunteering and social issues. The outreach program gives the students the opportunity to have some hands on experience. It is an occasion for these new graduates to assist WCA's staff to facilitate life skills courses in their home communities. This is also an opportunity for them to 'give back' to their community, while building their own experience by helping others to learn what they have learned at WCA. World Changers academy uses this course to build up the volunteer base of the organization by approaching some of the graduates and asking them whether they are willing to be WCA volunteers. Table 1 below illustrates the structure of the courses, frequency and duration.

Table 1. Life Skills and Leadership courses, frequencies and duration

Source: World Changers master document (WCA 2009)

<b>Courses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Duration</b>
<b>LEADERSHIP COURSES</b>	<b>Residential program run at leadership centre</b>	
For Unemployed	7 courses per year	5 weeks residential, 6 weeks outreach in home community
For High School Students	6-7 courses per year	1 week (7 days)
For Employees	According to demand	2 day, 5 day, 7 day (flexible)
Organizational Leaders	According to demand	2 days, 5 days, 7 day (flexible)
<b>LIFE SKILLS COURSES</b>	<b>Run in local communities/schools</b>	
For Unemployed	7 outreaches per year (about 6-10 courses per outreach)	4 weeks (20 days)
For High School Students (holiday program)	According to demand	1 or 2 weeks (5 days per week)
For High School Students (year long program)	10-20 schools per year (simultaneously)	+/-30 weeks (1 day per week)
For Employees	According to demand	12 Week course for employees, run 1-2 hours per week at the place of work, with a 2 day residential program at beginning and end of the course

WCA's database shows that, as of September 2008, 12861 students have been trained through 457 courses in over 50 different communities (WCA 2009). However no study has been done on the real impact of WCA's Life Skills education program on its participants. Given that a broad impact evaluation is beyond the scope of a mini dissertation, the following research project will narrow its focus on the assessment of the participants' self-perception of the effects of WCA's life skills program. On that account, it can serve as a pilot study for a larger impact evaluation to be conducted in the future.

The main question this research project seeks to answer is how do the participants perceive the effects of WCA's life skills program in their lives? This question will help in assessing the participants' perceptions of the impact of WCA's program. Participants' self-assessment will help to determine the effectiveness of the program and to assess whether the program is beneficial and is reaching its objectives. It is assumed that the participants in the life skills course learn skills, knowledge and attitudes that cause changes in behavior and empower them for life success.

## **1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The study will be based on the capability approach as suggested by Armatya Sen (1999). The capability approach holds that the main objective of development is the expansion of human capabilities. The central element in this approach is that poverty is caused not only by a lack of goods, but by the lack of the ability to be and do things that are essential to leading a human life (Levine 2001). The capability approach suggests that economic growth alone is not always sufficient for development. For that reason, this approach argues that development discourse should shift away from a narrow focus on economic growth toward the expansion of real freedoms that people enjoy (Sen 1999; Levine 2001; Clark 2005). Following this view, Evans (2002: 55) affirms that 'growth in real output per head is also likely to expand people's capabilities, especially at lower levels of income, but it cannot be considered, in itself, the ultimate yardstick of development or well-being'. It is therefore important to distinguish between 'growth mediated' and 'support led' development. The former operates primarily through macroeconomic policy. The latter works first and foremost through proficient welfare programs that support education, health and social security (Clark 2005).

Viewing development as expanding the freedoms that people enjoy directs attention to the ends that make development important. From this perspective, development requires 'the removal of major sources of unfreedom: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as



systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or overactivity of repressive states' (Sen 1999: 3). Expansion of freedoms is therefore the primary and the principal means of development. Within this framework, poverty is defined as deprivation of basic capabilities rather than simply as low income, which is a standard measure to identify poverty (Sen 1999: 87).

Attempts to apply the capability approach have expanded in recent years. It has been used to investigate poverty and inequality, social justice, well-being, social exclusion, gender, disability, health, child poverty and identity. It has also been related to human needs, human rights and human security as well as social development in a broad sense (Clark 2005: 11).

The capability approach may consist of capacity building and the increase of opportunities. Capacity refers to people's skills, knowledge and attitudes, including any ability to do something, such as caring for others, the environment or the increase of self-esteem. Opportunities are places and areas where people can utilize their capacity – skills, knowledge and attitude to generate income and other rewards. This study fits within the CA approach because it seeks to assess how WCA's Life Skill program contributes to the expansion of the real capabilities of its participants.

## **1.5 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The study pursues the following objectives:

- ❖ To assess the participants' perceptions of the effects of WCA's Life Skills program
- ❖ To match the participants expectations and experiences against what WCA perceive as its goals
- ❖ To give some recommendations

## **1.6 CHAPTER OUTLINE**

The study is divided into five chapters. Chapter one is the introductory chapter. It presents the background of the research problem; World Changers Academy; the nature of its life skills program; the theoretical framework; the aims and objectives of the study and the chapter outline.

Chapter two is divided into two parts. The first part explores the literature on NGOs and their contribution to social development, which in turn is divided into two ideological approaches: the pro-NGO which holds that NGOs are critical agents for social development and the anti-NGO that sees NGOs as nothing but new imperialists. The second part explores the literature on life skills education in the context of numerous social stresses such as poverty, unemployment, HIV/AIDS, violence and the like, with a focus on South Africa. It starts by discussing the history of poverty and inequality in South Africa and what that means for education, skills and job opportunities.

Chapter three presents and justifies the methodology used to assess the participants' perception of the effects of World Changers Academy's life skills program. It looks at the type of research, the sampling procedure, the data collection and data analysis methods and procedure, the ethical considerations and the limitations of the study.

Chapter four presents, analyzes, and discusses the findings based on the semi-structured interviews and the focus group discussion. Using content analysis the findings are organized into six major themes and several minor themes as illustrated in table 2. These themes illustrate the reasons people participate in the program, their lifestyle and attitude before the program, how they perceive its effects, the less beneficial aspects of the program, and some suggestions and recommendation. Chapter five concludes and suggests some recommendations.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter reviews the literature on NGOs and social development and on life skills education. It should be acknowledged here that, in part, the original interest of this study was to be able to reflect on the broad role of NGOs in development. The first part of this chapter defines NGOs, describes their exponential growth since the 1980s and discusses the controversies in the role they play in social development. These controversies are divided into two main positions. One view holds that NGOs play a vital role in social development through their many social interventions and their advocacy role. The other views NGOs as simply advancing a neoliberal agenda. The controversies over the role that NGOs play in development can be contextualized within debates in sociology on structure and agency. According to the structuralist theories of social change, structures such as economy, politics, religion, social division, etc. shape and constrain the possibilities of an individual agent by setting limits to what we can achieve as individuals (Giddens 1994 & 2006). From this perspective, the arguments against NGOs that will be discussed later are basically structuralist because they argue that NGOs support or fail to dismantle oppressive, patriarchal and exploitative structures. However, NGOs such as World Changers Academy, and many others, believe in human agency. Their focus therefore is on empowering individuals to have greater agency in order to create change for themselves. Sen (1999), in his capability approach, as discussed earlier, is interested in human capacity and sees it both as goal and engine of development. However, he believes that certain kinds of structures need to be removed in order to achieve the development goals.

The second part of this chapter discusses the impact of the legacy of apartheid in education, income opportunities and skills acquisition in South Africa. It also reviews the literature on life skills education in a context of numerous social scourges such as poverty, unemployment, HIV/AIDS, violence, and criminality. It should be mentioned that one of the major challenge

faced in this section was the difficulty in finding suitable academic literature addressing the relationship between life skills education and development. However, what was available allowed reflection on the importance of life skills education as an empowerment tool in a context of the cumulative risks that young people are exposed to.

## **2.2 DEFINITION OF NGOS**

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are often referred to as ‘non-state, non-profit oriented groups who pursue purposes of public interest’ (Schmid and Take 1997, cited by Fisher 2007: 3). According to Michael (2004: 3), NGOs are commonly understood as ‘independent development actors existing apart from governments and corporations, operating on a non-profit or not for profit basis with an emphasis on voluntarism, and pursuing a mandate of providing development services, undertaking communal development work or advocating development issues’. In turn the World Bank (WB) defines NGOs as private organizations that act to relieve suffering, promote the interest of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services or undertake community development (WB 2001). NGOs are an expression of people’s need for organization, self-improvement and change. They have initiated new ways of ‘thinking about health, the environment, gender, technology, small enterprise and credit. They have become recognized as an important element of civil society, fostering citizen awareness and participation in development, and as part of a new approach to governmental accountability and transparency’ (Smillie 1997: 571). Most simply, the term NGO is applicable to any structured not-for-profit institution that is independent from government and that aims at improving people’s lives and the environment. NGOs are value-based organizations which depend partly or totally on charitable donations and voluntary service (Fisher 2007: 3). Independence, volunteerism, and altruism therefore are key defining principles of NGOs. There is a great heterogeneity among NGOs involved in social development. Their differences depend on a wide range of factors. These include geopolitics (North/South), size, organizational structure, ideology or motivation, financial resources and funding sources, level of coordination with government and other NGOs, and membership criteria (Atack 1999; Asamoah 2003; Teegen et al., 2004). The strategies they

use range from 'grass roots/local community organizing, education, leadership development, policy development and implementation, empowerment through local and national coalition building, to human rights and social justice promotion and monitoring' (Asamoah 2003: 2). An important distinction is made between membership organizations or club NGOs, where benefits are directed toward the welfare of their members, and social interest NGOs that help others (Atack 1999; Teegen, Doth, and Vachani 2004). This discussion limits its scope to social interest NGOs because they seek to improve the life of others including the environment.

### **2.3 THE GROWTH OF THE NGO SECTOR IN AFRICA**

At the beginning of the 1980s many developing countries experienced severe economic crises. The welfare gains achieved since independence in areas such as food consumption, health and education were being reversed (Manji & O'Coill 2002). During that period, many developing countries applied structural adjustment programs (SAPs) that resulted in public sector cutbacks with negative social consequences (Weiss 1999). According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP 1996), between 1981 and 1989 per-capita incomes dropped by 21 percent in sub-Saharan Africa countries. In Madagascar and Mali, per capita incomes dropped respectively from \$1,258 and \$ 89,825 to \$799 and \$753 in 25 years (UNDP 2001). Nearly 42 percent of sub-Saharan Africans live on less than \$1 a day. Fisher confirms that 'there is widespread evidence that development strategies of the past few decades have failed to adequately assist the poorest of the world's poor' (1997: 443). Developing country governments can be said therefore to have failed in their mission to bring about social and economic development. This failure has put into question the capacity to bring about social, economic and political change in many developing countries.

Due to this failure to foster social, economic and political change in many developing countries in the last three decades, the centrality of the state as agent of development process has been questioned. Statistics show that per capita incomes dropped by 21 percent between 1981 and

1989 in many sub-Saharan African countries (Manji & Ocoill 2005: 16). Meanwhile, the 1980s witnessed an exponential growth of Western and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the developing world.

In this context, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have appeared as complements or alternatives to the failed states (Lutabingwa & Gray 1997; Michael 2004). Following this claim, Manji & O'Coill (2002: 581) affirm that NGOs have been plying their trade within the escalating impoverishment, growing conflicts and state negation of its social responsibilities. NGOs' work, they claim, is justified only within the decline of Africa's social conditions. The less stable the world becomes, the more finance will become available to organizations that can deliver stabilizing social services. NGOs have become, then, the 'favored child' of official development agencies 'hailed as the panacea to cure the ills that have befallen the development process, and imagined as a "magic bullet" which will mysteriously but efficiently find its target' (Edward & Hulme 1996a, cited by Fisher 1997: 442). Consequently, NGOs have become the driving force in social development programs. They are involved in poverty reduction programs, the improvement of access to basic services, fostering democracy, influencing public policy, advocacy, conflict prevention and resolution and many other social projects. According to Fowler (2000), NGOs' activities touch about 20 percent of the world poor.

According to Lutabingwa and Gray (1997), the NGO sector in sub-Saharan Africa has grown both in numbers and in the amount of financial resources they control. In 1995, there were about 811 NGOs in Tanzania, of which more than three quarters were established since 1980. Between 1979 and 1987, the number of international NGOs grew 260 percent while local NGOs grew by 115 percent. In Botswana the number of local NGOs increased by 60 percent between 1985 and 1989. The same pattern of growth in the number of NGOs is observed in western Africa. It is reported that 61 percent of Niger's NGOs and 95 percent of its recognized indigenous associations were formed from 1991. The ministry of interior in Cote d'Ivoire stated that between 1990 and 1992 nearly 50 new associations were registered (Lutabingwa & Gray 1997: 36).

The main cause for the increasing number and significance of NGO activity appears to be the growing practice of international and national development agencies to channel development through NGOs (Fisher 1997: 5). Four other reasons are put forward to explain the sudden growth of the NGOs:

1. The UN World Conferences of the 1990s have offered major incentives for the establishment of new NGOs and the expansion of existing organizations engaged in development and environmental issues at the international level.
2. The increasing power of mass media and the globalization of communication by electronic information technologies support transnational networking activities of non-state actors.
3. International civil society functions as a substitute for former state-driven welfare services (health, education and social policy) as a consequence of the neoliberal project of decreasing state activity in this field.
4. In many developing countries, NGOs function as substitutes for formerly state-run activity in health and education, especially as international programs for economic reforms, like IMF programs, forced states to reduce public services. (Debiel & Stich 2005, cited by Fisher 2007: 5).

After the 1994 democratic elections in South Africa, the NGO sector shifted its strategy from an 'oppositional' mode to a 'developmental' mode (Walters 1993, cited by Pieterse 1997: 158). Under apartheid, NGOs were mostly identified as liberation movements. They were actively involved in the struggle to oppose, circumvent and destabilize the apartheid regime. It is for that reason that their approach was labeled as the 'oppositional' mode (Pieterse 1997). Prior to the 1980s the apartheid government only supported NGOs that were serving the white community and the racial order. NGOs that were critical of apartheid, by contrast, were subjected to increasing harassment. Their leaders and activists were 'subjected to banning, arrests, detention

without trial, death threats and assassination attempts, and having their homes and cars petrol bombed (Habib & Taylor 2001: 220). However, with the liberalization of the political environment in South Africa, the apartheid regime, though not supportive of anti-apartheid NGOs, allowed many to emerge and serve the marginalized black population. According to Habib & Taylor (2001), the particularity of the South African case during apartheid was that foreign aid was directly channeled to NGOs rather than through the government. According to Bernstein (1994), this resulted in a massive growth of the NGO sector to the extent that by 1990 it was estimated that there were about 5,000 NGOs in the country.

The period between 1990 and 1994 is characterized by the crisis of identity in the NGO sector. Under apartheid they were over-politicized, with as main focus the conscientisation and mobilization of strategies as a function of the anti-apartheid struggle. The 1994 democratic elections brought about a shift from the politics of resistance to a politics of reconstruction (Marais 1998 cited by Habib & Taylor 2001: 220). Walters (1998) speaks in term of a shift from an oppositional mode to a developmental mode. The relationship between the government and NGOs, which was adversarial and conflictual, before the first democratic election is now much more collaborative. Ballard et al. (2006: 16) addressing the issue of anti-apartheid social movements in South Africa, expressed this shift in these terms: 'The organizational mechanisms that had been used to express opposition to government prior to the transition –the UDF, ANC, civics, NGOs – were either now part of the government or operating in close collaboration with the government'. According to Pieterse (1997), one of the main characteristics of the post-1994 NGOs is the substantial volume of funding and knowledge that was flowing into the country to facilitate the development initiatives: urban and rural development, housing, education and micro-enterprise development among others. Within international NGOs, these funds were attached to a 'knowledge industry' aimed at assisting the South African NGOs in their new role as development policy-makers. This shift brought about the rapid expansion of small NGOs in terms of staff and resources, allowing them to fulfill a number of tasks: policy research, action-research, networking, training, design and implementation of development projects (Pieterse 1997: 158). According to Marrais (1997) cited by Ballard et al. (2006), this new relationship with government created an increasing pressure for NGOs to professionalize by adopting more



‘technocratic approaches to development’, with the risk of falling into the trap of becoming mere service deliverers (Ballard et al. 2006: 16; Boulle 1997). Swilling et al. (2002: 5), in their study on the size and scope of the non-profit sector in South Africa, affirm that ‘social watch’ and ‘service delivery’ were the two basic expectations of NGOs in current government policy. The state’s responsibility was to harness financial and institutional resources to realize its developmental goals. NGOs’ role was to ‘access financial resources and shape delivery processes in a way that helps sustain them in the new democratic order’ (Swilling et al. 2002: 80).

## **2.4 CONTROVERSIES IN THE ASSESSMENTS OF NGOS’ ROLES**

Despite their significant growth, there is a great controversy in the literature on the role NGOs play in development. These controversies can be divided into two broad categories: pro-NGO vs. NGO-skeptics. The former acknowledges the vital contribution of NGOs in development while the latter considers NGOs incapable of resolving structures of exploitation and domination. Proponents of the first position hold that NGOs are important agents of development because they play a significant role in social development processes in many regions of the world (Asamoah 2003: 1). They argue that NGOs pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services or undertake community development. Their role is of critical importance in circumstances where state funds are limited, political situations are unstable, ethnic conflict is rampant, natural disasters put people’s lives at risk, and where the effects of poverty severely restrict people’s ability to purchase basic goods and services (World Bank 2001; Asamoah 2003). Opponents of this view take a more critical, sometimes radical, stance against NGOs’ role. They argue that NGOs are at the service of the neoliberal agenda. In that sense, Petras and Veltmeyer (2001) affirm that NGOs are in the service of the new imperialism and therefore ‘are not non-governmental organizations’ because they depend on funds received from overseas governments and work as private subcontractors for local government. These two broad positions are discussed below.

### ***2.4.1 NGOS AS AGENTS OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT***

Many scholars and practitioners argue that NGOs are important agents of social development. Teegen et al. (2004) distinguish three main categories of NGOs' participation in social development. First, advocacy *NGOs* work on behalf of those who lack access and voice to promote their own interests and the interests of the environment. Second, *operational NGOs* provide goods and services to some of those who cannot meet their needs; they also provide assistance to people affected by humanitarian disasters. The third group are called *hybrid NGOs* because they do not fit neither to the advocacy nor to the operational NGOs but integrate both to achieve social benefits.

*Advocacy NGOs* focus on some of the important issues people face that are not often included into government policies. The poor and the most vulnerable people, for instance, do not have the power and resources to take any action that can reduce some of the social stressors and hardships they are faced with. They may be excluded from decision-making as a consequence of ethnic, religious, gender differences, age, disability or any other reason. Advocacy NGOs are equipped and well placed to understand their particular needs, grievances and voices. In this case, advocacy NGOs are 'the voices of the voiceless'. More importantly, NGOs' advocacy role is of great importance when market mechanisms ignore people's needs and when government regimes are too repressive, too weak, or too resource-strapped to deliver what is expected (Teegen et al. 2004; Korten 1990). In turn, Bird and Rowland (2003) cited by Teegen al. (2004 : 467) argue that advocacy NGOs are of critical importance because they can provide logical norms which can influence and guide the decision-making process when there are conflicts between 'market-driven economic efficiency and ethically-bound social efficiency consideration'.

There are many other approaches to advocacy: serving as representatives and advisory experts to decision making meetings, conducting research, holding conferences, creating citizen tribunals, monitoring and exposing the action and inaction of governments and other institutions, providing information to key constituencies, setting and defining agendas, developing and promoting codes

of conduct, and organizing civil disobedience, strikes and boycotts. In these ways, NGOs give voice and provide access to institutions to promote social gain and or mitigate negative spillovers from other sector's actions (Teegen et al. 2004).

Alongside advocacy NGOs, operational NGOs are playing an important role in social development. Teegen et al. (2004) argue that operational NGOs serve as critical 'safety nets' where markets fail, where governments which are corrupted, indebted, politically challenged, are unable or lack the political will to provide for the basic needs of the majority of the population; and where global problems are beyond a specific country's responsibility. Atack (1999) calls operational NGOs 'service provision NGOs'. In his view they belong to the first and second generation NGOs, which directly deliver services to meet an immediate deficiency or shortage experienced by the population, such as need for food, health care or shelter. Such strategies are particularly relevant to emergency or humanitarian relief in times of disaster or crisis. Famine, flood, war, earthquakes, disease outbreak, are some of the examples of crises where operational NGOs are necessary to meet immediate human needs of the affected people.

In addition to the short term humanitarian interventions, operational NGOs are committed to long term development work; mostly in capacity building, with the hope that the outcome of their action would be sustained over and above the period of their assistance. Their main focus is to develop the capacity of people to better meet their own needs through self-sustainable local action (Atack 1999). Examples of such operational NGO involvement include the Red Cross/Red Crescent intervention in providing relief, the monitoring of natural resources and nature by the World Wide Fund for Nature, the distribution of medical drugs by Doctors Without Borders, Oxfam, Care, and many others.

The third type of NGOs, according to Teegen et al. (2004), is the integrated or *hybrid NGOs*. Unlike NGOs that primarily focus on advocacy and those who focus on operational service delivery, many others combine simultaneously advocacy and operational service delivery or shift

from one to the other. This transformation is caused by changes in the context and environment in which they work or a redefinition of their mission and goals. They affirm that, in general, NGOs contribute to the building or rebuilding of social capacity. In order to reach their objectives some NGOs integrate advocacy and operational activities to establish codes, providing training, resource access and know-how concerning goods and service delivery, and sharing best practices, as well as creating and supporting institutional settings that promote social welfare (Brown & Kalegaonkar, 2002 cited by Teegen et al. 2004). Furthermore they affirm that, more and more, an important area is the establishment of codes of conduct for firms and states. They suggest that NGOs can start by advocating the establishment of these codes, then leverage their technical expertise and social welfare focus to develop codes or other rules as norms that promote their interests; they may also monitor compliance with these codes. Their monitoring capability is said to be more effective than those of agencies within state bureaucracies. They conclude by affirming that, by establishing codes and assessing compliance, NGOs help to govern the ability of public and private sector actors within society.

Through their involvement, whether in political advocacy or in operational activities, or through both advocacy and operational, it is certain that NGOs contribute to the building up of social capacity. NGOs also play an important role in mobilizing a diverse number of campaigns and activities to support the International Climate Convention, designing adequate policy strategies for poverty reduction, and creating better conditions for human rights and justice. By so doing, some people think that they make the world a better place to live. NGOs are therefore of paramount importance in our society. Today's society is not immunized against natural disasters, disease outbreaks, conflicts, xenophobic attacks, social exclusion, numerous types of discrimination, environmental degradation, or negative market externalities. Very often NGOs make important interventions on these issues.

### ***2.4.2 CRITICISMS AGAINST NGOs' SOCIAL INVOLVEMENT***

Although many acknowledge the importance of NGOs for their capacity to foster human rights and social development, there those who view NGOs more 'skeptically in terms of whether they can deliver what they promise and whether they are usurping the role of government in shaping development programmes and priorities' (Commins 2000: 73). Some critics consider NGOs as simply advancing the neoliberal agenda and collaborating in the depoliticization of development. From this perspective, Petras and Veltmeyer (2000) argue that NGOs are in the service of the new imperialism and therefore are not 'non-governmental organizations'. They hold that NGOs are not non-governmental organizations because of their dependence on funds received from overseas governments and because they work as private subcontractors for local government. Additionally, they are subsidized by corporate private foundations with close relations with these governments. It is argued that less than two percent of NGO incomes came from official donors in early 1970. By the 1990s this figure had increased by 30 percent. The British government, for instance, increased its funding of NGOs by almost 400 percent (Manji & O'Coill 2002). Their dependency on official donor funds affects negatively NGOs' freedom to effectively play a role as part of civil society. Pearce (2000) and Commins (2000: 71) agree with Petras and Veltmeyer, affirming that NGOs are no longer offering significant advantages either in community development or in complex emergencies but are merely useful 'fig leaves that cover government inaction' and indifference to human and environmental suffering.

Critics also argue that NGO officials are less accountable to local people than to overseas donors who assess and supervise NGOs' performance according to their own criteria and interests. NGO officials are self-appointed and one of their main tasks is to secure funding. Petras and Veltmeyer harshly describe them as follow:

The NGOs worldwide have become the latest vehicle for upward mobility for ambitious educated classes. Academics, journalists and professionals have abandoned earlier interests in poorly rewarded leftist movements for a lucrative career managing an NGO, bringing with them their organizational and rhetorical skills and a certain populist

vocabulary. Today, thousands of NGO directors drive \$40, 000 four-wheel-drive sports utility vehicles from their fashionable suburban homes or apartments to their well-furnished offices and building complexes, leaving the children and domestic chores in the hands of servants and their yards to be tended by gardeners. They are more familiar with and spend more time at the overseas sites of their international conferences on poverty (Washington, Bangkok, Tokyo, Brussels, Rome, etc.) than the muddy villages of their own country'. They are more adept at writing up new proposals to bring in hard currency for "deserving professionals" than risking a rap on the head from police attacking a demonstration of underpaid rural school teachers. NGO leaders are a new class not based on property ownership or government resources but derived from imperial funding and their own capacity to control significant popular groups. The NGO leaders can be conceived of as a kind of neo-comprador group that doesn't produce any useful commodity but does function to produce services for the donor countries, trading in domestic poverty for individual perk (Petras & Veltmeyer 2001: 129).

Despite their democratic grassroots rhetoric, NGOs can be hierarchical, with the director in total control of projects, hiring and firing, as well as of deciding who gets their way paid to the next international conferences. 'NGOs undermine democracy by taking social programs and public debate out of the hands of the local people and their elected natural leaders and creating dependence on non elected overseas officials and their anointed local officials' (Pearce 2000; Commins 2000; Petras & Veltmeyer 2001: 132).

While millions of people are losing their jobs and poverty is spreading significantly, NGOs are engaging in preventive action, focusing on 'survival strategies', not general strikes; and they organize soup kitchens instead of mass demonstrations against food hoarders and the neoliberal regimes of U.S. imperialism.

The NGOs co-opt the language of the Left – "popular power," "empowerment," "gender equality," "sustainable development" "bottom-up leadership," etc. The problem is that this language is linked to a framework of collaboration with donors and government agencies committed to non-confrontational politics. The local nature of NGO activity means that "empowerment" never goes beyond influencing small areas of social life with limited resources, always within condition permitted by the neoliberal state and macroeconomy (Petras & Veltmeyer 2001:133).

Martina Fisher (2006) categorizes criticisms against NGOs into five main arguments: (1) NGOs are not 'independent' per se but often state-driven; (2) Donors, market and media requirements influence the performance of NGOs; (3) The international NGOs of Western and Northern origin are dominant in comparison to others, often exporting and imposing concepts that are inadequate in relation to social realities in other countries; (4) Some international NGOs that are driven by external state actors are seen to interfere with the internal affairs of sovereign states; (5) NGOs are not subject to any democratic control and thus lack legitimacy. I shall now briefly expand on each of these critiques.

The first critique is that NGOs lack independence. Many of them are not financially independent. Their activities are financed by governments and other funders. NGOs spend part of their time seeking donor funds through customary procedures set by the funding agencies. Consequently, their degree of independence depends on their relation to donor agendas. Their scope of action is therefore limited (Shivji 2007). Public financing of development NGOs doubled between 1995 and 2002; increasing from US \$ 3.1 billion to \$ US 7.2 billion (Fisher 2007). In both Europe and the US, for instance, approximately 50 percent of NGO activities are financed by public funding. At least 50,000 NGOs in developing countries receive in total more than \$10 billion from the international institution, European, U.S. and Japanese governmental agencies and local government (Petras & Veltmeyer 2001). For these authors, there is clear risk of NGOs becoming mere implementers of state policies. Clark (1992) speaks of NGOs on that account as contractors of public service. In this case, NGOs might end up functioning merely as private branches of governments.

The second critique is that NGOs change in performance. They have become simply service providers. According to Commins' analogy, they are just another 'ladle in the global soup kitchen', which provide meager comfort in harsh economic conditions and complex political emergencies; they hand out a little bits of comfort, dishing out cups of soup, to the victims of

massive economic changes and to the survivors of brutal civil wars (Commins 2000). There has been such an explosion in the number of NGOs in the world that the quality of the service they provide is put into question. NGOs now constitute a 'third sector', a new labor market. Since the late 1990s, there is an ongoing debate on the change in performance of NGOs, which includes the bifurcation of NGOs into either movement-oriented or service-providing (Fisher 2006).

The third critique concerns the dominance of Western NGOs. This argument points to the inequality between international NGOs and domestic NGOs in accessing finances, media and qualified staff. This situation creates power imbalances and differences in capacity, for example, in relation to putting issues and grievances on the agendas on both politics and the media. While Western NGOs, for instance, often focus on political human rights, Southern NGOs tend to focus on social human rights. Some critics further assert that NGO personnel disregard local ownership and contribute to the establishment of a culture of dominance and subordination (Reich 2006). Western NGOs tend to apply a technocratic version of conflict resolution. They transfer western concepts of civil society to other contexts and impose these on other cultures. When applied in developing countries, this can hamper efforts to strengthen state institutions (Fisher 2000).

The fourth critique concerns NGO interference with government affairs. Political interference, bad practices, and abuse of resources do exist in the NGO world. State agencies, non-state donors or lobby groups might fund private agencies and associations in order to manipulate or enhance changes of the political order in their zone of interest. Eagen (1991) suggests that NGOs have caused the underdevelopment of local governments, and slow down or reduce participation in local development activities, affecting the sustainable recovery of the country. In turn, Fisher (2000) argues that cases of exploitation have been reported; a relevant example is the resolution against Israel that was formulated in the World Conference against Racism, Discrimination, Xenophobia and Intolerance in Durban in September 2002.



NGOs in general are said to be marked by a lack of legitimacy, accountability and credibility. Many NGO officials are unaccountable; they are 'self-appointed do-gooders', and have 'rubber-stamp boards of directors' (Smillie 1997: 574). Unlike government and parliaments, they do not obtain their legitimacy through public elections. They tend to act according to their free will, conscious that they won't be answerable to anyone except to those who fund their projects and perhaps to their members and supporters. Hilhorst (2003) points out that it is not an easy job to acquire legitimation as an organization claiming to be 'doing good' for the development of others. This legitimation entails 'first convincing others that the intervention of the NGO is indispensable and appropriate, and that it has no self-interest in the envisaged programme. It requires convincing others that the NGO is able and reliable, in other words, trustworthy and capable of carrying out the intervention' (2003: 78).

Besides these above criticisms Petras and Veltmeyer (2000) argue that NGOs weaken the ability of people to start social movements to fight against the oppressing system. They transform 'solidarity' into collaboration and subordination to the macroeconomy by drawing people's attention away from the state resources of the wealthy classes the self-exploitation of the poor. This basic philosophy of NGOs contrasts with Marxist's view of 'solidarity as sharing the risks of class political movements, not as being outside commentators who raise questions and defend nothing' (2004: 136).

The literature reviewed mostly focuses on the exponential growth of NGOs since the 1980s, the circumstances supporting this growth, the importance of NGOs' role, and the debate on the role they play as agents of social development. Not much is said about the concrete nature of their social involvement, less still about how the primary beneficiaries of their services perceive the effects of NGOs' intervention in their life. On that account the current research takes the above debate in the literature on NGOs and social development to be a framing context, but limits its scope to the assessment of the participants' perception of World Changers Academy's Life Skills Education program.

## **2.5 LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION**

### ***2.5.1 DEFINITION AND IMPORTANCE OF LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION***

According to Levine ‘to be without skill is to be unfree in your activity; and to be unfree in your activity is to be irrelevant to, or at least marginal in society, and therefore poor’ (Levine 2001: 12-13). People are faced with certain demands and opportunities in the process of growing up and maturing. If they lack the necessary skills, they might struggle to cope efficiently with life’s demands. Life skills are those skills that help people to cope with problems, adapt to changes and effectively confront crises and conflicts (Ebersohn & Eloff 2006). The World Health Organization (WHO 1993) defines life skills as the abilities to adopt positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. According to Kingsnorth et al. (2007), a number of critical life skills must be learned for youth to be able to reach their full potential. The term ‘life skills’ encompasses therefore a wide range of coping behaviors necessary to function effectively in society. The concept of ‘life skills’ is self-explanatory; ‘it is the general term for all the skills and capacities that an individual needs to be able to enrich his life in a meaningful way’ (Ebersohn & Eloff 2006: 57). Unicef, Unesco, and WHO list ten core life skills strategies and techniques: critical thinking; decision making; effective communication skills; problem solving; creative thinking; self-awareness building skills; interpersonal relationship skills; empathy, and coping with stress and emotions. Life skills include the ability to set realistic goals, to solve problems, to make decisions and evaluate their outcomes, and to develop appropriate personal and interpersonal skills. ‘This set of skills is critical for dealing with the everyday challenges of life such as: organizing personal affairs; managing health care; pursuing vocational, leisure, and educational activities; and engaging in positive social interaction’ (Kingsnorth et al. 2007: 323). The common characteristic in the definitions of life skills is the focus on the skills and strategies that allow a person to act in accordance with his/her needs, others and the environment (Ebersohn & Eloff 2006). In other words life skills are of critical importance if individuals are to cope independently and competently with the daily activities and changes in various environments.

In South Africa, as in most developing countries, youth have to contend with high levels of unemployment and underemployment, HIV/AIDS, poverty and major challenges in accessing and securing a decent education and skills. Thulani (2009) argues that in many countries the problem of youth unemployment is increasingly reaching dangerous proportions due to the fact that their economies and education systems are not able to accommodate these numbers of youth. In response to these challenges, youth development NGOs can play an important role in educating, empowering and supporting the individual to create improvement for themselves. Youth development NGOs can also provide platforms for young people to express their views and concerns. According to Sangonet (2009), these NGOs understand the potential of South Africa's youth and have 'dedicated themselves to preserving South Africa's future by working in support of the youth'. According to Unicef (2002), life skills education is increasingly being adopted by many institutions as a means to empower young people and reduce their vulnerability. Life skills-based education refers to an interactive process of teaching and learning which enables learners to acquire knowledge and to develop attitudes and skills which support the adoption of healthy behaviors.

Naturally some people are better equipped to cope with the challenges they face in the various aspects of life, while others have to be guided if they want to build up their repertoire of life skills. Life skills may be acquired at home, in school, on the playground, in the park, and in the mall. Sometimes the limitations of the parental home and the education system do not give people the opportunities to acquire the life skills they need (Ebersohn & Eloff 2006). From this perspective, NGOs such as World Changers Academy that provide life skills education appear as an important development intervention that can fill the gap and contribute to reduce young people's vulnerability.

### ***2.5.2 APPLICATIONS OF LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION***

The available literature indicates that life skills training has been given specific applications. It has been used to empower youth with disabilities, HIV-AIDS infected people, to educate young people to adopt healthy behaviors and to help them in adopting positive social skills (Marylin et al. 2008; Kingsnorth et al. 2007; James 2006; and Magnani 2005).

By way of illustration, the 4-H, which is one of the largest youth organizations in the United States, helps youth and adults to learn, grow and work together as catalysts for positive change. It uses the framework of targeting life skills. It is a framework based on the 4-H pledge to organize the delivery of experiences that support the growth and development of youth (Marylin et al. 2008, 1998). 4-H focuses on developing skills that are healthy and productive for both youth and their communities. 4-H teaches young people leadership, citizenship and life skills through experiential learning program. The H's stand for head, heart, hands and health. Its pledge is "my Head to clearer thinking, my Heart to greater loyalty, my Hands to larger service, and my Health to better living, for my club, my community, my country, and my world" (Iowa State University, 1996). The following diagram is the 4-H targeting life skills model. It shows the areas that 4-H life skills education targets.

**Figure 1: Targeting Life Skills Mode for 4-H**

Source: Iowa State University Extension (1996)



The above 4-H targeting life skills model sums up many of the areas that any life skills training seeks to achieve. This is done through helping young people to use their heads, heart, hands, health to lead a fruitful life.

Life skills education is also used to empower youth with disabilities because naturally they may be limited in acquiring these skills. A study by Kingsnorth et al. (2007) shows that life skills programs for disabled people are of critical importance because institutional, environmental, and social barriers limit the opportunities and life experiences necessary for children with physical disabilities to become independent. As a result they often lay behind their able-bodied peers in the life skills required to successfully manage the adult world. In turn, Steven et al. (1996) have found that young people with physical disabilities are less future-oriented in their educational and vocational planning compared with a national sample. Given these barriers, they conclude that specific learning opportunities are necessary to allow youth with physical disabilities to develop and practice life skills.

According to James (2006) education in life skills has been central pillar of state and NGO strategies in fighting the scourge of HIV/AIDS in South Africa. She states that some people view life skills education as a euphemism for ‘teaching about sex’ while others see it as an essential way of contextualizing sex education in its broader context of empowerment and striving for equitable gender relation. In their study on the impact of life skills education on adolescent sexual risks behavior in KZN, Magnani et al. (2005) conclude that school-based life skills education appears capable of communicating information and helping youth develop skills which are relevant for the reduction of HIV risks.

### ***2.5.3 HISTORY OF POVERTY AND INEQUALITY IN SOUTH AFRICA AND ITS IMPACT ON EDUCATION AND SKILLS ACQUISITION***

The history of poverty and inequality in South Africa is of great importance if one wants to understand the problem of unemployment, skills and access to opportunities. In that sense, many analysts link the history of poverty and inequality in South Africa with poor education, skills acquisition, unemployment, and low job opportunities. In their view the legacy of apartheid and colonialism has negatively impacted on education, skills and the ability of many South Africans to access income opportunities (Bhorat et al. 2001, Cheru 2001, Aliber 2003, Seekings & Nattrass 2006). According to Cheru (2001: 505) ‘poverty in South Africa is intertwined with a host of social and economic issues. The burden of poverty is exacerbated by limited access to basic services, poor housing, limited employment opportunities and inadequate infrastructures, which are an outcome of the terrible legacy of apartheid’. Any attempt to alter these hardships which the poorest half of the population is struggling with will fail if the legacy of apartheid is not thoroughly recorded and studied (Terreblanche 2002). Many historical factors have contributed to South Africa’s actual configuration of poverty. These can broadly be summarized into three main categories: land dispossession, repressive labour systems, and discriminatory measures.

One of the most direct effects of colonial settlement was the dispossession of land, which forced many African farmers either to retreat to other areas or to become sharecroppers or farm laborers. Subsequently, the discovery of diamonds and gold at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century created a growing demand for African workers. To facilitate the supply of this labor, various laws and policies were introduced. The Native Land Act implemented in 1913 was the ‘most notorious’ and the ‘most successful’ (Terreblanche 2002: 386). It made official the ‘distinction between the African reserves and white farming areas, prohibiting Africans from acquiring, owning, and renting land in the latter’ (Aliber 2003: 474). Terreblanche (2002: 397) observes that before 1980 Africans were ‘deprived of the opportunity to legally accumulate capital and entrepreneurial skills outside the Bantustans, and to develop a capitalist class’. He further argues that up to 1994,

Africans were forbidden from owning land in 87 percent of the country. As a consequence of this law and many others, the economic options of Africans were so severely limited that they were obliged to sell their labor to mines and white farms (Davenport 1987).

The laws regulating the labour market were also discriminatory. Leibbrandt et al. (2000) point out that over the last century the South African labour market was characterized by a set of legislation that maintained the division of the workforce on the basis of race. The real reason justifying these discriminatory laws was 'to protect poor white Afrikaners against competition from cheap black labour' (Terreblanche 2002: 386). As consequences of these laws, Africans were unable to participate in skilled and highly paid jobs. Even when they were employed in the same job categories as whites, their salaries were lower. Furthermore they were not allowed to join trade unions. For that reason they were deprived of any opportunity to participate in industrial action and wage negotiation. 'Discriminatory legislation also deprived Africans of the opportunity to gain skills and undergo professional training' (Terreblanche 2002: 387). As a consequence they were condemned to low-paid and unskilled work. Although a small elite of Africans advanced to more skilled and better-paid jobs from 1970, the majority either saw their wages declining or became unemployed. Despite the abolition of job discrimination in the labour market in 1979, it was still difficult for Africans to compete on an equal footing with whites because of unofficial discrimination and cultural barriers. From the mid-1970s, the reduction of racial and gender wage inequality increased significantly, however it was not wiped away by 1989 (van der Berg & Borat 1999).

Discriminatory policies have also deprived many South Africans of educational opportunities. According to Streak and van der Westhuizen (2004), the apartheid educational system provided to Africans an education that was not in relation to the labour demands. Consequently, skills supply did not match the demand. The education that black Africans were receiving allowed them to cater for the needs of the white minority rather than be oriented to the demands of the labour market (Streak & van der Westhuizen 2004). Terreblanche (2002) argues that at the end



of apartheid many Africans were either unemployed, or employed in low-paying jobs. This was due to their low levels of education. The lack of adequate opportunities for Africans to build up human capital during the 20<sup>th</sup> century has affected them negatively and remains one of their major causes of poverty. According to May, Woolard, & Klasen (2000), the outcomes of these historical developments are easily observable. They stated that based on a per adult equivalent poverty line of R352 per month, in 1995, 61 percent of blacks, 38 percent of coloreds, 5 percent of Indians, and 1 percent of whites were poor. The same data, they argue, shows that 72 percent of people living below the poverty line reside in rural areas, while 71 percent of all rural people are poor. The poorest provinces by most measures are those that have the most populous former homeland areas. Those are the provinces of KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and Eastern Cape.

Since 1994 two main socioeconomic policy frameworks were introduced respectively to reduce the poverty affecting a great number of people and to redress the inequalities and injustices of the past. These were the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) and the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR). These policy frameworks, more particularly GEAR, which replaced the RDP, were seen by many analysts as a neoliberal sell-out by the ANC (Bond 2000). For them, it was an inappropriate way of solving the pressing economic problems such as unemployment and poverty (Adelzadeh et al., 1998). According to Aliber (2003) GEAR contributed to a jobless growth which reached its peak in 2000, when growth reached a four-year high while formal sector job losses accelerated.

Despite the dramatic economic, social and political transition South Africa has undergone in the last decade, 'many of the distortions and dynamics introduced by apartheid continue to reproduce poverty and perpetuate inequality. The correct identification of these and the introduction of remedial policies have been recognized as priorities by both government and civil society' (May 2000: 2). To overcome the inherited legacy of apartheid, it is suggested that an integrated set of programmes be designed to strengthen the assets of poor people and to enhance their access to existing livelihood opportunities (May & Rogerson 2000: 208). From that perspective, attention

should be given to governmental and non-governmental programmes that seek to increase peoples capabilities through education, skills development and access to income opportunities

#### ***2.5.4 WORLD CHANGERS ACADEMY'S LIFE SKILLS PROGRAM***

World Changers Academy believes that South Africa's many problems can only be solved if people's minds are changed through life skills education. This change will allow individuals to hope again, to have a new and positive vision, to embrace new opportunities and to correct distorted value systems; in brief it will contribute in the creation of 'cumulative protection'.

Since 2002 World Changers Academy has taken as mission to empower young people with the following skills through their life skills program: goal setting; relationships; social concerns; business skills and leadership skills. In addition, some participants learn some basic computer skills. The main topics covered by WCA's life skills program are as follows: healing of the past, relationships and interpersonal skills, communication skills, leadership skills, building self-esteem, personal growth, volunteerism, HIV/AIDS, job preparation skills, financial literacy, and opportunity awareness (WCA 2008). Though many former participants have acknowledged that the program has changed their life positively, no study has been conducted to assess the real impact of World Changers Academy's Life Skills Program. Since an impact evaluation of WCA's program is beyond the scope of a mini-dissertation, this study will limit its scope to assessment of the participants' perception of World Changers Academy's Life Skills program.

## **2.6 CONCLUSION**

This chapter has reviewed the literature on the role NGOs play in social development, and the literature on life skills education. It has also investigated the impact of apartheid on education, skills and the ability of South Africans to access income opportunities. It was stated that literature on NGOs and social development can be broadly divided into two positions: pro-NGO, arguing that NGOs are important agents of social development because of their many operational and advocacy roles; and anti-NGOs, seeing NGOs as tools of exploitation and domination at the service of neoliberalism. Within this context, we have focused our attention on a specific NGO program called Life Skills Education in order to assess how people who underwent the program perceive its effects on their lives. The literature reviewed on life skills has shown the importance of life skills education. Concrete examples of the application of life skills were illustrated in 4-H targeting life skills; life skills programs for youth with disabilities and the impact of life skills education on adolescent sexual risks behaviors. The next chapter will describe the methodology followed to assess the participants' perception of World Changers Academy's Life Skills Education program.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents and justifies the methodology used to assess how people who underwent World Changers Academy's Life Skills program perceived the intervention. The approach used for this project is beneficiary assessment. Mikkelsen (2005) defines beneficiary assessment as a process of gathering information in order to assess the value of an activity as perceived by its intended beneficiaries. Beneficiary assessment, he argues, is about answering the questions of how and why a certain process and activity took place and how it was perceived by beneficiaries, instead of the outcome of the process. The following discusses the type of research, sampling procedure, data collection methods, data analysis technique, ethical considerations and limitation of the study.

### **3.2 TYPE OF RESEARCH**

This research project falls under evaluation research because it seeks to assess the participants' perception of the effects of a social intervention, which is World Changers Academy's life skills program. The purpose of evaluation research is to test social interventions in order to assess whether programs and policies are working, for whom they are working, and how they can be improved (Bless & Higson-Smith 2000; Rubin & Rubin 2005). Evaluation is often concerned not only with assessing worth or value but also with seeking to assist in the improvement of whatever is being evaluated (Robson 2002: 205). In that sense evaluation is an important means of linking action and research in a positive way. According to Paton (2002: 220), evaluation research relies greatly, even first and foremost, on qualitative method.

This research is primarily qualitative because of the beneficiaries' subjective assessment of their own experience. Qualitative research allows the researcher to understand experiences and reconstruct events in which he/she did not participate (Rubin & Rubin 2005). Qualitative research uses open-ended methods during design, data collection, and analysis. Qualitative data can also be quantified. The advantages of qualitative method are that they are flexible, can be purposely adapted to the needs of the evaluation using open-ended questions, can be carried out quickly using rapid techniques, and can greatly improve the findings of an impact evaluation by offering a better understanding of stakeholders' perception and priorities and the conditions and processes that may have affected program impact (Barker 2000).

### **3.3 SAMPLING PROCEDURE**

Bickman & Rog (1998) define a sample as a subset of the population used to gather information about the entire population. For the purposes of this study a sample is defined as a specific group of participants used to assess how the participants in WCA life skills program perceived its effects on their life.

According to Paton (2002: 230), 'Nothing captures the difference between quantitative and qualitative methods more than the different logics that undergird sampling approaches. Qualitative inquiry typically focuses on relatively small samples, even single cases (N=1), selected *purposefully*. Quantitative methods typically depend on larger samples selected randomly'. In qualitative research, the sampling method requires careful reflection on the purpose of the study and the resources available to carry out the research. This includes the questions being asked and the constraints being faced (Henry 1998, Paton 2002).

A purposeful sampling of fourteen participants for semi-structured interviews and six others for a focus group discussion was used to select key informants for this research. The selection of the participants was based on their particular knowledge of the program, their fluency in English and their willingness to share their experience to the researcher. Some of the participants in the interview were suggested by WCA's management team. All the participants were out of school boys and girls aged between 17 and 26. Only those who had completed the training in the previous three months were interviewed. According to Paton (2002), purposeful sampling is one of the distinguishing characteristics of qualitative research. It focuses on selecting 'information-rich' cases that can illuminate and enrich the question under investigation.

### **3.4 DATA COLLECTION METHODS**

The interview is one way of asking questions and, hopefully, receiving answers from the participants. It involves face to face contact with the interviewee, who is expected to answer questions relating to the research problem. A distinction is made between three types of interviews: *structured*, *semi-structured* and *unstructured*. Structured interviews use a predetermined set of questions with fixed wording and sequence of presentation. Unstructured interviews focus on a general area of concern and allow the conversation to develop within this area (Robson 2002).

The semi-structured interview, which was the main data collection method used for this research, has a predetermined set of question of which the order can be modified based of the participants' perception of what seems to be most appropriate. Flexibility and adaptability in finding out things is an important advantage of interviews. Semi-structured interviews, through face to face interaction, offer the possibility of modifying the researcher's line of enquiry, following up interesting responses and scrutinizing underlying motives in a way that other methods of investigation cannot. The main disadvantage of semi-structured interviews is that they are highly time-consuming and expensive. They may also introduce interviewer bias and other biases due to social desirability (Bless & Higson-Smith 2000, Robson 2002).

It should be acknowledged here that a focus group discussion was not initially part of the research design. After a few interviews during field work, the researcher realized that it was almost impossible to carry on with face-to face-interviews because of the disproportion between the number of people to be interviewed and the time allocated for all the interviews. Since all the participants went through the program at the same period, the researcher decided to organize a focus group discussion of eight participants. This was done with the hindsight gained from the previous interviews. It turned out to be a good opportunity to debate and probe some of the issues that came out from the individual interviews.

Bless and Higson-Smith (2000) define focus groups as a group of four to eight people who are interviewed together. Their main advantage is that, while participants are discussing issues with each other, one person's ideas may generate related ideas from another. If there is disagreement the whole group will explore the disagreement in detail, thereby deepening the understanding of the problem. Another advantage is that, unlike questionnaires and interviews, which are information gathering, the focus group discussion will be an opportunity for the participants to share their views and learn from others. However the disadvantage of the focus group is that without skilled facilitation some participants may be excluded. Participants may also influence each other and that might affect individual responses.

### **3.5 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE**

The data were collected between December 2008 and January 2009 using semi-structured interviews and a focus group discussion. Semi-structured interviews and the focus group discussion were carried out at the YMCA, Durban and at the WCA leadership center in Shongweni. They lasted between thirty and sixty minutes. Permission to conduct the research was granted by WCA's management, which helped in facilitating the relation between the researcher and some participants.

Before the beginning of each interview session, the researcher had prepared a general interview guide outlining issues to be explored with each respondent. The aim was to ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry were followed for each participant.

According to Paton (2002), ‘raw data’ from the interviews are the prize sought by the qualitative researcher because they are the actual quotation spoken by the interviewee. He asserts that ‘no matter what style of interviewing you use and no matter how carefully you word questions, it all come to naught if you fail to capture the actual words of the person being interviewed’ (Paton 2002: 380). To fulfill that objective, all interviews and the focus group discussion were tape-recorded. One of the advantages of tape-recording the interviews is that it allows the interviewer to be more attentive to the interviewee.

During the interviews, important notes were jotted down for non-verbal communication and as a back-up solution in case of the failure of the tape recorder. Given that English is the medium of instruction in WCA the interviews were done in English. All the interviews were conducted and transcribed by the researcher.

### **3.6 DATA ANALYSIS**

The challenge of qualitative analysis lies in making sense of massive amounts of data. This includes ‘reducing the volume of raw information, sifting trivia from significance, identifying patterns, and constructing a framework communicating the essence of what the data reveal’ (Paton 2002: 432). Furthermore Paton states that data interpretation and analysis is a process of explaining the findings, answering the ‘why’ questions, giving importance to results, and putting patterns and themes into an analytical framework.



Recorded interviews were analyzed using *content analysis*. Content analysis is the search for recurring patterns and themes emerging from the raw data. In general content analysis refers to any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings in volumes of qualitative material.

The main findings were organized into six major themes constituted of several minor themes, as illustrated in table 2. Direct quotes were used to illustrate important findings, as will be shown in the next chapter.

### **3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Scientific research is a source of power which can be abused because it seeks accurate information. In this regard the process and results of any research project require strict ethical choices and careful thought from the researcher (Bless & Higson-Smith 2000). This section explains the steps followed to ensure that this research project was conducted in ethical manner.

At the start of the research, ethical clearance was obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal ethical committee. The three basic ethical considerations of voluntary participation, informed consent and confidentiality were the guiding principles of the research.

The informed consent statement was read at the beginning of each interview. It explained background on the research and the researcher's identity. It described the project and the purposes of the research. It emphasized that the participation was voluntary and that the participant was free to withdraw at any time from the interview, should the person feel s/he had

to do so. Before the interviews commenced, the participants were asked to sign the informed consent forms.

Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality were meticulously observed. Participants' names were substituted by codes as a form of identification during the interviews transcription and in the dissertation. Transcripts of interviews and tapes used were stored and disposed of according to the School of Development Studies policies.

### **3.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Due to financial constraints, since this was a self-sponsored study, the research was limited to participants who were easily accessible and a strictly manageable sample size. The validity of the study would have increased if some well-known success stories as well as failures were identified and interviewed.

The sites for the interviews (YMCA and WCA leadership center) were also chosen due to their easy accessibility with the aim to reduce costs.

Another limitation was the inability of the researcher to speak Zulu. For that reason the participants were sampled depending on their fluency in English. All the interviews were therefore conducted in English. It would have been more enriching if the participants were interviewed in their first language, which was Zulu.

## **CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This study set out to assess the participants' perception of the effects of World Changers Academy's life skills program. This chapter summarizes the findings. A qualitative research approach was used to collect data. Semi-structured interviews of 14 participants and one focus group discussion constituted of 8 participants. Data were analyzed using content analysis. Content analysis is the search for recurring patterns and themes in the interview transcript. The findings are presented according to the objective of the study and are organized into six major themes constituted of minor themes as illustrated in table 2 below.

Table 2. Summary of the main findings

<i>MAJOR THEMES</i>	<i>MINOR THEMES</i>
<b>Reasons for participating in the program</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased job opportunities</li> <li>• Increased knowledge</li> <li>• Interest in knowing about life skills</li> <li>• Self-improvement</li> <li>• Improve community</li> </ul>
<b>Lifestyle/attitude before the program</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sitting at home doing nothing (idleness)</li> <li>• Jobless</li> <li>• Criminal background</li> <li>• Studying but unable to pay school fees</li> <li>• No direction in life</li> <li>• Abuse of alcohol, drugs and cigarettes</li> <li>• Multiple partners</li> <li>• Clubbing</li> </ul>
<b>Effects of the program on the participants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change in vision/goals setting</li> <li>• Change in attitude</li> <li>• Change in knowledge</li> <li>• Discovering true potential</li> <li>• Working now</li> <li>• Social skills</li> <li>• Job preparation</li> <li>• Increased employability/opportunities</li> <li>• Spiritual growth</li> <li>• Communication skills</li> </ul>
<b>Effects on others as perceived by participants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with diverse organizations</li> <li>• Volunteering</li> <li>• Helping their community</li> <li>• Staying at home doing nothing despite the training</li> </ul>
<b>Less beneficial aspects of the program</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Religious clash</li> <li>• Failure to attract former participants to follow-up program</li> </ul>
<b>Suggestions/Recommendations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extension of the duration of the programs</li> <li>• Finding ways to channel as many participants as possible to leadership course</li> <li>• Finding strategies to attract ex-LS participants to follow-up program</li> <li>• Speakers to interact more with participants</li> <li>• Finding ways to reintegrate failed students into the program</li> <li>• Intervention at an early age when youth ‘are not yet spoiled’</li> <li>• Seminar for parents to instruct them about life skills</li> </ul>

## 4.2 REASONS FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE PROGRAM

During the interview participants were asked to state the reasons for their participation in the program. Most of them reported that the reasons motivating their choice to participate into the program were: increase their opportunities to find a job, increase their knowledge, satisfy their interest about life skills programs, improve their personality, and improve their community.

The common reason why people participated in WCA's life skills program was the access to opportunities. In that sense many participants interviewed reported that increasing their chances and opportunities of getting into the job market was the deciding factor that made them participate. This is illustrated by the following statements.

*“The first time I heard about WCA? Actually... it is a true story; I was sleeping at home and my mom wakes me up and said ‘you have to go there to the community hall, there are jobs opportunities’. Then I wake up and took my ID and went”* (Interviewee 6, male)

*“I was at school before and after finishing school I spent about four month at home doing nothing. There were no opportunities. That is why I joined WCA”* (Interviewee 11, male)

*“Since I was struggling to find a job I thought that WCA will increase my chances of getting a job”* (Interviewee 8, female)

Some of the participants reported that they were interested in participation in the program because they wanted to increase their knowledge in general. This is captured by the following quotes.

*“I needed to understand better, what are life skills, then what is the purpose of knowing the life skills” (Interviewee 13, female)*

*“Actually I heard about life skills in the radio; local radio station and I was interested on whatever they were talking about and I made a phone” (Interviewee 5, female)*

It was reported that people participate in the program because of their desire to improve themselves and their community.

*“I wanted to improve myself in life; I wanted to develop my community and I wanted to show the talents to other people; which talents I have and nothing more about life skills. Just that I wanted to know myself and the direction where I’m going” (Focus group)*

### 4.3 LIFESTYLE AND ATTITUDE BEFORE THE PROGRAM

Participants were also asked to describe their life just before joining the program. Some of the common points in the interviews can be summarized thus: ‘sitting at home doing nothing’, joblessness, studying but unable to pay for school fees, criminal background, living a life without purpose and direction, abuse of alcohol, drugs and cigarettes, having many girlfriends and clubbing.

Many people interviewed reported that before joining WCA’s program they were ‘sitting at home doing nothing’ because they were unemployed. Some stated that they did not have any direction. The following statements better illustrate the participants’ views in this regard.

*“I was jobless; at that time I was looking for job and I was an opportunist because I was looking for anything that can come on my way”* (Interviewee 8, female)

*“I was at school before and after finishing school I spent about four month at home doing nothing”* (Interviewee 11, male)

*“At first, I was doing things... I had no direction, no purpose until I came to WCA”*  
(Focus group)

A few respondents reported that they had criminal backgrounds before joining WCA’s program. They had been in prison several times, and were involved in drug and alcohol abuse. The life skills program helped them to change their behavior and ‘view life differently’.

*“World Changers helped a lot. I have a little bit of criminal background, I was very active in my community, doing stuff in order to get money and in order to be on the same level as other young people”* (Interviewee 1, male)

*“I have stopped drinking and smoking dagga through World Changers”* (Focus group)

*“Basically, I was in and out of jail many times before WC came into my way and helped me change. They help made me view life differently”* (Interviewee 10, male)

Before joining the program some people were studying but dropped out because they could not effort to pay for their school fees. Others were desperately looking for a job and could not find it. Out of that desperation they chose to participate in WCA’s life skills program. They expressed it as follows:

*“I was studying in 2007 a BA Social Work at UNISA but I had financial problem and was obliged to drop. After that I start looking for a job but still I was not able to find. I thought it was enough because did not even have money to go to town ... I just gave up”* (Interviewee 8, female)

*“I was doing nothing at that time. I was just studying at UNISA and most of the time when I don’t have money to attend classes I was sitting at home doing nothing that is why I was interested in life skill program”* (Interviewee 7, female)

*“I was that person who was looking for a job. I could take any job, anything as long as it can help me to support my family”* (interviewee 5, female)



A number of interviewees reported that they were had unhealthy social and sexual lifestyles. They were spending their time in clubs and shebeens, and had multiple partners before joining the program.

*“Before I was a person who was using alcohol and cigarette. I was spending most of time with my friends in shebeens... and I was a person of girlfriends. So when WCA came they help me to see life differently and I decided to change”* (Interviewee 6, male)

*“Clubbing and alcohol was my life before... For me it was the meaning of life; other things were not important”* (Focus group)

#### **4.4 EFFECTS OF THE PROGRAM ON THE PARTICIPANTS**

This research project set out to assess the participants’ perception of the effects of WCA’s life skills program. Participants were asked to identify and describe how the program has impacted their lives. All the participants but one answered that the program was very beneficial because it has positively influenced and changed their lives. It was also reported that the program helped them in changing their vision, increasing their knowledge, changing their attitude, discovering their true potential, building social skills, increasing their employability and opportunities, contributing to their mental and spiritual growth, increasing their communication skills and preparing them for the job market. However, two participants mentioned that despite the program and the skills learned they are still struggling to find jobs. They have reported that have learned a lot but were still relying on the follow-up program to get job opportunities.

The program, according to some interviewees, has changed their vision and helped them discover their true potential. They have reported that the program helped them to view life positively. Through the program they have learned and acknowledged that without vision there is no direction in life.

*“WCA gave me vision, something that I did not have. Without a vision there is no direction to life”* (Interviewee 3, female)

*“Now I know how to plan and I know what is the vision and know how I will discover it...I know that this is my vision and all those stuff... So yah... I have learned a lot really”* (Interviewee 14, female)

Almost all the participants reported that the program helped them in finding ways to build their knowledge and know-how to search for useful information. In that sense the program has contributed to their knowledge building. This is how they expressed it:

*“When I went there, I was just empty, empty inside myself. I did not know about love, life, I didn’t know even about the values of human person. But now I know were to go, what to look for, and how to do it”* (Focus group)

*“So they introduce me to go to library... something that I was not used to. Now, I am hungry to get knowledge, I go to the library to collect information on things that I want to know”* (Interviewee 4, female)

*“The environment that is outside there need people who know who they are, who know what are their purpose, who know what they are going to supply... So for me being here at WC gave me the identity to know who I am and where I’m going”* (Interviewee 8, female)

#### **4.4.1 CHANGE IN ATTITUDE**

Participants have reported that the program has helped them to change their attitude. These changes in attitude are organized into four broad areas. Goal setting, purpose and vision; reconciliation with the past; improving self-esteem and future-orientation; and developing social skills by growing self-awareness and a sense of involvement in community.

Goal setting, purpose and vision were the recurrent theme in every interview. Participants attested that these were the areas in which they had learned a great deal. The issue of goal setting, particularly realistic goals, appears as one area which people participating in the interview were very excited about. They now view goal setting as an important factor for their success in life. This is captured by the following quotes.

*“If you fight for what you need you get it. What you need in life, you need to have goal”*  
(Interviewee 3, female)

*“Now I have a goal in my life in everything but I know when I plan, even if you can wake me up in the middle of the night, I know what I want to be”* (interviewee 13, female)

*“I’ve never thought about vision and setting goals and... you know? All of that stuff; I’ve never thought about, I never even have a diary in my life. Now I have learned the importance of setting goal and work on how to achieve them”* (Interviewee 4, female)

#### **4.4.2 CHANGE IN MIND, CHANGE IN BEHAVIOUR AND INCREASED SELF-ESTEEM**

Many participants indicated that the program helped them to transform their mind, to change their behavior and to increase their self-esteem. They reported that the program helped them to renew their minds. They also mentioned that the program has completely changed the way they think. One participant reported that, before, every girl for him was just a girlfriend. Now he has learned how to respect women and see them as sisters and helpers.

*“Their teachings seriously renew and transform my mind. Attending WC training and workshop changed totally the way I used to think before, it has empower me”* (Interviewee 6, male)

*“So I’m proud to be who I am. I’m not afraid to speak to anyone about my future and what I want to be and I’m proud and excited about what I want to be. It makes me to prepare in every step, take one step at a time and understand where I am going...I’m really proud, I’m a go-getter”* (Interviewee 4, female)

*“So I view life differently. Not only using my eyes but also using my mind. Now when I see a girl, I don’t look at her as before that she must be my girlfriend... So when WC came they bring me the light that is I can see a girl in a different way, not as my girlfriend but as my sister or an assisting person in my life so that I can progress in life; yah... WC helped me a lot”* (Interviewee 10, male)

Reconciliation with the past was reported as one area in which participants have benefited. In that sense, some mentioned that the program was helpful because it helped them to heal their past wounds. One participant reported she has learned not only to forgive others but herself. Another reported that the program helped her to accept her HIV-positive status, and talk about it, in order to help others.

*“So healing of the past... I have issues with that. I could forgive my father. But I was touched by the topic healing of the past and forgiveness... they helped me a lot dealing with it. I am now in good term with my father”* (Interviewee 4, female)

*“I must understand that the past is the past. I have stopped holding grudges and blaming others. I have learned to forgive others and myself... So let the past be the past and I must face the future now”* (Interviewee 13, female)

*“I have learned to accept my status and talk about it. I am not afraid to say that I’m HIV-positive. I believe it is in that way that I can succeed in helping others”* (Interviewee 4, female)

Through the program many participants have learned and developed positive social skills such as volunteering and helping in their community. One interviewee mentioned that after WCA he has volunteered for several organizations, where he gained a lot of experience. He is now involved in his own community.

*“World Changers taught me the importance of volunteering. I have volunteered in many organizations where I have learned a lot. Now I have decided to serve my community where I’m involved in different projects”* (Interviewee 6, male)

*“I must not sit in my comfort zone; I must not limit myself; I have to be wide, know what is happening in my community and everything because at the end I am accountable for my community”* (Interviewee 8, female)

Some of the participants indicated their intention to return to their studies as a result of the program.

*“I have already have my plan for next year so... next year I’m gonna go to school and continue my studies”* (Interviewee 4, female)

*“WCA gave me inspiration to go back to school try and find loan so that I can carry on with my studies”* (Interviewee 3, female)

#### **4.5 EFFECTS OF THE PROGRAM ON OTHERS AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS**

People interviewed were asked to give their views on their fellow participants who went through the program with them. It was reported that while some are working either in their communities or in different organization and others have resumed their studies, many others went back to their previous lives. For these latter it can be said that the program did not meet its objectives. One participant attributed this failure to their non-participation in the follow-up program. These views are expressed in these terms:

*“Some are working and they are still leaving positively. I know some of them and some of them are helping in the community, they are working with different organization”*  
(Interviewee 11, male)

*“I’ve met some of the people I was attending the life skills class with. Some of them have register at UNISA, they told me... So some are working, their life is going effectively and positively”* (Interviewee 6, male)

*“Some of them came here for the leadership course. Some of them just stay at home and carry on with their poor life”* (Interviewee 7, female)

*“They failed to attend the follow up for getting themselves assisted. They still don’t know what they want for their life... even if you told them to come for the follow up, they do not want to come”*(Interviewee 6, male)

#### **4.6 LESS BENEFICIAL ASPECTS OF THE PROGRAM**

The negative aspect of the program reported by the participants was primarily the cultural clash they perceived between African values and Western values, mostly with regard to the issue of difference of religious belief; African traditional religions versus Western Christianity.

Many participants perceived the religious and cultural clashes as negative aspects of the program. They reported that the topic on African Renaissance was very confusing because of the clashes it caused between the participants’ cultures and the Western religion. One participant mentioned that, some days, people were spending a lot of time arguing on the issue of religion.

Spending time arguing on the issue of whose religion, for instance, is the best was perceived by them as not beneficial. The following statements capture their views and feelings.

*“I believe in ancestors but they had another way of seeing things... the way they teach about ancestors, is like when they teach you get lost... there were areas that I was completely lost because I believe in ancestors and my family also believes in ancestors”*  
(Interviewee 4, female)

*“We are coming from different family background; we have been raised in a particular culture and then... Suddenly somebody tell you that you are wrong. The topic of African Renaissance was confusing for me because of that point”* (Interviewee 1, male)

*“Some days people was just arguing in the issue of religion; Oh I’m a Roman... I’m Shembe... I’m Zionist and blah blah blah. It was something like that, so there were so many questions in a class. Everyone wants to show he has a God. Yah It was like that”*  
(Interviewee 8, female)

One particular interviewee was quite negative about the program. Though he felt that although he had benefited from the program, he felt that some people left WCA unhappy because of its leadership. Furthermore, he mentioned that the system was limiting young leaders to show their true potential. When asked to elaborate, he answered that there was nothing more to explain.

*“I know some people who left WCA being not happy with the system and its leadership... I think the problem is the leadership... And then it is this thing of domesticating people or of telling people to think on this level, to do this and that and that and that... to minimize the potentials of young emerging leaders... there was many, many, many... the system*



*was limiting young emerging leaders to show their potential... yah” (Interviewee 1, male)*

#### **4.7 SUGGESTIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE PROGRAM**

Participants were asked to give their views on how to improve the program. These views are summarized in three broad groups. The duration of the program, increasing as much as possible participation in the leadership program, looking for ways to attract participants into follow up meetings, organizing seminars for parents.

Many participants agreed that both the life skills and the leadership program were very short. They suggested that the duration of these programs should be extended in order to allow participants to fully reap their benefits. Some participants manifested their concern about the limited number of people selected for the leadership course and suggested that WCA should find a way to increase participation in the leadership course. These views are summed up as follows.

*“I would say the time is too short, because you have done life skills in just a month... and if you are lucky, you are selected for leadership program for another month at WCA, then after you go for six weeks outside in outreach. After that there is another week for feedback and then you are done with the leadership... You then get your certificate and just live the life you want to live. Everything just happens in just a small space of time... maybe it should be just extended” (Interviewee 3, female)*

*“I wish the majority of people participating into life skills course can also get the chance that I got to come to the leadership course because that is where most of the things you do at life skills classes... you know? Are more effective; that they are more deeper than...*

*In the life skills class. Life skills courses are just the basic, the surface. But when you come to the leadership class, that is where you go deeper with the things that WCA teaches you” (Interviewee 8, female)*

Other suggestions to improve the quality and the impact of the program focused on finding ways to attract as many former participants as possible into follow-up meetings. Many participants acknowledged the role and importance of the follow-up meetings. In that regard, it was suggested that WCA should work out strategies that would enhance participation in the follow up meetings. This was viewed as the best way to monitor progress and link participants with the available opportunities.

*“World Changers must make sure that people who have completed life skills course are doing some positive things with their life. There must therefore have effective follow up meetings and find ways to make sure many people participate” (Interviewee 10, male)*

*“WC must look for ways to invite people into follow-up meetings” (Interviewee 13, female)*

Some general suggestions concerned the increase of the number of speakers. It was suggested that speakers should interact more with students. It was also suggested that life skills should target teenagers younger than 15 years old. Some interviewees mentioned the importance of introducing seminars for parents in order to make them aware of what their children have learned at WCA. This, according to them, is necessary due to the fact that participants can be influenced negatively by their families who have no clue about some of the values learned at WCA. This can also help families to be more supportive of their children. These views are broadly reported in these words:

*“Mostly the speakers were not much because the coordinator has to do some other topics because there were no speakers to come and just present that topic that day. But I cannot say much... and on a break time they can just chat with us, talk, get to know us, what is wrong and how are thinking and how are we gonna get along with the life skills”*  
(Interviewee 3, female )

*“So I think the corruption is starting around 15 years old or less. I think if they can have more programs that target those children, now people will come to life skills... they are already destroyed... like now WCA is doing the fire fighting; you know? People are already broken but if we can have a program that targets those teenagers/young people and direct them into the right direction, it will be”* (Interviewee 7, female)

*“Why if we try to teach our parents about life skills so that they can understand the way... so that they can understand the things that we learn here at WC. Because I can learn something and go back home and they are saying I’m great. And I’ll live with this family 24/7 yes... and they will influence me because most of the time I’m spending with them so they will influence me; so we can try to have some classes maybe for two hours with parents.... Because you can influence the child and the child is living with the elders and the elders will demand the child to do something that may contradict what s/he have learned”* (Interviewee 10, male)

## **4.8 CONCLUSION**

This chapter has presented the summary of the main findings of the study conducted on the participants' perception of the effects of WCA's life skills education. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and a focus group discussion at YMCA, Durban and at WCA leadership center, Shongweni. Content analysis was used to identify, categorize, classify, and label patterns and themes in the data. The results were summarized into five major themes: reasons for the participants' enrolment into the program; their lifestyle or attitude before the program; their perception of the effects of the program; the less beneficial aspects of the program, and their suggestions and recommendations. These five major themes were subdivided into minor themes as shown in Table 2. The next chapter will discuss these findings.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The aim of this research was to assess the participants' perception of the effects of WCA's Life Skills education program. The research project was informed by Sen's capability approach, which holds that the 'the enhancement of human freedom is both the main object and the primary means of development' (Sen 1999: 53). The rationale behind the use of the capability approach framework was justified by the fact that the study aimed at assessing the participants' perceptions of whether WCA's life skills education has enhanced their capabilities. It was assumed that people participating in the program would learn skills, knowledge and attitudes that could cause changes in behavior and empower them for life success. The objectives of the study were: (1) Assessing the participants' perception of the effects of WCA's life skills program (2) matching the participants' expectations and experiences against what WCA perceives as its goals, (3) giving recommendations for the improvement of the program. In the following, these objectives will be discussed in relation to the findings.

### **5.2 PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTION OF THE EFFECTS OF THE PROGRAM**

The findings revealed that many participants perceived that the program has caused a positive change in diverse aspects of their life. The literature on life skills holds that life skills are important skills that help people to cope with problems, adapt to changes and effectively confront crises and conflicts. In that sense a set of life skills is of critical importance if one has to deal with organizing personal affairs; managing health care; pursuing vocational, leisure, and educational activities and engaging in positive and fruitful social interaction (Ebersohn & Eloff 2006, Kingsnorth, Healy & Macarthur 2007: 323). The findings support the literature on life skills in the sense that before the program, many participants reported that they were jobless, some had criminal backgrounds, and others were living a purposeless life. After the program

they reported that the program has helped them to change their behavior, attitudes and knowledge, improving their self-esteem, healing their past, contributing to their spiritual growth, increasing their employability and opportunities, and allowing them to discover their true potential and to learn critical personal, interpersonal and social skills. They reported that the program has also helped many of them to set realistic goals.

### **5.3 MATCHING PARTICIPANTS' EXPECTATIONS AGAINST WCA'S GOALS**

Matching participants' expectations against WCA's goals is way of checking whether the program is meeting its objectives and therefore can be said to be legitimate. Hilhorst (2003) points out that it is not an easy job to acquire legitimation as an organization claiming to be 'doing good' for the development of others. Their legitimation entails 'first convincing others that the intervention of the NGO is indispensable and appropriate, and that it has no self-interest in the envisaged programme... it requires convincing others that the NGO is able and reliable, in other words, trustworthy and capable of carrying out the intervention' (Hilhorst 2003: 78). These criteria of legitimation will be discussed with regard to the outcome of the program as perceived by WCA's participants.

#### ***5.3.1 WCA's INTERVENTION: INDISPENSABLE AND APPROPRIATE? EMPOWERMENT THROUGH WCA'S LIFE SKILLS PROGRAM***

According to Rowlands (1995: 105) 'Programmes that build on the demands and wishes of the people who participate in them are a step toward empowerment'. The aim and objective of World Changers Academy is to empower people for life success through value-based life skills education. The concept of 'empowerment' according to Rowlands (1995) is problematic. In development thinking and practice, it is usually used uncritically. It is used in community development, adult education, and particularly in social work. However, it means different things

for different people. The root concept of empowerment -power- suggests that empowerment terminology allows the analyses of power, oppression and inequality. Many politicians, social activists, publicists and an increasing number of intelligentsia see empowerment as an effective answer to exploitation, oppression, injustice and many other problems which our society is facing (Berteille 1999, Rowlands 1995). Empowerment is conceptualized more clearly as a socio-political process. Within empowerment, there is power; therefore, empowerment is ‘about shifts in political, social, and economic power between and across both individuals and social groups’ (Batliwala 2007: 559).

In relation to the use and interpretation of power, empowerment is sometimes linked to the issue of participation in governance and development projects. In that sense, it can be seen primarily as bringing people who are outside the decision-making process into it. This is a conventional approach to empowerment. The generic interpretation of power has led to a definition of ‘empowerment’ that includes access to ‘intangible decision-making’ processes. It is concerned, as Rowlands (1995: 103) put it, ‘with the processes by which people become aware of their own interests and how they relate to those of others, in order to participate from a position of greater strength in decision-making and actually to influence such decisions’ . Chambers (1997) concurs with this later definition by stating that empowerment is an ongoing interaction among people oriented toward equity and well-being. He describes this process as follows:

Empowerment, unless abused, serves equity and well-being. It is not a static condition. It is a process not a product; it is not something that is ever finished. There is no ‘empowerment’ box which can be ticked as complete. It entails enhanced capabilities and wider scope for action. Nor is it just something that happens among lowers. It is interactive, between lowers, peers and uppers. Especially, it requires and implies changes in power relations and behavior. These can be analysed under three heads: institutional; professional; and personal (Chambers 1997: 220).

In practice, empowerment is increasingly used as tool to understand what is needed in order to change the situation of poor and marginalized people. In that sense empowerment can be defined

as ‘the process by which people, organizations or groups who are powerless became aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context, develop the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives, exercise this control without infringing upon the rights of others and support the empowerment of others in the community’ (Mc Whirter 1991, cited in Rowlands 1995: 103).

The findings confirmed the above definition of empowerment. People reported that the program has helped participants not only to build and develop important skills but also to improve awareness of their potential. The expectations of the participants before starting the program, as reported, were to increase their opportunities in getting jobs, build their knowledge, improve themselves, improve their community. Some participants interviewed have expressed their willingness to be involved in their community in order to assist and share what they have learned with those who did not have the opportunity to participate in the program. Other participants attributed the fact that they are already working or volunteering in their community and diverse organizations to their participation in WCA’s life skills program.

World Changers Academy’s aim and objective fit into the definition of empowerment because almost all the participants interviewed have acknowledged in one way or another that the program was built on their demands, needs and wishes and therefore has constituted a milestone toward their empowerment. From that perspective it can be argued that WCA’s life skills program is not only legitimate but it is of critical importance because it contributes in building people capacity.



## **5.4 LIFE SKILLS AS AN ASSET**

There is strong relationship between asset ownership and vulnerability; ‘the more assets people have, the less vulnerable they are, and the greater the erosion of people’s assets, the greater their insecurity’ (Moser 1998: 3). The findings revealed that World Changers Academy’s life skills program had helped the participants to improve their condition by reducing their vulnerability and by the building up of their human capital. Moser (1998:4) describes human capital as encompassing, ‘health status, which determines people’s capacity to work, and skills and education, which determine the return to their labor’. Life skills therefore are important assets that the participants have acquired at World Changers Academy.

## **5.5 FITTING THE STUDY WITHIN THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical framework of the study, based on the capability approach, holds that development must focus on the expansion of human capability. Poverty, within this framework, is seen as deprivation of people’s basic capabilities. People’s capabilities are influenced by factors ranging from the prospect of earning a living, to the social and psychological effects of deprivation and exclusion. These include people’s basic needs, employment at reasonable wages and health and educational facilities (Birdsall & Londono 1997). The Capability approach aims then at building people’s capacity, reducing their vulnerability and increasing their opportunities.

The Capability approach may consist of capacity building and the increase of opportunities. Capacity refers to people’s skills, knowledge and attitudes, including any ability to do something, such as caring for others, the environment or the increase of self-esteem. Opportunities are places and areas where people can utilize their capacity – skills, knowledge and attitude- to generate income and other rewards. It is in this sense that Anderson and Woodrow (1989, cited by Moser 1998: 3) define development as a ‘process through which people’s physical/material, social/organizational and motivational/attitudinal vulnerabilities (or

capacities) are reduced or increased'. Preece (2006) sums up some of the basic capabilities as follows: vocational skills, management skills, financial skills, technology skills, business knowledge, access to loans/credit, skills updating opportunities and trade agreements.

The findings reveal that participants in World Changers Academy's life skills program have learned positive attitudes, skills, knowledge that have increased their opportunities and reduced their vulnerability. Through WCA, participants reported that they have learned the ability to adapt and adopt positive behavior that will enable them to deal effectively with the challenges and demands of their daily life. It can therefore be said that, according to the interviewees, WCA's life skills program contributes to the expansion of the real capabilities of its participants through the increase of their knowledge, helping them to adopt positive attitudes, helping them to set achievable goals, providing job preparation skills that increase their employability and helping them to discover their true potential.

## **5.6 STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE PROGRAM**

Identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the program was one of the objectives of the study. The findings reveal that some of the major strengths of the program are: its ability to build vision and achievable goals with the participants; to equip them with knowledge; to develop values and attitudes; to facilitate job preparation skills, communication skills and other important skills that empower participants for effective functioning in the society. Almost every participant interviewed stated that one of the areas in which they have benefited the most was when they were instructed on how they view their future and set achievable goals.

Although almost all the participants in the study have acknowledged that the program was greatly beneficial and has impacted them positively, they have pointed out some areas that were less beneficial and therefore need to be improved. These were related to the issue of religious

clashes between African traditional religions and Western religions; the failure to attract former life skills participants to follow-programs; the duration of the programs; the limited number of students participating in leadership course, and the failure to reintegrate failed students into the program.

According to many participants, the issue of religions covered on the topic of African Renaissance was very confusing. They pointed out that sometime the class was sidetracked due to the fact that people were arguing over the issue of religions instead of focusing on what was planned. In that sense the program failed to take into consideration the religious diversity of participants. Many have suggested that people should not be told to abandon their culture and belief systems since they are part and parcel of their identity and personality. From that perspective it is important that the issue of religion be handled with care, taking into consideration the cultural and religious diversity of the participants.

The second area of improvement pointed out by the participants was about the follow up-program. Participants have deplored the fact that follow-up sessions are not succeeding in attracting former life skills participants. In their view the follow-up programs are meant to check the progress of ex-life skills students. They are therefore an important component of the program that should be taken seriously. The fact that many students don't participate in these follow-up programs shows that they need to be reviewed and improved.

The third area of improvement concerns the duration of the program. It was pointed out by some participants that the duration of both life skills and leadership programs was insufficient to master all the subjects covered.

Some participants manifested their desire to see the number of people taking part in the leadership program increased. However, they reckoned that logistically it is not feasible.

Another area of improvement mentioned by the people interviewed concerned the distance between some speakers and the participants. In that regard, they advocated for a greater and livelier interaction between the students and the speakers. This would allow for a friendlier environment of sharing and learning.

## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 CONCLUSION**

Despite some criticism, many agree that the role of NGOs is of critical importance in social development. This is due to their countless social interventions. World Changers Academy, as profiled in this research, is a local NGO operating within the Greater eThekweni municipality. Its contribution to social development is to empower people for life success through value-based life skills education.

The aim of this research project was to assess the participants' perception of the effect of World Changers Academy's life skills program. To serve the intended purpose, the research questions were designed in relation to the main research question which was: 'how do the participants perceive the effects of WCA's life skills program in their life?' The research objectives were: to assess the participants' perceptions of the effects of WCA's Life Skills program, to identify program strengths and weaknesses, to match the participants' expectations and experiences against WCA goals and to give some recommendations. To reach its objectives, a qualitative research method was adopted because of the participants' assessment of their own experience. Data were collected in fourteen face to face interviews and one focus group discussion.

The findings revealed that in most of the case, World Changers Academy's life skills program has positively impacted the life the participants. Many of them perceived that it has helped them to improve their life. They have reported that, through the program, they have learned how to have new vision and to set achievable goals. The also indicated that the program has helped them to increase their knowledge, to develop values and attitudes, to acquire job preparation skills, communication skills and many other critical skills that have empowered them to cope effectively with the many challenges they are confronted with daily. However, a few have reported that despite the program and its beneficial aspects, they were still struggling to find

jobs. This justifies Budlender's (2000: 98) argument that 'education and training alone do not provide the opportunities (such as jobs) which allow individuals to utilise their skills and knowledge to escape from poverty'.

Whether all the beneficial aspect of WCA's life skills program as perceived by the participants will translate into material changes in their lives remains a matter for further examination. This can be done through a broader impact evaluation of WCA's life skills program.

Although acknowledging the program's beneficial aspects, participants have also identified areas which were less beneficial and therefore need to be improved. These were related to religious clashes, to the difficulties of attracting former participants into the follow-up program, to the short duration of both life skills and leadership programs and to the reintegration of failed students into the program. The next section will provide some recommendations based on these less beneficial aspects of WCA's program.

## **6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The follow-up program is an important means to monitor and evaluate the progress of former life skills students. This carries many advantages because it is a means through which WCA can check former participants' evolution and be able connect them to opportunities available through its various networks. It is also an important means to re-orient failed students into the program. For these reasons, strategies to attract former students into the follow-up program should be improved.

Many interviewees mentioned the fact that the duration of the programs, especially the life skills program, was too short to allow students to acquire all the necessary skills. Finding ways to

increase the duration of the program would surely increase its impact on the participants. In that regard, the issue of the duration of the life skills program should be taken into consideration.

It was also mentioned that, after the life skills program, a very small number of participants are selected for leadership course. Although the number of participants in the leadership course depends on World Changers Academy's capacity to host them, alternative ways of conducting leadership courses should be thought upon.

### **6.3 RECOMMENDATION FOR A BROADER IMPACT EVALUATION**

This research was conducted as a pilot study, aimed at informing a broad impact evaluation to be conducted in the future. In this regard, the findings resulting from this qualitative approach can be used to design questionnaires for a quantitative survey of a broad random sample of participants. The Likert Scale could be used in designing questionnaires that will measure the participants' level of agreement or disagreement on the subjective assessment of their experiences.

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## APPENDIX I

### Letter of Introduction to the Study and Informed Consent Form

Good morning/afternoon, my name is Momo Lekane Gillo (student number 208511197). I am doing research on a project entitled 'NGO and Social Development: An Assessment of the Participants' Perception of the Effects of World Changers Academy's Life Skills Education Program, eThekweni Municipality'. This project is supervised by Dr Richard Ballard at the School of Development Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal. I am managing the project and would appreciate greatly your contribution. Should you have any question my contact details are:

School of Development Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban.

Cell: 0783419531. Email: momo\_gillo@yahoo.fr or 208511197@ukzn.ac.za

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the project. Before we start I would like to emphasize that:

- your participation is entirely voluntary;
- you are free to refuse to answer any question;
- you are free to withdraw at any time.

The interview will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to members of the research team. Excerpts from the interview may be made part of the final research report. Do you give your consent for: *(please tick one of the options below)*





## **APPENDIX II**

### **Sample Semi-structure Interview Guide**

Can you state the reasons that made you participate into World Changers Academy's life skills program?

How did you find the program?

What were you doing before the program (lifestyle, attitude)?

What are you doing now?

How do you link (if possible) what you are doing now with what you have learned at WCA?

How has the program affected you (feeling about self, attitude toward work, aspirations, interpersonal skills, and others)?

What did the program help you to achieve (skills attained, outcome achieved, knowledge gained, things completed)?

Do you have any idea on what other participants do after completing the program?

What do you think about the program (strengths, weaknesses, things liked, things disliked, best components, poorest components)?