|  |
| --- |
| Respondent 1 (R1) |
| **Onderhoud voerder:** Nioma Venter (NV) |
| **Tyd:** 35:25 |

NV: We can start.

R1: Well. I am respondent 1. I am part of the Little Seeds operational team. I have been involved with Diaconia since 2016 until the collaboration with Badisa and Little Seeds began in May 2019.

NV: There we go. So, thank you so much for sharing your experience with me today.

It is very valuable to us. I sent you three questions beforehand, and we are going to reflect on it. The first question is about when two worlds meet. You know when Diaconia and Badisa met and developed Little Seeds. Now the idea of ​​such an integrated approach is to work together towards a shared vision and a shared strategy. What was your experience in the meeting of Diaconia and Badisa as partners in ECD in this regard? You can distinguish in your answer between, let's call it the emotional or the relationship aspects on the one hand, and the functional or operational experience on the other hand.

R1: Okay, I had the privilege of starting at Diaconia, but I also had knowledge of Badisa. Badisa visited the school where I was working. Also, one of the teachers from my school was appointed at Badisa. So, when I started working at Diaconia, it was unfortunate for me to see that there was little collaboration between Badisa and Diaconia. It disappointed me. It was truly two separate units. I like to work in collaboration, and I did not feel part of Badisa. There was an underlying tension as well. Diaconia stayed on their side of the building and Badisa on their side. But me and my colleague decided we were definitely going to work on this relationship. Because one cannot work like this, we are working in the same building, we both work for the Lord, and now we work separate, although towards the same goals.

NV: So you guys were colleagues before?

R1: Before we ...

NV : She came to Badisa and you came to Diaconia, but before that you were colleagues?

R1 Yes, before that she had been with me.

NV Okay, great.

R1 Yes, and we worked terribly hard on building a relationship. We said to ourselves that we are the bridge builders between Diaconia and Badisa. And we really put a lot of effort into it. And then there was renovations to the building on our side and we were forced to move to Badisa’s side of the building for a few months. And it was wonderful, just getting to know people in a different way.

NV You say there was renovations to the building?

R1 Yes ...

NV O okay.

R1 They built here at Diaconia's offices

NV Well then you had to evacuate?

R1 That's right yes

NV And then you had to physically sit down at Badisa?

R1 Yes, what was nice about my situation is that I had to sit in an open space. All the Badisa staff walked past me in the mornings and afternoons. So I came to know them on another level. And then I realized once again we can not work like that, we are actually one. And wonderful people, really, I got to know people who initially, the rumors that went around, who ... how hard they are and do not work together ... So it was really nice for me to see but they are just like us. They work for the same ... they have the same goal.

NV Same purpose.

R1 And they are good people, and nice people.

NV So Badisa had ECD projects and Diaconia had ECD projects?

R1 Yes

NV But you were operating separately?

R1 Yes, completely separated.

NV Ja

R1 And then my colleague and I decided, but then we work together. If there's one thing going on with Badisa, she's going to talk to me, and I'll talk to her again. So when she visited me at my office, my colleagues got to know her as well.

NV Ja

R1 And it's great to work with them, because Badisa and Diaconia are really the same.

NV And then in 2019 collaboration became official?

R1 That is right yes, and then ... yes and then the shift came. We all moved to the same area in the building.

NV Ja

R1 Each one got his office and then started working together. And it was a good experience for me because I knew the colleagues so well, and I knew their work ethics. They were hardworking, and ... so it was very good for me.

NV You did not have a personal relationship with everyone in the Badisa team before?

R1 None, actually had no relationship with them. For example, I spoke to two of the management members of the Badisa twice over the phone only. When my previous collegue applied at Badisa, I was her referent; that was one of the occasions I had contact with a management member of Badisa.

NV Ja

R1 Had long conversations, but I did not know them in person.

NV Okay, and then everyone moved to the same place in the building and you say it was a possive experience for you. If you think back on it, let's say on a rational level, was it a challenge for you to find a common vision and strategy?

R1 I think quite so yes, because we are from two different worlds, the culture is not the same. It got quite a challenge.

NV Explain what you mean by different cultures.

R1 Diaconia was much more ... relaxed, I don’t now how to put it.

NV No that's ok

R1 It was much more informal, things happened here, and things ... We made a decision and it was immediately run with it. At Badisa, the gears slow down a bit. A decision is not made quickly, and there were too many bosses who had to give permission for certain things. So that was it was a challenge, because at Diaconia if we made a decision then we would run with it. That was quite an adjustment for us. We decided to take an action, but then we must first get permission from different people.

NV On the Badisa side are more, processes and ...

R1 Yes because the protocol

NV Protocol and ...

R1 So it took a little longer, and it was a lhuge big frustration, at times. Because in Early Childhood Development work it goes fast. You can not wait ... it's going too fast. A decision is made and an email is sent and they want us to, say, for example, we have to get to De Doorns, and then we are on our way to De Doorns. But now we had to wait. Is there permission? And are you allowed to do it? What you should say and what you may not say. So it was an adjustment. And as I say, Diacona was much more ... but then, we were also a much smaller group. We had only been four people in the Diaconia team.

NV Ja

R1 So it was easy, on a Monday morning we got together, and we made the decision and we ran with the project.

NV Then each one continued to work independently.

R1 That's right. And because we as a team trusted each other very well, and we knew each one was going to give his best. It is not checked whether you are going to do it or whether you did it right. So it was a very comfortable and peaceful atmosphere for me. But when Badisa joined, there were more people, playing roles. Decisions have to be made, and things started to go slowly.

NV So you just said there was trust. And what was the other word you said now ...

There was confidence ... In other words, do you experience the different way of management as less trustworthy?

R1 I think it's because you do not really know the people. The people, the top management, you do not really know them. Because they are not, they are not really involved with us on the floor. Where at Diaconia, the boss and class were on the same level. Not necessarily in terms of jobs, but we looked each other in the eye and we could do things.

NV Ja

R1 While with Badisa we are not really dealing with top management.

NV Okay, so the distance between, what you call top management and the operational team.

R1 Yes

NV Was for you in Little Seeds a greater distance. And it sometimes gives you the impression that you are not trusted.

R1 Ja-ja

NV Is this what I hear from you?

R1 Yes and of course, there are so many decisions to be made, without us who are on the ground ...

NV This is an important point yes.

R1 The decisions are made without us, and we are the people who do the work.

NV Ja

R1 And we have all the experience and so, but ... the top management makes the decisions ... As a group we felt we felt, just talk to us then maybe one can sort things out in a much easier way. And ask us, because we are the people who have experience.

NV So I hear what you are saying, your experience at Diaconia was participatory management and with the merger you experienced a different management style that was more of a hierarchical management style.

R1 That's right, that's 100% right. We are on the ground level, and then we have a middle management and a top management. And a message comes via-via-via in the end, and it's just like that, everyone hears a message in a different way. We interpret messages in a different way, so conflicts was caused because of messages coming from different places...

NV Miss communication?

R1 Miss communication, a lot. And the biggest frustration that top management did not communicate directly with us. And we never had combined meetings, no I cannot say, I think we once met as a whole group. And then there was also conflict, because we spoke out and top management did not like it much. So it also caused conflict, but things improved a lot much more since. I think one’s attitude also plays a big role. If you're a positive person, and you see how things are ... it's moving very slowly but it's moving. And because I have experience, I built three different schools from the ground up. I know it takes between three and five years to build this unit it really runs well.

NV Thank you, Let us move to the second question now. In your own words, you say it takes three or four years to start a new project. We've been down the road for four years now, these are two worlds that have met, we said. So if we look back now, over four years of development, what do you think is the unique contribution that Badisa has made. And what is the unique contribution that Diaconia has made, to this partnership we now call Little Seeds.

R1 Diaconia could only ... We could only have reached small areas. Where Badisa has already reached different areas in the Western Cape, and in the Eastern Cape. So I think this is a very unique, getting together. Because we now have a bigger pool from which we can work. We have more partnerships through all the congregations Diaconia brings to the partnership. Different congregations in different towns. Then Badisa also have crèches, and home mothers. We are starting to form a unit now. And we have appointed new appointment too, the person who's now working directly with the churches. I think her contribution will be very valuable; she does the footwork for us at the churches, and then we move in. When we were Diaconia alone we had to do all the awareness ourselves.

And now the person comes in, and she's now doing the field work in the different churches and she's coming back and telling us, this church is ready to do Early Childhood Development or start a reading programme ... So I think it is wonderful ...

NV So with the coming together of the team you say, each one has brought other roleplayers along and each one has brought a geographical position that they are already covering. Each contribution is an extension of the other?

R1 That's right, that's right.

NV Okay, so it also actually gave you an opportunity to see where there are gaps, even if you bring the two parties together, there was still gaps. And that gap was then filled with a new appointment.

You referred to the culture of Badisa that was challenging for you. Do you think there is anything good, something that one can appreciate, something that one can say yes we struggled at first, but now we realize that culture brings something? Are there such plus points, you do not have to mention anything if you can’t think of something.

R1 Yes, for sure. Badisa is an established organization and that counts for a lot. Definitely, there are a lot of plus points, because they've are experienced in Early Childhood Development. Diaconia was new to the industry, so we may have learned well from them. Especially because Badisa knows the children's law so well. That is a plus. At Diaconia we did not really work with that. We just moved into situations, gave training and such, without real protocols and stuff in place. We needed that. We should have put rules in place at Diaconia, while at Badisa this was all in place.

NV So you consider the experience of the legislation to be one of the ...?

R1 I realise it now, yes. We all work with children and did not know the children's law. What is also nice, is we have someone now in the team that specializes for example with the registrations of centers. She knows exactly what's important – stuff we did not know.

NV So, in other words it actually reduced the risks for Diaconia?

R1 Very definitely, yes because now they assist us not to do wrong things. And that the right procedure is followed. So I appreciate that, yes. And then also, we were only four people, but now, with Badisa, we are a bigger team, more capacity.

NV An extended team

R1 Extended team, yes. They have social workers, they have nurses ... Also other support services, like someone who does marketing and so on. Many who strengthen our team when we joined forces.

NV Additional support networks

R1 Yes I think the support networks are much bigger since we are one unit. So it's reassuring to me that we know we're on the right track.

NV Wonderful.

R1 It moves slowly, but we also have to realise there are too many things to consider before a decision can be made.

NV And Diaconia? I know it's harder to reflect on your own contribution now, but what do you think Diaconia brought that Badisa could appreciate – anything they otherwise would not have had?

R1 I think the fact that there is a congregation in every town. Now Badisa also have access.

NV Absolutely

R1 And Diaconia, is all over the provice. Because in every town, as I say, there is a Dutch Reformed Church, a URC Church. And of course the fact that we are starting to move more into the URC church as well, that is nice. The Dutch Reformed Church moved much stronger initially when I arrived here at Diaconia. It has more NG Church, they work, they do things. And now the URC Church is also starting to buy into what we are doing, yes so I think it's nice

NV So the footprints that Diaconia has, you consider that as a asset? Do you think the collaboration added to the gaining of interest in the URC?

R1 You know, I think it has to do with Diaconia and Badisa who are now together as a Little Seeds ...

NV You think the appeal on congregatons are stronger now that we are a unit?

R1 Definitely yes, again because Diaconia was small on our own. We could only reach so far with our limited capacity.

NV It is very valuable that you notice it. So I'm going to move on to the third question.

Unless you wanted to add something else ...

R1 No, all I have to say is that I'm really excited. Terribly excited to see that Badisa and Diaconia have really started to see that Little Seeds has a right to exist. And that we can run with this thing. I think at the moment as Badisa and Diaconia we have full confidence in this unit, Little Seeds We are going to move forward more easily. To this point we were so separate….two companies, I do not know how to explain

NV Two worlds?

R1 Two worlds, yes, but now we are moving forward in becoming one.

The are still obstacles that still hold it back. But I believe if all the uncertainties are sorted out, and everything is official, Little Seeds will be able to stand on its own. We need to stand on our own and do what we do best. And we are very enthusiastic about what we do. Every one in our team has his own expertise, but we are held by decisions that are still outstanding and causes uncertainty. E.g. an NPO number, and this and that .But I'm still excited. We came a long way and I definitely see a change yes.

NV A dynamic growth. Okay, so I'm going to move on to the third question and it's about the way forward. We have gained a lot of experience – as team, but also personally. What would you say from this experience, the main challenges for the way forward , for the joint venture between Diaconia and Badisa, is? Let us first think about the challenges, but then also the possibilies you see for the way forward. You mentioned that we came to a certain point, but then of course, there is still the future. What does the future hold for us?

R1 I think one of the biggest challenges will be finances.

NV Okey

R1 Finances because there is an uncertainty. You do not know if there will be enough money. Financially things are not going well with Badisa, and things are not going well with the church. And because people make fewer contributions. I think the funds are a big challenge.

NV Can I ask you. Funds for projects or funds for jobs? What is your fear?

R1 Funds for projects and our jobs. Actually we need to expand the team, but expansion costs money. Also for operational costs, petrol, a plane ticket, other stuff you use. It all costs money, and to expand I think funds are definitely needed there. Actually we are only a small team. We need more capacity. We work in the Eastern Cape, Northern Cape and the Western Cape.

NV So capacity is scarce and you are worried that there are not finances for what is currently there, but also not for expanding.

R1 Yes and of course also the uncertainties. Is causes tension. When will we now finally be on our own feet. I think that's the challenge. There is a frustration because we do not see movement. Some of my collegues feel that management do not see what they are doing. And the decision making processes without our involvement. That is really challenging.

NV Okay, so I want understand what you're saying. The one then is the finances and the capacity that goes along with it. Then the second point you make is that it remains a challenge that the program is not independent or that there is too big a distance between management and the team?

R1 Yes and I think the whole approach to decision making and control, it is quite a challenge. And I can see there is a lot of frustration.

NV It frustrates the team?

R1 Frustration in the team, yes. For example, on Thursday, two of my colleagues said, "We are bleeding to death." And it was quite upsetting to me now because I still want to be here by at least ten years, and I do not want it to be like that.

NV You do not want that to be the experience of team members?

R1 No, and I'm really trying to see what I can do to get that idea out of their heads. Because if it's the idea 'we're bleeding' then it's making people less enthusiastic and they start to distance themselves. They do not want to be there anymore.

NV Let’s try and give that ‘bleeding dead’ a name? What makes the team feel this way? What was the conversation about?

R1 It was about the fact that after three years it feels as if we are still not independent.

NV Okey

R1 We cannot yet make our own decisions. For example, we do not have a budget yet, it is a big frustration because there is no budget on the table. How do you know your boundaries in a project if you have no insight in your budget?

NV So there is uncertainty about your budget.

R1 Uncertainty yes. Uncertainty about our posts, you know because the whole thing is ... people talk. Someone hears something, and soon everyone fears they will loose their jobs. The transition of ECD to education. What is the implications for us? Will some of our jobs still be subsidized?

So there is a lot of uncertainty and again a lack of communication ...

NV Communication remains a challenge if the structure is set up in such a way that the operational team feel they do not have enough information? Will there be provision and how will funding be sustained?

R1 Yes, and then also the frustration that is there, we have already said, that we can not really make our own decisions. Because it is only unilateral decisions from the top down. We feel we cannot move forward. We are bleeding dead. I do not experience it. But some of the others does. If there is bleeding, let us find solutions.

NV Okay, so you personally, you are positive about the future. You are willing to call challenges by name and find solutions?

R1 We have to move faster, it's actually the idea that everyone has. I know it takes between three and five years before one can breathe. I know this is how it works.But it is also a frustration for people if it goes too slow.

NV Well I, am also a participant in the process. So...I can confirm that we are looking at Little Seeds having its own governing body and function more independently. It is the ideal that we foresee.

R1 Yes

NV So independent operations is an opportunity that we want to explore. That Little Seeds will have the opportunity to be independent in the next phase.

R1 Yes it has been communicated to us that this is going to happen. The gears are turning slowly but this is happening.

NV Just keep hoping

R1 Yes. It's just keeping people motivated all the time. This is a big challenge. And the moment when there is a hiccup, negativity kicks in.

NV The issue dominates the overall atmosphere?

R1 Dominates it yes.

NV Okay so we are looking back on four years. Now let's assume we're in 2006, four years later. What do you see unfolding in the next four years?

R1 I think we are going to expand more to different areas. Because we want to reach more children. We would like to reach more towns. We want more ... We want to create opportunities for the congregations, URC and Dutch Reformed Church. To be able to roll out these wonderful projects we have to offer. There are many congregations that already have something but there is no structure to their programs. I think it's going to be awfully fun, this can, be part of this roll out to different congregations. And then of course reach more towns.

NV So expansion is definitely something ...

R1 Extension yes.

NV One would say that this is half an opportunity, but also a dream you have.

R1 Yes of course. But with expansion, you need people again. At this stage we have one trainer, one person who ... I say marketing now, but one that goes forward and speaks to the congregations.

NV Doing awareness and preparing congregations

R1 Preparation yes, and it's a big job. And then there is someone who focusses specifically on marketing. We are also all responsible for marketing. Everytime we speak to people. So yeah, I'm very excited about that. I'm just worried that our capacity is not that big. And that we might be dreaming terribly big and there are no people. But we also need to reconsider our strategy so what we can work wise with the capacity we have. Train the trainers. We are now going to start training people to be able to train other people again. This is a good ... solution for me ...

NV Do you see this as a opportunity?

R1 Definitely. Definitely.

NV The challenges revolve around capacity.

R1 Yes.

NV And Train the Trainers are part of your solution?.

R1 Yes. That you train three to four people in a town, who can then continue running with it.

NV Give me an example. What you think can be handled in this way

R1 For example, look at the reading groups. That we train someone who can do reading groups. That what I do, but we can also train others. That there can be more reading groups, that they have a champion in every town.

NV Do you seen these trainees as paid people or as volunteers?

R1 Volunteers. Working in the community. Even though I would like to be in every town, it's actually impossible

NV So the training and mobilization then of volunteers.

R1 Volunteers yes.

NV This is an opportunity you see?

R1 I think so yes, and I think there are quite a few people who are in the church URC, NG Church whoever, who will be willing. There are a lot of people sitting at home who are really looking for an opportunity. So I think we can play a very big role there.

NV Wonderful. Thank you for your time and participation and your valuable input in the process.