Respondent 8 (R8)

**Onderhoudvoerder:** Nioma Venter (NV)

**Tyd:** 44:02

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| NV | Respondent 8 is part of the strategic team of Little Seeds.  He has been involved with Diaconia since 2015 until the collaboration with Badisa, around Little Seeds, began in May 2019.  I've given you the three questions in advance that form the framework of our conversation. Please tell me about your experience of the effort to collaborate or integrate the Diaconia and Badisa efforts in ECD. |
| R8 | We cannot separate a conversation about the relationship between Diaconia and Badisa around ECD from the larger relationship between the two parties. In the beginning it was hard. I will try to separate the different aspects of the conversation and fast forward to where we are currently. We grew closer to each other. We really started to believe and experience that we can work together focused. However, a lot happened in the past which initially made it a difficult process. It side-tracked us initially. It made me personally very careful about what I say and what I don't say. People didn't exactly listen to each other in the beginning, or at least didn't finish listening. It made you wonder if what you were doing had any value. It felt like the others just wanted to see how they could negate you. But it got better over time. The more time we spent together and went through all the processes, the better it got. |
| NV | You say very clearly that the relationship was initially challenging and that it was not only about ECD, but a wider context? |
| R8 | It is as you say, yes. |
| NV | Have you also sometimes felt that there was no recognition for the contribution you made? |
| R8 | Yes, I sometimes experienced it that way. And all the time one feels the tension. You hold back because you don't want to add to the tension. Maybe if we had dared more, we would have progressed faster. Everyone had something to bring to the table, but it took time to get to the point where it was appreciated. Now one can sometimes make a little more controversial comments and it does not overturn the apple cart. |
| NV | But these are your more recent experiences if I understand correctly? |
| R8 | Yes no, as said a lot of good happened. Relationships take time. And meanwhile the operational work had to continue. We had contractual obligations at Diaconia that had to continue, the Smart Start program, as you know. |
| NV | So, it was challenging for you, to build a relationship with a potential partner on the one hand and continue with the work on the other hand? |
| NV | Let's reflect on these processes and what exactly made them so challenging. We set ourselves the goal of investigating integration between church and organization. It is therefore an inter-disciplinary process that we have undertaken. What is your experience? Have we made progress with this? |
| R8 | If I have to say personally, I didn't really experience that much tension about the interdisciplinary process. As I see it, it should work fine. I can identify with that. The problem comes when there is inflexibility about regulation. |
| NV | Yes |
| R8 | For me it's about the outcome we want to achieve. Our intent is pure. Perhaps one just has to accept that Badisa works in a certain way and it is very different from our way of working. Process may come first for them. |
| NV | Process above what? |
| R8 | Process over intent, that's my experience. |
| NV | This is your perspective on Badisa's way of working? |
| R8 | Yes. Badisa is also a faith-based organization, so I don't think the problem was really about theology as such. It is more the processes and the way of doing things of Badisa that are very different from our way of working. Not that I'm saying that at Diaconia we would take shortcuts, but we move faster. Take for example the short time that Diaconia has been involved in ECD and how quickly we have grown compared to Badisa who have been involved for years. In a short time, we managed to deliver the same outputs as Badisa delivers. Diaconia is less bureaucratic than Badisa and this allows us to move faster. It's easier for us to partner and collaborate with others. Badisa is much more isolated. At Diaconia we aim to unlock the capacity of members. We had a lot to learn, and we are still learning. If we see gaps, we fill them. We dare. The church has the boldness to do this. We also admit if we don't know something. |
| NV | Do you also experience that learnability at Badisa? |
| R8 | Unfortunately, not. |
| NV | I would like to make sure that I understand you correctly. You say that in terms of the philosophy of theology or social work, the leap is not necessarily too great? Also, that both have a contribution to make? |
| R8 | Yes |
| NV | But the practical implementation, when it came to processes and such, was challenging. |
| R8 | Yes, no I think you're correcting it that way. I am very familiar with social work processes. From the beginning of my ministry, I had to deal with it. I think I have a good understanding of that. But still, it was challenging to tackle the integration with Badisa. |
| NV | You now mention that you understand Badisa's way of working. Did you experience this as a reciprocal attitude? |
| R8 | No, but as I said at the beginning, there is also a history to it, so I only understand it in the light of that. It took longer than it would normally take to build trust. |
| NV | We weigh in on the second question. Could we perhaps try to specify the unique contributions of the respective parties? |
| R8 | Yes, look obviously Badisa sits with the expertise of social work. And we are theologians. I would say that there is a gap between the two of us, namely that we do not have an educational partner in our team. |
| NV | This is very true. This is an obstacle we share. |
| R8 | I don't know if we've really admitted it yet, but we'll have to do something about it, especially when we soon appoint a governing board for Little Seeds. Diaconia always had such a specialist in our team when we started with ECD. I think it helped us tremendously. |
| NV | Did an educator help Diaconia a lot in initially developing the program? |
| R8 | Yes, to do that groundwork, but also to have someone close by who you could test stuff with all the time. Someone who can give you guidance and support. This is something we need, going forward. |
| NV | Early childhood development, after all, is about human development, so your intuition makes perfect sense. |
| R8 | Yes, it can help the team a lot. Especially now that ECD is also placed under education. The government has moved ECD away from social development to education. |
| NV | Yes. And if we think further about the unique contributions of the different parties? |
| R8 | Yes, look, I was convinced from the beginning, both have great value to add. Badisa with all its programs and things, especially also its systems and programs that are in place. The church officially with its larger network. However, it was not that simple to get Badisa programs involved. But you also know by now that their manpower is low. The unlocking of mutual support is not going as smoothly as one would hope. But we are working on it. It's also about good communication. The message must reach everyone.  Diaconia brings all its congregations and the sanction of its synods. Both synods approved ECD as a strategy to combat poverty.  I think we must admit that our towns are often still so isolated that it brings separation. Relations at ground level between NGK and URC congregations are not always so good. We must keep working on it. Otherwise, one congregation feels that another congregation is coming to work in its area. It happens. For Badisa it is in a way easier because they have assigned areas, regardless of whether they include an NGK or a URC congregation. |
| NV | So this is one of the contributions that Badisa potentially makes? Do they work across borders? |
| R8 | It is so yes. Badisa can be a unifier in a way. |
| NV | Yes |
| R8 | And on the church's side, we can really say we have many assets and resources to offer. |
| NV | Yes |
| R8 | And I think if those assets are unlocked wonderful things can happen. We have already seen this in Diaconia. Just to be able to have a space to be able to hold an event is already very valuable. |
| NV | So the church's resources are a great asset? |
| R8 | Yes |
| R8 | So just to have that secure space, where you can meet uninterrupted for a day,  can hold a workshop, can hold an information session. And yes, unfortunately there are some of our congregations who do not see it that way. But I think we're getting there. People see more and more and are willing to sacrifice. |
| NV | Ok |
| R8 | Diaconia continues to create awareness that ECD is the focus of the church and that it is part of our ministry and is about building the Kingdom. This is language and vocabulary, which we must now also create within the church. As our congregations begin to see and understand this, it unlocks that goodwill. It has great value to me. I even heard someone from DSD say recently that working with the church also provides them with security, because our congregations are not built around a person as independent churches often are. The systems in our church and congregations are established. In ten years and in thirty years it will still be like this, and it brings stability at the end of the day. So the faith community gives that access, or passage to the community that other role players need to be able to do their work. |
| NV | Am I right that you say there is trust in the church? You say that it is someone from a government department who says so? |
| R8 | This is my personal experience yes. And again, it came with relationship building. After 94 there was little suspicion. Our denomination was guilty of focusing our ministry very much inwardly. It was only our members who came first, and the rest came second. We only really started working ecumenically later. And now... |
| NV | Aren't we just focusing more inward? |
| R8 | Yes, and it's not just us. Other denominations have also worked this way in the past. We just followed that onslaught. In the past, schools were only church schools and the Methodists appointed teachers. The Roman Catholics also worked like that. Historically, the URC has also had the legacy of community involvement. It is in our roots to work with others, and we have a captivated audience every Sunday. |
| NV | Yes |
| R8 | So again, the flow of information...but also the integration of a community. The church has great value for this. |
| NV | You said earlier that communication within the different systems is challenging. Here you are saying that the church might help with communication. If you have a message that you want to take root, can the church be a good channel? |
| R8 | Yes. I believe so. I hope so. We have thought from the beginning that our pulpits are a good platform for the message to go out. |
| NV | Yes |
| R8 | It's a contribution that the church can make, and must make, understand?  And as said, we are constantly broadening the church's vocabulary and their theology so that we as a church can be relevant in the time in which we live. The theological basis is important, so that we cannot be accused of being too humanistic. The same applies to Badisa when we think about integration. Even if the starting point is social work, we still want to be sure there is a good theological understanding behind our work. As far as possible.  Yes, that is the role we can play. But we all have to sing from one page. |
| NV | Ok |
| R8 | The message must be uniform whether it comes from Diaconia or whether it comes from Badisa.  But it must also be consolidated, in Badisa's understanding of that message. |
| NV | We have now talked a lot about the contribution you think the church can make. Would you like to focus for a moment on the unique contribution of Badisa? |
| R8 | Yes look, as said there is a lot of expertise within Badisa |
| NV | Okay. |
| R8 | ...which has been established over the years. And the staff, across the board that I've dealt with, are really passionate about their profession too, you know. |
| NV | Academic underpinnings |
| R8 | Yes |
| NV | Ok |
| R8 | The challenge or gap I have always noticed with Badisa is the retention rate of their social workers. Badisa is for many an entry into the job market.  And then they move on. So we have younger social workers in the field.  More experienced workers who have been involved in communities for longer get to know the dynamics of a community. They can work proactively in communities. In the cities we often work too reactively because we don't know the communities. And this is often our challenge when we work with certain social issues. We don't know the communities.  So unfortunately this is sometimes my experience with Badisa workers, that they don't always know the communities that well because they don't stay long. So that role they have to be able to play does not always come across so well. Sometimes they just need to make a reference or pass on information. It helps if they can at least identify with a church environment and I have to say, at least most of them do. Do you understand? The ethos of the church environment. I think Badisa workers stand out from other organizations' workers when it comes to this. |
| NV | The church and Badisa share the same ethos. |
| R8 | We share the same ethos. |
| NV | Yes, and you experience it in communities with social workers? |
| R8 | Yes, and also contributes to trust. Badisa clients trust the workers and they trust the church. I feel that Badisa workers are really interested in people and not just watching the clock. Their empathic approach I think is better than other organizations. |
| NV | What do you think will be the biggest challenges for us on the way forward? |
| R8 | We have learned a lot in the past seven years. What are our main challenges that we need to pay attention to, according to your impressions?  It always comes back to good communication for me. There are even some of our leadership in the church who are currently confusing the Little Seeds project with the vegetable garden project! Do you understand? |
| NV | There is quite a difference, isn't it! |
| R8 | Who doesn't know who or what Little Seeds are. |
| NV | So communication remains a challenge? |
| R8 | This remains a challenge, and it is an essential one that we will have to continue to pay attention to so that everyone knows, who, what and what Little Seeds is there for so that we can get the whole church involved. |
| NV | Yes |
| R8 | Along with that, I think it is very important that at least all our pastors understand the importance of ECD and know what we are doing. How can we expect our members to have a good understanding of Little Seeds and the intention of Little Seeds and our leaders do not understand this. Everyone has to buy in. We have said from the beginning that the project is not just for a certain target group. This is early childhood development for all children. Yes, we focus the marginalized and try to reach them, but ECD is important for all children. |
| nv | No one is excluded, not even our own congregation children. |
| R8 | Yes, it is not exclusive. That is why it is important to me that we make sure that the philosophy of Little Seeds also includes our own parish ministries. That this is also reflected in our congregations. That everyone will realize and apply the necessity and the value of early childhood development. So Little Seeds is not just a program, it also represents a specific philosophy that we preach. |
| NV | Yes |
| R8 | It is not only a service to the marginalised... |
| NV | This was not the original idea  Any other challenges you foresee? |
| R8 | Financial sustainability remains a big challenge. To grow and expand we need it. But I think it is also necessary to ensure job security for the staff. I mean, our staff works hard and we're going to ask a lot more from them. One does not want them to worry about their job security. |
| NV | This creates uncertainty… |
| R8  R8 | Yes, and it comes back to good communication, but this time with our employees.  Are we transparent enough? Our employees must also be able to trust us and feel they are included in the larger strategy and in the sustainability of the project. Here is the information. This is how it works. This is how we intend to ensure financial security. |
| NV | Yes. We can begin to conclude our conversation. You pointed out challenges. What about opportunities? What do you see as the biggest opportunities for the way forward? |
| R8 | I'm just thinking about geographical expansions. We were recently in the Eastern Cape. It is a fallow land. We can do a lot there. |
| NV | The need there is great |
| R8 | There is a lot of need. Even if it's just information and a little support. And the basic how to. Then I'm not even talking about the capacity that can be built there. |
| NV | Yes |
| R8 | So we have plenty of opportunities, once again the church has the network and the church shows the intent. |
| NV | Thank you for your valuable contribution |