

Social Work in Contemporary Nigerian Society: Challenges and Prospects

Chibueze C. Udeani

*Department of Catholic Theology, Faculty of Catholic Theology
Julius-Maximilians-University Würzburg, Germany*

Abstract

Around the world today new and challenging issues and problems are arising within the field of social work. In contemporary Nigerian society social work is faced with increasing challenges which also affect and shape its prospects. Within the frame of these emerging issues, social workers are anticipated to bring answers to these daunting questions. To do this, social workers are called upon to develop and add certain new extras to the usual methods of doing social work. They must become innovative in their approach to tackling, solving, ameliorating and managing these new and contemporary issues and problems. Although the call for the indigenisation of social approach would help rediscover the cultural perspective of social problems of the people, there is a need to understand what is being indigenised. Social work in Nigeria today needs to adopt an intercultural and innovative approaches to solve social problems instead of relying solely on the traditional methods. Examples of innovative ways that was suggested include; professionalization of social work in Nigeria, retraining of social workers, improvement in social work training curriculum and encouraging the use of new media and ICT in social work practice and education.

Keywords: Indigenization, inter-culturalism, international social work, social problems, social development

Introduction

One of the problems faced by all societies especially in our today's world is as to how to develop ways to meet the needs of the non-self-sufficient and less-privileged members be they the orphan, the blind, the physically challenged, the poor, the mentally disabled, the sick etc. In the past, the responsibilities were largely met within the traditional societies by the family, church, neighbours and other similar agencies. In recent times societal transformation process has radically changed the features and modus vivendi of traditional society. This being the case, the burden has become increasingly difficult for the immediate family and such agents to cope with the erstwhile functions of the full extended family. To accomplish these tasks, social workers in today's world are meant to focus not only on the problems of people, but the problems of resource systems seeming to be in dearth in Nigeria (Ogundipe & Edewor, 2012).

Sometimes social work is viewed in a specific context as virtually synonymous with, charitable work, one-to one intervention by highly qualified professionals utilising a therapeutic approach, the welfare state, and emerging urban concerns (Cox & Pawar, 2006). These views are clearly erroneous, given the nature and scope of social work throughout its history. However, the apparent prevalence

Address correspondence to Prof. Dr. Chibueze C. Udeani, Department of Catholic Theology, Faculty of Catholic Theology, Julius-Maximilians-University Würzburg, Germany. E-mail: chibueze.udeani@uni-wuerzburg.de

in some contexts of such views as those listed suggests that the social work profession has not been as successful as it might have been in projecting an acceptable image across the developing world (Cox & Pawar, 2006).

Furthermore, it is important to perhaps acknowledge that, while many would regard the breadth of social work as one of its strengths, it is very likely that that same breadth makes it difficult for many outside observers to distinguish a common thread that typifies the core of social work (Hartman, 1990). She (Hartman) maintains that social work includes a broad and varied array of activities and is practised with different size systems and in a variety of arenas. There is scant agreement in the field on the worldview, epistemology, or even on the principles or shape of practice. Volumes have been published on the different models and some scholars have concluded that the only common thread that runs through all of social work is a shared value stance. Social work is socially constructed in various ways in various parts of the world. As reflection goes on the reported differences in the predominant forms that social work has adopted in various regions and countries, one could ask whether this diversity can meaningfully be understood as different expressions of one and the same profession.

For example, "the individual paradigm", according to Elliott (1993), "is strongly represented in American social work." However for Chow (1987), in China the focus is on the mobilisation of the masses to address social problems. In Latin America, social work as Kendall (2000) observed, presents a strong emphasis on social justice and social action. In Africa, Healy (2001) noted an increasing emphasis on social development as defined by, for example, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Constable and Mehta (1994) claim that the rebirth of social work in Eastern Europe since 1990 has seen a strong emphasis on social reconstruction or the building of civil society. While it has been common in the literature to highlight some dominant forms adopted by social work in specific countries, a closer analysis, as was afore mentioned reveals that, in virtually all countries, there exists a range of sometimes competing and sometimes complementary forms of social work - a range that is commonly expanding as social work agencies and practitioners venture into new fields of practice as an ever widening range of social problems is recognised. All these developments, however, add to the difficulty, even for social workers, in defining social work, and of non-social workers perceiving a common thread running through the diverse approaches that constitute contemporary social work globally.

Social work and the challenge of identity

Social work originates variously from humanitarian, religious, and democratic ideals and philosophies and has universal application to meet human needs arising from personal societal interactions and to develop human potential. Professional social work is dedicated to service for the welfare and self-fulfilment of human beings; to the development and disciplined use of scientific

knowledge regarding human and societal behaviour; to the development of resources to meet individual, group, national and international needs and aspirations; and to the achievement of social justice (Cox & Pawar, 2005). Social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are, according to the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) fundamental to social work. In other words, social work, from the perspective of Barker (2003), is the applied science of helping people achieve an effective level of psychosocial functioning and effecting societal changes to enhance the well-being of all people.

Social work could be perceived as a social institution in the sense that it is social intervention to encourage, enrich and increase the ability of individuals or groups to socially function. It, therefore, caters for those who have difficulty attaining social performance due to physical, psychological and social factors. Linguistically x-rayed, 'social' in social work refers to human society, its organisation or quality of life while 'work' refers to activity carried out to improve the quality of life of those who have difficulty accomplishing their life tastes, alleviating their distress and realising their aspirations. It stands for a professional activity aimed at enriching and enhancing individual and group development. Several definitions of social work abound, but the definition this paper will adopt is that by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW): The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilizing theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments (IFSW&IASSW, 2014). Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work" (Cox & Pawar, 2005).

Purpose of Social Work

The central distinguishing characteristic of social work is its capacity for providing the means and opportunities by which persons can work. Several efforts have been made to induce social as well as individual change, prevent social problems as well as alleviate their end results. The following, therefore, constitute the purpose of social work:

1. The planning, development and implementation of social services, programmes and policies required for meeting basic needs and supporting the development of capacities and abilities of individuals, groups, communities, and organisations.
2. The promotion, restoration, maintenance or enhancement of the functioning individuals, families, households, social groups, organisations and

communities, by assisting them to prevent distress and utilise resources effectively.

3. The pursuit of policies, services and programmes through legislative advocacy, lobbying and other forms of social action.
4. The development and testing of professional knowledge and skills related to this purpose.

However, on the interactions between people and resource systems, the social worker must help people enhance and more effectively utilise their own problem solving and coping capacities; establish initial linkage between people and resource systems; facilitate interaction, modify and build new relationship between people and societal resource systems; contribute to the development and modification of social policy; dispense material resources; and serve as agent of social control (Ogundipe & Edewor, 2012).

Over its long history social work has evolved to serve three major areas of practice. Throughout this history of social work, questions have periodically arisen as to the validity of these three areas and the nature of the balance between them. The first area perceives social work as an arm of the welfare state. Within this area, the state effectively dictates the specific fields of practice on which the profession focuses, and the majority of social workers are either employed directly by the state or by agencies that are funded, and therefore effectively controlled, by the state. This area of practice includes the following specific fields of work: work with juvenile delinquents and adult criminals through, for example, probation and parole work and working within correctional institutions; family welfare services; work in the child protection and child adoption fields; and work in the fields of social security, family assistance, and similar welfare and assistance schemes. There are strong elements of social control and protection in this general area.

Within the second area social work is seen as committed to enhancing the social functioning or wellbeing of individuals and families by working directly with clients experiencing problems. This area of practice has had several offshoots, including clinical social work, family therapy and marriage guidance, medical and psychiatric social work, and work within the so-called psychotherapies. In this area of social work, workers are very much serving individual people who become their clients, epitomised in its extreme form by private practice. However, it also covers practice in state and private institutional settings, such as hospitals.

The third area of social work sees the profession as seeking to contribute to the building of healthy, cohesive, and enabling communities and societies, and by this process promoting the well-being of people. The fields of practice in this area range from community development to macro social policy formulation, and can today be summarised perhaps as social development: the basic goals are always related to improving the environments or societies within which

people develop and live. Here social work is to some degree the servant of the people within selected contexts, including communities and population groupings such as ethnic groups, regions, and nations, but it also reflects the profession's mission to contribute to the building of a better world at various levels. The majority of social workers employed in this area work for the agencies of civil society, although some will work for the state, especially in the fields of social administration, social policy, and state devised community development or social development programs, but with goals similar to the goals of those working within civil society.

The criticisms levelled at the profession, most frequently from within its own ranks, are of three types. There are those who criticise the balance within the profession between the three areas, however these areas are delineated. Secondly, there are those who criticise the profession for effectively neglecting certain fields of practice altogether, and the fields referred to lie mainly within the third area outlined—the area which can be referred to as social development. On a final note, there are those who criticise the profession for ignoring selected population sectors altogether, which means that all three areas of practice delineated above are not applied to any significant degree to designated population groupings (Cox & Pawar, 2005).

Social work and the challenge of identity: Hermeneutical definitional x-ray

When it comes to a simplistic definitional understanding of social work the scope poses a challenge in one way or the other to non-social workers. The typical diversity inherent in the nature of social work sometimes leads to non-social workers failing to appreciate the full nature of social work, and to their perceiving social work, whether positively or negatively, in terms of only one of its various dimensions. Furthermore, there is the need to perhaps recognise that, while many experts of social work would regard its range or scope as one of its assets, it is very likely that that same breadth would prove to be problematic for many outside observers should these try to differentiate a common thread that typifies the core of social work (Cox & Pawar, 2005).

Social work implies a constitutive flexibility and adaptability as a part of its aspect. It is essential that the profession remains flexible, and is capable of adapting itself to changing conditions and needs either as the world changes or as the profession moves into new environments. It would reflect poorly on the profession, if it did not present many different faces globally, given the wide range of national and local conditions to which it is called upon to respond.

At all times and all places social work has always been, is, will and should remain a child of its times, spaces and societies. There are various "ways in which social work is 'socially constructed' in various parts of the world. As one reflects on the reported differences in the predominant forms that social work has adopted in various regions and countries, one may well wonder whether this diversity can meaningfully be seen as different expressions of one and the same

profession" (Cox & Pawar, 2005). Social work from a definitional analytic perspective embodies a multi- and interdisciplinary topology. "The history of social work reveals its links with social welfare and social development, with other professions such as medicine, and with the charitable movement that emerged in the nineteenth century" (Cox & Pawar, 2005). On a further note, social work is based on scientific knowledge and skill in human relations to help individuals, groups or communities obtain social and personal independence. It is both a science and an art. It draws scientific knowledge and insight (theories) from sociology, anthropology, biology, education, economics, history, law, philosophy and psychology synthesised into social work theory/treatment. Therefore, social work depends on a body of knowledge of these mentioned disciplines as well as on the specific structure and functions of social services and the skill and responsibility of professional social workers (Ogundipe & Edewor, 2012).

Social work and the question of indigenisation

Indigenous social work within the traditional Nigerian societies

Prior to the advent of colonialism, there was indigenous social work in Nigeria. Pre-colonial Nigeria, had its very solid institutions in, for example, kinship, family and marriage systems. These institutions were very complicated but understood and practiced by the societies in which they were found as, for example, in the concept of the family. So, kinship, family and marriage ties were iron clad in their responsibilities in traditional indigenous societies. Kinship groups met the recreational, religious, legal and economic needs of their members. They served as social security and social welfare agencies providing for the elderly, the sick, the unemployed, and gave shelter and food to new migrants. They were a form of friendship network of relatives, a ready-made source of companionship and care-giving. Members were not usually turned away in times of need. Financial and moral assistance was provided primarily from parents to children in the early years of marriage. Other forms of mutual aid include the exchange of services and gifts, counselling age grades, traditional rulers, elders, and local religious leaders. Other influential members of the community also rendered services and assistance.

For Ogundipe and Edewor (2012) the execution of social service is as old as the earliest human communities and Nigeria has a long tradition of assisting the individual within the community. In traditional Nigerian societies as elsewhere in traditional Africa, corporate existence was supreme. People converged and lived in relatively harmonious clan or lineage in groups where sense of belonging, solidarity, and affinity defined the individual and subsumed them under the general will. A labyrinth of relationships by blood or marriage, networking entire communities underlies the African social structures, and in that manner making everyone his brother's keeper. The sense of relationship and solidarity provided by kinship expresses itself in mutual support, assistance and succour.

The traditional social structure in Nigerian includes organisational divisions into clans, lineages, families, households and individuals. Some of these structural divisions avail concerted action in times of stress, crises, sorrow, loss and failure. They are not just problem-oriented. They encourage shared joy and success. Learning of genealogies of dissent is a traditional form of education, instilling a sense of origins, rootedness, sacred duty and history. Clan and lineage members by believing in a common ancestor possess a strong sense of identity with one another which often leads to further cooperation. The breakdown in socio-political and economic establishment through colonialism and its resultant ills, the traditional Nigerian social structure fell apart. Colonisation, modernisation and westernisation gave birth to changes which fostered modern social problems.

Colonisation and the expansion of the western model of social work

Western social work as found in many parts of the world today especially in the so-called third world countries, as Hoogvelt (1997) argues, accompanied colonialism. Essentially it was meant to meet the needs and aspirations of the colonial powers, rather than to allow social work to make a contribution to these countries' development. The colonial powers believed that they were bringing these territories into the modern civilised world, and such social welfare services as were established reflected this objective. This objective, coupled with the fact that those who administered these services were social workers and others recruited from the respective home countries, resulted in the imposition on these lands of a usually rudimentary western welfare system staffed, or at least administered, largely by westerners. For the most part, the emphasis was on health, education, and law and order, especially in urban areas, but often confined to the support and protection of those classes whose roles were important to the colonial system, with the needs of many others ignored except where Christian or humanitarian motivated services reached out, more often than not to civilise and Christianise rather than meet welfare, let alone development, needs.

In a number of colonies, social welfare and community development training courses were initiated as more and more local people were recruited to staff the developing social services. To some extent these early training courses formed a basis for the establishment of modern social work. It is also true that when modern social work was introduced, it represented to some degree a new import from the West with western schools and training models often used as the models for these developments. As Midgeley (1997) went to point out, the UN also took a strong interest in the establishment of professional social work in developing countries in the 1950s and 1960s, as too did a number of social work professionals from the Western world who initiated many new developments. Inevitably the schools of social work established in this period had to draw heavily on expatriates as teachers, who invariably taught according to the models and curricula with which they were familiar.

Indigenisation of social work has been frequently invoked as a solution to this problem. For Osei-Hwedie (1993), indigenisation refers to the idea that the theories, values and philosophies that underlie social work practice must be influenced by local factors including local cultures. For Gray (2005) indigenisation essentially refers to the extent to which social work practice fits local contexts. Walton and Abo El Nasr (1988) see indigenisation as a process through which a recipient country experiences discontent with the imported western model of social work in the context of the local political, economic, social and cultural structures. Subsequently, the social work profession in the recipient country identifies incongruous components of the western model and work to adapt, adjust or modify them in order to improve the model's fit to the local country and culture.

Indigenisation of social work is an issue for several scholars all of whom demonstrate certain common grounds though with differences in their respective points of emphasis. These include adaptation, discontentment, recapturing etc. Gray and Allegritti (2002) believe that indigenisation is essentially about culture, whether it be articulating local cultures and the way in which they differed from Western cultures or reclaiming culture and possibly also tradition. What all these views by different authors point to is that professional social work roles must be made to be appropriate to the needs of the particular country where it is being practised and also social work education must be made to be appropriate to the demands of social work practice in a particular country. In other words, social work practice and social work education must be country specific because different countries have or are embedded in different cultures, values and orientation. These differences must also be taken into account in the way and method social services are provided because, if the provision of social services are not made to be people specific, then it may not be effective. Social workers do not and cannot provide social services in a vacuum. Rather they must be mindful of the culture and peculiar circumstances and needs of the people.

In Nigeria as in many countries of the world (in general but Africa in particular), social work has been moulded and shaped by colonial influences. Social work education in African countries, according to Osei-Hwedie, Ntseane and Jacques (2006), through the efforts of international development agencies aided by private organisations and western schools of social work are based on the western professional and scientific model of social work. This usually involve academic training of several years' duration but which is widely divergent from the social, political, historical, economic and cultural contexts in Africa.

Within the African context experts are concerned about the gap between western theory, especially social science theory, and social work practice in Africa. Scholars like Osei-Hwedie (1993) suggest that the indigenisation of social work in Africa must start from within, determine what our problems and requirements are, what resources and skills are available to us and what

processes and procedures we can borrow from others. He argued that it may be necessary to redefine social work within the context of social development and social development concerns. Osei-Hwedie (1996) argues that increasing social work effectiveness in Africa means perfecting the professional expertise, and establishing greater legitimacy and societal acceptability. The struggle to define social work and charter its course also involves the issue of control. It is a struggle about who defines and controls the profession and therefore assigns it its socio-economic status. By necessity whoever defines the field must also set the agenda.

A major problem here is that the social work agenda (in Africa) even as of today is still set even if not totally but to a substantial extent explicitly or implicitly by other people, especially politicians, and that to a large extent, social work training is dictated by the nature of employment, in almost all cases, as offered by government and non-government organisations. Once again, indigenisation of the field must resolve the question of who sets the agenda, and remove the content of practice from the political to the professional arena.

Steps towards the development an appropriate indigenous social work

Clarification of terms, concepts and tools used within the context of the discourse on and practice of the development of an appropriate indigenous social work counts as one of the important steps that is constitutive of this venture. There is a wide range of such terms, concepts and modes in use. Hence a clear, comprehensive and differentiated understanding stands as a *conditio sine qua non* [an indispensable condition]. Such terms and concepts like “indigenisation”; contextualisation; adaptation; adjustment; modification etc. count among them. Since we are within the realm of social work it follows that an appropriate hermeneutics of “social” and “society” cannot be done without. As a scientific field the question of the aptness of applied scientific tools and standards equally abound.

The struggle to define social work and charter its course also involves the issue of control. It is a struggle about who defines and controls the profession and therefore assigns it its socio-economic status. By necessity whoever defines the field must also set the agenda. A major problem is that, as was mentioned above, the social work agenda (in Africa) is set by other people, especially politicians, and that to a large extent, social work training is dictated by the nature of employment, in almost all cases, as offered by government and non-government organisations. Once again, indigenisation of the field must resolve the question of who sets the agenda, and bring the contents of practice away from the political to the professional arena.

The issue of the mindset of actors brings to the fore the case for the acceptance by social work educators of the fact that they are mostly teaching a western social work model, resulting in a questioning of the model and the local relevance of the various subjects and specialisations. Hence a radical mental

decolonisation which implies an intellectual cum academic self-emancipation from both the conscious and unconscious academic mental enslavement is urgently called for here. This aspect addresses essentially that question of the mindsets of both social work educators and social workers. Here one may have to recall an old mediaeval scholastic principle of explanation “*quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur*. (Pasnau, 2002). A principle which avers that whatever is received is received according to the mode of the receiver. This implies that whatever one perceives is likely to be shaped more by who one is than by the characteristics of what one is perceiving. Hence the need for an appropriate indigenous mindset.

In the case of the development of an appropriate and indigenous social work, the right perception of the social work questions, issues and needs within the context of Africa must be rightly perceived. A central subsequent implication includes a clarion call for and the development of a critical constructive discontentment with the given social work philosophy, theory and practice in Africa of today. These steps forward would imply *inter alia* a re-identification, recognition and relocation of the indigenous social work mandate from, in and for Africa in our 21st century. In a sense it calls for a moving back to the drawing board of the specific and peculiar social work contexts of Africa. Neither a nostalgia of nor an apologetics for the old traditional African social work *modi operandi* is being hereby advocated for. Rather it is more about the prioritisation of the primacy of indigenous and peculiar African social work questions instead of the blind importation of foreign answers and solutions.

Re-visitation of indigenous traditional social work models is inescapable if one intends to succeed here. No matter what, history has demonstrated the stubbornness and resilience of *Africanity* in the lives of Africans even in face of the avalanche of westernisation and globalisation. After all it is said that, you can take the child out of the village but you cannot take the village out of the child. Another step towards the development of an appropriate indigenous social work is the development and consideration of new and alternative approaches and models. This would imply a recognition of already existing relevant indigenous academic and professional approaches and models. Therefore, a tripartite intercultural hermeneutical disposition and approach which would embrace an unmitigated self-expression; autonomous self-explication and an inter-relational self-interpretation of social work within the African circumstance are called for.

Furthermore, an appropriate cooperation and readiness for academic and professional disciplinary interdependence is also essentially called for. This would hence entail identifying affected and involved academic and professional actors and spheres and trends coupled with recognition of and acquaintance with already existing approaches and models from other academic fields like philosophy, anthropology, communication sciences, intercultural and migration studies etc. The foregoing would imply an inevitable re-addressing of social

work education and training with the African context in general and in our own case here in Nigeria in particular. Given Nigeria's cultural diversity and history of colonialism, this concern is even more appropriate and hence the push for the development of an appropriate indigenous social work in Nigeria. Principally, the call for and discourse on indigenisation as such is a new in the field of social work practice. This development, as Ugiagbe (2015) opines, suggests the need to look inwardly and re-examine the realities of the state of African societies and review the knowledge, theories and practices imposed or handed over to us by Western scholars via colonialism and imperialism.

While the inadequacies involved with applying Western theories and practices to local problems is apparent, it is interesting to see how the debates translate into knowledge on one hand and dominance or submission on the other. Particularly, the internationalisation of social work education is an ambivalent process. Re-addressing social work education and training calls for a re-visitation of the vision, mission, objectives and programmes; change in the objective, content, method and context of teaching; development of relevant curriculum; retraining of the collective consciousness both of students and society in general; and the observation, understanding and interpretation of changing social conditions and novel developments.

The issue of internationalisation and interculturalisation

The "internationalisation of social work", according to Osawe (2018), is an ambivalent process that requires social work to reflect and examine the paradigms and policies of neoliberalism and their impact on social work education as well as on the practice of social work at local levels. Understanding the debates around internationalisation of social work education requires a consideration and thorough research of how knowledge is translated within the context of transnationalism in our uneven global world of today. Cox and Pawar (2005) maintain that social work is an international unified profession with a common core. In their view it possesses all of the elements of a global profession, despite its inherent diversity. Several scholars like Midgley (1997), Elliott (1993), Healy (2008) and Kendall (2000) see social work as an international profession.

Internationalisation of social work mostly remained ambivalent because of the inherent hegemonic bias. Two fictions must be avoided if social work is to be practiced in the spirit of an intercultural orientation, which does not give an undue privileged treatment to any one particular tradition or model of social work, to be a regulative idea and abstains from any essentialist fixation in social work. The idea of a total commensurability and that of a radical incommensurability between different frameworks of social work as some social work relativists would present as argument for internationalisation of social work is fictitious and endangers any communication and understanding because it either makes it redundant or impossible. The real bias lying at the root of both these two fictions is the belief in the total purity of a model of social

work. The paradigm of interculturality in social work underlies the idea of a “situated unsituatedness” or “unsituated situatedness” and aims at a reciprocal understanding and communication in full recognition of differences.

This kind of attitude or disposition and this culture of interculturality, accompanies every culture and prevents all cultures from absolutising themselves. It is a disposition that also leads to cooperation and communication among different culture. The term interculturality is neither a trendy expression nor a romantic idea in this age of global technological formation and world tourism. It must not be taken as compensation by non-European cultures born out (of) inferiority complex. Interculturality is also not just a shift made while facing the de facto encounters of today’s world cultures (Mall, 2000). We cannot succeed if interculturality is misunderstood, instrumentalised or abused. It cannot just be reduced to a construct, an abstraction, or a syncretic idea. The concept of interculturality stands for a conviction and insight that no culture is the one culture for the whole of humankind. The spirit of interculturality approves of pluralism, diversity, and difference as values and does not take them as privations of unity and uniformity (Mall, 2000).

Consequently interculturality in its affirmation of pluralism *per se* as a value does not necessarily entail the negligence of one’s personal attachment and commitment to his or her own standpoint. Although it could be described as being preferential or even demarcating (for it affirms difference), yet interculturality, as it is understood here, bears no traits of monolithism and discrimination (Mall, 2000). International social work - interculturally understood and practiced - needs also to be understood in terms of education and practice and of interdependence between the two, resulting in diversity that is nonetheless held together by the integrated perspectives geared essentially to the promotion of individual and collective well-being.

On the task of professionalisation

Social workers exercise a significant degree of control or influence over people’s lives and wellbeing, and the principle of accountability or responsible behaviour would necessitate that all social workers are trained to the highest level possible. Social work has a responsibility to be as professional as possible, given that doing so does conform with the important principle of accountability and ensure that all practice has the potential to raise levels of well-being to the highest possible in a given environment. However, professionalism in social work does not necessitate a certain level of training for all workers, or certain levels of salary and work conditions for that matter. The objective, and indeed obligation, is to provide a service at the highest level possible in a given context. While that level will inevitably vary to some degree, the existence of global guidelines established by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) is very important. However, it might be argued that, above all other considerations, countries’ resource levels should never preclude social work

altogether or specific levels of social work practice, as appears currently to occur.

In Nigeria, the mode of teaching and practice of social work has made it difficult for social workers to meet up with the ideals of and expectations on it adequately. This is because social work education and practice need to develop new approaches of intervention which possess indigenous contextual relevance and mirror the realities and challenges facing social development in the country. In Nigeria social work is placed under the umbrella of the Federal Ministry of Social Development. In October 1989 the Nigerian government, formulated “*Social Development Policy for Nigeria*” which was revised and published again in 2004. With regard to the document, social work education and training has the task of producing various levels of manpower capable of applying professional knowledge and planned skill intervention in the various problem situations to achieve a suitable welfare state (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). The growing dimension of social problems without a corresponding increase in the number of qualified social workers to competently arrest these problems has created serious demands for professionally trained social workers in Nigeria.

Social problems and social welfare delivery in Nigeria have evolved to a stage which requires a proper handling by social workers who are adequately trained and equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills, orientation, value and competence. This demand for professionally trained social workers has led to the establishment of a variety of educational courses, utilizing and contributing to the growth of professional social work (FRN, 2004). Social work education and training are considered as a process of professionalization of social work based on improved scientific knowledge which enhances the skills of social workers in human relations and problem solving. In Nigeria, funding resources, resource systems and social workers are not there for the most part. Hence, social work education is the way it is. Social services, social security and social welfare are not there hence things are the way they are.

In most Western countries where social work has been recognised as a profession, there are certain requirements both on the part of the institution and on the part of the individual that must be fulfilled before degrees in social work can be awarded. For instance, in the USA, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) sets standards for social work education, and promotes and improves the quality of education in social work programmes. Students who attend schools with accredited programmes are assured that the quality of education meets national standards and generally have an advantage in securing employment following graduation, because social welfare agencies prefer hiring graduates from accredited programmes (Okoye, 2013). Nonetheless, this is not so in Nigeria, where individual universities set standards as they deem fit. The result is that there is no harmony in the courses taught and credits required in order to qualify on any of the programmes. Many students upon graduation

from Bachelor's programmes find it difficult to pursue postgraduate programmes abroad because they are unable to provide evidence of an accredited programme. Many get frustrated and some start fresh social work programmes abroad. This has not helped the growth of the social work profession in Nigeria.

Social workers in Nigeria, has no accrediting body to license social work practitioners. Licensing is a process granting permission by which a government agency or other jurisdiction acting on legislative mandate to individuals to engage in the practice of a particular profession. By ensuring a level of safe practice through professional education and experience, this process protects the general public. There is no such board in Nigeria and this has immensely hampered the development of the profession in Nigeria. Various attempts have been made to remedy this situation, but because most current social work practitioners in Nigeria have no qualifications, there abound a unwillingness to act because of fears like that of people losing their jobs (Okoye, 2013).

A profession should protect the public from those who abuse their position. In order to carry out such self-policing, every profession must establish standards and develop procedures for evaluating complaints and imposing sanctions if a member engages in incompetent or unethical practice. Licensing boards perform this protective function by withdrawing the legal rights to practice as a social worker if such violations occur. In Nigeria, such checks for misconduct do not exist. Cases abound of social workers who engage in one form of misconduct or another. In all these situations, no form of sanction is meted out against the perpetrators and so the profession is greatly undermined (Okoye, 2013).

One of the challenges facing the teachers is how to use local examples to portray some of the social work issues. This means that staff and students have to operate under very difficult conditions. There is, however, another key problem here. The field practicum is the core of social work training, but due to the fact that many of the staff members in agencies are not trained, there is minimal supervision in the agencies where students go for their practice. Situations abound where students have had to teach the staff their job, and this has sometimes led to students being rejected by fieldwork agencies (Okoye, 2013).

Conclusion

Recapitulating we are reminded that social work addresses social issues that constrain the betterment of a community. In Nigeria today there are emerging issues where social work practice is anticipated as a promising alternative for bringing succour to the populace. Some of these emerging issues include terrorism, IDPs, migration, kidnapping, Fulani herdsmen and so on. However, social work appears to be struggling to deal effectively with these issues. New and contemporary issues and problems are arising around the world especially

with particular reference to Nigeria. Hence there is need to link the helping nature of social work and the need for social workers to get involved in tackling the new issues and problems. To do this, social workers must add certain new extras to the old methods of doing social work. They must become innovative in their approach to tackling, solving, ameliorating and managing the new and contemporary issues and problems.

Examples of innovative ways that may be suggested include; professionalization of social work in Nigeria and retraining of social workers to face these new and contemporary challenges. Other innovative ways are, change of or improvement in social work training curriculum which will include among other things, the introduction of courses that will address the new and contemporary problems. Also encouraging the use of new media, ICT in social work practice and education and even strong political advocacy that may demand seeking political offices if need be are also other ways out.

In conclusion, the above suggestions would all be implying a spirit of adventure without an *ab ovo* guarantee that everything or anything about social work will be better if they are followed. That is what nobody can make a claim of certainty. However, that the practice of social work in Nigeria must imbibe innovative changes to become better and impactful is a fact with a character of the mathematical *quod erat demonstrandum*.

References

- Barker, R.L. (2003). *The social work dictionary* (5th ed.). Washington, DC: NASW
- Chow, N.W. (1987). Western and Chinese ideas of social welfare. *International Social Work*, 30 (1), 31-41.
- Constable, R.T., & Mehta, V.D. (Eds.). (1994). *Education for social work in Eastern Europe: Changing horizons*. Chicago: Lyceum Books.
- Cox, D. & Pawar, M. (2005). *International Social Work: Issues, strategies and programs*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Elliott, D. (1993). Social work and social development: Towards an integrative model for social work practice. *International Social Work*, 36 (1), 21-36.
- Gray, M. (2005). Dilemmas of international social work: paradoxical processes in indigenisation, universalism and imperialism. *International Journal of Social Welfare* 14, 231-238.
- Gray, M, & Allegritti, I. (2002). Cross-cultural practice and the indigenisation of African social work. *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk* 38(4), 324-336.
- Hartman, A. (1990). Many ways of knowing. *Social Work*, 35 (1), 3-4. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/35.1.3>
- Healy, L. M. (2008). *International social work: Professional action in an interdependent world*. Boston: Oxford University Press.
- Hoogvelt, A. (1997). *Africa: Exclusion and the Containment of Anarchy*. In: *Globalisation and the Postcolonial World*. London: Palgrave.

- IFSW & IASSW (2014). *International Federation of Social Workers & International Association of Schools of Social Work, Global definition of social work*. Retrieved from <http://www.ifsw.org/policies/definition-of-social-work/>
- Kendall, K.A. (2000). *Social work education: Its origins in Europe*. Alexandria, VA: Council on Social Work Education.
- Mall, R.A. (2000). *Intercultural philosophy*. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Midgley, J. (1997). Social Work and International Social Development: Promoting a Developmental Perspective in the Profession, in M. C. Hokenstad and J. Midgley (eds) *Issues in International Social Work*, (pp. 11–26). Washington, DC: NASW Press.
- Ogundipe, A. & Edewor, P.A. (2012). Sociology and social work in Nigeria: Characteristics, collaborations and differences. *African Sociological Review*, 16 (2), 40-45.
- Okoye, U.O (2013). Trends and challenges of social work practice in Nigeria. In Cree, V.E. (ed) *Becoming a Social Worker: Global Narratives* (Chapter 17, pp149-157) London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group.
- Osawe, T.O. (2018). Mapping international social work education: A research proposal toward rethinking social work education and professional practice in Nigeria. *Transnational Social Review*, 8(3), 331-336, Doi: 10.1080/21931674.2018.1504159.
- Osei-Hwedie, K. (1993). The challenge of Social Work in Africa: starting the indigenization process. *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 8 (1), 19-30.
- Osei-Hwedie, K., Ntseane, D. & Jacques, G. (2006). Searching for appropriateness in social work education in Botswana: the process of developing a master in social work (MSW) programme in a 'developing' country. *Social Work Education*, 25(6), 569-590.
- Osei-Hwedie, K. (1996). The Indigenisation of Social Work Education and Practice in South Africa: The dilemma of theory and method. *Social Work and Maatskaplike Werk*, 32 (3), 221-225.
- Pasnau, R. (2002). *Thomas Aquinas on human nature: A philosophical study of Summa Theologiae, 1a 75-89*. Boston: Cambridge University Press.
- Ugiagbe, E.O. (2015). Social work is context-bound: The need for indigenization of social work practice in Nigeria. *International Social Work*, 58 (6), 780–801.
- Walton, R.G. & Abo El Nasr, M.M. (1988). Indigenization and authentization in terms of social work in Egypt. *International social work*, 31(2), 135-14.

