

International Social Work and the Promotion of the Sustainable Development Goals with Special Reference to Migration

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to prove the relevance of international collaborations and international perspectives for social work issues. If this can be shown, it might be a strong argument for including international perspectives into core curriculums of social work education in Germany and Nigeria, alike. The paper proceeds in six steps. Firstly, it shortly introduces readers to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Then, it narrows it down to one of the key goals – reduction of inequalities. Further, the paper will explain the significance of this SDG for migration, while proving specific relevance for Nigeria. Another is to demonstrate the relevance of social work in the process of the implementation of the SDG, while questioning whether International Social Work could possibly contribute anything more to it. Finally, the paper dares to draw some conclusions for social work education.

Keywords: Sustainable development goals, international social work, migration, social work curriculum

Introduction

The term development has undergone some rather significant changes (Healy, 2008; Cox & Pawar, 2013). In 1970, the United Nations (UN) Symposium on Social Policy and Planning saw development rather neutrally and technically “as a process of improving the capability of nation’s institutions and value system to meet increasing and different demands, whether they are social, political or economic” (Omer, 1979: 12). In 1984, the Society for International Development took a more value based approach, when defining it as a “sustainable process geared to the satisfaction of the needs of the majority of peoples, and not merely to the growth of things or to the benefit of a minority” (Mattis, 1984: 1). Thus, from then on, development was not judged anymore by its sheer contribution to meet *any* demand but the needs of the *majority of the peoples*. By mentioning “*peoples*” instead of “*people*”, the international perspectives of development accepts the diversity that separates different populations of the world.

The first call for sustainability came at a time aid receiving countries had experienced the failing of development attempts that proved to be unsustainable and discontinued at completion of projects. This led to the United Nations (UN) General Assembly (2015) to propose on September 25, 2015 the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)* which was meant to transform the world. Building on the Millennium Development Goals, the new Agenda attempts to complete what the older

Goals did not achieve. It promulgates 17 integrated and indivisible Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 Targets that are supposed to balance the three dimensions of sustainable development, namely the economic, social and environmental. By implementing them, the commitment is “to end poverty and hunger everywhere; to combat inequalities within and among countries; to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies; to protect human rights and promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; and to ensure the lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources” (UN, 2015 no. 3). The transformative vision driving the Agenda was all-embracing and over-ambitiously laid out especially as can be seen in declaration 7, 8 and 9 (UN, 2015).

Sustainable Development Goal 10 and migration

Keeping this all-inclusive honourable approach in mind, with respect to our subject, we will focus on only one, yet important goal, namely SDG 10. It aims at the reduction of inequalities within and among countries. It is important to stress from the beginning that just as before the 1984 definition by the Society for International Development did not only address the needs of the majority of the “*people*” but the “*peoples*”. Here, the international dimension, the global interconnectedness and transnational responsibilities are expressly taken into regard when the new Agenda mentions not only inequalities on the *national* but also *international* level. Focusing on combatting inequalities may be found justifiable also by its central significance not only for many other SDGs but also for protection of human rights, the General Assembly assigns seven Targets and three Means of Implementation to SDG 10 (UN, 2015):

Targets:

- 10.1 By 2030, progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 per cent of the population at a rate higher than the national average
- 10.2 By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status
- 10.3 Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard
- 10.4 Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality
- 10.5 Improve the regulation and monitoring of global financial markets and institutions and strengthen the implementation of such regulations
- 10.6 Ensure enhanced representation and voice for developing countries in decision-making in global international economic and financial institutions in order to deliver more effective, credible, accountable and legitimate institution
- 10.7 Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.

Means of implementation:

10. a Implement the principle of special and differential treatment for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, in accordance with World Trade Organization agreements
- 10.b Encourage official development assistance and financial flows, including foreign direct investment, to States where the need is greatest, in particular least developed countries, African countries, Small Island developing States and landlocked developing countries, in accordance with their national plans and programmes
10. c By 2030, reduce to less than 3 per cent the transaction costs of migrant remittances and eliminate remittance corridors with costs higher than 5 per cent”

As shown, SDG 10 refers to migration in its Targets 10.2 and 10.7. It is important that we ask the following questions: Why do the SDG targets relate to migration? Is there a significant interrelationship between inequalities and migration? The answer to these questions will form the crux of the discussion that follows.

Inequalities are a root cause for migration, although there are two dimensions to it. First of all, there are inequalities *within* the countries of origin, which are push-factors, especially but not constraint to discriminatory inequalities. Secondly, we have to consider inequalities *among* countries, which are well-known to be pull-factors to the supposedly more developed countries of destination. In both alternatives, these inequalities may lead to conflicts within and among States, thus unloading in yet another root cause for migration (Lischer, 2014). More so, both alternatives carry the option for migration being seen as a chance to flee existing inequalities. Thus, many migrants hope that migration could actually reduce if not end individual inequalities (Black, Natali & Skinner, 2005; Orrenius & Zavodny, 2018).

Some believe that free movement of people not only could ease individual inequalities but has to be seen as a prerequisite to a just and equal society in a globalized world with free flow of goods, services and money (Weyl, 2016). In their eyes, it supposedly balances the unequal distribution of wealth, resources, development and opportunities by moving the people to the geographical regions, where higher standards can be obtained, therefore, automatically levelling inequalities over the time. At the same time, sending back remittances could help the receiving relatives back home catch up in their personal development as well as the development of their communities. On the other hand, this migration to the lands where at first sight ‘milk and honey flow’, could also lead to ongoing exploitation of the status, involving weak and sometimes vulnerable migrants, thereby creating new forms of exploitation. Sometimes, even remittances themselves, could create new inequalities and dependencies within the societies of origin, as they offer opportunities primarily for relatives and all too often only for the ones already privileged (Black, Natali & Skinner, 2005; Cox & Pawar, 2013; Orrenius & Zavodny, 2018).

In turn, migration might be seen as a root cause for inequalities as migrants sometimes leave behind property, status, recognition, opportunities and relationships in the familiar society (Orrenius & Zavodny, 2018). As a consequence of forced migration, they might be deprived of their status and capacities being forced to live in specific camps or communities, and being denied chances to take care of and develop themselves. Many of them suffer from harms during their journey, which they cannot easily recover from, and which might impair their future capacities to achieve equality. They get trapped in human trafficking, exploitation and prostitution, have to start anew, maybe with scarce or no funds, in an unknown context. They have to realize that the standards for equality within the receiving society are different if not higher and, therefore, more difficult to achieve. Migrants have to fight legal barriers to gain access to basic resources like the labour market, accommodation, social benefits, medical treatment, education, etc. They often face actual obstacles to integration and wellbeing. Such obstacles include: inability to own resources, missing support networks, foreign language, and ignorance of the system arising from facing a new culture. Not seldom, they might not be accepted by the receiving society on an equal footing (Cox & Pawar, 2013; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2011).

This interrelationship between inequalities in development among countries and regions on one hand and migration on the other made the European Union (EU) adopt the new European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD). The justification for the fund states that:

The purpose of the EFSD as an integrated financial package, supplying financing capacity in the form of grants, guarantees and other financial instruments to eligible counterparts, shall be to support investments and increased access to financing, primarily in Africa and the European Neighbourhood, in order to foster sustainable and inclusive economic and social development and promote the socioeconomic resilience of partner countries... (Art. 3 of Regulation [EU] 2017/1601).

The EFSD is meant to be a framework, “to establish migration compacts with countries where migrants originate or transit. These tailor-made agreements combine incentives to help partner countries to manage migration effectively, to cooperate on readmission of irregular migrants, and to address root causes of migration” (European Parliament, 2016). Furthermore, Consideration 5 of the Preamble of the according Regulation expressly acknowledges this interrelationship by stating:

The EFSD should contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, which recognises international migration as a multi-dimensional reality of major relevance for the development of countries of origin, transit and destination, requiring coherent and comprehensive responses, while underlining the potential for migrants to contribute to inclusive growth and sustainable development.

Investments supported by the EFSD should contribute towards addressing migratory pressures stemming from poverty, conflict, instability, underdevelopment, inequality, human rights violations, demographic growth, and the lack of employment and economic opportunities, as well as from climate change.

Inequalities in the Nigerian context and migration

The relevance of our discourse on inequality and migration can easily be demonstrated bearing in mind four key points. They are: inequalities within Nigeria, forced migration within Nigeria, migration from Nigeria and forced migration to Nigeria.

Inequalities within Nigeria:

Inequalities exist within the Nigerian society both at the individual level and among the States. World Bank (2018) analysis states:

Nigeria has made significant progress in socio-economic terms over the last 15 years. Between 2005 and 2015, Nigeria's Human Development Index value increased by 13.1 percent. However, the country continues to face massive developmental challenges, which include reducing the dependency on oil and diversifying the economy, addressing insufficient infrastructure, and building strong and effective institutions, as well as governance issues, public financial management systems, human development indicators, and the living conditions of the population. Inequality in terms of income and opportunities has been growing rapidly, and has adversely affected poverty reduction. The North-South divide has widened in recent years due to the Boko Haram insurgency and a lack of economic development in the northern part of the country. Large pockets of Nigeria's population still live in poverty, without adequate access to basic services, even when they could benefit from more inclusive development policies. The lack of job opportunities is at the core of the high poverty levels, of regional inequality, and of social and political unrest in the country.

This is backed and underlined by an OXFAM study titled "The Commitment to Reducing Inequality Index". According to this study, Nigeria is placed last in a comparative analysis of 152 countries. It is last in spending on health issues, education and social protection. It is placed 117 when it comes to progressive structure and incidence of tax and ranked 139 out of 152 with respect to labour market policies to address inequalities (OXFAM, 2018a). In addition, OXFAM, (2018b) claims that:

Poverty and inequality in Nigeria are not due to a lack of resources, but to the ill-use, misallocation and misappropriation of such resources. At the root is a culture of corruption combined with political elites that are out of touch with the daily struggles of average Nigerians. In 2012, Nigeria spent just 6.5 percent of its national budget on education and just 3.5 percent on health (by comparison, Ghana spent 18.5 percent and 12.8 percent respectively in 2015). As a result, 57 million Nigerians lack safe water, over 130 million lack adequate sanitation and the country has more than 10 million children out of school.

One source of inequality therefore is corruption. Transparency International (2017b) noted that corruption and inequality feed off each other, creating a vicious circle between corruption, unequal distribution of power in society, and unequal distribution of wealth.” Its 2016 report, ranks Nigeria 136 out of 176 in the corruption index (Transparency International, 2017a). Therefore, SDG 10 and the fight for a reduction of inequalities clearly is of existential significance for Nigeria.

Forced Migration within Nigeria

As of October 31, 2018, United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) counts 231,473 Nigerian refugees, 118,781 of which are living in Niger, 101,404 in Cameroon and 11,288 in the Chad. Additionally 1, 926,748 Nigerian IDPs were counted in the Lake Chad Basin (UNHCR, 2018b). They also noted that 94% of these were displaced by the insurgency in north-eastern Nigeria. The Boko Haram terror has many faces for sure but it is also linked to inequality. Kaplan, (2015) avers the militant Islamist group Boko Haram to be:

...a product of Nigeria’s poor and unequal governance...There is also growing resentment in the predominantly Muslim north toward the south, which is doing much better on almost every conceivable measure: growth is higher; there is more investment; and public services such as education and health care are, however poor in some places, but significantly more robust. Whereas, rapidly growing cities like Lagos are booming, and have seen marked improvement in governance over the past decade, in many parts of the north the economy is stagnant and the government nearly non-existent. Three-fifths of Borno State’s adolescents, where Boko Haram is most active, are illiterate. Like all northern states, less than a tenth of one-year-olds receive all their basic vaccinations.

It seems to be superfluous to repeat, that internal displacement as well as seeking refuge across the border, again, creates precarious situations and increases inequalities.

Migration from Nigeria

Nigeria has developed to be the top African state of origin for migration to Europe. Eurostat shows Nigeria as number four for first time asylum seekers in the EU-28 from Q2 2017 to the Q2 2018, in total numbers of 29,825 (Eurostat, 2018). In Germany, Nigeria is ranked number three overall (behind Syria and Iraq) with a share of 6.9% from January to July 2018, or in absolute terms 6,648 (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2018a: 8). In 2016 and 2017, of those arriving Italy, Nigerian nationals were the largest group registered (21% and 16% respectively) (International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2018: 6)

It’s interesting to know that the prospects for Nigerians are not too attractive. In Germany, according to the figures of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees from Jan-Oct, 2018, out of 11,602 decisions on applications for international or national protection, only 1,620 were positive (13.96 %) (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2018b). In turn, Nigerians – especially but not alone Nigerian females – are all too often victims of trafficking. Olujuwon (2008) estimated that

60-80 percent of all immigrants working in the commercial sex industry in Italy were Nigerians with a substantial number in Netherlands and Spain. Actually, trafficking is not only a one-way-street as illustrated by a 2012 *Trafficking in Persons Report* by the United States Department of State (United States Department of State 2012: 270). The report noted as follows:

Nigeria is a source, transit, and destination country for women and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. Trafficked Nigerians are recruited from rural, and to a lesser extent urban areas within the country: women and girls for domestic servitude and sex trafficking, and boys for forced labor in street vending, domestic service, mining, stone quarries, agriculture, and begging. Nigerian women and children are taken from Nigeria to other West and Central African countries, as well as South Africa, where they are exploited for the same purposes. Children from West African countries, primarily Benin, Ghana, and Togo, are forced to work in Nigeria, and many are subjected to hazardous labor in Nigeria's granite mines. Nigerian women and girls, primarily from Benin City in Edo State, are subjected to forced prostitution in Italy, while Nigerian women and girls from other states are subjected to forced prostitution in Spain, Scotland, the Netherlands, Germany, Turkey, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Sweden, Switzerland, Norway, Ireland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Greece, and Russia. Nigerian women and children are recruited and transported to destinations in North Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia, where they are held captive in the sex trade or in forced labor [!]. Nigerian women are trafficked to Malaysia where they are forced into prostitution and to work as drug mules for their traffickers.

Similarly, in 2012, the British Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), Freedom House (2010) reported that "Nigerian women and children are trafficked domestically and abroad for forced labour and sexual exploitation, and citizens of neighbouring countries are brought into Nigeria for similar reasons. Nigerian women and girls comprise approximately 70 percent of the estimated 70,000 African women victims of trafficking". Of course, making use of trafficked girls and women but also boys and men is disgusting, a crime, and a shame for any country of destination in Europe, claiming to be so "civilized" and "developed". However, when 70 percent of the estimated 70,000 African women victims of trafficking are Nigerians, how can this figure be explained without pointing to specific national circumstances? What are the systemic structures of inequality working within the Nigerian society to make Nigerian females such an easy target?

Forced Migration to Nigeria

Last but not least, as already addressed in the context of trafficking, there is also forced migration to Nigeria. Additionally, as result of the ongoing crisis in Cameroon's Anglophone regions, struggling for more autonomy from the government and the French speaking parts of the country, Nigeria has become refuge for some 21,291 registered refugees as at March 2018 (UNHCR, 2018a: 1). Again, inequalities are the root causes and consequence of (forced) migration.

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The relevance of Social Work and International Social Work in addressing inequalities

We have demonstrated that inequalities are a formative reality within Nigeria but also among Nigeria and Europe. Inequalities have been identified as root causes for migration. However, migration is not only to be considered as a chance to level personal experienced and structural inequalities but also a source for new precarious inequalities. So, how can this vicious circle addressed?

The obvious answers to the question above are more money, development projects, administrative capacity building, economic growth, creation of job offers in Nigeria and opportunities for legal circular migration to Europe. In August 2018, the German Chancellor Merkel has offered more study placements for Nigerian students in universities in Europe which she believes will help curb irregular migration (Onyeji & Sanni, 2018). This alone, will not solve the fundamental challenge of inequalities to this society. Instead, there is even the risk that it will increase inequalities, as long as only a minority gets its share, and as long as economic advancement just creates even more opportunities for privileged ones to migrate, stay abroad, and return more privileged than the ones left behind.

The situation Nigeria is facing is not at all about lacking resources. Nigeria is a rich country and its resources are legendary, and not at all limited to oil. The Nigerian government pointed out on its webpage about other abundant mineral resources in Nigeria (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2018):

Nigeria is richly endowed with a variety of Natural Resources ranging from precious metals and underground elements such as Barites, Gypsum, Kaolin and Marble. Most of these are yet to be exploited. Statistically, the level of exploitation of these minerals is very low in relation to the extent of deposit found in the country. One of the objectives of the new National Policy on Solid Minerals is to ensure the orderly development of the mineral resources of the country.

The proven reserves of oil are 23 Billion barrels; the gas reserves are 160 Trillion cubic meters. This may be the reason why the government praises the tremendous opportunities for investments in the Nigerian economy (FRN, 2018). Thus, there is only one true key to level inequalities, fight brain drain, migration and exploitation. This one true key is a change of mind-sets. Nigerians need a mind-set that is aware of their capacities as individuals, as communities, as society and as human mankind. They need positive examples of social care. They need empowerment to stand up for their rights. They need to create social cohesion within their neighbourhoods, states and country. They need education to be able to analyse their situation and alternatives, to get aware of self-inflicted but also postcolonial injustice and learn how to overcome it. They need empathy with the vulnerable and authenticity in their personal and political lives.

Very consciously, indeed, there is need for the mind-sets in the so-called Global North to change too. As has been shown, our fates are too much interwoven as to

isolate one situation from the other. We jointly have to identify and dissolve structural inequalities and injustices that people in the Global North are living of and people in the South, namely Nigeria, are suffering from. The next question then becomes – Who could possibly help change the mind-sets? Who could analyse individual situations and social structures alike? Who could empower and accompany service receivers on their individual way? Who has learned to understand the interrelationship between health, psyche and social sphere? Who knows about our rights and how to enforce them? Who has a clear ethical foundation and the pedagogical skills to pass it on? Who has the sense to deal with all age groups, gender and classes? Who has the interdisciplinary approach to explore and develop solutions to complex challenges on individual and societal level?

According to the global definition by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), 2014:

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. ...

Another quote from the IFSW commentary notes on Social Work's core mandate (IFSW/IASSW, 2014):

Social work is a practice profession and an academic discipline that recognizes that interconnected historical, socio-economic, cultural, spatial, political and personal factors serve as opportunities and/or barriers to human wellbeing and development. Structural barriers contribute to the perpetuation of inequalities, discrimination, exploitation and oppression. The development of critical consciousness through reflecting on structural sources of oppression and/or privilege, on the basis of criteria such as race, class, language, religion, gender, disability, culture and sexual orientation, and developing action strategies towards addressing structural and personal barriers are central to emancipatory practice where the goals are the empowerment and liberation of people. In solidarity with those who are disadvantaged, the profession strives to alleviate poverty, liberate the vulnerable and oppressed, and promote social inclusion and social cohesion.

The social change mandate is based on the premise that social work intervention takes place when the current situation, be this at the level of the person, family, small group, community or society, is deemed to be in need of change and development. It is driven by the need to challenge and change those structural conditions that contribute to marginalization, social exclusion and oppression. Social change initiatives recognize the place of human agency in advancing human rights and economic, environmental, and social justice. The profession is equally committed to the maintenance of social stability, insofar as such stability is not used to marginalize, exclude or oppress any particular group of persons.

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Social development is conceptualized to mean strategies for intervention, desired end states and a policy framework. The later in addition to the more popular residual and the institutional frameworks. It is based on holistic biopsychosocial, spiritual assessments and interventions that transcend the micro-macro divide, incorporating multiple system levels and inter-sectorial and inter-professional collaboration, aimed at sustainable development. It prioritizes socio-structural and economic development, and does not subscribe to conventional wisdom that economic growth is a prerequisite for social development.

From the foregoing, there is a clear mandate for Social Work and there is a long lasting tradition in the field of migration (Cox & Pawar, 2013). However, one may ask, is it also a mandate for International Social Work? From the outline so far, it already became clear that many structural inequalities and for sure migration itself, are international phenomena, that have to be viewed from an international perspective and can only be solved by international collaboration. This is also true for Social Work. Social Workers and Schools of Social Work in different parts of this world have to learn from each other as well as from current international institutions. In order to responsibly and effectively intervene as Social Workers in destination countries, they have to know how migrants were raised and educated, what their beliefs and cultural backgrounds are, and what harm they possibly might have suffered in the course of their journey.

In turn, Social Work in Nigeria will only be able to tackle emigration and trafficking when it has gained sufficient expertise on the situation abroad as well as the motives of and the effects of migration locally. Albeit, social workers across the globe should be conscious of transnational realities most migrants are living in and should collaborate when it comes to returning migrants and reintegrating them into the Nigerian society. So the international phenomena of migration must not be localised (Ife, 2008) but lead to an international perspective and platform of cooperation. It is also important that social workers work universally on the awareness and removal of structural inequalities that determine the international relationship of our countries. Lastly, while doing so, there is need to reflect upon the possibility that our actions themselves might be guided by such inequalities (Hugman, 2010).

To this end, it is clear that social development is applicable to both Social Work practice and International Social Work Practice. It is linked to the micro, meso and macro level. It is reactive and proactive at same time, just as (Elliot, 2012:103) puts it:

The progressive nature of social work practice based on social development arises out of the fact that such an approach is developed in response to injustice, discrimination, exclusion, or marginalization and to the extent it is reactive. However, its predominant characteristic is proactive, with emphasis on human

rights, structural and institutional change, growth, and investment. It therefore addresses discrimination and oppression through structural change.

Conclusions for Social Work Education

On the overall, four conclusions are to be drawn for Social Work Education:

1. The development of Social Work in the Nigerian Higher Education System is of utmost significance to the development of the country.
2. Social Work needs recognition as a scientific discipline, an academic profession and accorded its professional mandate.
3. To live up to its high ethical standards, Social Work education itself has to tirelessly reflect and if necessary frequently adapt its curriculum and lecturing to measure more with best international standards.
4. Aspects of International Social Work and the practice of international collaboration should become a part of the core curriculum of Social Work in order to fully qualify for Social Work practice that is capable to analyse and deal with international influences at micro, meso and macro levels.

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