

Social Welfare at the Grassroots and Contributions to National Development

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ABSTRACT

Globally, social problems are taking different dimensions, which keep evolving. Approaches to tackle these problems cannot only rely on improved economic power and privileges, whereby some global citizens cannot participate economically. This could be because of failed biological organs, weak institutions, or social disorganization. The consequences manifest in poverty, mortality, and vulnerability. While it is important for societies to develop economically, it is likewise important that they develop socially, by inclusion and social security. This is the essence of social welfare, as gaining increased attention across the globe. This paper looks at the concepts of social welfare and social development across continents and argues its importance to the achievement of sustainable development goals, especially for developing nations like Nigeria. It relies on a traditional review of the literature and a framework of models of welfare put forward by Titmus to include the residual, achievement-performance, and institutional models.

Keywords: Social welfare, social development, social policy, social security, social work

INTRODUCTION

Society is a subconscious living organism that strives to survive, grow and develop. Social development is driven by the subconscious aspirations of the society for advancement and progress targeted at improving the general well-being of people in the society (Midgley, 2014). Hence, social development has been recognized internationally as a viable approach to social welfare and services that emerged in the Global South years ago. Social welfare and social development are captured under the purview of the International Council on Social Welfare [ICSW] which aims at promoting all forms of social and economic development targeted at reducing poverty, hardship, and vulnerability throughout the world, especially amongst disadvantaged people. It strives for recognition and protection of fundamental rights to food, shelter, education, health care, and security. It is on this note that social welfare seeks also to advance equality of opportunity, freedom of self-expression, and access to human services. In essence, this has far-reaching implications for both international, regional and national welfare policies and programmes (Midgley & Conley 2010).

The idea behind social welfare emerged to address social problems and meet human needs arising from industrialization. This pressure exacerbated social problems everywhere such as absolute poverty, unemployment, destitution, etc., and as well connected those working to alleviate human suffering in the global community such as the civil society, families, households, social networks, faith-based and nonprofits organizations in the exercise of social

control and in the regulation of access to societal goods and services based on citizenship rights (Jenson, 2010). Gradually, governments, the voluntary sector, and other social actors in society became involved with meeting needs, managing social problems, and providing social benefits and social programmes such as social, economic, education, and health services that were crucial to the maintenance of society and in the meeting of people's needs (Zastrow, 2008; Word Press, 2014). With greater emphasis on the well-being of the people, Kirst-Ashman (2007) asserted that through welfare policies and programmes, what people can expect from society remains a yardstick by which a society can measure how well it is socially developing in meeting the needs of its people, both rich and poor. For instance, through anti-poverty efforts like food assistance, public health insurance, and other programs, millions of children and families are thriving. This is evident in the decrease of children in low-income families in the U.S from 33.2 million (44.9%) in 2010 to 29.8 million (41.2%) in 2016 (National Center for Children in Poverty [NCCP], 2016).

Therefore, this became a renaissance for good governance essentially linked to the growing thirst for an improved living standard and a secured environment. These growing demands on governance bring to fore a mandatory appeal for participatory and democratic governance to allow for a proper articulation of social needs and problems through policy formulation and implementation (Bakare, 2013). Democratic governance has therefore been accepted and tested to have acquired the requisite ingredients and paraphernalia to serve as an effective platform for not only people-oriented governance but a sure way of ensuring result-oriented governance and development, internationally. As part of its structural strategies to fulfill its growing concern, the democratic practice has within its credentials social welfare services orientation that guarantees a gradual but steady improvement on the living conditions of its subjects and a general transformation of the society. Social welfare is now a common characteristic of modern democracies, this culminated in measuring democratic performances through welfare programmes and the wellbeing of the citizenry.

Despite this, widespread poverty and deprivation continue to exist with 1.4 billion people living below USD1.25 a day and with a further 75 percent of the world's population not being covered by social security as reported by the International Labour Organization [ILO] (2012). This has contributed to the job crisis and rising unemployment in both developed and developing countries. Corroborating this idea is the report by the World Bank (2019) that people in developing countries still receive little or no social assistance given that 8 in every 10 people know nothing about social welfare assistance. Hence, it can be deduced thus far that social welfare and social development are no longer a peripheral set of ideas and concepts that sit outside the mainstream of social welfare thinking as the success of any society is likened to adequate incorporation of the well-being of the people in the society. Therefore, the question is no more whether welfare services should be part and parcel of the society but on how well they can be improved for the greater good of the people. It is in this light that this study aims to majorly find out what constitutes social welfare services and social development at both international and local frontiers, the challenges to effective and efficient social welfare service delivery, and possible ways forward.

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL WELFARE AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The terms – social welfare and social development are often used interchangeably and there has been much confusion about what these terms mean. Welfare is generally a type of government support for the citizens of the society at all levels usually intended to ensure that people can meet their basic human needs such as food and shelter. International social welfare refers to social welfare and programs around the world. Therefore, social welfare is concerned with the welfare and well-being of the poor, vulnerable, and marginalized segments of the society and as well the population that has fewer opportunities for economic, social, and human development, and remains caught in a vicious cycle of poverty (Midgley, 2014). Hence, economic growth needs to be equitable for improving the living standards of all strata of the society. The social welfare sector envisages inclusion of the poor in interventions aimed at poverty reduction and social development for enhancing their upward socio-economic mobility.

On the other hand, social development refers to many of the non-economic processes and outcomes of development, including but not limited to: reduced vulnerability, inclusion, wellbeing, accountability, people-centred approaches, and freedom from violence (Patel, 2012). It is fundamentally concerned with human rights, formal and informal power relations, inequality, and possibilities for building greater equality among individuals and groups within societies. In a nutshell, social development is a planned institutional change including social, economic, and political change for the welfare of the nation as a whole (Ngwanamont, 2014). Nevertheless, social welfare complements social development though their common denominator lies in the improvement in the conditions and quality of life of the population.

EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL WELFARE AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Early colonial era witnessed the domination of welfare provisioning by voluntarism especially from the Christian missions, with little assistance from the government until the poor laws adumbrated the first codification of society's responses to individuals in distress with an emphasis on government as the entity in charge of those responses. The laws responded to people in poverty, by using three distinct categories: deserving poor, undeserving poor, or children in order to cut the costs of poor relief (Day, 2008). This system was substantially modified by the 19th-century Poor Law Amendment Act, which introduced the system of workhouses. However, public assistance programs were not called welfare until the early 20th century when the term was quickly adopted to avoid the negative connotations that had become associated with older terms such as charity (Blaug, 1963).

Before the spread of formal social welfare, communalism, cooperation, mutual aid and the social group which relied on community support systems to meet human needs were prevalent in the Global South countries (McKendrick 1990). For instance, in the Islamic world, Zakat (taxes from charity) were used to provide income for the needy, including the poor, elderly, orphans, widows, and the disabled (Crone, 2005). With this, MacPherson and Midgley (1987) have argued that colonialism disrupted and denigrated most traditional and religious forms of social welfare. Thus, several reviews of social development attested that social welfare has existed years ago (Kasari, 2016).

It was predominantly in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that an organized system of state welfare provision was introduced in many countries. The consequences of the Great Depression motivated United States of America President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Congress to enact the New Deal policies designed to provide a very large number of unemployed workers with paying jobs in the USA. These initiatives were the impetus for creating the Civilian Conservation Corps [C.C.C.], the National Youth Administration [N.Y.A.], the Works Progress Administration [W.P.A.], and Public Works Administration [P.W.A.] all the USA (Day, 2008; Frances Perkins Center, 2008). Federal work relief programmes were looked upon favourably by most Americans because they made public assistance something earned rather than granted.

Furthermore, the enactment of the Social Security Act in the USA in 1935 established a national system of old-age insurance for retired workers, benefits for victims of industrial accidents, unemployment insurance, aid for dependent mothers and children, the blind, and the physically handicapped (Hansan, 2017). The American government also during the term of President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964–65 launched the Great Society campaign which was a set of domestic programmes aimed at the elimination of poverty and racial injustice (Hansan, 2017). During this period also, new major spending programmes were launched that addressed education, medical care, urban problems, rural poverty, and transportation in the USA.

Social welfare history describes the changes in helping activities and services initiated to combat a variety of social ills of complex origins. While poverty and public assistance play large roles in this narrative, they are not the entire story. Social welfare history reflects the lives of people living, being educated, working, and voting in the nation (Ngwanamont, 2014). The efforts of individuals, religious groups, non-profit organizations, and governments recounted in this history have strengthened the fabric of society and improved the quality of life for many.

GOALS OF SOCIAL WELFARE ASSISTANCE AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Initially, social welfare services targeted creating social order in the society due to several significant developments such as the impact of the Revolutionary War, large scale immigration, rapid industrialization, and widespread urbanization that increased the incidence of poverty, a large influx of immigrants, slum housing, diseases, and child labour. A paradigm shift later brought in other goals as the society transcended such as to promote social inclusion of the poor and the vulnerable by making institutions accessible to all and to enhance the social functioning of all age groups both the rich and the poor by achieving sustainable economic, social and environmental wellbeing to meet the needs of today and future generations (Dominelli, 2012).

In all, social welfare strives to meet the social development objectives which emphasize social investments that promote social and economic inclusion of the poor. It also stresses that the poor have strengths, assets, and capacities that may be mobilized for proactive participation and contribution in the society (Petal, 2005; Midgley & Tang, 2001).

FORMS OF WELFARE ASSISTANCE

Welfare can take a variety of forms such as monetary payments, subsidies, and vouchers, or housing assistance. Welfare is commonly provided to unemployed individuals, those with illness or disability, the elderly, those with dependent children, and veterans. However, a person's eligibility for welfare may also be constrained by mean testing or other conditions. The

system of social security in a welfare state provides social services, such as universal medical care, unemployment insurance for workers, financial aid, indigent scholarships, subsidized public housing, and pension schemes.

Though welfare systems differ across countries, there are some common welfare services countries like Nigeria can adopt, since they are provided for the enhancement of social living. One of these is the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF] which is financial assistance that is given to individuals and families in poverty to aid families in caring for their children in their own homes. Also, we have food and shelter programmes which can come as school feeding programmes or food stamps that see to the nutritional needs of the needy. More so, health care services such as Medicaid are provided to anyone receiving public health assistance in the USA (Alicia, 2018). Other welfare assistance that exists in other parts of the world includes housing programmes and Supplemental Security Income that provides low-income families, the elderly and disabled with rental payments to make living more affordable and supplement the income of the elderly, blind and disabled, as well as parents of minor children with disabilities respectively.

Currently, around the world, there are international efforts to control the behaviour of companies through increased regulations. The idea is to make the companies provide social welfare assistance to members of their host communities. This has resulted in companies yielding to the pressure to become more directly involved in promoting social and economic development (UNRISD 2010). This gave birth to Corporate Social Responsibility [CSR] which is beginning to give way to a greater social engagement and provision of social welfare assistance by businesses in the society. This is the trending form of carrying out social welfare services in many societies.

Furthermore, some indigenous welfare assistance exists across the local frontiers through the efforts of titular associations, the council of elders, women associations, contribution groups, town union and age-grade associations who several communal assistance like community policing, sanitation of the town, attracting of social amenities like schools, electricity, pipe-borne water (Rankopo, Osei-Hweidi & Moroka, 2006). They also assist in providing farm services and other assistance to the aged, provide indigent scholarships, and as well collectively help in raising the children just as what is obtainable in most Igbo communities that termed this welfare 'nwa bu nwa oha' (Isichie, 1978). This corroborates the expression 'ubuntu', which means humanity. The spirit of ubuntu is one of mutual care and support and recognizes that one's humanity is expressed through the value of mutual self-help and volunteering which is still firmly rooted in different local cultural practices (Rankopo et al 2006). These undoubtedly, promote useful and harmonious social living.

SOCIAL POLICIES IN THE MAINSTREAM OF INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL WELFARE AND DEVELOPMENT

Social policies are guidelines and interventions for the maintenance or creation of living conditions that are conducive to human welfare. They are courses of action adopted through the government which relate to the social characteristics of life. It can also be described as an action that is deliberately intended and taken to improve the welfare of the citizens (Latridis, 1995). Hence, social policy is usually a response of a government as a protector and promoter of the interests of society in satisfying the welfare conditions of people. This is usually achieved

through series of services in diverse meadows of nutrition, water supply, education, health, housing, employment, recreation, etc.

One of the guiding principles of social policy is the principle of utilitarianism by Jeremy Bentham and John Mill which emphasizes that every intervention by the government should be for the greater good of the society (Shackleton, 1972). This makes social policies to be people-centred and as well an inalienable part of every system that has humans (Titmus, 1974). Therefore, as an instrument of the government, it is not only risky to promote the welfare of the citizens but suicidal as social policy has become an inseparable part of international social welfare as a tool for social and human development.

MODELS OF SOCIAL WELFARE AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The argument here is that political, ideological, economic, social, and cultural policies have a direct bearing on how social welfare is conceptualized and carried out. Different models of social welfare and their implications for social welfare in changing and developing the national and global world are discussed below.

The residual model

The residual model holds that social welfare institutions come into play when the market and the normal systems of support, such as the family and community networks, break down. This is associated with conservatism as a philosophy that upholds the idea of individual responsibility for meeting human needs. The residual approach to social welfare cited by Wilensky and Lebeaux (1965) is associated with minimal state intervention in the provision and financing of social welfare services and social security. It sees the family and the private market as the natural mechanisms for meeting needs. If there is a breakdown in these natural systems of support, then a third mechanism in the form of social welfare comes into being. This proposition presumes that social welfare provision should be of a short-term, emergency in nature and should tide people over a crisis period. This implies that provision should cease once the crisis is over (Tang, 1998).

The achievement performance model

This model emphasizes work and merit. Hence, if an individual should be a social welfare recipient, the person must work for it and as well as merit it. This undoubtedly encourages hard work and promotes social and human development (Ngwu, 2015). It holds also that social welfare institutions should be seen as adjuncts of the economy (Tang, 1998).

The institutional redistributive model

This model is of the notion that social welfare should be an integral part and parcel of the society courtesy of the fact that social policy is a matter of right than need and there should be no criteria or condition for one to be a beneficiary of social welfare services (Ngwu, 2015). It conceives of social welfare as a normal 'first-line' function of modern industrial societies to ameliorate the negative effects of market failure in capitalist societies (Segal & Brzuzy, 1998). This implies as a citizen, those services must be available for one to use such as income security, medical care, education and housing, pipe-borne water, electricity, etc (Tang, 1998).

CHALLENGES FACING SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICE DELIVERY AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

There is no single entity that is perfect and devoid of hindrances toward achieving its objectives. This is because, despite the contribution to promoting social well-being and social development at both local and international frontiers, social welfare efforts and development continue to face numerous challenges (Bowen, 2007). The financial stability of a country goes a long way in determining its involvement in social welfare service delivery because it is cost-effective. This is evident in the socio-economic disparity in the world as we have the Global North countries comprising the developed countries such as the European countries and the Global South countries made up of the developing and the underdeveloped countries as we have in most African and Asian countries. Supposedly, the developed countries are likely to be more socially developed than their developing counterparts. For instance, one cannot compare the level of social development in the United States of America with that of Nigeria that is at a very low ebb. This implies that the best is still yet to be accomplished around the globe. Budlender and Proudlock (2011) remarked that even the grants provided for social welfare service delivery to the developing countries do not cover the full cost or scope of the social welfare services especially the remuneration of the service providers which seems to be the biggest hurdle to proper service delivery. There is significant evidence to show that social investments are critical to economic growth and vice versa (Midgley 2014; Patel, 2005). Without an expansion of funding and staff to implement developmental services, the system will continue to underperform.

Another global challenge to effective social development is socio-cultural factors. People's belief and values often deter certain social welfare services in a country (Obi et al, 2008). For instance, the population of most European countries is more racially and ethnically homogenous which forms the basis of the argument that they are more inclined to help out a neighbor who is down on their luck unlike some African countries that are highly heterogeneous just as what is obtainable in South African and Nigeria today. Another dimension of this is that people tend to see some social welfare services as unbecoming due to their ethnic and religious inclination. For instance, the Igbo custom frowns at taking the aged to old people's homes for adequate care and support; most people would rather adopt their indigenous welfare (which most often are no longer effective) for this population than following the innovative welfare service in this regard.

Another militating factor is corruption. This ranges from structural imbecility, poor administration and implementation, embezzlement of public funds to exploitation and marginalization in social welfare service delivery. Some of the administrative officials who are responsible for social policy processes and welfare implementation are corrupt and not humane to carry out these all-encompassing human problems (Ngwu, 2015). Some countries can only pay lip-services to the welfare of her citizens due to poor planning and proper implementation of social welfare services targeted at improving the well-being of the people despite the constitutional provision (Martin, 2010).

More so, lack of a stable workforce; insufficient collaboration, and recognition of the social development department are other militating factors. Contributing to these are high turnover, poor remuneration, acute shortage of personnel, and lack of cooperation on multiple levels especially between the government and NGOs. The acute shortage of staff such as social workers has resulted in a severe lack of capacity to respond to the demand for social welfare

services to people (Giese, 2010; Sanchez, 2010). In line with the lack of coordination amongst social development actors, is the fact that social welfare services are delivered as a concurrent function by different levels of government. As indicative in most countries, the redirection of welfare funds to other services and priorities and lack of clarity in their responsibilities resulted in inadequate allocations for developmental welfare services (Shenck, 2004).

Among other factors is lack of awareness of welfare services and access to them, insufficient mapping of community services, the skyrocketing population of citizens without proportional and commensurate resources to cater for their welfare as we have in Nigeria, and religious cum political conflicts and tensions. The volatile political situation in these communities interrupts the delivery of welfare services due to safety considerations and logistical issues (Patel, 2016). These factors add another layer of complexity to community development processes. Welfare and development agencies and practitioners are faced with numerous challenges in service delivery and how to best facilitate participatory development processes under these conditions.

INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL WELFARE AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: THE WAY FORWARD

Given the above formidable challenges, prospects for social development around the globe seem not to be bright. To ensure that social welfare is likely to grow and strengthen social development, several factors need to be in place to achieve this outcome. Adequate financial resources are crucial to building and strengthening developmental welfare incrementally (Bowen, 2007). The financing policies to support the directions identified in welfare services and development interventions need to be in place to fund NGOs and necessary incentives that promote social service delivery. Also, the government must opt for alternative ways of funding social welfare services such as grants from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. For instance, over the past decades, the World Bank has been involved in various projects focused on social development and inclusion, improved health, and access to education. The number of out-of-school children and teens dropped from 196 million to 124 million between 2000 and 2013, largely due to its efforts (Picincu, 2019). Hence, lack of financial policies will lead to the abrogation of state responsibility for the welfare needs of the population.

Another real protection for social welfare lies in the country's constitutional democracy and the social guarantees that it provides for all its citizens. Failure to give effect to social welfare rights could amount to a violation of these constitutional commitments. Development actors outside the state have used alternative legal remedies where state action was contrary to these rights such as the United Nations and international NGOs and welfare programs. The future of social welfare and social development is therefore integrally connected to these constitutional guarantees and should be defended by non-state actors such as social workers.

More so, the realization of these constitutional commitments requires capable welfare institutions staffed by personnel with the appropriate knowledge, skills and values to deliver on these commitments. As suggested previously, transformational and ethical leaders are critical in steering the implementation of complex collaborative development processes and strategies (Patel, 2016). Moreover, independent and professional public officials like social workers who are appointed on merit and whose performance is managed against key deliverables to safeguard welfare service delivery is greatly needed.

Furthermore, since the social welfare service delivery is said to be constrained by the poor quality partnership between the government and various NGOs, better collaboration will be a means of improving the efficiency and effectiveness in rendering welfare services (Patel, 2016). Related to this is the underfunding and loss of NGOs staff to the government that has resulted in a lack of capacity of NGOs who still deliver the bulk of welfare services. For this reason, there needs to be a more systematic engagement between the government and NGO service providers courtesy of the fact that they have complementary roles to play in the process of implementing social welfare programs and social development. Also, Ray et al (2011) caution that some governments do not have the systems or capacity to cater for the welfare of their citizens. They are therefore of the view that the government given to some level of incapacitation should support NGO sector sufficiently to render these services on their behalf.

Lastly, the shortages of social service professionals for the effective implementation of social welfare services across international and local frontiers had to be addressed urgently and efficiently through enhanced deployment and capacity building such as employing more social workers and other helping professionals. The Department of Social Development (2009) proclaimed that the shortage of needed staff for effective social welfare service delivery demands urgent and immediate measures. This is where social workers come in. There is a need to urge the government to sign the bill that will make social work a profession in Nigeria. That way, social workers will move into the social service milieu fully and fill the shortages being experienced. This will go a long way in seeing to the effective implementation of social welfare programmes and services in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, international social welfare and development face dire social, economic, political, and institutional challenges that have a direct bearing on its growth and development potential. Failures to find innovative solutions to meet these challenges do not augur well for the future of social development. Strategies should involve a variety of stakeholders, engaging them in comprehensively broad and versatile welfare programmes to reduce poverty, develop human capital and improve social well-being. These strategies should reflect a balanced approach to development, an approach that will harmonize social policies with socio-economic goals; addresses diverse community needs, and helps people meet those social, economic, educational, and health needs that are fundamental to the maintenance of the society. They should also consider the aspirations and values of people in the context of their lived experiences.

Summarily, welfare agencies, social work, and the social service professions could take this agenda forward through dialogue, debate, and advocacy for policies and strategies that will safeguard social development as an integral component of the country's growth and development strategy. There is still much to be done to entrench welfare services into social development policies across the national frontier.

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