

## THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORK IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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### ABSTRACT

Social work is a modern profession, but its task of providing help is as old as the human race itself. Social workers are professional, qualified people who struggle for the general well-being of people from every walk of life.

It is their task to analyze the deep-rooted causes of social problems, such as poverty, unemployment, illness, antisocial behavior and other social inadequacies, and to help those concerned to overcome them. Specialized knowledge and an understanding of people are therefore essential in the job.

Their services are aimed at the individual, group, family, organization, or community context and their environment, as well as at the interaction between people and their environment. These are the challenges facing the social workers on a day-to-day basis. Social workers try to help improve people's behavior or circumstances to enable them to once again play a meaningful role within their families, communities and society.

Some of the social workers' tasks are aimed at the prevention and elimination of social problems in the community. This involves close cooperation with specific members or groups within the community. In some cases, social workers work in close contact with other disciplines, such as doctors, psychologists and educationalists. Social workers identify social pressures and needs in a community, to employ existing resources or to establish those that might be missing.

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **Social work**

Defining social work needs describing the roles and functions of social workers. Although many attempts have been made to define social work, there have been some disagreements in trying to come up with a universal definition of social work. Thus, without a general agreement on what comprises social work, it is difficult to perfectly explain what the roles and functions of social work are or should be. (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk>).

According to Farley and Smith (2006:7), "social work is an art, a science, a profession that helps people to solve personal, group (especially family), and community problems and to attain satisfying personal, group, and community relationships through social work practice".

Probably the most comprehensive, authoritative and most widely used definitions of the concept is the one that states that social work is "a profession which promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilizing theories of human behavior and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work" (International Association of Schools of Social Work: 2001).

From the above definitions, it follows that social work consists of organized and systematic efforts to secure the highest personal and social satisfaction for individuals, groups and communities. Its auspices may be voluntary, governmental or combination of both. Social work in its various forms addresses the multiple, complex transactions between people and their environments, and aims at enabling all people to develop their full potential, enrich their lives, and prevent dysfunction (<http://www.sozialarbeit.at/>).

### **National development**

According to Walter Rodney (1972), at the level of the individual, development has the implications of increased skill and capacity, freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. At the level of society, he goes on, the concept connotes increasing capacity to regulate internal as well as external relations.

As for Todaro and Smith (2003), the term development may mean different things for different people and may be defined from different perspectives.

From the economic perspective, development means the capacity of a national economy, whose initial economic status has been more or less static for a long time, to generate and sustain an annual increase in its gross national product (GNP) at the rates of perhaps 5% to 7% or more.

Todaro continues to indicate that development has also been economically defined using rates of growth of income per capita or per capita GNP taking into account the ability of a nation to expand its output at the rate faster than its population.

Thus, any nation may be said to be achieving some level of development if its per capita output is growing faster than its population. Economic development has further been seen in terms of the planned change of the structure of production and employment.

Apart from the aforementioned economic views, there are some social indicators of development, including gains in literacy, schooling, health conditions and services, and provision of housing; development has, therefore, been redefined in terms of reduction or elimination of poverty, inequality and unemployment within the context of growing economy in order to improve the quality of people's lives. That is, for any country, if poverty, inequality and unemployment have all declined from high levels, then that implies some level of development for that country (Todaro, and Smith, 2003).

Additionally, Stutz and De Sousa (1998: 543) note that the United Nations has devised a Human Development Index (HDI) to measure national human development of both developing and developed countries; this HDI comprises demographic, social and economic factors such as life expectancy, literacy rate and per capita purchasing power, respectively.

In summary, development is both material and social. Material in terms of economic growth and increased productivity, and social in terms of qualitative changes in people's lives, attitudes, institutions and external relationships.

“It is an ongoing, dynamic process by which individuals identify themselves as a community and are collectively empowered to use the necessary knowledge, values and organizational skills to sustainably share and enhance that community's resources and to bring about positive change for the benefit of all its members; development is realization of rights, especially economic, cultural and social rights aimed at ending poverty, inequalities, suffering and injustice” (Oxfam Community Aid Abroad, 2001).

## **II. Objectives**

The approach in this paper will be to define social work and national development first and then try to establish the relationship between the two. The various categories of social work and their assumed influence on the various aspects of development will then be discussed. Thereafter, the discussion will be directed to the overall effects of the process of social work, in its totality, on national development.

## **III. Research methodology**

Three primary methods are used by social workers in their professional work, namely: casework, group work and community work. These three methods are usually complementary to each other.

Case work: Case workers develop one-to-one relationships with individuals, visiting them to give personal assistance and encouragement.

Group work: Group workers organize group activities for people sharing similar problems, interests and needs; for example the organization of recreational activities for the elderly.

Community work: These social workers identify needs in the community and help to plan and develop health, housing, rehabilitation and other welfare services.

## **IV. The contribution of social work to national development globally**

The evolution of social work and efforts to promote social development can be seen as closely linked to the ancient tendency of humans to help one another in all past human societies.

In traditional, including African, societies, the concern for social welfare was reflected in activities within the family, the clan and ethnic group.

In such “gemmeinschaft” (Tonnie, 1887), social work was more or less a task for everyone instead of individuals and specialized agencies.

As such, social work has always been geared towards improving the quality of life of each and everyone. Social work as it is known today has relatively recent origins. It emerged at a time

when feudalism was disintegrating and capitalism taking its place. The control of the family and the church was fast declining too.

According to Finketal (1968:27), these fundamental social changes occurring between 1834 and 1909 and conducted in Britain by specialized care agencies for certain helpless and disadvantaged groups, such as dependent children and people living with physical or mental disabilities.

Institutions such as district schools, foster homes, hospitals, infirmaries and special schools were provided for these groups.

In the United States within the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the country was undergoing transformation from an agricultural to an industrial economy.

Social problems associated this social change necessitated involvement from the state and non-governmental organizations, thus attracting the attention of those who required to alleviate the burdens of new conditions in a fast urbanizing and industrializing nation.

In response to the vices of poverty, dependence, disease and others there were efforts to provide improved medical care, prevent child labour, apply safeguards to dangerous working conditions and improve the lives of the aged and those with disabilities.

All these social welfare measures constitute a vital contribution to national development.

In countries like USA, social work has grown so much that it is now regarded as the most important profession in that country.

There are also suggestions that the profession should be strongly exported to other parts of the world as a matter of American foreign policy (Farley et al, 2006: 13)

At any rate, social work is increasingly becoming globalized, for it is being applied in a variety of settings and numerous agencies and people across the world are benefiting from its services.

Among the social work services provided are: “psychoanalysis, medical, marriage and family counseling; the school; rehabilitation; corrections; public welfare; workplace; and child welfare” (Farley et al, 2006: 13).

Social work does not only address needs and problems at the personal or family level but also at the neighborhood, national and international level.

## V. Conclusion

In this article, the terms of social work and national development has defined.

Within the context of these definitions an attempt was made to establish the relationship between the two concepts and found a strong and positive one.

The contributions social work makes to development are many and wide-ranging.

These contributions have been discussed through the presentation of the various approaches or strategies employed by social workers throughout the world and the role of social work in its totality in the history and present realities of development, in the developed and developing countries, the Global North and the Global South.

The most important contribution of social work perhaps is the consideration it gives to the human and social sides of development.

This is essential in order to avoid high material and economic standards without consequent matches in human and social standards.

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