

African Research Review

An International Multi-Disciplinary Journal, Ethiopia

Vol. 4 (4), Serial No. 17, October, 2010

ISSN 1994-9057 (Print)

ISSN 2070-0083 (Online)

Effective Social Work Practice in Lagos: An Emerging Megacity (Pp. 236-246)

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Abstract

Social work is the profession through which social services in the conglomerate of social welfare are provided by professionally trained persons. The practice of social work has three perspectives namely: residual, which is ad hoc or reactive, and largely practiced before advent of modern social work profession; institutional perspective is the modern approach that is currently put in place, that is, social services that are routinely provided for the people on a continuous basis. The third is the developmental perspective which places emphasis on economic benefit that social services could contribute to financial development. Emerging megacity such as Lagos brings with it a developmental perspective wherein social work practice relegates social work values and ethics to the background. Economic development is placed above human dignity and general welfare of the people. This paper looked at social work practice and Lagos as an emerging megacity with its attendant social welfare problems. It is recommended that social workers in a megacity should have adequate competence through relevant, efficient and effective training; and observing all ethics and principles of social work practice.

Key Words: Social Work, Practice, Megacity, Lagos.

Introduction

Social work and social welfare have been misunderstood, contradicted and misrepresented by administrators, society and even practitioners of social services. It has been generally believed that both social work and social welfare means the same.

Social welfare is the conglomerate of social services institutions and services. It is a nation's system of programmes, benefits and services that help people meet those social, economic, educational and health needs that are fundamental to the maintenance of society (Kirst-Ashman, 2003). Social welfare is a concept geared towards providing opportunities for work, reasonable security from want and assault and supposedly, respect for human dignity. Some of these institutions which are members of social welfare conglomerate are hospitals, schools including Approved Schools; housing; family care centre; child care centre; Rehabilitation centre; Ministries of social welfare; Education; health, etc.

Social work, on the other hand, is the profession through which social services in the conglomerate of social welfare are rendered by professionally trained persons. Whereas social welfare has to do with institutions providing social services, social work is the practice towards achieving the goal and objectives of these social services. However, understanding these concepts by practitioners would place them in good stead for practice.

Social Work – what it is

Historically, social work in Nigeria predates colonialism. Kinship system in the traditional Nigerian society provided for family welfare, child welfare, health, mental health, care for the aged, informal education, social planning and development. Extended family met social welfare needs and dealt with problematic behaviours that the community regarded as deviant.

However, a well-packaged, formal social work as a profession with well-articulated theories began with colonization in Nigeria (Anucha, 2008). Lagos had for long been in the fore-front of the development of social work in Nigeria significantly during World War II returnees and its attendant social welfare-related problems.

Social work is the professional activity of helping individuals, groups and communities enhance or restore their capacity for social functioning. Social workers help people deal with their relationships with others to:

- (a) solve their personal, family and community problems; and

- (b) grow and develop by learning to cope with or shape the social and environmental forces affecting daily life.

Therefore, social work is a profession for those with a spark of idealism, a belief in social justice, and a natural love of working with people. Social work offers the chance to work with and for people of all kinds: rich or poor, young or old, in hospitals, at home, or at work. Social workers render services to the children, families, elderly, persons with disabilities, persons with needs of health and mental health care, youth, delinquents and schools.

Social work practice is speedily moving away from residual perspective where an ad hoc or REACTIVE approach was prominent, an approach focusing on problems and gaps – social welfare services were supplied to persons with acute problems as obtained in community of old using community resources; to an institutional perspective where social welfare services are routinely put in place and supplied to meet people's needs as a normal part of life. Institutional perspective in social work believes that it is not people's fault that they require such social services but rather an expected part of the human condition and rights. This institutional perspective is being threatened by developmental perspective in social work, a new concept, which focuses on identification of social interventions that have a positive impact on economic development only (Kirst-Ashman, 2003).

This developmental perspective does not take into cognizance the core values of social work which have concern for the worth and dignity of every individual in which ever situation. But developmental perspective focuses only on the economic gain from every social work activity. All social workers must be prepared to tackle this new trend called developmental perspective in an emerging megacity as this will become an issue sooner than later.

The Megacities and Lagos as Emerging Megacity:

United Nations (2003) defined urban agglomerations as cities with populations of over 10 million. Urban agglomerations include all contiguous, territory inhabited. These population figures often include people living outside the official boundaries of a city or administrative district. In other words, a megacity is defined by the United Nations (2003) as having a population of 10 million and above. Some megacities of the world were listed as follows:

1. Tokyo, Japan	-	35 million
2. Mexico City, Mexico	-	18.7 million
3. New York, USA	-	18.3 million
4. Sao Paulo, Brazil	-	17.9 million
5. Mumbai, India	-	17.4 million
6. Delhi, India	-	14.1 million
7. Cairo, Egypt	-	10.8 million
8. Manila, Philippines	-	10.4 million
9. Paris, France	-	9.8 million
10. Seoul, South Korea	-	9.7 million

(Source: United Nations Population Division, 2003).

At the start of 20th century only about one person in ten lived in a city, but today the proportion of urban and rural dwellers is approximately equal. By 2025, nearly two-thirds of the world's population will live in urban areas. This is premised usually on the assumed opportunities in cities (United Nations, 2003).

There are varied definitions or conceptions of an urban area. For instance, United States regard urban areas as those with at least 2,500 people but the figure is 1000 in the United Kingdom. Nigeria may have her own definition. However, a megacity is unambiguous in this regard in conceptualization. Cities with more than a million inhabitants were rare before 1800. In 1900, there were at least 13 cities in the world with more than a million inhabitants, and by 1950 the number had peaked 68. By 2000, there were no less than 250 many of which were in Asia namely India and China (United Nations, 2003b).

Lagos has, with her present population, dwarfed all other so-called urban giants in Nigeria. There have been kinds of coalescence of once separate cities into a continuous built-up area called megapolis – Greek word for great city. Location of a city often depends on its original function i.e. defence, trade, resources, administration, or religion. However, trade is more peaceful force that makes a city endure and grow in a continuous manner.

Some industries and farm-lands that have become non-functional are giving way for expensive housing. This process is called gentrification. This is happening already in Lagos. In Cairo, for example, which is the largest city in Africa; extra stories are added to houses and blocks of flats to accommodate more and more people.

United Nations gave Lagos as having about 18 million people, the biggest conurbation in sub-saharan Africa. United Nations also projected Lagos to be the **THIRD LARGEST CITY** in the world by the year 2015 only next to Tokyo, Japan as the first; and Mumbai, India as the second. Lagos is projected to have 20 million by the year 2010 by United Nations.

The first obvious fact here is that Lagos is already a megacity. Lagos has fulfilled all requirements and definitions of a megacity. The second obvious fact is that Lagos, as a megacity, has increasingly been manifesting social welfare-related problems and challenges. We should note that Nigeria as a developing country is impeded by a vicious circle linking poverty, insecurity, and vulnerability in a context of growing inequalities according to United Nations (2003). Undoubtedly, the end products of these will be social welfare-related vices.

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country and tenth largest in the world by population. Nigeria is made up of more than 250 ethnic groups of Christian, Islamic and other faiths who have not always managed to co-exist peacefully (Collier, 2007). Lagos, as a megacity, has all the groups and faiths. How prepared are the social workers for conflicts and challenges of all kinds which usually destabilize families? (Ayangunna, 2008).

In Lagos, the only megacity in Nigeria, several able-bodied persons are expected to be preoccupied solely with survival and elementary needs. For them, work would be frequently unavailable or when it is, pay may be low and conditions often barely tolerable. Permanent insecurity is the condition of the poor, no public systems of social security in the event of unemployment, old age, sickness; or death of a wage-earner in the family may eventually close off the avenues of escape (Collier, 2007).

Social Work Practice in Lagos, a Megacity:

How do we feel the effectiveness of social work practice in a megacity with all the problems and challenges as mentioned above? Do we just continue to practise the same way as being done now? Who should be the social workers in a megacity like Lagos?

Responses to these questions should come from the social workers themselves. The social work profession, with its long tradition of empowering and working with marginalized people through multi-level interventions and collaborations, is expected to face stiffer challenges in the megacity hence the urgent need for social work practitioners to acquire adequate skills and knowledge. Even the Western world does not have better solutions to ever-emerging problems of megacities.

Therefore, social workers as professionals, must guide against failure as social work profession in the Western world, especially the megacities, has failed to come up with answers to so many vexing social problems i.e. drug addiction, killings in schools, divorce, single parenthood, gay and lesbianism, etc. Some of these social problems are even beginning to enjoy legal backing i.e. gay marriage in some States of the USA!

Social work profession is continually developing empirically with increased artful approaches by well-trained practitioners and researchers. Every practitioner must understand the following for effective impact on the people:

- (i) Social workers must first of all consider how people live, or rather die. This is a process towards achieving social diagnoses that will lead a way for treatment. Social workers should not assume to know all the problems and challenges of the people. Get into business, investigate and diagnose. This is basic to make social work impact be felt in megacity.
- (ii) Multi approach to problem-solving in megacity. Surely, some social problems will need to be hit with several policies at the same time, some of them counter-intuitive (Collier,2007). Therefore, professionally trained social workers must constantly be REVISING and REVERSING the trend of all social welfare-related problems and challenges. This is when the effectiveness of service will be felt and appreciated.
- (iii) Restore hope to the people: Social workers must be “apostles of hope” in practice. No meaningful restoration of clients to social functioning can be achieved without first giving the clients hope. Take hope away from the people and “smart” ones among them according to Collier (2007), will use their energies not to develop themselves positively but to escape and get into more criminal practice far beyond social workers i.e. Internet crimes, 419 (a

popular fraudulent behavior in Nigeria), kidnapping, armed robbery, etc. Social workers should always talk hope and work hope.

- (iv) Enrich your formal education with informal education so that your education does not become terminal. Non-formal education is broader and necessary for life-long learning. Social workers live and work with the people, so learning from the people is continuous.

It is, therefore, required that every social worker in megacity must have professional competence, dedication to work, compliance to ethics of profession and strictly observing the practice principles with high integrity. For the impact of social work to be felt, social workers must also adapt the following, but not restrictive, for practice: The '3Cs'-Competence, Confidence and Courage without which they may not perform well because:

- (i) Social workers must know that every individual, group or organization has crises within or without or both;
- (ii) Hazardous events are major problems or series of difficulties, which start crisis off i.e. unemployment, sudden loss of job, death of loved one or bread-winner, etc;
- (iii) Hazardous events may be anticipated such as unemployment leading to youth restiveness, adolescent vices, threatened marriage, divorce, death or the unanticipated such as environmental disasters caused by exploitation, accidents and explosion i.e. Ikeja bomb blast.
- (iv) Vulnerable states exist when hazardous events cause people to lose their equilibrium, which is their capacity to deal with things that happen to them. This also happens to groups and communities.
- (v) When equilibrium is disturbed, the people try out their usual ways of dealing with problems which may not work as expected.
- (vi) Tension and stress arise with each failure in their usual ways of dealing with problems.
- (vii) Precipitating factors may be presented to the social worker as the victims' main problem, but these are not the crisis, only a point in the sequence. The clue to this is often immense emotion associated with apparently minor events.
- (viii) A precipitating factor on top of unresolved problems adds to the tension and causes a disorganized state of active crisis.

- (ix) The more successfully past problems were dealt with, the more problem-solving strategies will be available, so, states of active crisis are less likely. Unsuccessful problem-solving in the past leads to people falling into active crisis after and finding it hard to escape.
- (x) People in crisis are more open to being helped than those who are not. Intervention in crisis is more successful than at other times. Social workers must recognize this stage and intervene promptly and appropriately. It is then that the impact of social work could be felt in Lagos, the megacity.
- (xi) In “reintegration” after active crisis, people become set in their newly learnt ways of solving problems, so, learning effective problem-solving during the crisis improves coping capacity in the future (Ayangunna, 2008).

Reintegration is always the focus of social work practice in all crises affecting individuals, groups and communities. Therefore, social workers in a megacity shall continue to work on the following challenges as products of megacity.

A. Health

- Diseases – nutritional deficiencies, respiratory such as pneumonia due to exposure to cold as a result of lack of shelter,
- Sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS which may be due to forceful sexual intercourse with the victims,
- Rape – may lead to emotional instability/depression or suicide,
- Disruption or truncation of physical, mental and cognitive development of the children and young adults.

B. Social

- Poor or lack of educational attainment
- Loss of jobs or abdication of employment
- Early and unwanted pregnancies, teenage parents i.e. baby-mothers/father

- Household poverty and food insecurity stress on the entire family.
- Children are orphaned due to loss of parents and unknown relatives.
- Refugee status: families are displaced (usually due to conflict or disaster).
- Child labour, Trafficking in children / young adults
- Inadequate or lack of accommodation may lead to social vices and diseases
- Social services are overstressed i.e. hospitals, security, water, etc. Some patients may be abandoned at hospitals.

Social workers in megacity are expected to be proactive in the performance of their profession. They must recognize the motives behind every social service being provided by the individual, group, community, non-governmental organization or even the government, and support those social services that are pragmatic.

	PRAGMATIC	ALTRUISTIC
Individual	1. Mutual insurance	2. Philanthropy
Social	3. Social protection and betterment	4. Social compensation

Motives for Social Service provision

The pragmatic motives provide social services that affect the entire society with the coverage without any discrimination. It improves the lives of all people i.e. employment opportunities for all qualified candidates, social security, hospitals, schools, etc. Altruistic motives are usually restricted to individual or group of individuals; and done to settle troubled conscience i.e. to give a little out for 'support' enjoyed. This is ad hoc and may not be long-lasting. Social workers in a megacity must embrace pragmatic approach to services for effectiveness.

Conclusion

For effective impact of social work in megacity, the six 'Ps' must be absorbed as practice guidelines:

1. P – Problem: What problems are the social workers called to solve? What is the magnitude of the problem? How many people are involved? etc. The social workers must understand the problem thoroughly.
2. P – Programme: This is the knowledge of the approach that is needed to solve or alleviate the problem. The cost of this process must be understood including identifying other stakeholders to be in the programme designed to solve any or some of those social problems.
3. P – Practice: Social worker utilizes his/her knowledge in solving the client's problem. This is the actual doing. Practice exposes **competence, confidence and courage** (3C's) of every worker.
4. P – Product: Social worker evaluates the service being rendered by him/her. Is it of high quality? How effective is it? What impact can the people tell they are feeling about the service?
5. P – Policy: What policy guides your practice? Are you in line with the agency function? Could new policy be initiated to capture the contemporary issues as ever emerging in a megacity?
6. P – Professionalism: Social workers should possess adequate competence in the profession; highly trained and certified, observing all the ethics and principles of social work practice. Social worker should be able to explain very clearly why he /she takes whatever step in practice.

Social workers' impact cannot be felt in practice, not only in megacity practice, but elsewhere unless they extend themselves to another human being in any way at all, when they positively touch the life of one person, they benefit the whole of humanity.

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