

THE IMPACT OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES ON THE DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING OF SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES IN NIGERIA

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This paper is in general a critique of the role of the social sciences in Social Welfare Development and Planning in Nigeria. It begins with a general review of the social scientific bases of social work models and practices during the pre-colonial, colonial and post-independence periods in Nigeria. The second and final part of the paper attempts to demonstrate that through the use of a medium such as the cooperative movement in Nigeria, social work can be planned and executed in a way that makes it truly an effective agent for transforming the present social situation.

The Pseudo-Scientific Bases of Pre-colonial Social Welfare Practices:

It is necessary to begin by defending my assertion that pseudo-science existed prior to the developed nations' conceptualization of it. If social science can be broadly described as an experimental, time-tested, consistent and systematic effort to determine and interpret patterns of individual and group behaviour, then one can assert that, crude as the efforts may have been in pre-colonial times, the vagaries of human environment and the need for survival dictated constant experimentation for purposes of providing solutions to prevailing problems. Social welfare practices in pre-colonial times were generally the result of an understanding, true or false, of the laws of nature as these were predicted, controlled and applied in the satisfaction of felt social needs.

Polly Hill (1970) and Inya Eteng (1979) attest to the fact that human behaviour in pre-colonial times was generally «rational». The concern was with immediate and relevant problems of survival. The approach was pragmatic, constantly emphasizing man's organic relation with his environment. Inexplicable natural and social phenomena were generally regarded as mysteries. Events and elements considered deleterious to human survival were tabooed. Community relationships were founded on Durkheimian mechanical solidarity characterized by a view that society could only be held together by the sharing of common norms and beliefs. And, since emphasis was placed on the survival of the group, deviations from social norms sanctioned by the group were heavily penalized.

Pre-colonial welfare was oriented more or less to collectivities. It also emphasized mutual interdependence and a high degree of reciprocity in virtually all aspects of human existence: labour exchange, social ceremonies, socialization and care of young members of a kingroup, parent-child relationship and aid in times of need or war. The clan, kingroup and family needs and interests were primary while individual needs and interests were

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subsidiary. The welfare services were preventive and comprehensive in that the welfare systems, that is, the family and kingroup, the community, and clan provided various types of socio-economic insurance and emotional support. These welfare systems also served political, educational, religious and other needs of the members.

The scientific explanation for the model of practices described above lies in the fact that the precariousness of human existence under conditions of rudimentary technology and science engendered cooperative and collective endeavours rather than competition and individual approach to life. This is graphically portrayed in the Igbo adage: *Igwe-bu-ike*, meaning «there is strength in number.» It is known organizational principle that when people pool their skills and resources, they are relatively surer that their requirements will be more readily met.

Nyerere described this mode of cooperative living thus:

«While the first principle of the ujamaa unit related to persons, the second related to property. It was that all the basic goods were held in common, and shared among all members of the unit. There was an acceptance that whatever one person had in the way of basic necessities, they all had; no one could go hungry while others hoarded food and no one could be denied shelter if others had space to spare. Within the extended family, and even within tribe, the economic level of one person could never get too far out of proportion to the individuals within the family, and some families within the clan or tribe, could «own» more than others. But in general they acquired this through extra efforts of their own, and the social system was such that in time of need it was available to all.» (Nyerere, 1969).

Social Scientific Bases of Social Work Practice During the Colonial Era.

Writers such as Gunder Frank, (1969) Nyerere, (1969) Gavin Williams, (1976) Eric Wolf (1968) and Martin Igbozurike (1976) have documented the widely recognized social dislocations resulting from the diffusion of western productive, distributive and socio-cultural systems. According to Martin Igbozurike:

The clash of cultures resulting from this encounter of British political institutions, Christianity, Western education, with African traditional political, educational, religious and legal institutions in one geo-political entity constitutes a series of structures which caused and are still causing problems for the Nigerian nation. (Igbozurike, 1976).

In Nigeria, the spread of the market system and western-type education were instrumental in dynamiting the pre-colonial social order. As a result, the carefully worked-out balance in production and fairly equitable distribution and consumption of resources during pre-colonial times were dislodged. Production for sale was now emphasized over and above production for use. Land and labour became saleable commodities rather than collectively controlled means of production and distribution. Land which was communally owned and was vested with various social privileges and

obligations became a marketable commodity. Series of social insurance provisions by the clan, kingroup and the extended family which cushioned social shocks were dislodged or abrogated. Equally, traditional systems of social protection were undermined. People were severed from usual social ties and from relations of interdependence and reciprocity. They became more concerned with maximization of profit unmindful of community obligations. As people were stripped of these social ties and obligations, they became increasingly more concerned with profit maximization than with eking out mere subsistence. Thus, alienation set in as one of the most formidable social ills in Nigeria. Western-type education which ignores the traditions of the people and extols an alien culture further heightened this process of alienation. Other social ills also emerged. Among them are poverty, unemployment, crime, polarization of society into the haves and the have-nots, and social disorganization. (Nzimiro 1978).

The social problems enumerated above have to be viewed in their proper international context in order to appreciate the models used by social work in tackling them. First, these problems, in my judgement, represent the result of the continued spread of western capitalist system in Nigeria. According to Gavin Williams (1976) these problems

«... have been determined by the requirements of Western capitalism which has restricted the development of peasant and petty commodity production and subordinated indigenous capitalism to its own ends. The colonial state was unable to contain the contradictions generated by colonial capitalism; its indigenous successor could not contain the contradictions generated by neo-colonial capitalism, and could only consolidate its authority after the imposition of military rule and the prosecution of a bloody civil war. The Military Government seeks to promote the development of capitalism and regulate its contradictions. As yet, it has proved unable to establish the conditions for accomplishing this. (Williams, 1976).

Secondly, according to Hoogvelt:

«... all modernisation theories have in common the belief that because of the cultural diffusion of Western economic/technological processes and because of the compatibility of societal structures, developing countries in the long run inescapably will come to take on the characteristics of the developed ones. (Hoogvelt, 1976).

Not only is it believed that developing countries will take on the characteristics of the developed ones but that developed countries must hasten this process of transformation.

If as demonstrated above these social problems will continue to exist and even become exacerbated, then the role of western social sciences has been that of developing theories of adjustment to the existing social order. In the main, these theories divert attention from causes to effects. As a result, they generally subscribe to the maintenance of the status quo. Kodjo in a paper entitled «Science, Technology and Society» asserted:

On the basis of available information, incomplete as it seems, one cannot but tentatively go along with the critical view that in an advanced capitalist technocratic environment the ultimate function of the state is to use power vested in it to create and sustain an overall social frame or order within which ideological mystification, domestication, unconditional submissiveness, obedience, discipline and the like are established and easily achieved as universally accepted modes of proper conduct. Needless to say that the pursuit of such normative values appears to be a necessary, even though not obligatorily sufficient, condition for the workability, viability and success of the capitalist system as a whole. (Kodjo, 1979).

The major theories which shaped social work practice during this period include structural functionalism, systems theory, pathology model of practice, liberalism and consensus theory.

Structural functionalism for many years subordinated cause-effect analysis which is the surest way of tackling problems at their roots. Rather, its subscribers laid unjustified claim to the compatibility of structural element leading constantly to social equilibrium and stability. Social conflicts and disharmonies in human groups were thus assumed away.

Systems theory in its application to social work emphasizes the interdependence of variables within systems and subsystems in society. Thus, in dealing with the family as a social system the concern is primarily with the interdependence and interaction processes among family members. In other words, the emphasis is on how the family operates in relation to other social groups and institutions. The differential distribution of power and other resources and the resultant effects of this asymmetrical distribution are left untouched. As a result of this approach, institutional harmony as well as conformity to norms are over-emphasized while socio-economic relations which are often the major bases of differentiation and conflict are de-emphasized.

The pathology model of social work practice is dominant in Nigeria. Individuals and families and groups are seen by social agencies (public and private alike) as pathological and needing case work or group work assistance. Community work is defined in terms of identifying the problems (pathologies) for purposes of tackling them within limits of available resources. The social order that precipitates these pathologies is generally not the target for action.

Liberalism in social work practice «sees deviants as products of a sick society or as helpless inadequates who cannot make the pace of modern living. Liberal socialist social work urges care, rehabilitation and reform». (Brailey and Brake 1975). Many of our social welfare agencies operate a liberalist model. Government and voluntary social welfare institutions are running this model (See third Dev. Plan on S. Welfare)

Finally, there is the consensus model of practice which is more pronounced in community welfare work. In this case, through self-help projects, a cross-section of the people collaborate in common venture, develop problem-solving skills and learn ethical values. The objective is not to tamper with nor to shift the power relations and the system of resource distribution in the community.

These models most of which have continued to inform the Nigerian social work practice till to date have had some ameliorative effects on societal problems, but their impact could be greater.

Social Science Bases of Social Work Practice During the Post-Independence Period

During this period, Third World Social Scientists became gradually aware that after a number of development plans they have failed to achieve the expected level of development or to reach Rostow's «take off» stage. (Frank 1969). Various social science fields began to reappraise their theories and practices. In Nigeria, in the social welfare field, there was an increased recognition of the limitations of our urban-oriented, remedial services. There is some awareness of the need to come to terms with the contradictions in our social life and policies. But thus far, because of a number of factors, the predominant ones being our economic link with, and our economic dependence on, the west and our ruling elites with strong personal interests, it has been difficult to make any meaningful transformation of our social and economic order. Concomitantly, national economic and social policies regarding the production and distribution of goods and essential services have, at best, been reformist and no more.

To be sure, a number of social legislations have been introduced by the present military administration. Some of these programmes have offered practical social services. They include: operation feed the nation programme, the National Youth Corps Services; the Legal Aid Scheme, and the Land Use Decree which, inspite of its many demerits, limited land speculation. But there are social welfare measures which have not achieved the desired objectives. The Price Control Decree is a demonstration of government concern over the lot of the masses. But it is ineffective primarily because of low productivity generally, and ineffective and inefficient management of the programme particularly.

The Indigenization Decree has turned out to be a take-over by government of foreign-owned businesses in the name of all Nigerians but for the benefit of those few Nigerians who have savings or access to credit from banks.

The National Supply Company makes bulk purchases of scarce commodities from overseas countries. It also ensures that these imported goods are equitably distributed through cooperatives. However, in practice the impact of the company has not been felt by the Nigerian masses. Quite often, goods not very much in demand are imported, while at other times the Company serves the interest of the ruling class.

The Labour Decree has a number of restrictive clauses and the Workman's Compensation Act is in dire need of immediate review.

Inspite of many constraints to more effective social work practice in Nigeria, there are potentials for the kind of practice which Paulo Friere (Brailey and Brake 1975) describes as «a restructuring at the roots of the dominant social order.» The contention of this paper is that social work ought to espouse the conflict theory in practice. Conflict orientation in community welfare work posits that in a given community what is called common interests are usually the interests of the dominant power group

which it imposes on the rest of the community. Thus, conformity means conformity to their interests and values which are often opposed to and disagreeable with those of the producing masses. A conflict-oriented community worker brings dissensions and discontent to the fore front, and assists the community to produce its indigenous leaders who will develop ways and means of resolving these conflicts. The conflict-oriented worker tries to help community residents create new centres of power. He mobilizes and aids the masses in confronting the middlemen, the military or political leaders that exploit and oppress them. This process of creating a new centre of power can be achieved through attempts to redress the imbalance in power by developing public cooperative organizations which are different from the existing independent and weak ones which presently cannot stand the stiff competition provided by public and private organizations. Public cooperatives must have government support. They must be organized by the workers, peasants and other progressive elements. The public cooperative marketing organization for example, should buy peasant products and purchase export cash crops and food staples. Marketing organizations when fully strengthened should compete with and eliminate mercantile monopolists by offering higher prices for the purchase of the same products and by buying sufficient quantity to prevent the creation of artificial scarcity. The provision of adequate storage facilities, transportation and credit facilities will all help to increase the bargaining power of the masses. The masses must participate in these organizations. They should also directly benefit from their services. They must at all times prevent the elites from participating and benefiting from these organizations. The large merchants and the wealthy and powerful must be prevented from joining these peasant public cooperatives, or else they will become another mechanism for increasing the power of the elites and for eroding the power of the masses.

The public marketing and consumer cooperatives that sell strictly to members at prices lower than those of private merchants can improve the position and life style of the masses and shift the balance of power in their favour. Once the masses have the power, they can participate in transforming their reality and in being free from and in destroying oppressive system. The ultimate end is a society with a mode of production in which the essential means of production are collectively owned and controlled by the productive class of workers and peasants who also control the political and other instruments of production and distribution and exchange. The role of social work in this process is that of «crystallization of issues and organization of people to take action against enemy targets.» (Cox et al 1971). This process is coterminous with Alfero's «conscientization». But, Alfero emphasized that as professional social workers, we cannot conscientize others unless we have begun the process of conscientization of ourselves. I would add that our social scientists and policy-makers would have to accept, enunciate and consciously pursue this policy of not reforming but transforming the existing social order in order to make possible this model of social work practice.

In conclusion, this paper has examined the social work practices in Nigeria and the social science bases for the various models of practice. The author has suggested an alternative model of practice that has the potentials of transforming the Nigerian society. Constant evaluation through the work of research institutes is essential if practice is to be adequately refined to serve our national development efforts effectively.

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RESUME

L'article traite du rôle des sciences sociales dans le développement et la planification des services de sécurité sociale au Nigéria. Il passe en revue les fondements sociaux et scientifiques des pratiques et modèles des travaux sociaux pendant les périodes pré-coloniales, coloniales et post-coloniales. L'auteur montre en conclusion qu'à travers des organisations de coopération publique le travail social au Nigéria peut devenir un agent important pour la transformation de la situation sociale actuelle.

Les pratiques de sécurité sociale dans le Nigéria pré-colonial étaient généralement le résultat d'une compréhension des lois de la nature comme devant pouvoir aux besoins sociaux ressentis. Les liens entre les membres de la communauté étaient solides parce qu'ils partageaient les mêmes normes et les mêmes croyances. Les systèmes de sécurité sociale dans le Nigéria pré-colonial comme la famille, les relations de parenté, la communauté et le clan ont produit de différents types d'assurance socio-économique et de soutien sentimental. Il y avait dans les problèmes de la vie une interdépendance mutuelle et une réciprocité. On pouvait toujours compter sur la force de l'action collective. Mais tout cela fut anéanti par «l'économie de marché» et le concept occidental de l'éducation qui engendrèrent la compétition et la polarisation des sociétés. Les peuples ne cherchaient plus qu'à maximiser le profit et ainsi l'aliénation s'installa comme l'un des maux sociaux les plus redoutables au Nigéria. La pauvreté, le chômage et le crime s'en suivirent. Ces problèmes sociaux sont le résultat d'un développement continu du système capitaliste occidental au Nigéria. Un aspect inhérent au système capitaliste est l'effort sans cesse croissant des pays développés pour hâter le processus d'imprégnation des pays en voie de développement de caractéristiques appartenant aux pays développés. Cela implique donc que non seulement ces pays auront toujours des problèmes sociaux mais que ces problèmes deviendront de plus en plus aigus. Compte tenu de cette situation le rôle joué par les sciences sociales de type occidental a toujours été de produire des théories d'adaptation à l'ordre social existant.

Les grandes théories qui ont dominé la pratique du travail social pendant cette période ont été, entre autres choses, le fonctionnalisme structurel, la théorie des systèmes, le modèle pathologique de pratique, le libéralisme et la théorie du consensus. Dans le Nigéria de l'après-indépendance, il s'est développé une prise de conscience quant au besoin d'en finir avec les contradictions de la vie et des politiques sociales. Cependant une transformation significative de cet ordre social et économique est rendue très difficile par la dépendance économique sur l'Ouest ainsi que le souci extrêmement grand des élites dirigeantes pour leurs intérêts personnels.

Bien qu'il y ait des obstacles pour une pratique efficace du travail social au Nigéria, il existe cependant des moyens pour une restructuration profonde.

La création d'organismes de coopération publique qui soient complètement différents de ceux qui existent actuellement rectifierait le déséquilibre dans la force de production dans tous les secteurs du pays. Le but final serait donc la mise en place d'une société dotée d'un mode de production dans lequel les principaux moyens de production appartiendraient à toute la société et seraient contrôlés par la masse des producteurs.