

**Social Development
and
Urban Poverty**

**Proceedings of a Workshop
Held at the Kentucky Hotel,
Harare, Zimbabwe**

22 – 26 February, 1993

**School of Social Work,
Zimbabwe**

Social Development and Urban Poverty

**Paper presentations and edited proceedings of a
Workshop held in Harare, Zimbabwe
22nd – 26th February, 1993**

edited by Nigel Hall

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Aims and Focus of Workshop

Workshop on Social Development and Urban Poverty

Dates: February 22 – 26, 1993

Venue: Kentucky Airport Hotel, Harare, Zimbabwe

Contact: Editor, Journal of Social Development in Africa, School of Social Work, P Bag 66022, Kopje, Zimbabwe, Tel: 750815.

Sponsors: Overseas Development Administration (British Development Division Central Africa)

Organisers: Journal of Social Development in Africa, School of Social Work

Participants: To be drawn from Southern African countries: Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Also participants from University College, Swansea.

Aims of the Workshop:

- a) To discuss issues of social development with specific reference to urban poverty.
- b) To facilitate an exchange of experiences on problems of poverty in southern Africa.
- c) To examine the social consequences of structural adjustment programmes, especially as they relate to urban poverty.
- d) To discuss the implications of urban poverty for social work education and practice, in particular, fieldwork.

Focus of the Workshop:

- The Workshop will focus on the problem of urban poverty, looking at issues such as definition of problems, intervention strategies, social policy, the way forward, analysis of students' experiences while on fieldwork, etc.
- Country structural adjustment and economic reform programmes will be reviewed.
- The Workshop will also address the issue of popular participation and accountability, with the objective of making central and local governments more accountable than they are.
- Specific services such as housing, health, community services, personal social services, social security, research, etc, will be evaluated in their relation to urban poverty.
- Fieldwork, with its implications for social work education and practice, will be examined.

Papers will be two-pronged:

- a) Focus on country with discussion of urban poverty, extent of problem, intervention strategies, etc.
- b) Focus on fieldwork regarding its role in training social workers and urban development; and social development training with special reference to fieldwork.

Keynote Address:**“The Social Worker of Tomorrow and Fieldwork Today: Poverty and Urban Social Work in Africa in the 1990s”**

Nigel Hall *

“Few people in the North have any detailed conception of the extent of poverty in the Third World or of the forms that it takes. Many hundreds of millions of people in the poorer countries are preoccupied solely with survival and elementary needs. For them work is frequently not available, or, when it is, pay is very low and conditions often barely tolerable. Homes are constructed of impermanent materials and have neither piped water nor sanitation. Electricity is a luxury... The combination of malnutrition, illiteracy, disease, high birth rates, under-employment and low income closes off avenues of escape; and while other groups are increasingly vocal, the poor and illiterate are usually and conveniently silent... No concept of development can be accepted which continues to condemn hundreds of millions of people to starvation and despair” (Brandt Commission Report, 1980:49).

“More than many professionals, social work educators and practitioners are conscious that their concerns are closely linked to respect for human rights. They accept the premise that human rights and fundamental freedoms are indivisible, and that the full realisation of civil and political rights is impossible without enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights (United Nations, 1992:9).

Poverty and the Economic Environment of the 1990s

There are many different theories concerning the causes of poverty. As Hardiman and Midgley (1982:51) point out, explanations that poverty is the result of “laziness, insobriety and irresponsibility”, which were widely accepted in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are by no means obsolete today. On the other hand there are also various sociological explanations that suggest that social and political factors are primarily responsible. We can identify three major theories that tend to describe the causation of poverty, its relationship to development, and correspondingly suggest certain remedies. There is the “modernisation” school, the international structuralism, or “dependency theory” school, and the “developmental” school of thought.

The modernisation school (eg Rostow, 1963) suggested that development was a linear progression from the “traditional” to the “mass consumption” society. This school tended to see traditional social institutions and cultural values as an impediment to economic development and suggested a vigorous form of capitalism, unrestricted by government intervention which would result in prosperity. In practice it was found that the “trickle-down” assumptions of this theory, where economic growth through industrialisation inevitably yielded higher incomes for the majority, did not work. This school of thought was widely discredited in academic circles, but retains a great deal of influence, particularly through the policies of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

The second school of thought, the dependency school, took a neo-Marxist position. This school stressed the state of functional dependency of the Third World. According to this school, mass poverty is the direct consequence of colonial and neo-colonial exploitation and deliberate impoverishment of the “periphery” to provide resources for the metropolitan countries of the “centre” (eg Prebisch, 1963; Dos Santos, 1973). The problem of poverty would only be solved when the capitalist mode of production in the world economy as a whole is brought to an end.

* Editor, JSDA.

The third school of thought, the developmentalist school, rejected the idea that economic growth would lead to a significant reduction in poverty in the Third World, and instead called for concerted state intervention and specific ameliorative policies to protect the poor. Economists such as Seers (1972) and Lipton (1977) recognised the importance of growth through industrialisation, but questioned the “trickle down” assumptions of modernisation theory. Instead they suggested that social planners should develop policies specifically targeted to assist vulnerable groups and which encouraged investment and growth in selected sectors, such as education and housing.

The dependency school, in my opinion, offers the most convincing explanation regarding the causation and persistence of poverty – although we should add to this factors of corruption, political conflict and, in some instances, the calculated diversion of funds. However, modernisation and rapid growth policies appear to be dominant today – under the guise of structural adjustment – a situation which does not necessarily help the poor and may impoverish them further as elite groups monopolise resources. Developmentalist policies should be encouraged as a way of mitigating some of the worst excesses of monetarist capitalism, which currently occupies centre stage.

Poverty is a pervasive phenomenon in the world today. Estimates put this figure at 700 million in the early 1970s, growing to 800 million by 1982. The latest figures suggest about one billion persons are living in poverty, or about one fifth of the total world population (World Bank, 1992). The poverty line is estimated by the World Bank to be approximately US\$420 annual income per capita in 1990. However, substantial progress has been achieved over the past 25 years. Average consumption per capita in developing countries has increased by 70% in real terms; average life expectancy has risen from 51 to 63 years; and primary school enrolment rates have reached 89%. The World Bank’s World Development Report (1992) notes that if these gains were evenly spread, much of the world’s poverty would be eliminated. Instead more than one-fifth of humanity still lives in acute poverty.

Asia, with its rapid income growth, continues to be the most successful at alleviating poverty, with the exception of China, although its incidence of poverty remains, for its income, very low. In most other East Asian countries poverty continued to decline. South Asia, including India, has maintained a steady but undramatic decline in poverty. The experience in other developing regions has been markedly different from that in Asia. All poverty measures worsened in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean.

According to the World Bank, the prospects for poverty alleviation to the end of the century, assuming that the distribution of income within countries remains constant, is that the number of poor in Asia would continue to decline, the adverse poverty trends in Latin America and eastern Europe would be reversed, with economic recovery in those regions. Sub-Saharan Africa is the only region in which the situation is expected to deteriorate: with increases in the proportion of the population in poverty, the number of poor would rise by about nine million a year, on average. By the end of this decade about one-half of the world’s poor will live in Asia and one-quarter will live in sub-Saharan Africa.

As Cornia (1990) points out, the 1980s were a disastrous decade for the majority of countries in the developing world. Although average incomes did rise substantially in Asia (including China and India), they fell by approximately 10% in Latin America (and by much more among the poorest), and by 25% in Africa, where incomes were already the lowest in the world. This decline has continued without significant change into the 1990s. Human development is of extreme urgency in Africa. Of the 45 countries that score lowest on the UNDP global human development index (HDI), a rating that combines measures of life expectancy, educational attainment and real GDP per capita, some 34 are in Africa, while of the 25 countries performing most poorly, 21 are African (UNDP, 1992).

Many countries in Africa as elsewhere in the developing world have begun to adopt economic reforms, popularly known as “structural adjustment”. The harsh economic climate of the 1980s, the

collapse of the former socialist eastern bloc, and the dictates of bilateral and multilateral aid agencies have required such reforms. However as developing countries do not have the resources to support these initiatives, the majority of African governments have been forced to rely on the aid agencies for assistance. This assistance is usually only provided if the countries concerned have accepted structural adjustment packages, which inevitably requires reduced government expenditure on government-funded social services. Yet these reforms are within an environment of a depressed world economy, declining terms of trade, protectionism of the rich world's markets, excessive spending on military and "prestige" projects and the like. In addition, the crippling nature of the debt burden compounds these problems. As President Babangida of Nigeria pointed out at the 1991 OAU summit (1), the total inhumanity of what is now happening is reflected in the single fact that even the small proportion of the interest which Africa does manage to pay is absorbing a quarter of all its export earnings. It is also costing the continent, each year, more than its total spending on the health and education of its people. Consequently the economic reform measures are unlikely to succeed when the hostile environment of the 1980s continues into the 1990s.

Urban Poverty

Although the primary emphasis of social work and social development has been to assist the populations in the rural areas with the aim of reducing the urban bias in the allocation of resources, there is also an urgent need to consider the growing urban populations. Although the majority of the developing world's population live in the rural areas, this situation is rapidly and dramatically changing.

A recent Time magazine report (1993:27) indicated that faster than ever before, the human world is becoming an urban world. Near the end of the 1990s the human race will pass a demographic milestone: for the first time in history, more people will live in and around cities than in rural areas. By 2030 urban populations will be twice the size of rural populations. Developing country cities as a group will grow by 160% over this period, while rural populations will grow only by 10%. The UN and the World Bank define "urban" as settlements of at least 20,000 inhabitants, while "city" is used to describe an urban agglomeration of more than 100,000 people. Different countries use widely differing criteria for defining "urban" – for example Colombia records an urban population of 70%, but has a definition of 1,500 person settlements. Nigeria uses the figure 20,000 and records only a 25% urban population. Despite these differences in definition, it is clear that there has been a phenomenal growth in urbanisation in Third World countries. There is likely to be an accelerated growth in Third World cities over the next twenty years as they have not yet reached their likely maximum rates of urban growth. It is also clear that the large cities are expanding very rapidly.

Two major components of urban growth – high urban population fertility rates and rural-urban migration have been cited by MacPherson (1982:119). By 2000 there will be 21 cities in the world with more than 10 million inhabitants, and 17 of them will be in developing countries (World Bank, 1992:27). Mexico City already has 20 million people and Calcutta 12 million. Some of Africa's cities are growing by 10% a year, the swiftest rate of urbanisation ever recorded. For example, according to the Population Division of the U.N. Secretariat, Cairo and Lagos are the two African cities that come in the top 20 in terms of population, with 9 million and 8,7 million respectively.

Although urban areas have been seen to offer the possibility of better health services, clean water, more reliable food supplies, the opportunity for employment and housing – and this has led to vast numbers of people flocking into urban areas, the reality today is very different. Firstly there are major health risks associated with urbanisation, and the condition of the poorest groups is likely to be much worse than those in rural areas. The appalling squalor of many of the developing world's cities is testimony to this. Another example is the widespread use of powdered milk for infants in urban areas which is a major health risk (Chetley, 1980).

There are serious environmental pollutants in urban areas which are becoming an increasing cause for concern. For example, the World Health Organisation estimates that air pollution in a sample of fifty cities indicates that in the mid-1980s about 1,3 billion people – mostly in developing countries – lived in towns and cities (of more than 250,000 population) which did not meet WHO standards. (World Bank, 1992:51). Rapid urban growth brings in its wake severe environmental problems. Without adequate environmental protection, development is undermined; without development poverty increases. Between 1990 and 2030, as the world's population grows by 3,7 billion (from the present 5,320 million to 8,869 million), food production will need to double, and industrial output and energy use will probably triple worldwide and increase fivefold in developing countries (World Development Report, 1992). Yet this is in a context where the poorest sectors are becoming poorer, and where – in the era of structural adjustment – even the middle classes are reduced to poverty.

Other Meanings of Poverty

So far we have only considered the economic implications of poverty, yet the term has a much wider meaning. There is the distinction between absolute poverty, which relates to an extreme form of human deprivation, where even the basic necessities of life – food, clothing and shelter – are not available, and that of relative poverty. The latter concept refers to the fact that persons or groups within society are unable to meet the *standard of living* accepted as normal by others in that society. Even though basic needs may be met, these persons will feel deprived simply by the fact that they cannot afford, or enjoy, what others may take for granted. Primary and secondary poverty are similar concepts to these: primary relates to absolute poverty, while secondary refers to the situation that occurs when income is either wasted or spent on inessential items, which may leave the person or family destitute.

A further distinction of the term “poverty” relates to the fact that individuals, groups or community lack political or influential power within society. Muzaale (1986:44) discusses this in an article on rural poverty, which conceptualises poverty as:

“...the lack of power to make decisions on matters that intimately affect one's welfare, like the fixing of the prices of one's produce and the establishment of the laws governing the processes of acquiring and disposing of productive assets. This is seldom used in designing measures against rural poverty in Africa”.

This sense of poverty is especially important for social workers to take into account, with the emphasis in social work as social development, and with empowerment and participation important and relevant values to which social workers subscribe. In addition, while social workers are obviously very concerned by the consequences of poverty, it is also necessary for them to consider the strengths and the positive factors which even those in the direst state of physical and economic poverty manifest. Extended family supports, mutual assistance and help, richness of culture and spiritual values are some of the strengths which are often manifested, even, or perhaps, especially, in situations of dire poverty.

The Social Worker of Tomorrow

Widespread poverty in Africa and the growing urban phenomenon creates unprecedented opportunities and challenges for social workers in Africa. Social work as a profession is legitimately concerned about poverty. As a profession, social work practice has always focused on meeting human needs and on developing human potential and resources. As noted in the International

Federation of Social Workers' International Code of Ethics (1976):

"Professional social workers are dedicated to service for the welfare and self-fulfillment of human beings; to the development and disciplined use of scientific knowledge regarding human and societal behaviour; to the development of resources to meet individual, group, national and international needs and aspirations; and to the achievement of social justice".

Social workers are concerned about poverty, because poverty infringes one of the most basic of human rights, as enshrined in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948):

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the wealth and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control".

Social work in Africa is in the process of changing from a basically remedial and reactive profession dealing only with a select clientele, to one where it will take on responsibility for working with the needs of the majority, which are essentially issues of human rights. The translation of social work into social development is testimony of this. As Paiva (1982:6) notes: *"In social development the worker's primary role is to seek qualitative growth and to that extent the remedial task is secondary"*. Hollister (1982:33) amplifies this statement as follows:

"Social development emphasises both the need for more comprehensive and coordinated policy and planning on a regional and national basis, and the need to help indigenous groups to organise in order to influence political and bureaucratic structures to more completely address their particular needs. Social development thus stress the need for reciprocal influence between the community and social policy at all stages in the development of social programmes".

In Africa the main concerns for social work have moved – rightly so – to a consideration of the developmental needs of the majority and this has meant inevitably, a concern with rural social development. However as already noted, the urban situation also increasingly requires the urgent attention of social workers. Examples are in abundance of urban need – the growing crowds of street children, the urban squatter settlements, the vast numbers of unemployed and newly-retrenched in search of non-existent jobs, the increasing size of the informal sector and those forced to beg on street corners for a living. Social workers are already providing a remedial role with these groups, but need to strategise methods of assisting the most vulnerable in ways that avoid "blaming the victim" and that enhance their potential. Social workers should also contribute in the formulation of social policy, through an active and concerned public presentation of some of these issues.

The search for a relevant social work in the context of developing countries is also the search for the social worker of tomorrow. Social work as a human profession is – or should be – by its very nature adaptable and responsive to changing circumstances, as new needs require new helping responses. The profession's history followed on from the social consequences of industrialisation and urbanisation in Western Europe and the United States of America – initially as a charitable effort to lend "poor relief" to the vast number of urban poor in the fast developing cities. As traditional systems of coping collapsed in the face of the onslaught of capitalism and entrepreneurism, new responses had to be found to deal with the extreme poverty of the new towns and cities. Efforts at

amelioration were basically focused on the needs of the individual and family and then increasingly, as the profession widened its scope and interests, group and community work approaches.

In the developing world, following years of colonial expansion and metropolitan development, social work was introduced in a similar way to deal initially with problems of urban poverty, again based on charitable and humanitarian values. It is of course also possible to see this "compassion" for the poor as a method of maintaining social control and a deliberate attempt to preserve the *status quo* for those who benefited most from it.

As the even vaster needs of the rural poor in the developing world became apparent, and as culture, religion, history, economic and political developments varied widely, so new problems were faced in creating a social work that was relevant and responsive to the needs of the majority of the population. The search was on for more appropriate and "indigenous" models of social work, suitable for use in a developing world context.

These concerns were reflected in part through contributions to the literature on international social work education (eg Bogo and Herington, 1988; Healy, 1992) and by the seminal work of Midgley (1981) on "professional imperialism". Two authors I would like to quote more extensively in this regard are Walton and El Nasr (1988) who have followed this process in their search for "domestic" alternatives in social work. They suggest, using Egypt as an example, that developing countries have passed through three main stages in the development of social work and social welfare approaches.

Firstly, there is the *Transmission Stage* in which developing countries transferred or imitated the Western model of social work in education and practice. The belief after the Second World War was that social work was an international and universal social technology that could be applied equally to all societies – this was the stage of professional imperialism. The second phase is the *Indigenisation Stage* which meant that although many felt that the profession's basic approach and philosophy were useful, some concepts required modification to suit the culture, values and practicalities of each society. A further stage identified by these authors is the *Authentisation Stage* where fundamental changes in social work education and curricula are encouraged, geared to the actual situation of the country concerned.

Ragab (1990:41), an advocate of authentisation, complains about the "perennial poverty and paucity" of local teaching materials available for use, which leads to increasing dependence and frustration. He proposes that a conscious effort should be made towards a clear identification of the political, economic and social-structural situation in each country, and then from this information, appropriate practice models be developed which can address the specific local problems and needs of the population. Ragab suggests that the profession develop greater relevance through appropriate research, education and practice, where:

1. *Local social work education is genuinely reoriented towards respecting, carefully codifying and then appropriately utilising any bits of locally-generated practice experience.*
2. *Locally-trained practitioners would confidently record their practice experiences, compare their insights, generate (as far as possible) general principles for practice, and perhaps even test these principles in the field.*
3. *Local practice theory is then accumulated which meaningfully addresses local societal problems on the basis of local realities and in light of insights gained through local experiences. Other countries' experiences may also be utilised on a selective basis without assuming that they have universal validity.*

4. *This locally relevant practice theory may than be fed back into local social work education – thus increasing its degree of relevance to local realities” (Ragab, 1990:45).*

It is necessary for social work to undergo a process similar to the one described above if the profession is to gain credibility and meaning in the African context.

Fieldwork Today

Fieldwork training for social work students provides the practical context in which students will learn to develop professional attitudes, values and skills. Students in many African countries are sent to traditional, urban-based “remedial” agencies, which may provide the bulk of placements on offer. These are the placements with the Departments of Social Welfare, Children’s Homes and Parastatal Corporations, among others. Although the proactive, developmental goals of social work may be better served by agencies involved in social development activities, particularly in the rural areas – often they have not been used for very good reasons. Firstly the rural placements require excessive expenditure in terms of supervisor visits to agencies often hundreds of kilometres away from the School or University. Secondly these placement settings may not be as well-established and skilled in the modalities of student fieldwork training as the urban. Thirdly accommodation and other logistics may present problems which militate against the rural placement. As a result, although the rural setting may be seen as more relevant and suitable in the context of social development, for reasons already discussed, the urban setting is becoming once again more valid as an operational ground for student training. The needs are vast and the opportunities for more innovative and relevant approaches virtually limitless.

In selecting agencies suitable for training, the School will need to take into account the learning experiences likely to be acquired on the placement, the professional quality of supervision available and the suitability of the agency generally.

In recognition of the importance of social development as a framework for social work, Schools should also be concerned to place students in agencies that genuinely are working at the forefront in dealing with issues of poverty, deprivation, powerlessness and social injustice. Students needs to be exposed to issues which both provoke and stimulate them in a critical way. There is no reason why the urban-based placement should be the remedial or traditional casework agency – there are many interesting and innovative developmental placements available, although this may require some investigation on the part of the Director of Fieldwork.

Once arrangements for the placement are made, good planning and preparation are essential. The student’s role in the agency needs to be fully discussed and the learning objectives and specific tasks for the student identified.

The student should have regular access to his or her supervisor during placement and a full discussion of the student’s progress should take place at an appropriate time with the School’s supervisor. The role of both supervisors is to assist students to develop effective responses by helping them think through the implications of their work and encourage them to be receptive to new ideas. Professional growth should demonstrably take place during fieldwork and the student should develop greater confidence in his or her own skills and abilities.

In conclusion, social work training should orient students to deal with the many urgent situations and concerns of vulnerable groups in both rural and urban settings. The paucity of relevant social work theory places even greater importance on the need to learn from experience. The field practicum provides the opportunity to build a relevant profession and indigenise our practice to suit Africa’s realities.

• *Footnote (1)*

Address by General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, President, Federal Republic of Nigeria at the 27th Ordinary Assembly of OAU heads of State and Government, Abuja, Nigeria, 3 June 1991, in UNICEF (1992:51).

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