MONITORING AND EVALUATION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: A CASE FOR SOCIAL WORK IN SOUTH AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION

It is now ten years since the transition from autocracy to democracy unfolded and seven years since the developmental welfare paradigm was formally adopted as South Africa's welfare policy. During this period momentous changes have transpired in the sector. Critical among these are: the repealing of archaic racist and exclusive legislation or polices; shifting of programmatic foci to more inclusiveness and issue-based targets, e.g. poverty reduction; the transformation of the former Council of Social Work; refocusing of social work education and training to reflect the changed social order; and changing the financing regimes of the sector. Despite these positive endeavours, it is still difficult to ascertain systematically the efficacy of programmatic interventions, especially the way in which they have impacted positively upon the lives of vulnerable groups. The present discussion proposes that monitoring and evaluation (M&E) need further implementation and articulation in social development so as to address the aforementioned shortfall in this arena.

SOUTH AFRICA'S RESPONSE TO HUMAN NEEDS

South Africa responded favourably to meeting the needs of marginalised groups and communities, as well as addressing inherited socio-economic challenges of the past apartheid order by adopting the developmental social welfare paradigm in 1997. In line with the vision of the Copenhagen 1995 Summit on Social Development, the country begun transforming its welfare sector almost immediately after political emancipation in 1994 and became one of the leading proponents in this arena in the developing world. After promulgating the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) that sought to focus on social rights and equity in order to address past disparities in the allocation and distribution of resources, and create partnerships between the public sector and civil society to promote individual, family and community empowerment (Patel, 2003), the government went on to back up this policy with budgetary allocations. Through the White Paper the government was also able to set up benchmarks for restructuring the welfare system and also embark upon initiatives aimed at improving the delivery of social security and welfare services as well as piloting developmental approaches. Some of these initiatives included the transformation of the child and youth services, the flagship programme for women (focusing on empowerment) and the victim empowerment programme. A crucial dimension arising from the new welfare policy was poverty alleviation. To this end, the Ministry of Social Development has been receiving a sizeable portion of the national budgetary allocation for poverty relief, resulting in a significant upward adjustment to the size of the budget (Noyoo, 2003:374-375). The financing regime was also made more enabling by allowing the progressive not-for-profit organisations into the welfare system. Two pieces of legislation, the *Welfare Laws Amendment Act No. 106 of 1996* – which authorised financial awards to non-profit organisations rendering developmental social welfare services - and the *Non-profit Organisation Act No. 71 of 1997* – which created an administrative and regulatory framework within which relations between the state and civil society could be funded and managed (Patel, 2003), were critical in allowing organisations access vital financial resources that had hitherto been the preserve of elite types of organisations.

The adoption and implementation of the developmental welfare perspective also led to the crafting of new ways for meeting the needs of vulnerable South Africans. Key area of this new welfare perspective as stipulated in the White Paper were the following:

- Eradication of poverty through investments in social security, especially non-contributory social assistance and development programmes;

- Equitable distribution of resources to those in need and addressing social exclusion due to race, gender, geography, urban/rural divide, disability and any other forms of social discrimination;

- Promotion of social rights especially those, which have been upheld in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa in relation to children and women, the right to social security and the right to equality;

- Mobilisation and facilitation of partnerships between the public, private and the voluntary sectors in service delivery;

- Quality, accessible and appropriate social services to promote individual, family and community well-being and empowerment (Patel & Wilson, 2003:219-220).

Even though a lot of progress has been made in the social development arena in the light of policy and programmatic interventions, it is still difficult to track their impact when it comes to the living conditions of beneficiaries. It is still also a difficult feat to gauge how social services have shifted from a curative or remedial outlook to a developmental one. This paper therefore contends that such a gap remains due to minimal monitoring and evaluation systems existing in the sector, both at the state and non-state levels. At this juncture, it is imperative to unpack the concept of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) by highlighting their intended purpose before moving any further.

THE PURPOSE OF MONITORING AND EVALUATION (M&E)

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of development activities provides government officials, development managers and civil society with better means for learning from past experience, improving service delivery, planning and allocating resources, and demonstrating results as part of accountability to key stakeholders (World Bank, 2002). Assessing the impacts and monitoring project results are necessary to ascertain whether the programmes are reaching intended beneficiaries, if resources are being spent efficiently, or if the programmes or projects can be better designed to achieve intended outcomes. Again M&E provides direct feedback and help both policy makers and practitioners to arrive at effective and efficient projects that yield better re sults (World Bank, 2002). The central monitoring and evaluation requirement is to track systematically the key variables and processes over time and space, and see how they change as a result of strategy activity (Spellerberg, 1991 in OECD, 2002). To do this requires:

- measuring and analysing sustainability;

- monitoring and implementation of the strategy;

- evaluating the results of the strategy;

- reporting and dissemination of the above findings (OECD, 2002).

There are different approaches to M&E. The World Bank (2002) proffers a summary of some:

- *The logical framework approach* – helps to clarify objectives of any project, programme or policy. It also aids in the identification of the expected causal links, i.e. inputs, processes, outputs, outcomes and impacts;

- *Theory-based evaluation* – has similarities with the logical framework approach, but allows a much more in-depth understanding of the workings of a programme or activity;

- *Formal survey* – these can be used to collect standardised information from a carefully selected sample of people and households. Surveys often collect comparable information for a relatively large number of people in particular target groups;

- *Rapid appraisal methods* – these are quick, low-cost ways to gather the views and feedback of beneficiaries and stakeholders, in order to respond to decision-makers' needs for information;

- *Participatory methods* – involve stakeholders at different levels working together to identify problems, collect and analyse information, and generate recommendations;

- *Impact evaluation* – this is the systematic identification of the effects – positive or negative, intended or not – on households, institutions and the environment caused by a given development activity such as a programme or project.

The above list is not comprehensive, nor is it intended to be. Some of these tools and approaches are complementary, while others are substitutes. Some have broad applicability, while others are quite narrow in their uses. The choice of one as appropriate for any given context will depend on a range of considerations. These include the uses for which M&E is intended, the main stakeholders who have interest in the M&E findings, the speed with which the information is needed, and the cost (World Bank, 2002:1). Also, their advantages and disadvantages have been deliberately overlooked for the sake of brevity in this paper. Given the manner in which social work is anchored in social development processes, coupled with its professed values of social justice and empowerment, participatory methods of implementing M&E find favour in this discussion, and they will be examined shortly. Since social work and social development are about people-driven agendas, it remains imperative that those directly concerned – local decision-makers and affected groups – should have the most to gain from M&E and not be disadvantaged by the exercise.

Participatory approaches are important to social development, and strategies should include special efforts to involve affected communities (OECD, 2002). Participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) speaks directly to this inclusive approach:

> Participatory monitoring and evaluation is part of a wider historical process, which has emerged over the last 20 years of using participatory research in development. PM&E draws from various participatory research traditions, including participatory action research (PAR) spearheaded by the work of Paolo Freire (1972), Fals-Borda (1985), and others; participatory learning and action (including Rapid Rural Appraisal (PRA) and later Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) drawing on the work of Robert Chambers (1997) and many others; and farming systems research (FSR) or farming participatory research (FPR) developed by Amanor (1990), Farrington and Martin (1988) and others (Etrella & Gaventa, 1997).

Participatory monitoring and evaluation is not a new concept and has been utilised by different professionals for almost four decades now. PM&E is increasingly being used for differing purposes and in different sectors. PM&E thinking and practices are widespread and extremely diverse. However, this process also has some pitfalls. PM&E is indeed a highly political issue and many writers acknowledge that the negotiation process of PM&E is of a political nature. The

politics of negotiation become evident particularly in the context of developing indicators and criteria for monitoring and evaluation, especially in determining whose perspectives are represented in selecting indicators. This issue demonstrates the underlying political dynamics inherent in stakeholder relationships and interaction (Estrella & Gaventa, 1997). Nonetheless, this reality should not dissuade social workers or other social development practitioners from spearheading social development as it is also highly charged politically.

RATIONALE FOR M&E IN SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

It is not the intention of this article to engage in a discourse that explicates social development or that rationalises how/why social workers are located in the social development process. Other earlier works have done justice to this debate (Patel, 1991; Mazibuko, 1996; Gray, 1997; Lombard, 1997). However, it remains important for this discussion to locate M&E in social development. Marsden and Oakley (1990) remind us that the move towards development in terms of empowerment, social democracy and popular participation required an approach to evaluation which went far beyond the traditional and limited methods which stressed simple quantitative indices of activity, impact, results and achievements. Indeed, the goals of many social development projects and programmes involve such things as the development of indigenous sustainability, capacity, the promotion of participation, the awakening of consciousness and self-reliant strategies; because we are dealing with development strategies which are rather different from those which emphasise production, new techniques and methods had to be devised. In this light, social development must be seen as essentially a process and M&E as an organic part of that process (Marsden & Oakley, 1990). Critical to social development is therefore the notion that M&E is an educational intervention – a learning opportunity for the project community – rather than being seen as judgemental. Therefore, M&E should be viewed as developmental in order to enhance confidence and capacity (Marsden & Oakley, 1990).

Participatory monitoring and evaluation in social development also speaks to the traditional or rehabilitative formal aspects of meeting human needs. Usually this sphere is referred to as the welfare functions of M&E. Here, M&E's utility falls under the realm of *process evaluations* (sometimes called implementation evaluations) that describe how the programme services are actually provided, and then asses how well the services provided match the intended purpose of a programme. They also assess the degree to which a programme was successfully implemented and thus aid in charactering the policy 'treatment' that the participants and potential participants actually received (Moffit & Ver Ploeg, 1999). As can be noted here, there is more emphasis on evaluation and less on monitoring. Furthermore, M&E will also be used for purposes of arriving at improved management systems for service delivery, to improve base-line information, social indicators and statistics for service delivery, as well as to modify arrangements, programmes and mechanisms so that they become relevant to transient socio-political orders, as well as provide effective services for new populations in need (welfare reform). The foregoing areas form the qualitative and quantitative aspects of M&E systems.

In transforming societies such as South Africa, M&E can help to guide policy experts or social workers to shape new forms of interventions in fast-changing contexts, both at governmental and non-governmental levels. In most cases governments in transforming societies are, on the one hand, involved in legislative and welfare reforms so that the question of need is adequately addressed, while on the other hand, welfare organisations are mainly, but not exclusively, engaged in impact assessments, organisational strengthening or institutional learning and understanding to negotiate stakeholders' perspectives.

The table below gives some of the functions of M&E in transforming or reforming welfare systems.

TABLE 1
TYPES OF WELFARE REFORM PROJECTS

TYPE OF STUDY	DESCRIPTION
Monitoring and description	Documents trends in well-being, e.g. examining adults and children by following families over time.
Welfare leavers and related groups	Documenting the outcomes for individuals and families who have left welfare.
Randomised experiments	Evaluations using randomised experimental and control groups to estimate impact of specific reform programme or feature.
Caseload and other econometric models	Analyses econometric methods to estimate the effects of welfare reform on caseloads and other outcomes.
Process, implementation, and qualitative studies	Studies using qualitative methods to examine and document implementation of welfare reform, state programme rules, or detailed pictures of individuals and families.
Other welfare reform studies	Studies of special populations, the child welfare system, and data collection projects.
Studies on topics related to welfare reform	Studies of child support enforcement, absent fathers, low-income neighbourhoods, low-income children, and other topics.

Determining the consequences of welfare reform raises the following questions:
- Has welfare reform worked? Has it been a success or failure?
- Has it been beneficial or harmful to certain groups?
- Should welfare be pushed in the same direction or pulled back?
- Which elements of the new welfare system need to be changed and which should be left as they are?
- What works and what does not in aiding former welfare recipients to leave the system and become self-sufficient?

Monitoring studies in the welfare sector are important because they:
- Signal whether the well-being of the target population is improving, deteriorating, or remaining the same;
- Are useful in identifying specific sub-groups that are doing particularly poorly and may therefore be in need of additional assistance, regardless of what may have caused that condition;
- Track target groups before and after a reform and attempt to make an assessment of the reform by comparing stated outcomes before and actual outcomes after (Moffit & Ver Ploeg, 2001).

The above areas need to be taken into account when the implementation (non-implementation) of the White Paper is taken into account.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN CASE

Policy monitoring and evaluation are a critical function of government and non-governmental organisations to inform ongoing policy analysis and review (Patel & Wilson, 2003). When it comes to the social development sector, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms – from both government and the NGO sector – have yet to be crystallised and then aligned at the local, provincial and national levels (Noyoo, 2003). Though initiatives have begun, more work needs to be done in this area. Deficits of M&E in the country can also be linked to the historical context of South Africa. The apartheid government did not have a comprehensive approach to M&E and basically did not encourage the practice within state agencies or departments. There was also no rigorous endeavour to ascertain the impact of the provided menial services on the living conditions of the majority poor, who were Africans. Rather, spot-checks were carried out by officials so as to ensure that the system did not collapse (Noyoo & Mamphiswana, 2003). The international donor community (mostly drawn from Scandinavian countries) also did not make the situation any better, especially when it came to civil society organisations (CSOs) that were involved in development work aimed at improving living conditions in black communities. They were very lenient with such organisations and funds were disbursed with minimal prescriptions for accountability. In the final analysis, this situation engendered a culture that eschewed M&E in CSOs (Noyoo & Mamphiswana, 2003).

Moagi (2000) further thinks that, prior to 1994, M&E systems were underdeveloped in the public sphere due to the problem of legitimacy and fragmented government administrations. A basic problem regarding M&E was the lack of a clearly defined delivery orientation to performance monitoring and evaluation. Performance in the public sector in the old political order was measured in terms of inputs, compliance and obedience. From 1994 through to 1999, under President Mandela, the government was not only preoccupied with legislative and policy reforms, but began to engender a culture of accountability in both the public and private realms of society. For instance, the White Paper for the Transformation of the Public Sector (1997) or *Batho Phele* (literally translated as 'people first') set the tone for efficiency, effectiveness and accountability in the public sector (Noyoo & Mamphiswana, 2003). From 1999 onwards, under the leadership of Thabo Mbeki, government has been at pains to link funding to performance. Non-performance is not rewarded and as a result some organisations have had to close shop because of this requirement. Government and international donors are on the same page when it comes to the question of accountability in the light of social service delivery. However, this process has not been easy and there are still some lessons to be learnt.

According to Everatt and Zulu (2001), the post-1994 period witnessed a flurry of tenders for monitoring systems. Despite this overzealous response from development actors/organs, M&E was not well grounded in scientific frameworks. There were also shortcomings in the conceptualisation of the actual process and how it could be executed. The persistence of the above problem seems to be defined by past experiences of the country and is a carry over from the apartheid era in that monitoring is still widely regarded as 'policing', and monitoring data are rarely consulted when management decisions are taken (Atkinson & Everatt, 2001 in Everatt & Zulu, 2001). When it comes to the traditional aspects of social development or welfare, one criticism emerges in regard to M&E, namely that there is an over-emphasis on performance and not on process issues. There is also enormous variation in the reliability, quality and utility of monitoring data across the National Department and Provincial Welfare Departments. For instance, there is less stress on documenting the trends relating to populations that have been 'weaned off' the welfare system or highlighting trends in the well-being of the people that entered the system in 1994 (Noyoo, 2003).

SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE AND M&E

Social work practitioners occupy a significant space in social development or the welfare arena and need to be armed with sound theoretical know how of M&E as they are confronted with new and challenging situations relating to human well-being on a daily basis. There is dearth of material relating to M&E in social work, especially in the South African case. As the profession is still undergoing transformation from curative to developmental practice as well as from exclusion to inclusion, the case for M&E becomes much stronger. Indeed, the knowledge base of the profession requires a social worker to have competencies in understanding human behaviour in the social environment, such as human growth and development, with particular emphasis on life tasks encountered by individuals during different development stages. To assess and to work with human problems, practitioners must be aware of needs and resources associated with each developmental phase (Hepworth & Larsen, 1993), hence the relevance of M&E in social work. Furthermore, social workers' participation in the shaping and implementation of social policy again urgently requires proficiency in M&E. It is noteworthy that social workers need to be acquainted with M&E as well as advocate for its utility in their respective agencies as social work activities point to planned change efforts tilted towards outcomes (Noyoo & Mamphiswana, 2003).

The need to synthesise M&E with social work knowledge and practice has become pertinent as societies have constantly been confronted with complex problems emanating from fast-paced changes associated with modernity. For instance, the wave of globalisation that has been so pronounced in the 1980s and 1990s opened a Pandora's box that brought to the fore not only opportunities but also problems associated with this phenomenon. Therefore, it is not just trade and technological gains that countries accrue from globalisation, but negative aspects such as poverty and acute marginalisation of disarticulate populations in certain countries, especially in the developing world. Globalisation's ability to make individuals and groups transcend national boundaries has also led to the mass migration of people from their countries of origin to new lands. In many instances such people bring with them problems that are not unique to host countries. Indeed, a niche for M&E could be in this area, as services rendered have to be assessed in terms of effectiveness and efficiency. More often than not, social workers are the prime actors who intervene on behalf of such populations, thus the need for this skill.

CONCLUSION

The intention of this paper was to stimulate debate on social development, and monitoring and evaluation in South Africa. It noted that the issue of M&E in social development still needs to be adequately addressed. The paper also pointed out that South African welfare monitoring and evaluation systems focus more on performance, and they need to break out of this mode by embracing other process-related issues such as tracking the well-being of recipients. The paper also touched upon issues relating to welfare reform and transformation as well as the need to make M&E more visible in social work practice.

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