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## THE BABY AND THE BATH WATER: THE DILEMMA OF MODERN SOCIAL WORK IN AFRICA

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### INTRODUCTION

Social development has become the buzzword of social scientists, specifically social workers, in the run-up to the twenty-first century, and the implications of this concept for the African continent, especially for the countries of southern Africa, are now being given serious attention by academics and practitioners in view of the perceived need for a new direction for social work in the region. Other popular concepts include radicalisation, indigenisation, authentisation, participatory approaches and empowerment practice. As with so many dimensions of social change, however, great care has to be exercised to ensure that the focus is on enhancement and progress and not simply change for change's sake.

It is important, in this regard, to establish the mission of social work in a specific context - what it is that social workers need to do and how it should be done in the particular society in which it has its unique (yet universal) being. To this extent the profession will differ somewhat in nature and content from community to community, whilst retaining, hopefully, the consistency of its overall meaning and purpose. It has been argued that social workers are, in fact, "brokers in shades of grey" (Stevenson quoted in Philpot & Hanvey 1994:2), contributing to the sensitisation of society and mediating in many areas of conflict in interpersonal relationships. They negotiate in situations involving "lesser evils", and are frequently faced with the need for choice followed by action with unpredictable outcomes. As a consequence of having to deal with the "rough and unpredictable material of humanity" (Philpot & Hanvey 1994:3), the objectives and methods of social work are often less clearly defined than those of other professions.

The roots of the profession are diverse, giving rise to an eclecticism which harbours the danger of applying approaches to human issues based on the worker's penchant for them rather than on a catholicism which implies knowledge of different modalities and selection of those most relevant to different situations. In Africa, as in other parts of the world, the social worker must be equipped with a variety of techniques based on theoretical approaches which, singly or in concert, can be implemented in the amelioration of human suffering and the development of resilient individuals, families, groups and communities. In developing Africa it might be considered that the concept of individual focus in social work is irrelevant and that more benefit would be derived from strengthening the role of the extended family system which, in the past, has provided a "casework" substitute for its members. It is argued that, as social work serves to stimulate self-actualisation at the individual or family levels, human systems become accumulatively more flexible, expectant, spontaneous, and willing to try other changes. The suggestion is, therefore, that social work in Africa can and must draw on viable networks of relationships, extended families, clans and village groupings to promote the co-operative ambience that enables other more positive steps towards change to be taken (Ankrah 1987:17).

However, in the context of rapidly changing attitudes this may not be sufficient for those who denounce the efficacy of the old methods and believe that, for example, senior relatives who traditionally address controversial family issues do not fully comprehend modern styles of living.

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They are perceived by younger family members as being out of touch with the emerging needs of those who have been exposed to the influences of formal education and/or Western style values. Modern living standards produce new norms, mores, and value systems necessitating the development of appropriate methods for addressing problematic issues. The definition of such methods is one of the functions of contemporary social work practice.

Significant in this context is the concept of women's rights and status and the plethora of concomitant factors that introduce a new dimension to African social systems. Factors such as opportunities for women in the spheres of education, training and employment; issues related to the AIDS pandemic; spouse abuse; single parenthood and female-headed households; ownership of goods and property; familial authority patterns; relevant roles of family members; child support; and financial rights and responsibilities are but a few of the issues arising out of women's new position in society which family elders may have difficulty in managing in an appropriate and timeously acceptable manner. Thus the role of the social worker in direct intervention with individuals and families must be viewed as crucial in the burgeoning arena of social development, and care should be taken in designing new professional systems not to throw the baby out with the bath water.

### **NEW WAYS FOR OLD/ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES**

International and African scholars are sounding the depths of social work paradigms in order to formulate methods of professional practice which will be more relevant to the needs of the continent as it moves into the new millennium. Some of these will be critically examined in the context of the argument for discarding only what is irrelevant and retaining that which has value for the evolving societies of Africa.

#### **Social Development**

The United Nations World Summit for Social Development paved the way for a new world order in which holistic approaches to social issues would gain supremacy over "silver-bullet" strategies for development - the idea that one intervention can solve all ills. The commitments emanating from the Summit contained dynamic implications for social workers world-wide and specifically in developing countries. Of particular interest for Africa were the following objectives (United Nations 1995):

- social integration
- poverty alleviation
- productive employment
- human security and human rights
- resource development
- population and sustainability and
- the creation of a new social order.

Social integration, or inclusive integrated social development, focuses on enabling all groups in a given country to work together to change and improve their individual and communal living through economic, social, technological and political or decision-making processes. Such efforts are aimed at correcting the underlying causes of problems, thereby empowering the people involved in the process (Heller quoted in Billups & Julia 1996:177).

Poverty alleviation seeks to consider how the poor can be made responsible participants in the total life of the community by overcoming their sense of alienation.

Productive employment is ensured through effectively managing the conflict of technological advancement and human welfare. The United Nations believes that unemployment is best solved by focusing on people rather than solely on capital and the productive process.

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Human security and human rights are viewed in a pragmatic context. Where the concern is for survival, human rights have little relevance. The emphasis, therefore, has to be on achieving human survival.

Resource development concerns the acceleration of economic, social and human resources in Africa and the least developed countries and focuses on the vagaries of structural adjustment programmes. There is a need for reconciliation of the concerns of donor agencies for accountability and the pursuit of a particular approach to development and determining what is best for recipients.

Population and sustainability issues embrace preserving natural resources, containing population control, and promoting social security through the provision of free education and health services, unemployment insurance and old age security measures.

The goal of a new social order is not merely to integrate social dimensions into the development process but to redefine the very concept of development so that it becomes socially relevant.

Social workers operating within these parameters must pursue and acquire knowledge about the political process; the functioning and performance of the national economy; the nature and role of social relations and interaction; the roles of government, voluntary organisations, communities, groups and individuals; and the relationship of all these factors to the development process (Osei-Hwedie 1990). Social work, concerned as it is with both the individual and the community, involved in devising intervention strategies to target both these levels and their interrelatedness, is thus at the core of all social development efforts (Wong 1993). In this regard the social worker focuses, at one and the same time, upon the capacity of individuals and groups for effective interaction and upon social resources from the point of view of their contributing to effective social functioning. In the light of this dual focus the social worker initiates ... steps to ... increase the effectiveness of individuals' interaction with each other singly and in groups ... and to mobilise appropriate social resources ... (Boehm quoted in Specht & Vickery 1977:18).

Thus the linkage, between individual and family intervention on the one hand and social development on the other is established. The case for a holistic, ecosystemic approach within the development framework therefore begs consideration.

Midgley's conceptualisation of social development is a process of planned social change to promote the well-being of the population as a whole in conjunction with a dynamic process of economic development (Midgley 1995:25).

The critical or key elements of this perspective include linkages to economic development; an interdisciplinary focus; a sense of progress; being progressive in nature and interventionist rather than evolutionary; formulating strategies supported by beliefs or ideologies; having inclusive or universal scope; and promoting the role of social welfare. Midgley's thesis is based on the need to address the phenomenon of distorted development, demonstrated by persistent poverty in the midst of economic affluence in many parts of the world, specifically in developing countries where economic development has not been accompanied by a significant degree of social progress (Midgley 1995). He sees social work's alleged preoccupation in developing countries with the urban destitute as irrelevant to the overriding need to promote economic development and contribute to the eradication of poverty (Midgley 1996:16).

In this context the focus is on developmental rather than remedial strategies and collective rather than individual approaches but the substantive issue is that economic well-being does not necessarily approximate social, emotional and psychological well-being. Many people in urban areas (in developed and developing countries) are not destitute but may be suffering dislocation factors and in

need of help to adapt psychologically and emotionally to the isolation of life away from family and community support. Social development programmes targeting the African woman, for example, may increase the insecurity of men, exacerbating problems of physical, emotional, psychological, and sexual (rape) abuse necessitating social work interventions at crisis and counselling levels. Migration weakens traditional tribal beliefs and support systems, fostering alienation and the emergence of new problems such as mental illness, prostitution and alcohol abuse. The resulting social breakdown has negative consequences for economic development and requires intensive social work intervention, often at a remedial level. Experience in the West shows that material welfare does not automatically bring emotional stability; often the converse is true. In Africa there is no reason to believe that it will be different. Thus the role of individualistic social work is still of significance in the changing scenario of needs.

The developmental model of social welfare involves social work in a process of structural change aimed at redressing inequalities in the society through improving the responsiveness of institutions to the needs of the people. Social work strategies appropriate to this model are advocacy and empowerment, both of which aim at promoting client control and involvement in all aspects of their lives. Linking people with collective networks of social support, including other individuals, their family, other groups and ultimately the community (Bernstein 1995:55) implies working not only with the support systems but also the clients themselves who must be enabled to reach out. Imparting social skills and problem-solving techniques and enhancing self-esteem and assertive capacities, places the social worker once again in the role of case or group worker supplementing that of social developer. Midgley himself states that overemphasis on a social development approach in some developing countries has led to the neglect of remedial programmes at considerable cost to vulnerable groups (Midgley 1984).

However, advocates of social development believe that social workers in Third World countries should assume more developmental responsibilities to deal with core social problems. Community development as a method of social work practice provides adequate opportunities in social development because of its emphasis on people's participation, empowerment, and education (Mufune *et al.* 1996:123). Examples of what some African social workers have done include using their skills to mobilise community participation in the construction of feeder roads, irrigation and safe drinking water supplies, sanitary projects, schools and community centres. It is felt that this developmental approach has relevance for developing and industrialised nations (Ngan & Hui 1996:92). These are indeed noble tasks whose efficacy transcends pragmatic issues as people do grow through participation; but what of the inevitable loneliness, fear, despair, distress, depression and other indications of malfunctioning within and between human beings and the systems of which they are a part irrespective of the level of development of their environment? Will they be totally relieved, reassured and restored by a feeder road, a pit latrine or a community centre? It would be relevant to argue that some maladaptive behaviours will be prevented from manifesting themselves through enhanced social development, but the intrinsic nature of humanity with its propensity for the entire spectrum of emotional and cognitive responses will always have need of empathy, support and reflective listening. In this regard there is no substitute in the social work dimension for the individualistic approach.

### **Radicalisation of Social Work**

It has been argued that, because of Africa's condition of underdevelopment (which, it is suggested, is more reflective of its social problems than the malaise of so-called modernisation), breaking through to new models of social work intervention is more relevant than tinkering with old ones. This, according to some theorists, necessitates a radicalisation that has been little evident on the African social work scene (Ankrah 1987:6). Radical social work seeks to identify and help eliminate

all forms of structural oppression so as to create a congenial climate within which individuals, families, groups and communities can achieve self-actualisation and contribute to the growth and development of their society. The implicit goal of empowerment is facilitated by the process of conscientisation which motivates individuals to break the bonds of oppression singly and collectively in order to reach a new level of fulfilment (Rwomire & Raditlhokwa 1996:14). The emphasis is on the transformation of social institutions through, inter alia, client involvement (Bernstein 1995:56). Once again, the role of the social worker in enhancing self-esteem on both an individual and group level is of prime importance, for it is only through remodelling the psychic and intrapersonal forces that people can begin to change the environments in which they function. Thus, although radicalisation signifies a move to a more pragmatic paradigm (Osei-Hwedie 1995) intrinsic to the new order is the germ of the traditional approach!

There has been a call for experimentation with innovative programme ideas in Africa to combine old traditional forms of provision and problem-solving with new approaches. Concern for child welfare, for example, could be expressed in terms of family development whereby children's rights and their participation in decision-making would be encouraged (Ankrah 1987:15). This is already in evidence with the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) by many African countries and the emergence in Botswana, for instance, of non-governmental organisations seeking to translate policy into practice. One such agency is Childline which combines a radical approach to policy formulation and social education on child abuse and neglect with in-depth counselling and holistic interventions in relation to individuals (children and family members) to equip them with strategies for coping. Traditional systems of child care, such as the extended family, are utilised where possible, but this is proving more and more difficult in the era of disintegrating networks, and the necessity for foster care by strangers is now being moulded into a programme of action. The advent of AIDS and the increasing pressure on families, especially grandmothers, to care for growing numbers of grandchildren whose parents are sick and dying turns expressedly trite objectives of traditional care into unrealistic statements of purpose (Jacques 1997). Thus, though the message of radicalisation of social work roles calls for macrodeterminism, futurism and political will (Ankrah 1987:22), the reality is that Africa will have to swallow a large dose of the very medicine which is believed to address only symptoms and not the disease. The alternative, however, is the death of the patient!

### **Indigenisation, Authentisation and a Sense of Community**

The concepts of indigenisation, authentisation and a sense of community are now being developed in Africa in the quest for a new formulation of social work practice and education. Indigenisation refers to appropriate theories and practice and the values, norms and philosophies underpinning them, which must be given life by indigenous sources (Osei-Hwedie 1995). Midgley (1983:170) defines indigenisation as appropriateness, which means professional social work roles must be appropriate to the needs of different countries and social work practice.

This presupposes that imported ideas and practices must be adapted to fit the local cultural context and also new ways must be found to implement local ideas and processes of problem-solving and service delivery. Authentisation emphasises the creation of social work practice and education as original domestic models emanating from the society's current political, economic and religious structures and conditions. Foreign theory and practice are secondary to local initiatives (Osei-Hwedie 1995). Community-based social work practice recognises that the community provides the context for social living and for identity, especially in Africa. Community is still a primary resource for the meeting of needs. It may also become the client and the location of unmet need, or the point of disparity between needs and resources. Such practice recognises that major social issues in the region such as poverty; unemployment; rural-urban migration; rapid social change; youth in relation

to education, unemployment, teenage pregnancy and delinquency; urban housing; economy; and health problems, primarily AIDS, STDs, and tuberculosis, are all essentially community issues. The exponents of community-based practice suggest a shift away from methods to interventions (which can be practised in a wide range of situations) such as empowerment, education, facilitation, brokering, affirming, prevention, research, policy development and counselling. This shift is essentially an approach to practice or a way of thinking rather than a way of working (Hutton 1994). Every one of these interventions, with the possible exception of policy development, is as much a part of individualised social work as of community-based practice.

The Institute for Indigenous Theory and Practice in Cape Town, South Africa espouses the identification and explication of indigenous helpers as an aspect of primary support both in community work and direct service to individuals and families. These people provide assistance of a remedial, therapeutic and developmental nature to others in villages, townships, and squatter camps without payment because they are concerned, caring and responsive to the needs of those who require support. The Institute seeks to provide the means to incorporate such people into formal networks as catalysts for changing the policies and organisational structures of welfare agencies (Cohen 1991). Although the initiative might be seen to be new and innovative, the concept of the nineteenth-century Charity Organisation Society movement in England and America immediately comes to mind with its utilisation of volunteer "friendly visitors" or indigenous helpers, the precursors of social case workers during the pioneering years of the profession. The more things change, the more they remain the same. The baby, it seems, is ever resistant to the draining of the bathwater!

Even in the developed world there is a perception of the need to counter the effects of modernisation and to make society more responsive to the specific requirements of the people. In England the Wolfenden Report (1978) on the future of voluntary organisations and the Barclay Report (1982) on the roles and tasks of social workers recognised that the substantial role played by informal care giving had been neglected. The reports urged social workers to take greater account of informal welfare and to develop skills and strategies to facilitate the linking of their clients with the informal system (Bernstein 1995:62). One of the most significant determinants of the strength of informal helping systems is that they provide, in large measure, the one-to-one interface and interaction component of casework which clients so often need to simply make them feel better about themselves and their situation. It is the personalisation of so-called remedial practice that makes it irreplaceable in the social work scheme of things. Be it ever so attractive, the community approach lacks a "human face".

### **Indigenous Generalist Practice Model of Social Work**

Anderson *et al.* (1995) advance a generalist model of practice, the substance of which is the concept of empowerment. The principle of indigenisation is incorporated to the extent that there is allowance for elasticity of the practice so that it is appropriate to the people and the community being served in terms of culture, values, needs and politics. The model is infused with a radical and social development perspective, and the personal, social, educational, economic and political dimensions of empowerment practice serve as the primary thrust of intervention (Anderson *et al.* 1995).

Although the model declares its central focus as addressing structural factors impacting on social justice and oppression, its definition of empowerment points to the essentiality of individual and family well-being as a basis for healthy societal functioning. Empowerment, it claims, is an ideology, process and outcome of social work practice that is based upon an action-oriented collaborative partnership with client systems. This seeks to reinforce and develop participatory competencies at multi-system levels that will enable client systems to attain their individual, family,

group, and communal goals (Anderson *et al.* 1995). Empowerment begins with the ego, thereby entering the domain of social casework which thus cannot be ignored.

### Participatory and People-Centred Approaches to Community Development

These approaches espouse the importance of placing people and their capacities, rather than the solution, as central in the domain of community development. A synopsis of a story originating in sub-Saharan Africa and related by Schenk and Louw (1995:83-84) illustrates the concept:

A highly motivated development worker went to a remote village to solve all the villagers' problems and transform their primitive lifestyle, as they (he believed) were fearful and apathetic and not prepared to change their own situation.

The community told him of a monster across the valley which was sent by evil spirits to kill them. They pointed out the place where the monster lay and then left the worker to face the beast alone. On closer examination he discovered that the monster was nothing but an overgrown watermelon which he nevertheless slew with a knife in order to convince the villagers, who were watching from a safe distance, of his bravery on their behalf.

However, to his dismay they refused to have the worker back in their village and asked him to leave in peace, as only a monster would know how to slay another.

Later there was another watermelon and another worker who, learning of their fear, asked them to join in with their traditional weapons and face the monster.

This they did until it was unceremoniously hacked to pieces. Then they proudly returned to their village, singing, dancing, and celebrating their great achievement.

This school of development thought suggests that groups, target populations and communities, for example, the poor, are often labelled as "unmotivated" or "apathetic" when programmes imposed upon them by social workers do not 'fit' through lack of understanding of the community by the programme designers. However, as Menike (1993:177) says of the so-called "poor", they do not wish to fall from the frying-pan into the fire; thus their apparent resistance, reticence, ignorance and lack of purpose is, in fact, their strength, wisdom and knowledge.

The discovery in this instance lies in the process of generalisation which distinguishes community from individualised work, subsuming personalities and souls under an amorphous collective, a stance advocated for by those who see the "remedial" approach as inappropriate. If we do not appreciate the individual amongst the masses of "destitutes" (as the poorest of the poor are designated in Botswana's social welfare parlance) then all our community-based initiatives will founder. In Botswana the central government welfare organ, managed through and by the local authorities, has delegated the implementation of the National Policy on Destitution (1980) to its section dealing with casework rather than that addressing community issues. However, methods of screening those who apply or are referred for assistance tend to be perfunctory and impersonal, focusing on material "band aid" approaches and ignoring for the most part the somewhat soft-bellied provision in the policy for rehabilitative practice. It is imperative that social workers put the "person" back into social work's interpersonal process if they do not want to be perceived as yet another embodiment of bureaucratic control in the lives of the emerging populations of Africa. "(Even) ... in Western countries ... many members of minority groups have not seen social work as competent, but simply as a coercive arm of the state" (Hugman 1996:141). This argument refutes in part the view that in most African societies the individual is a being within a societal or group context and therefore finds character and expression of the self within the group. That the focus of social work must therefore be the community which must give meaning to the practice, define its process, and outline its professional boundaries (Osei-Hwedie 1995) may thus be perceived as a non

sequitur in view of the fact that the person is defined solely in terms of the group. There is the essence and awareness of self which must be nurtured, engendered and respected if we are to avoid totalitarian policies and dehumanising practices which address only the collective organism and not its living, breathing parts.

In much the same way popular participation, or involvement in decision making related to policies that affect them by consumers, especially in the arena of community development, is, like the proverbial curate's egg, "good in parts". At the practical level, it is argued that participation enhances individual well-being, engenders social cohesion, empowers the marginalised and produces better decisions (Bar-On 1997). If it is indeed true that benefits accrue on both an individual and a social level, then the process is to be encouraged. Participation as a means of self-actualisation and a heightening of self-worth in balance with engendering among people a sense of community establishes a base for pragmatic social development where the needs of the individual and the group are addressed. However, if through participation original thought is rigorously reworked by the authority of the participant group then the dominance of an external force is simply replaced by that of internal control. In extreme instances the decisions of the group may give rise to the implementation of projects which few individual members innately support.

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is a participatory planning methodology that was developed in the second half of the 1980s in countries such as India, Kenya and Tanzania. In Botswana the first PRA was conducted in 1993. It concluded that changes in rural development approaches are necessary as Botswana's society itself is rapidly changing. Traditional methods of consultation and extension work encounter increasing difficulties in attracting people's attention and involving them actively in planning for their own communal needs. The study demonstrated that people have not simply grown dependent on government, but that traditional methods of extension and consultation also invite dependence. The methodology of PRA appears to be able to build partnerships between villagers and government officers. The Community Action Plan resulting from a PRA is a contract between the two parties in which both contribute knowledge, skills, and resources to local development and through which both have pause to reconsider their current roles of benefactor and beneficiary. Both villagers and extension workers appear curious, willing and ready to engage in a new form of relationship (Republic of Botswana, Ministry of Finance and Development Planning; Report on PRA Pilot Project, October 1996:xxi).

It would appear that the efficacy of such methodology rests on the appreciation of the role of each individual as a respected contributor to national planning at the rural level. The significance of the personal in conjunction with the communal "good" enhances the spirit of sharing and social development. "Ask not only what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country" is perhaps the maxim which builds self-esteem and community and national growth.

### **HOLISTIC/INTEGRATED SYSTEMS PRACTICE AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE INDIVIDUAL**

The primary values of social work may be identified as two-dimensional: society has an obligation to ensure that people have access to the resources, services and opportunities they need to meet various life tasks, alleviate distress and realise their options and values, and in providing societal resources, the dignity and individuality of people should be respected. Thus the domain of social work encompasses the relationship between the private troubles of people and public issues which impinge upon them (Pincus & Minahan 1977).

It is argued that, while a conceptualisation of practice is required that reframes and revitalises the social worker's traditional manner of viewing client troubles and acting on injustices in agencies and society generally, they must *simultaneously* provide services to those who are the victims of these

injustices. The call in some quarters is for social workers around the world to integrate more radical theories of practice into on-going methodologies and skills which will have an impact on systems as well as individual clients (Shulman 1992). The use of oppression psychology is an example of an initial effort toward such integration. This concept suggests that prolonged exposure to oppression can lead to an internalisation of the principle of the "oppressor without", culminating in negative self-attitudes and images or the "oppressor within" syndrome. The individual thus becomes an active participant in his own oppression, justifying continued stereotyping by the majority group and maintaining a vicious cycle which targets, for example, AIDS sufferers and their families, the poor, the disabled, women and marginalised ethnic communities. If the individual is also vulnerable, lacking strong social support systems, then the maladaptive behaviour increases (Shulman 1992). Thus stress is defined as a psycho-social condition, generated by discrepancies between needs and capacities of human beings on the one hand and environmental qualities on the other.

Stress may arise in three areas of living which are closely interrelated: life transitions, environmental pressures and interpersonal processes (Germain & Gitterman 1996). This presupposes that individuals are engaged in constant transactions with other human beings or systems in the environment and that these persons and systems influence each other in a reciprocal manner (Mason 1987). There is, then, the requirement of a "goodness of fit" between the needs of individuals and environmental resources (human and material) corresponding to these needs (Hartman & Laird 1983; Hepworth & Larsen 1993). The concept of "symbiosis" recognises that each individual finds that these needs, associated with living, are best satisfied in positive relationships with others. As people and systems often appear to be acting against the self-interest of others, and thus indirectly of themselves, within and between cultures there is need for a process of helping to assist the players to maintain or regain their sense of mutuality (Shulman 1992).

In this context the social worker, as one type of helping professional, has, through a process of positive orientation, to identify what is right about the client as opposed to what is wrong. This echoes the principle of empowerment practice which places primary emphasis on client system strengths, capabilities, wellness and the capacity to become more competent (Anderson *et al.* 1995). Assertiveness training and the enhancement of abilities and self-esteem as well as the strengthening of social supports must follow - helping individuals to deal with the oppressors both within and without (Shulman 1992). Simultaneously, practitioners should engage in modifying society's cognitive responses and methods of interaction through social education and enlightened policy formulation. However, it should also be borne in mind that social workers may have difficulty in accepting, for example, the actions and beliefs of women who appear themselves to reinforce traditional orientations of apparent sexism. Yet there might be situations where a radical approach would miss the strength which women can derive from being part of a strong, traditional community. Under such circumstances social workers could respond to clients in communities holding views about gender relations which are at variance with their own, or those of the profession, by reformulating the principle of "respect" as "respect for clients in context". In this regard the client becomes an active party in the definition of how that context is to be understood. Thus, the social work knowledge base is constructed with the awareness of diversity and how it might be creatively honed (Hugman 1996).

As societies develop, a large number of institutions and agencies are established to deal with the individual and his/her needs. These social, medical, educational, political, commercial, industrial and other systems are often difficult to negotiate, necessitating the intervention of the helping professional (Shulman 1992). Even in African societies, social welfare agencies, schools and health facilities are replacing the role of the extended family in behalf of individual need, and the disempowered require assistance to negotiate these systems and benefit from their services. This at times requires social work intervention on an individual and group basis.

The concept of community-and home-based care in industrialised and developing countries is ushering in a new era of social service based on the assumption that indigenous support systems can be underpinned by formal arrangements to the benefit of consumers and the state (Hudson *et al.* 1994). The institutionalisation or reinstitutionalisation of mechanisms for care, with government and other systems' support, places the individual and the family in pivotal positions within a holistic framework of reciprocity and service.

In Africa, especially, the situation is critical. Children, the aged, the disabled and AIDS patients, and their families, require the support of social workers in home-based care situations, primarily on the levels of counselling and empathic communication and also through the use of advocacy and brokering techniques to avail the needy of resources for underpinning informal maintenance and development strategies. The emphasis must be on the three Es: education, enlightenment and empathy. The disabled child, relegated to stigmatised seclusion, is sometimes still found tethered to a tree, adopting the behaviours of the goats with which it co exists and thus identifies. The orphans of AIDS living in child headed households for fear of dispossession by unscrupulous relatives or because no-one is able or willing to provide them with care and succour are the province of social work as a non-traditional support system in a traditional environment (Jacques 1996).

The breakdown of kinship networks in Africa and also their limitations in the context of changing societal norms, lifestyles and belief systems have created a space for social work intervention on different levels of need. However, there are those in Africa who support the community or social development approach while decrying the so-called remedial or casework model on grounds of irrelevance and the conflict of cultural fit. Silavwe, writing in Zambia of the need for new perspectives in African social work, maintains that casework is irrelevant unless its inherent principles, such as those concerning self-determination and confidentiality, are modified for practice purposes (Silavwe 1995:73). As previously stated (and universally acknowledged) social work practice is founded on cultural compatibility which aims not to focus on psychological and other differences so much as to identify general characteristics common to all cultures so that these may constitute bridges across societies in international social work (Osei-Hwedie 1996). Thus confidentiality and self-determination in African social work can be redefined in terms of the family, for example.

Silavwe himself states that, although no professional is more dependent upon the organisation and composition of a society than the social worker, universally social work practitioners have much in common, particularly in the realm of technical understanding and skill: Cultures differ, but people are people, wherever they are found, and social workers must understand them as such, and not just as representatives of a particular culture (Silavwe 1995:73).

It is argued that this understanding should, however, be framed by the social institutions which mould the manner in which people make sense of their experience. This is precisely the reason for caution in discarding effective strategies along with those which do not work in a given context. Social work has to be ever responsive to the dynamism of society (society-driven change) and also to the need for social action (social work-driven change). Thus, felt need of individuals and communities should be supplemented by identified need by social workers (and other competent professionals) if social change is to benefit the people subject to its influence. Needless to say, extreme care has to be taken to ensure that the input of policy-makers and service providers is a positive force and not a stumbling block in the process of development (Schenck & Louw 1995; Republic of Botswana, Ministry of Finance and Development Planning Report on PRA Pilot Project, October 1996).

In rapidly developing societies, of which Botswana is a prime example with one of the highest profiles of human development in sub-Saharan Africa (UNDP 1996), change is taking place at a

greatly accelerated pace. At the time of independence in Botswana (1966) it was one of the world's twenty poorest countries (Osei-Hwedie 1996a). Between 1966 and 1986 Botswana's growth rate was the highest in the world and even now real GDP per capita is the highest in Africa (UNDP 1966). However, the Gini coefficient, at 0.67 for rural and 0.56 for urban areas, indicates an inequality of income distribution greater than that of many of the most inegalitarian economies in Asia (Osei-Hwedie 1993; Jacques 1993). The discovery of diamonds and subsequent development of the mining industry through the 1980s to the present time has created a first world economy in a third world society, with all the concomitant problems that such a scenario presents. As a result, many members of the population are floundering in a no-man's land of transition, between traditional and modern value systems, normative behaviour and linkage or social support networks. Individualist practice (especially counselling) has a distinct role to play under circumstances such as these, as experienced by the author of this paper in interaction with students at the University of Botswana who request counselling to work through issues such as those cited above. In many instances their expressed need is for a member of a Western culture group to assist them in this regard as many of their own culture "fail to understand".

Many African countries have adopted the residual and remedial approach to social work in the form of casework and residential care (examples including Zambia, Zimbabwe and Kenya); but Botswana's history has been somewhat different with the emphasis, from the beginning, on community development. After independence in 1966 this practice was institutionalised as a national strategy for social development and nation-building at grassroots level. Initially it focused on the provision of basic infrastructure such as roads, schools, clinics, and dams which were undertaken in the context of drought relief programmes incorporating the principle of "food for work" or "ipelegeng" which, literally translated, means "to carry your own weight" (Ngwenya 1991). It is argued that the association of community development with self-help ruined the spirit of communal self-help, self-reliance, and self-development, with particular reference to strategies for coping with drought which is endemic in Botswana. Thus the burden of social provision shifted to government and external agencies (Osei-Hwedie 1993). Social work, therefore, became associated with drought relief.

Community development workers were seconded to local councils after 1975 and the practice became downgraded, affecting the image of both community work and its junior partner, social work. Since 1985, when the University of Botswana assumed responsibility for social work education, the profession's identity crisis has not been resolved. Social work and social welfare do not have a specific position at ministerial level and there is a lack of focus on clearly defined operational relationship between the Social and Community Development Department and other government ministries and departments. Also, there is a serious role conflict for social workers within the framework of local government authority (Osei-Hwedie 1993). Contemporary social work practice and education thus "float in a sea of confusion and it is ... imperative that social work educators and all other identified interest groups collaboratively engage in a comprehensive and complex process of deconstructing irrelevant education and practice and reconstructing contextualised approaches" (Ngwenya 1992). The question arises as to the direction of change.

In as much as indigenisation, social development, radical approaches and community-focused strategies are hailed as the "way to go" for social work practice in Africa, the reality is that these have to be supplemented, in equal measure, by attention to the needs of individuals who, despite being integral members of families, groups, and social institutions, at times require the intervention of professionals outside their operational systems to provide direction and introspective guidance. Individual personality defects, mental ill-health, psychological effects of problematic socialisation, and negative childhood experiences give rise to situations which cannot be ignored by the social work professional. Children in need of care require the protection of enhanced family support

systems (consolidated by social workers) or alternative care in the form of fostering (by strangers) or institutional arrangements which, though not ideal in the African context, are becoming necessary as a result of the AIDS pandemic. Direct input by social workers, again, is essential.

This is not to say that so-called casework approaches should not themselves be indigenised. In some areas people customarily share problems and arrive at solutions within the context of a family or other village or community groups rather than in the one-to-one privacy characterised by an individual interview (Billups & Julia 1996:179). In Zambia, neighbourhood associations or Social Casework and Remedial Services Committees dispense assistance through conducting interviews in open gatherings, with members of the community taking part in the problem-solving process. The committees themselves comprise resource persons such as members of the clergy, medical doctors, traditional healers ("witch-doctors"), social workers, local authority councillors, teachers and tribal elders (Silavwe 1995:82). Thus, the programme is casework in community development guise. Similarly, foster-care in South Africa is being remodelled to enhance the benefit to all participants - foster children, foster parents, birth parents, social workers and other helping professionals, and the community, with specific focus on the children. Planned group work replaces, to a large extent, planned casework in the relationship between social work and foster-care. However, casework is still a required method in crisis situations and to meet the special needs of the children. Community social work involves the training by the agency of foster shares or community members who relieve foster and birth families in crisis by providing them with support and guidance during difficult times. They liaise with the social worker who is an indirect participator in the helping process (Gunston 1995).

Doyle (1994) contends that even if the terminology and theoretical framework of social work practice change, it is to be hoped that most of the principles of so-called "casework" are retained. If society loses sight of the value and uniqueness of each individual then the struggle against oppression and abuse of power (the domain of more radical models of social work) will be diminished. An incest survivor writes in her autobiography: "When I read about concentration camps, I am drawn again and again to speculate on what made men and women able to live comfortably in the midst of such devastation without seeming to have any feelings for the suffering they were inflicting, or allowing to be inflicted, upon fellow human beings. The answer of course is, that it was only possible for them because they did not see the prisoners as fellow human beings" (Spring quoted in Doyle 1994:157).

On the basis of this quotation the argument is that social work must continue to demand what caseworkers throughout the 20th century have demanded - that people are accepted and respected and have a right to self-determination, confidentiality, and expression of their feelings, *appropriate to the needs of different culture groups*. As has been mentioned, self-determination and confidentiality in Africa are often family, rather than individual, concerns and should be treated as such. Only if respect for the individual person is retained will the depersonalisation of vulnerable or minority groups be countered. Only by resisting the objectification of the members of such groups can they be protected from oppression. By recognising the value of each individual, albeit in the context of family or community, it is possible to avoid a return to the terms "unworthy" or "undeserving" applied to people in need (Doyle 1994).

## SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

One may well ask whether the emphasis in training is a response to the needs of the field or whether the service offered in the field is the result of the training given (Bernstein quoted in Osei-Hwedie 1993).

The answer to that question is that the process should be reciprocal, with practice informing education and vice versa. The current concern, in Africa at least, is that insufficient attention is being paid to the indigenous factors which should constitute a base for social work education and practice.

Bernstein (1995:64) suggests that social work educators are ideally placed to work towards change through the medium of the curriculum which needs to provide a sound understanding of prevailing social conditions. He concludes, therefore, that the ecosystems perspective, with its emphasis on the interface between systems, facilitates this contextual focus. This reinforces the thesis that a balanced, circular conceptualisation of social work practice, with no one area apportioned greater weight than others, should be reflected in professional curricula.

It has been argued that the rightful foundation of social work training must be knowledge from practice. In other words, local practice will develop the knowledge and skills necessary for improved and sustainable professionalism (Osei-Hwedie 1993). Thus, there is a need for indigenous research and literature (Gray *et al.* 1996:40) to supplement the imported texts which have to be adapted to fit the local circumstances. This is, however, accomplished with some positive effect by the Social Work Department at the University of Botswana, through student participation and input from community agencies, which enriches the process and widens the horizons of education in a positive and dynamic manner. Universal theories constitute the framework for indigenous knowledge and practice.

There will obviously have to be greater emphasis than in the past on courses addressing developmental issues such as: theories of development; poverty and hunger issues; gender inequality; the rights of children; social justice and human rights; national and global contexts of such issues; and strategic planning for intervention (Dlamini 1995:31). Additionally, students in Africa need to be helped to perceive themselves, not simply as professionals, but as social workers who recognise their own skills and limitations as well as the experiential knowledge of community members and service consumers (Bernstein 1995:64).

## CONCLUSION

Social work as a formalised occupation/profession is global. Its origins are rooted in the industrial Western nations but it has, over time, developed in many other contexts around the world. Its boundaries have never been rigidly defined and it has encompassed approaches ranging from highly individualised casework, through intervention in families, small groups and local neighbourhoods to community, and now social, development (Coulshed 1991).

Social work is seen as a profession in which autonomy is bounded by the types of knowledge and skill to which it may lay claim, the specific organisational structures within which social workers operate, and the relationships between social work, other professions and the state. Thus, knowledge and culture are key aspects of professionalisation and the way in which social work responds to cultural diversity may be one of the major challenges facing the practice at the beginning of the twenty-first century (Hugman 1996). It should be remembered that culture underlies the manner in which human beings define their relationship with the universe (Osei-Hwedie 1996c) and therefore also the way in which social work defines its parameters. However, the social milieu is significant only to the extent to which it influences and is influenced by the individuals who are its inherent components. Collective welfare, then, is the sum of the welfare of all constituents.

Social workers have long been challenged by Jane Adams who, in 1930, stated that there is a superior role for them other than caring for the victimised in society. This, it is argued, was to challenge the profession to move into areas of conflict where the struggle must be pressed to bring about an order of society with fewer victims; but, at the same time, the role of the micro approaches

in social work should not be minimised (Dlamini 1995). The United Nations' guiding principles for developmental social welfare policies and programmes, delineated in 1988, declared that these should "assist individuals and groups at various stages and different circumstances of life to develop their capacities and to become or remain productive members of society, in addition to supporting those in need of care, protection, and financial help" (United Nations, quoted in Estes 1997). The balance of micro and macro approaches is hereby given official recognition.

Across the globe debates about the form and content of social work and its professional legitimacy are as old as social work itself. Currently, the need is felt to develop a social work knowledge base which responds to diversity in non-oppressive ways and to facilitate a move away from Midgley's concept of "professional imperialism". In this regard a more widespread dialogue between the varying national situations in which social work is practised is long overdue - a dialogue in which a sharing of similarities and divergence will help to expand the profession's knowledge base. There is an urgent need, therefore, for the development of global networks for social change as the needs of the future of social work are to be found in its present and in its past (Hugman 1996; Campfens 1996).

The need for definitive conceptualisation of professionalism, practice and education for social work is even more pressing in Africa than in the industrialised world because of confounding change in the realms of extended family breakdown, modernisation and underdevelopment, imposed or voluntary structural adjustment, and, most of all, the scourge of HIV/AIDS. For a new order to be facilitated there must be a blending of western philosophy and developing nations' contextual need.

It is to be hoped that, in the "brave new world" of social work, the individual will be given as much credibility, respect and consideration as the society of which she/he is an integral part. As social workers in Africa, and in third world countries generally, stand at the crossroads of development, attempting to forge a new deal for the profession in emerging societies, they should beware of throwing out the proverbial baby of benefit with the bathwater of irrelevance.

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