AN EVALUATION OF THE HISTORY OF INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL WORK AND DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL WORK IN NIGERIA

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1.0 PREABLE

This paper traces the history of international social work and examines the development of the social work profession in Nigeria, highlighting critical milestones and contextual influences. This paper is divided into two sections, namely section one, which is on examination of the history of international section work.

While Section two explores the history of social work in Nigeria.

1.2 SECTION ONE

The History of International Social Work

Introduction

Social work as a professional discipline has evolved over centuries, influenced by social, political, and economic changes worldwide. Its roots can be traced back to charitable activities and humanitarian efforts before becoming a formalized profession. This essay explores the development of international social work, followed by an analysis of the history of social work in Nigeria, emphasizing key milestones and influences shaping the profession in different contexts. Social work, a profession dedicated to promoting social justice, human rights, and community development, has evolved significantly over time and across diverse contexts. Its historical development reflects social, political, and economic transformations at both global and national levels.

1.3 History of International Social Work

International social work emerged as a response to global socioeconomic disparities, colonialism, and humanitarian crises. Its history can be divided into several phases, beginning with its origins in philanthropic activities and culminating in globally coordinated efforts to promote social justice.

The emergence of international social work can be traced back to philanthropic efforts that sought to respond to global inequalities and crises. Its evolution has been influenced by colonialism, global humanitarian efforts, and the rise of an international human rights framework.

Origins and Early Developments

The roots of international social work are embedded in humanitarian aid, missionary activities, and charity organizations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. European and American efforts focused on alleviating poverty and health issues in colonized and developing regions (Hokenstad, Midgley, & Shulman, 1994). The establishment of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) in 1928 and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) in 1956 significantly advanced the globalization of social work, aligning practices and standards across borders (Healy & Link, 2012).The roots of international social work can be traced to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, during the period of colonial expansion and humanitarian missions. European and American philanthropic organizations sought to address issues such as poverty, health, and education internationally (Hokenstad et al., 1994). The establishment of organizations like the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) in 1956 marked a significant milestone in consolidating global efforts and professional standards.

Post-World War II and Globalization

The aftermath of World War II accelerated international cooperation through entities like the United Nations, which promoted human rights and social development. The development of social development theories and the adoption of a human rights

framework further shaped international social work practice (Healy & Link, 2012). Efforts shifted towards development, community empowerment, and addressing structural inequalities on a global scale. The effect of World War II catalyzed international cooperation aimed at rebuilding war-torn societies and addressing global inequalities. The United Nations and its specialized agencies played pivotal roles in embedding social justice into international agendas, promoting human rights, development, and social welfare policies (Healy & Link, 2012). The adoption of the human rights-based approach further shaped the principles of global social work.

Contemporary International Social Work

Today, international social work involves humanitarian aid, disaster response, and advocacy for vulnerable populations across borders. It emphasizes cultural competence, global solidarity, and sustainable development goals (UNICEF, 2018). The profession continues evolving, influenced by global crises such as climate change, migration, and health pandemics. Today, international social work engages in disaster response, human rights advocacy, and sustainable development. Emphasis is placed on cultural competence, global solidarity, and addressing transnational issues like migration, climate change, and health crises (UNICEF, 2018). The profession continues evolving to meet the demands of a globalized world, aiming to reduce inequalities and foster social justice across nations.

International Social Work encompasses the following

- **Global Issues:**

  International social work encompasses global social problems, comparative social policy, and professional organizations focused on human rights and migration.

- **Humanitarian Efforts:**

  Social workers are increasingly involved in humanitarian and reconstruction efforts after disasters and conflicts.

- **Cross-Cultural Awareness:**

  International social work requires understanding diverse cultures and social service needs.

- **Global Knowledge:**
  International collaboration and knowledge exchange are crucial for addressing global challenges in social work.

1.4 SECTION TWO

1.5 THE HISTORY OF SOCIAL WORK IN NIGERIA

INTRODUCTION

The knowledge of the history of social work in Nigeria is of paramount importance to all practicing and training social workers in the country. Not only will it arm social workers with knowledge of how social work evolved, it will also serve as an inspiration in handling some contemporary social problems. However, academic literature on social work history in Nigeria is quite scanty, which justifies the inclusion of this chapter. This chapter focuses on the historical background of social work in Nigeria. It discusses the development of social work from pre-colonial through colonial to post-colonial eras. It also looks at how social work evolved from indigenous practice of the traditional society to modern (western) social work practice of today.

1.6 SOCIAL WORK IN PRECOLONIAL NIGERIA

Modern social work as a profession is relatively recent in Nigeria. However, indigenous social work practice has been in existence in Nigeria prior to the advent of colonialism. The pre-colonial Nigerian society accommodated a social welfare system that was well understood and practiced by its members in meeting their social needs. Customary arrangements and institutional provisions for organizing, mobilizing, administering and coordinating various forms of assistance to the poor, needy, destitute and mentally ill, existed among the various ethnic communities, centuries before colonization (Okoye, 2013).

The social structure of traditional Nigerian society is a web of relationships by blood or marriage, which made everyone his brother's keeper. People lived together in harmony, with a good sense of belonging, solidarity, and affinity. It was a caring communal system that was eager to ensure that no one was deprived of the basic necessities of life. Welfarist values of friendliness, kindness, hospitality, generosity, honour and respect for the older people and the helpless were

enshrined in the socialization, education, belief and practice of the people. Members nurture, share resources, socialize and educate one another within the family.

The system provided social welfare services, aid and succour to its members. Failure to carter for the aged is an abomination among various ethnic groups in Nigeria. The extended family also dealt with deviant behaviours through counselling and corporal imposition of restorative penalties.Furthermore, kinship groups met the recreational, religious, legal and economic needs of their members (Ogundipe & Edewor, 2012). They served as social security and social welfare agencies providing for the elderly, the sick, the unemployed, informal education, social planning/development, recreation, and gave shelter and food to new migrants (Odiah, 1991)

To buttress with the situation among the Igbo of Nigeria, a careful analysis of traditional (pre-colonial) Igbo social structure reveals the existence of a wide variety of familial and kinship organizations and networks. They undertake the task of providing both material and non-material assistance to needy and poor members of the society. Some of these institutional arrangements include the"umunne", "ezi-na-ulo", "umunna", "ikwu-na-ibe" "umuada", Ikwu-nne","ndi-ogo", "ogbe", the grade and "obodo" institutions. Depending on the nature of need or disability, the "umunne" had the primary responsibility of meeting the needs of their members or soliciting the assistance of other relevant societal organs when the need was beyond its capability.

Again, the 'ezina-ulo" is essentially a production/consumption and caring unit. It only seeks external help when issues they face are beyond it. They take care of the young, aged, sick, challenged, and unemployed (Obikeze, 2001).The "umunna" referred to as the patrilineal line is an aggregation of compounds(ezi-na-ulo) whose members may or may not inhabit a specific area of the village or community, but could trace their descent from one common male ancestor (real or fictional). At the head of the "umunna" is the

"okpara" who is usually the oldest male member in direct line of descent. The nature and structure of the pre-colonial Nigerian society alongside its welfare system made it impossible for some of the present day social problems to be witnessed. This is because it was comprehensive, all encompassing, and natural to the people (Omolewa, 1981).

With time , social work practice in pre-colonial Nigerian society took anew shape with the introduction of Islam in northern Nigeria between the 10thand 11th century. The coming of Islam introduced a new order of social relations based on Islamic principles. This brought about new set of social problems. For instance, the educational system that came along with Islam introduced the problem of "Almajiri" (Islamic students who survive on begging). It also brought along a new system of social work practice such as 'Zakat' system. The 'Zakat' is an informal Islamic system of social work practice that guarantees adequate security and support for the needy and disabled in an obligatory fashion (Abdalati, 1984). It prescribes a wide circulation and sharing of wealth, expertise and commodities (Kazeem, 2011).

While the Zakat system dominated social work practice in northern Nigeria, indigenous social work practice was maintained in the south until the advent of colonialism. The breakdown in social, political and economic organization brought about by colonialism weakened the traditional social structure in Nigeria and created changes which fostered more and modern social problems

2.0 SOCIAL WORK DURING THE COLONIAL ERA IN NIGERIA

The history of modern social work in Nigeria can be traced to the activities of Christian missionaries in the late 19th Century who came along with Portuguese and British colonial masters to proselytize Nigerians. Thomas Birch Freeman established the first Christian mission in Nigeria in 1842 (Ajayi, 1965).Between 1842-1900, several missions including the Church Missionary Society and Salvation Army had established themselves in various parts of Nigeria. These Christian

missionaries came with their own basic assumption of social work practice that was based on the teaching of Christ on charity, community service, love, joy, peace, patience and goodness. They established schools where knowledge of the bible, singing of hymns, chanting of psalms and reciting of denominational catechism predominated. They also established health facilities, provided drugs, taught midwifery and simple nursing hygiene and introduced child welfare and maternal programmes.

Notwithstanding, social work in Nigeria advanced to a more professional activity following World War I & II, which brought alongside more complex social problems that required professional social work intervention. The lifestyle of the returnee soldiers from both World Wars became a negative influence to young people who copied not only the returnees' dress code, but also engaged in other deviant practices such as smoking, drug and alcohol abuse, prostitution etc. The Salvation Army and the Green Triangle group were in the forefront of western social work in Nigeria as they established various programmes and activities aimed at assisting these delinquents who were being influenced by the way of life of the returnee soldiers.

The Salvation Army established industrial schools where delinquent children were sent for training and readjustment, while the Green Triangle established Boys' and Girls' Clubs where talents and potentials of the individual delinquent were addressed (Atolagbe, 1989). These were in addition to the reformatories ran by the Roman Catholic at Badagry. The British colonial government launched its first piece of social welfare legislation with the 1886 Guardianship of Infants Act (Ekpe & Mamah, 1997).This was followed by other acts and ordinances that sought to cater for the welfare of the people such as free services for the disabled, the establishment of Boys' Clubs to prevent delinquency among rural-urban migrants, as well as the establishment of remand homes (Eze, Ezea & Anichie, 2000). This owes to the fact that problems obtainable in the North, were not same as those obtainable in the South (Wisner, Lowe & Hopps ,2008) The cultural attributes of both

geographical territories differed, and therefore had enormous impacts on their interactional patterns, like gender relations, political structure, etc. (Abramovitz, 1998; Byrd& Clayton, 2000). Another instance is the impacts of slave trade which was more pronounced in the South than the North (Lowe & Pearce, 2006; Wood,1978).
Due to these emerging social problems outlined earlier, there was need to apply more organization to the social work practice introduced by the missionaries (Austin, 2000; Morris, 2000). This opened up space for volunteerism, which aimed at volunteers working with the missionaries to address identified problems in the society (Abramowitz, 1998; Figueira-McDonough, 2007).

In retrospect, the Depression of the 1930s and World War II occasioned the need for serious social welfare concerns across the colonies in Africa. The Colonial Welfare Act was passed in 1940 with particular focus on labour and child welfare, as well as sanctions against labour for children under 14 years of age. In 1942, the first Department of Social Welfare was created, and its scope expanded to include juvenile court services and screening of applications of juveniles travelling to Equatorial Guinea (Mere, 1988). Mr. Donald Faulkner, an accomplished social worker from the prisons department was appointed as the first welfare officer to preside over social development and welfare within British colonies. In carrying out his responsibility, Mr. Faulkner employed the services of some members of the green triangle, and other earlier social welfare service volunteers (Kazeem, 2011).

The Native Children's (Custody and Reformation) Ordinance was also passed and Salvation Army home reverted by the government. Summarily, formal social work started in Nigeria in the early 1940s, as a form of humanitarian work and philanthropy for young Nigerians in Lagos, as a response to observed human suffering and misery, occasioned by the ongoing World War II (Jack,1988).

3.0 .SOCIAL WORK IN NIGERIA,S POST –COLONIAL ERA

Since independence, the scope of social problems in Nigeria has increased in all ramifications. The civil war brought with it many problems that the traditional welfare institutions and the existing government social services could not handle. Thus, necessitating more government attention. The Federal government in 1970 invited the United Nations Regional Adviser on Social Welfare Policy and Training, Dr. A.H. Shawky to study the social welfare service situation in the country and advise it on the respective roles of the Federal and Regional governments, alongside voluntary organizations could play in the country's social welfare (Obikeze, 2001).

The Adviser's report marked an important watershed in the history of social work in Nigeria (Mere, 1988). In February 1974, the Federal government passed the enabling decree (Decree No. 12) known as the Social Development Decree. This led to the creation of a separate and totally independent Ministry of Social Development, Youth, Sports and Culture in 1975. The ministry was responsible for the coordination of social development activities in Nigeria. The Federal government also came up with a national policy on social development tagged: "Social Development Policy for Nigeria" in October 1989.
A separate advisory committee on education produced the report titled Mass Education in African Society. It emphasized the importance of mass education and adult literacy programmes as effective instruments for promoting community development and welfare in the colonies. The acceptance and implementation of this report led to the movement of community development unit from social welfare to the Ministry of Education or Local Governments in the Provinces/Regions/States. A practice which remained until 1967.

Since then, numerious institutional groups for therapeutic purposes have been established in Nigeria. These include the Ugbekun Remand Homes in Benin City, the Birrel House Approved Schools (for junior boys) and the Isheri Approved School (for intermediate boys) both in Lagos. Remand Homes were established as shelters for children and young persons that need care, protection and control. It provided remedial and

corrective training to children who are caught wandering and loitering because they are truants or because they are neglected and lacked parental care or close supervision.
These diverse establishments resulted to an increased need for professional social workers to manage and organize the various social welfare agencies in the country. At the initial stage, the staff members at the ministry of Social Development were sent overseas to acquire professional social work training. However, the practice was not sustained because methods of administration of Western social welfare systems acquired by the returnee social workers were criticized for lacking applicable relevance to indigenous social contexts (Odiah1991).

There was then need to integrate indigenous social welfare practice to the western system so as to make it relevant to local context. This led to the establishment of various levels of training institutions such as the Federal School of Social Work, Emene, Enugu State in 1982, and Social Development Institute, Iperu, Ogun State. The two established institutions offered certificate course in social work.

Evidencing the failures of social work in not just Nigeria alone but other third world countries was the 1968 meeting of third world nations' social welfare ministers conveyed by the United Nations (United Nations, 1971). The resultant effect of this meeting was the coming of Dr. A. H. Shawky to Nigeria in 1970.Shawky studied the social space of Nigeria and reemphasized the need for social workers to be trained, engaged and professionalized for the purpose of the country's social development (Okafor, 2004).

Based on Shawky's report, the Federal Government established social work programme in 1976 in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Nigeria Nsukka. The programme aimed principally to train and produce middle level manpower who can run the Social Welfare Departments in the Ministries. It began with undergraduate diploma programme in 1976/1977 academic session and later introduced degree programme in

1984/1985 and postgraduate programmes (PGD, M.Sc., and Ph.D.) as from 1986/1987 academic session. The social work unit acquired a sub-departmental status in November, 2001, and later, a full-fledged department in 2006 (Okoye, 2013).
Furthermore, the University of Benin established a social work unit in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology in 1979 but only offered postgraduate programmes (M.Sc. and Ph.D.) at its inception. Later on (in March, 1983) a two-year undergraduate diploma programme (Diploma in Social Work) was introduced but was on a part-time basis.

This was followed by the five-year undergraduate degree programme in the 1995/1996 academic session, also on part-time basis. The first sets of full-time students were admitted in the 2011/12 academic year as Social Work became a full-fledged Department in that time. The University of Jos also started a BSW programme in the late 90s, and in 2006 started postgraduate programmes (M.Sc. and PhD) (Okoye, 2013).
In 2004, the revised version of Social Development Policy for Nigeria was published. This newer version has a sub-section on social work education and training under the section on social welfare services. It states among other things that social work education and training has the task of producing various levels of manpower capable of applying professional knowledge and planned skill intervention in the various problem situations to achieve a suitable welfare state. The growing dimension of social problems without a corresponding increase in the number of qualified social workers to competently address these problems has created serious demands for professionally trained social workers in Nigeria.

This demand for professionally trained social workers has led to the establishment of social work courses in so many other Nigerian universities and polytechnics, who now contribute to the growth of professional social work(Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2004). Social work in Nigeria has continued to experience a steady growth. More and more professionals are being trained on regular basis. This has led to the formation of various social work associations in Nigeria which

include the Nigerian Association of Social Workers (NASOWS), the Association of Medical Social Workers in Nigeria (AMSWON) and the Nigerian Association of Social Work Educators. Currently a bill on professionalization of social work is with the National Assembly, waiting for legislative actions, as it was denied presidential assent by President Muhammadu Buhari on February 6, 2018(Okoye, 2014; Ogbonna, 2018)

4.0 CHALLENGES AND STATES OF STATE OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

After independence the new government in Nigeria made efforts to sustain the social welfare legacy of the colonial administration. Among the introductions were the Social Security Act of 1961 for 55-year-olds and above; Invalidity and Survivors' Grant for people who sustained injuries at work. The grants would always go to the next of kin of the deceased worker (Ekpe & Mamah, 1997).These mentioned services were among other social development innovations introduced after independence. However, one common denominator to these social care and protective innovations in Nigeria was the fact that they became moribund.

Ekpe and Mamah (1997) argued that one factor that caused these social development innovations to become moribund were the inconsistencies of these social welfare services, in relation to who runs them, how should they be implemented, and how they should be structured? For instance, Decree 12 of1974 established social welfare services as an integral part of Social Development Directorate, while the Social Welfare Department finally began operation in 1989 with a different ministry – Federal Ministry of Culture and Social Welfare (Ogbonna, 2017). According to Ogbonna (2017), the Social Welfare Department was charged with:

Coordination of intergovernmental and interstate social welfare activities, conduct of research and surveys in various aspects of social

welfare, and training of professional social workers, and the organization and coordination of welfare agencies' training. Execution of international casework, promotion of legislation on issues affecting social welfare in Nigeria, conduct research on international matters affecting social welfare, and leading interactions with social welfare organizations at national and international levels.

In addition to these reported inconsistencies, the political climate in Nigeria since 1960 complicated issues (swinging from military to civilian regimes, as well as coups and counter-coups). All these further stalled social development initiatives (Okoye, 2014b). Political inconsistencies in particular made poverty to be pronounced, which led to incessant rural-urban drift. Poor attention was given to healthcare and social amenities, as a result of the fact that those in political seats were much concerned with holding power, as against the welfare of the people. Thus, in order to survive, members of the society decided to fallback to the traditional welfare systems..

Successive Nigerian governments have attempted to respond to rural and urban problems through the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), community banks, directorate of food and rural roads infrastructure, better life for rural women, National Poverty Alleviation Programme (NAPEP), among other giant welfare strides (Agbola, 2002). Yet, poverty and unemployment remain on the increase. Could there be something wrong with our social development programmes, or the ways they are implemented, or who implements them?

Unlike in developed countries, an account of most social work services is synonymous with social welfare in Nigerian context, which lies solely with the government. Hence, they decided to utilize the system at will, and very often to their benefits. In fact, social welfare projects, including basic social amenities in Nigeria are used to score political points by the governments, and barely considered rights of the people (Abegunde & Akinyemi, 2014). This has crippled the social welfare system, and made it look as a second-class concern of the government (Ogbonna, 2017).

As a result of these issues, community based organizations and religious groups, age grades, town unions, philanthropists, among others, became the entities to rely on for social care and protection (Abegunde, 2009; Ayangunna, 2010; Odumosu, Olaniyi & Alonge,2009). The consequence became that these channels remained sources of social care and protective services, while the government held on to the idea of utilizing such services for politics (Kanu & Umoh, 2013).

In another development, social workers in Nigeria face conflicts with other professionals, who claim they do what social workers do. This owes largely to ignorance, and the lack of professionalization sanctioned by law (Okoye,2014a). Most ministries, agencies and parastatals in the three tiers of government where trained and qualified social workers are supposedly prepared to occupy, are managed by non-practitioners. Although, this is gradually changing, owing to the fact that in most federal healthcare facilities, social workers are currently employed.

The challenges of foster care, child abuse and neglect, poverty, politics and governance, migration, unemployment and underemployment, care of the elderly, HIV/AIDS, rehabilitation of physically challenged persons, community development among others, continue to mediate and weigh down the coping capacities of the citizenry. A regime of insecurity from kidnapping in South-East; militancy in the South-South; ethno-religious killings; terrorism, naturaland artificial disasters, presently threaten human existence in Nigeria.

Empirical evidence show a steady decline in Nigeria's government capacity to address the security and welfare challenges of her citizenry (Okoye, 2014b;Abegunde & Akinyemi, 2014). Further, the decline in foreign donors, lenders and policy makers referencing domestic conditions before help is offered to the Nigerian government seems not progressive for public welfare (Abegunde &Akinyemi, 2014). Tribal sentiments and nepotism add a lot to the woes of the country's social development, and impact on the ways resources and opportunities are distributed, including how policies will be favorable across

geographical blocs (Holms, Akinirimisi, Morgan, & Buck, 2012; Olufayo,2014; Osinubi & Osinubi, 2006; Akintayo, Hämäläinen, & Rissanen, 2017).These complex problems have so undermined the growth and developmental pace of social work in Nigeria that creating strategies to address some of these problems will be of help in advancing the success of the profession in Nigeria(Okoye, 2014).

5. 0 CONCLUSION

Every society is confronted with varying degrees of social problems. Social work is without doubt an organized response to the various social problems confronting the people. This paper has revealed the evolution of international social work and its metamorphosis in Nigerian society

International Social Work covers global social problems, comparative social policy, human rights ,migration. humanitarian , reconstruction efforts after disasters conflicts, diverse cultures ,social service needs, international collaboration and knowledge exchange vital for solving global problems in social work.

While social work from the Nigerian perspectives beginning from the extended family/kinship system which was the major institution of social intervention, to the colonial era where church missionary, organizations were at the fore front, and then to contemporary times where social welfare agencies of government and non-governmental organizations are championing the course of social welfare.

It shows that as Nigeria transits from simple, sedentary, and rural based setting, to a more complex urbanized social setting, it is confronted with a new order of social problems that require a more scientific social work approach.

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