THE CHALLENGES OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE IN NIGERIA AND IT'S IMPLICATION ON NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract
Social change begets social problems. Nigeria is facing among other problems; corruption, nepotism, inter-ethnic discrimination, kidnapping and armed robbery. The problems have reached a critical mass that it has become a matter of serious concern not only to the populace, government, but also international communities. Thus, there is a dire need for professionals like social workers to come into play to ameliorate these diverse social problems in order to foster social harmony and achieve national development. Social work is a practical social engineering discipline, promoting social change and interventions in a mirage of ways. Despite the core mandate of the profession, in Nigeria, the profession is faced with challenges that have continued to slow down the pace of its practice, education, and contributions to national development. This paper therefore, is a theoretical approach that attempts to identify the various challenges facing the social work profession in Nigeria, and also seeks to explore the implication of the challenges to Nigeria national development. The paper recommends, among others, that NASOW/NASWE should ensure that only professionals should be involved in social work practices and as a matter of urgency should pass the 2017 social work bill.

Introduction
The emergence of social work and its effort to promote social change and social development, liberation of the less privileged can be seen as closely linked to the primordial tendency of humans to help one another in all stages of evolution in human societies. In the traditional African societies, the concern of social welfare is reflected in the activities of the family, the clan, and ethnic group. The urge of human beings to help one another in all African traditional societies was demonstrated by the great care accorded to, inter alia, children, orphans, widows, widowers, as well as the elderly. In such a "mechanical society" (Durkheim, 1893 in Anugwom 2010), social work was more or less a task for everyone instead of individuals and specialized agencies. Hence, Social work has always been geared towards the betterment of life of each and everyone in the society.

Social work as an academic discipline and a profession as it is known today has relatively recent origin. It emerged at a time when feudalism was disintegrating and capitalism taking its place (Wilbard, 2016). At this point, the control of the family and the church was fast weakening too; individualization and government control of resources were coming on board. According to Fink (1968), these fundamental social changes began occurring between 1834 and 1909 and ushered in the development of specialized care agencies in Britain for certain vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals; such as district schools, foster homes, hospitals, infirmaries and special schools were provided for the groups.

Social work is increasingly becoming globalized, because it is being applied in a variety of settings and numerous agencies, and people across the world are benefiting from its services. Among the services social workers provide includes: in psychiatry, medical, marriage and family counseling, the school, rehabilitation; corrections, public welfare, workplace, drug abuse, and child welfare (Farley et al, 2006 in Wilbard 2016). However, social work does not only address needs and problems at the personal or family level but also at the neighborhood, national and international level.

Mere (1981) outlined the historical background of social work in Nigeria. Mere observed that social work after political independence in Nigeria is ameliorative in approach, emphasizing individual remediation, adjustment to prevailing social situation of poverty, malnutrition and illiteracy: reformation and rehabilitation. Compassion and concern for the suffering and problems of others in every society like Nigeria, gave way for the emergence of social work practice. The degree and magnitude of these problems in Nigeria increased with series of conflict and crises which includes the crisis of interethnic discrimination, the crisis of the gap between the rich and the poor and the problem of political culture. Along these line, social work in Nigeria, according to Ngwu (2014) developed as a result of problems created during our contact with the Europeans who came to Nigeria to trade and exploit our citizens.

In a bid to foster and advance the development of social work in Nigeria many projects and programs have been lunched and initiated. Among these projects made by successive governments were: the opening of two welfare centres in Lagos and later spread to Calabar, Enugu, Portharcourt and Warri, the establishment of National Council of Social Work in 1969 lunched by General Yakubu Gowon, establishment of the Federal Ministry of Social Development, Youth and Sports (since 1975), establishment of social work professional bodies, and incorporation of social work as an academic discipline in Nigeria tertiary institutions. These programmes and projects have the potential of promoting the social work education and practice in Nigeria, but ironically social work practice and education in Nigeria is facing challenges as the profession is not been noticed by populace and only 7(University of Nigeria, University of Lafia, University of Calabar, University of Lagos, University of Ibadan, University of Benin, Federal School of Social Work, Enugu) out of over 170 tertiary institutions in Nigeria are running social work program. Hence, this has made it possible for the involvement of non-professionals who lack fundamental knowledge of social work profession in all the core practices with individuals, families and communities.

The challenges confronting social work education and practice in Nigeria has aroused the interest of the researcher towards carrying out the theoretical investigation. With the aim to investigate the challenges of social work practice in Nigeria, this study

will also provide answers to questions such as: In what areas can social work skill and knowledge be applied?, what are the challenges faced by the profession? What are the appropriate strategies to be adopted to tackle the challenges?

History of Social work in Nigeria

One of the professions that had different diverse route of entry in the world over is the social work profession. Therefore it is very difficult to give a complete and comprehensive historical account of social work profession. A number of events in history have shaped our current ways of thinking, our value system, belief patterns and culture. Contemporary issues, rapidly accelerating advances and global political, economic and social welfare policies programmes and services did not just simply appear out of nowhere. They followed and evolved from harmonious interactions. Kare (2013) noted that, a long history of ideas, values, culture and events has shaped the present social work and welfare practice and services.

Social work evolution is intertwined with the history of social welfare, following significant social trends and events, therefore social work and social welfare are inseparable with a thin line of divide. It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a distinct, detail and chronological history of social work and social welfare. Attempts will be made to bridge the historical epochs. Like any other country, social work and social welfare are primarily anchored on two sociological imperatives; the fact that man is a cultural-building creature (Ekpe and Mamah, 1997). This presupposes that man is in constant cooperation and competition.

The discussion on the origin and history of social work development in any part of the world focuses primarily on the European experience especially England which provided the basic model for export. This was simultaneously followed by Amsterdam, New York city and Berlin in 1900(De Jongh 1972 in Lynne 2001, Ekpe and Mammah 1997), and the Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601 which identified dependent poor, impotent poor, and the able bodied poor (Miles 1949, Fraser 1973, Lynne2001, Karen 2013). The Elizabeth Poor Law enabled the states to take responsibility for the care of the dependent persons (Fraser 1973). This was shortly followed by the Thornes Gilberts Act of 1782 which encouraged the formation of unions and charity organizations in 1869 to advance the curse of social welfare.

Nigeria is a political enclave brought to birth in 1914 following the amalgamation process of the North and Southern protectorates. The evolution of social work in Nigeria like in Europe and America followed indigenous response to conditions of the late 19th century life, to address the problem of underdevelopment and emerging problems occasioned by the Nigerian Civil war.

Van Wimer (1997), noted that two social movements in social work and social welfare that shaped the development of the social work profession are the Charity Organization Societies (COSs) and the settlement houses. Each developed as a result and response to the social ills and problems of the time but differed in philosophy and approach.

Nigeria and indeed Africa existed and has its own indigenous network of social services through the extended family system. Both the children, youth, aged, the sick and the physically challenged etc in need of special assistance were been cared for by the extended family and Age groups with strong feelings of mutual obligations and

dependence to one another (Ijere 1998, Ifemisia 1980). Ekpe and Mamah (1997), noted that, the origin of social work and social welfare follows the early contact of the missionaries and the trading expeditions with the Europeans(the Portuguese) in Benin axis in 1483 because of its attractive red pepper, which further triggered trading relation and invasion of the country by the Europeans in 1553 and established itself as a leader trader most especially in slave trade as a result of high demand of cheap labour in their plantation, and by 1846, Europe has extended its trading command in other areas of Africa.

In Nigeria Lagos was the nexus route of slave trade since slaves were been transported through water ways (Ekpe and Mamah 1977, Federal Ministry of Information 1971), and by 1851 Lagos was occupied by the British and later became a British colony in 1862. With what happened between 1914 and 1960 was a period of political and social-economic exploitation (the colonial imperalism). Shortly after Nigeria independence, political, religious and ethnic sentiments Nigeria was plunged the country into civil war in 1967- 1970. The war further paved way for reconstruction, rehabilitation and reintegration arising from the mirage of social problems.

As mentioned earlier, social welfare and social work practice was largely shaped by the coming of the missionaries (the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, the Foreign Missionary Committee of United Free Church of Scotland, the Roman Catholic Society of African Missionaries). According to Ekpe and Mamah (1997), the missionaries were the purveyors of new cultures and civilization, and added new dimensions to their cultural heritage and new patterns of life and worship with preferred interest on their individual members, the new converts and adherents.

This was closely followed by the voluntary organizations as a moving force in the development of social work in Nigeria. The central Objective of the voluntary organizations was to advance and promote human welfare, giving of relief services to individuals, groups, and society. The relief services were primarily on economic, education, religion, cultural and social services (Otong and Bassey 2011, Ekpe and Mamah 1997).

Most of the voluntary organizations as pointed out by Ekpe and Mamah (1997) are; the Christian Relief Company at Onitsha, the England Coral Fund (used in funding churches in Nigeria), the Young Men Christian Association (YMCA) which provided recreational activities for young men, the Young Women Christian Association (YWCA), which was responsible for marital counseling and home management, the Boys Scout and the Girls Guide and the creation of town unions. One thing should be clear at this point that, all the activities and services provided by the various organizations and the missionaries were very unprofessional and were carried out by untrained social worker, it was an "all corners of affairs"

The post independence era and the Nigerian civil war dealt a deadly blow on the social development structure and welfare of the country. And provided opportunity for the new government in Nigeria to take responsibility to establish the 1961 Social Security Act for the old age, invalidity and death (Ekpe and Mamah, 1997). The absence of professional and trained social workers in Nigeria slowed down the development of social work practice. The Nigerian civil war brought about mass poverty, malnutrition, prostitution and child abandonment (Dyoreugh, 1985). Therefore, the federal government on the advice of Dr. R Shawky, who was then the United Nations Regional adviser on

social welfare policy, caused the federal and state government to play leading roles in advancing social welfare services. In 1974 the military government enacted the Social Development Decree No12 which saw the creation of social development division as an integral part of the Federal Ministry of Labour. Later in 1975, the Federal Ministry of Social Development, Youth, Sports and Culture was created to address the coordination of social development activities and training of social workers in Nigeria. Progressively, in 1989, the Federal Ministry of social welfare and culture was created to primarily focus on maximizing the contributions of social work to the attainment of national development (FMI ,1989).

Social work education and practice in Nigeria still remain "hanging" as appropriate laws and legislations are left out. Until this is done, social work profession will remain "all corners profession with a short and open entry" for quacks.

Social Work Contemporary Social Services Delivery Settings
Social work is an applied field with scientific and value foundations. It therefore focuses basically on meeting needs and aspirations of individuals. Its knowledge base is however eclectic in that it draws on many areas of theory, knowledge, settings, and indeed methodologies. The knowledge base of social work is determined by the problems it seeks to solve. Hence, the profession involves a wide variety of practitioners who operates in various organizational and community settings;

Child Welfare Settings: According to Macht & Ashford (1991), Child welfare is a specialized field of social work concerned with providing social services to children and parents to help them fulfill child rearing responsibilities, and to obtain from the community the resources and protections necessary for healthy family functioning. Examples of child welfare centers include: foster homes, orphanages, day care, schools, borstals and so on. Social workers here renders services such as catering for the abused or neglected children, linking children whose parents are physically or mentally incapacitated to philanthropic, government and Non-government Organizations for assistants and counseling of juvenile delinquents.

Family Welfare Settings: Social workers here provides counseling, health care, protection and material help for actual or potential mothers, and for victims of neglect or maltreatment as well as marital services.

Psychiatric Settings: Social workers in this settings can play the role of facilitator, therapist, consultant and administrator (Ngwu,2014). Rehabilitation services to clients who have developed some irreversible damage in their mental health due to severe mental disorder are provided by psychiatric social worker. Their services are extended to persons who are undergoing mental ill health.

Medical Settings: Social workers here extents there services from administering medical assistance programmes to playing a preventive as well as therapeutic role. Though an understanding of implications of various high-risk situations, the social worker can aid the patients and families to anticipate problems and cope more effectively. The task of social workers in a medical settings are achieved through counseling, ward round

services, making referrals, outreach services, and follow up. The professional social worker found in the medical settings is called medical social worker.

Prisons Settings: Social workers in the prisons can play roles such as Enabler, Mediator, Advocate, Teacher, and Broker (Ngwu, 2014). As an enabler, the social worker is charged with the responsibility of assisting prison inmates to identify their potentials or capacities in dealing with the problems associated with their incarceration. A social worker as a mediator in prison setting involves intervention in resolving disputes between parties. The parties in this sense could be the inmate and parents, friends or neighbor in conflict. As an advocate in a prison, the social worker helps in drawing attention of governments, prisons authorities, nongovernmental organization (NGOs) and other relevant agencies to either modify or change some of the policies and programmes that have made it impossible for judiciary, police, prisons and NGOs to collaborate positively in handling the issue of Awaiting Trail Person (ATP) who sometimes make up more than half of the inmate population in Nigeria (Ngwu, 2014). As a teacher, the prison social worker teaches and gives the inmates information needed to uplift their situation in prison. Educational and moral studies are being organized for the prisoners by the social worker.

As a broker, the social worker in prison can link prison inmates to lawyer who will help to secure their release on bail. The social worker can equally help the prisoner through linking them to philanthropist or nongovernmental organizations or churches who can assist in the payment of court fines, which authorizes their release on bail or a discharge-ending of the case.

Educational settings: Social workers can be found in the school or college settings. Here, social worker foster good relationship between the school and parental interest, between the school and the child's individual needs, and to make all parties; parents, school, and children to communicate openly to one another. The services rendered include: counseling, career guidance and linking the pupils/students to financial systems. Also, social worker in educational settings can be found teaching core and required social work courses especially in tertiary institutions.

Community Settings: At the community level, social workers as an advocate will speak on behalf of groups of people, or members of the community through information collection and arguing the correctness of their needs. For instance, As Ngwu (2014) observed that when a client or group of community members are in need of help such as obtaining government fertilizer for the poor farmers or free interest loans to community members, social workers can facilitate and assist in the process.

The challenges of social work practice in Nigeria.

Social work, compared to other helping professions like Medicine, psychiatry and nursing, is relatively a young profession. Despite its recent development, social work is a rapidly growing field in the world. The profession's phenomenal growth and development throughout the world is a clear indication of its contribution to the alleviation of social problems. However, in Nigeria, social work is been faced with challenges which have slowed the development and the practice of the profession. As

Ngwu (2014) observed that the Federal Ministry of Social Development, Youth and Sports has been making efforts since 1975 to promote social work education and practice in Nigeria. In 1976, the ministry in their first attempt gathered social work educators from the various institutions teaching social work to examine and propose solutions to the problems facing social work education in Nigeria (FMYSD, 1997 in Ngwu, 2014). Ngwu (2014), further argued that despite the frantic efforts of the ministry and the Nigeria Association of Social Workers/Educators, there have been many factors militating against social work education and practice in Nigeria. However, among other areas where there are challenges facing social work education and practice in Nigeria includes:

Poor awareness Creation about the Profession and Non Passage of the 2017 Social work bill by the National Assembly:
       Enlightenment of the public is very crucial in making the public, the government and International Organizations to come into reality of the relevance of social work in nation building. The lack of public awareness on social work education may have contributed in the non-passage of the social work professional bill sent to the Nation's National Assembly in 2018. By awareness creation of the profession people are been sensitize of the various prospects in social work, hence the profession may turn out to be new venture for them.

Lack of autonomy in social work training units/departments:
       In situation where the social work unit is subsumed in a department other than social work, the determination of the objectives and content of programmes as well as the characteristics, quality and number of trainees is often done by professionals from other disciplines instead of social workers Ngwu (2014). This attitude or relationship cannot help social work education to grow in Nigeria. Social work education is a professional training; there is a weighted emphasis on practice. Therefore, the determination of who goes into the programme and who graduates out of it should be the responsibility of the social work professionals.

Lack of Funding of Social work agencies:
       Scarcity of financial resources means inadequate office facilities and supplies (filing cabinets, stationery, tape recorders, etc). Under such conditions, keeping records and confidentiality becomes highly problematic. Moreover, shortage of funds means inadequate transport and communication facilities which in turn implies that home visits cannot be easily or efficiently made, especially in relation to clients residing in rural areas where the bulk of the population lives. These are as result of insufficient allocations of budget funds for the social services department.

Poor remuneration of Social workers:
       Social work is one of the most overworked, underpaid, under-recognized and distressed professions. As Ankrah (1991:159) points out, lack of recognition by governments manifests itself in the lower levels of remuneration and status accorded to social workers compared to other professionals with similar qualifications. As a result, social workers are very vulnerable to stress-generating situations such as role-overload, role-conflict, role-ambiguity, over-responsibility, and poor working conditions. These stressors tend to cause burnout, which results to the depletion of the social worker's

physical and psychological resources, mainly associated with a desire to achieve, unrealistic expectations and powerlessness. Many social workers in Nigeria especially those in the medical settings are finding it difficult to handle work-related stress, resulting in frustration and reduced efficiency.

Lack of Social Work Learning/Research materials:
According to Ngwu (2014) Most of the relevant books and journals in social work in Nigeria are foreign based and dealing with problems, policies and strategies that are alien to the students of African backgrounds. This actually makes the learning and teaching of social work education difficult in the country.

Non-professional teaching core social work courses in the tertiary institutions:
The involvement of non-professionals in all the core social work teaching and practice is one of the predominated challenge associated with social work education and practice in Nigeria. Non-professionals involvement in the core social work practices should be discouraged as they do not have the fundamental knowledge of social work profession and may not impart adequate knowledge to the students (Ngwu, 2014). Such students who undergo such teachings may in practice lack competency.

Recommendations
- The Nigerian Association of Social Workers (NASOW) and the Nigerian Association of Social Work Educators (NASWE) should ensure that only professional social workers are practically involved in social work practices.
- The Government and NGOs should help to sponsor social work practitioners towards attending local and International conferences. By so doing, new knowledge and skills in social work are learned and can be utilize for the nation's development.
- The Nigerian Association of Social Workers (NASOW) and the Nigerian Association of Social Work Educators (NASWE) with the collaboration of the National University Commission should not allow non-professional to handle major courses in social work because they lack social work skills and knowledge and practical experience to do so. Social work education in the universities should be an exclusive area of the social work department
- The current crop of social work professionals should increase their efforts in writing and publishing relevant books and journals for the development of social work.
- The government, NGOs and Philanthropist should help to equip Social work units/departments with modern computer laboratories and websites where information about current literature, e-materials, e-journals, and e-books will be sought.
- There is a general lack of professional recognition of social workers in Nigeria. This is due to the fact that most people do not understand what social work is, even among some government officials. NASOW and NASWE should intensify their effort on public enlightenment and sensitization about the profession.
- The National Assembly and the Presidency should approve and implement the 2017 social work bills, in order to streamline the profession and avoid non professional's involvement in social work practices.

- The professional associations (NASOW and NASWE) should also highlight the need for increased budget allocations for the social welfare sectors by governments as well as improve wages, salaries and conditions of service for social workers.

Conclusion

Social work is relatively young profession in Nigeria, but over the years has developed into a viable profession. Mostly integrated into government departments of social welfare, hospitals, correctional services/probation services, police and defence forces where the casework method is mainly dominant. Social work have overtime widens its positive influence in the society, in promoting dignity for the vulnerable support to attain full potentials. The profession of social work in Nigeria nevertheless faces a number of problems which need to be addressed urgently if it is to effectively deliver social services to the majority of people who are mainly poverty stricken. Some of the problems the involvement of non professional in social work practice, include lack of resources- both material and financial, low wages and salaries for social work professionals coupled with poor conditions of service as well as lack of proper professional recognition of social workers in Nigeria.

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