Exploration of Social Work Practice Models for Rural Development in Uganda

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the contribution that social work has for improving the quality of life of people living in rural Uganda. In so doing it is necessary to utilise models of social work that may contribute to the social development needs of the country. Consequently the paper evaluates the adaptability of various social work models, highlighting their strengths and shortcomings. The author suggests the creation of the role of Social Development Specialist to provide social workers with more respect and recognition and as a more appropriate way of responding to peoples' needs. The integrated development model of practice is presented as the best option for addressing problems and needs and for facilitating development in rural Uganda.

Introduction

The history of the social work profession is characterised by efforts to develop effective approaches to practice. Some social work practice models are more applicable to specific methods. For instance, the medical model and the problem-focused models were more applicable to casework. Some models were developed in response to changes pertaining to problems and conditions. As a result of these changes, effectiveness and relevance of existing models were questioned (Briar, 1968; Spitzer and Welsh, 1969; Stein, 1976; Turner, 1968). Other models have been proposed specifically for developing countries because of those countries' unique conditions, problems, needs, and social structures (Khinduka, 1971; Ragab, 1990). The purpose of this paper is to explore the possibility of utilising some of the social work practice models for rural development in Uganda.

Problems of Rural Uganda

Uganda is one of the developing countries and it is located in East Africa. It is 91,134 square miles in size and it has a population of 15,500,000. The majority of

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people, approximately 90 per cent, live in rural areas. Like other sub-Saharan African countries, Uganda experienced a decline in economy during the 1980s. Idi Amin's ruthless and destructive regime, wars, and political instability also had a negative impact on the country's economy (Kanyeihamba, 1988). The result was a lower standard of living in rural areas. According to Banugire (1989), only 20 per cent of the rural dwellers earn enough income to put them above poverty. He estimates that 70 per cent of the rural population fall in a category of "poor peasants" who cultivate their own plots or labour for others. Because of poverty, rural dwellers are faced with a number of problems. Substandard housing, inadequate clothing, limited education opportunities, diseases, inaccessibility to health services, lack of transportation, lack of safe water, a high infant mortality rate, poor nutrition, illiteracy, and a high fertility rate are some of the problems. Alcoholism is one of the problems which are on the rise.

On the other hand, the social protection which existed in the past is weak today. For example, the strength of the kinship system has been affected by rural-urban migration, death of able-bodied men as a result of political persecution and wars, and economic hardships. There is an increase in the number of widows and female-headed households. AIDS has also resulted in a high number of orphans in rural areas. Individuals are constantly struggling to meet the basic needs of their immediate families so they are finding it difficult to help relatives, friends or neighbours. Yet social service agencies are virtually non-existent in rural areas. The few social agencies in the country are located in urban areas. Therefore, there is a need to find means for facilitating change and addressing problems in rural areas.

Social Work and Improving Quality of Life

Social work has the potential of playing a significant role in improving the quality of life of people who live in rural Uganda. However, this will require adapting social work approaches to the Uganda situation. As Khinduka (1971: 64) points out, social work as practised in technologically developed nations is:

> *"... too culture-bound and too inextricably conditioned by its economic and political origins to serve as a universally applicable model".*

This view is supported by Ragab (1990) who stresses the need for "authentisation" of social work. He states that the process entails delineating:

> *"... the parameters of the appropriate practice models capable of address-ing the specific local problems and needs of the population".*

Ecological Model

It is apparent that the ecological model (life model) would be applicable to rural Uganda. This model identifies the focus of social work intervention as the individual, that individual's environment, and the interaction between the two. By incorporating concepts related to the life cycle and growth process, the model encourages attention to individuals' life tasks and maturational needs as the individuals interact with their environment. In this respect, the model provides useful tools for assessment. By using organisational theory, communication theory and systems theory, the model defines problems as consequences of interactions among people, organisations, information, values and other elements instead of defining them as a result of individuals' pathology. The model also highlights the importance of paying attention to the environment as part of any intervention process. It encourages the use of casework, group work and social action. The expected outcome of the intervention is improvement in individuals' adaptive capacities and better social supports for them. Social situations and group contexts which promote growth and maturation are also expected outcomes (Germain, 1973). The model is useful for helping individual rural Ugandans who are experiencing problems such as alcoholism, loss of a spouse or parent(s), and need of care due to incapacitating illness or old age. Nevertheless, its application is limited by lack of social agencies in rural areas. On the other hand, the model does not provide practice guidelines for changing the rural environment. As shown earlier, the rural environment is closely tied to the levels of poverty.

Structural Model

The structural model addresses some of the above concerns by emphasising the need to change environment as part of social work intervention. The model also provides guidelines for helping individuals by connecting them with resources or providing them with options for changing their plight, mobilising them for social action, working with other people on their behalf and engaging in activities directly aimed at changing specified social structures. These activities entail taking the roles of broker, mediator and advocate. Maximising supports in the client's environment is one of the principles which are part of the model (Goldberg, 1974). The model also encourages generalist practice. This is ideal for rural Uganda since most experts consider generalist practice a necessity for rural social work (Heffernan, Shuttlesworth & Ambrosino, 1988; Poole & Daley, 1985). However, the model does not spell out specific intervention strategies for addressing the problem of widespread poverty in rural Uganda.

Integrated Practice Model

The integrated practice model which incorporates concepts from other social work practice models seeks to promote competency, normalisation and empowerment. It also allows flexibility for choice of locus regarding intervention. This model emphasises individuals' ability to learn and to solve their problems if provided with the appropriate guidance, support, and opportunities. Use of selfhelp, mutual aid, education, and skill development groups are some of the suggested change strategies. For intervention on a macro-level, suggested strategies are *"... team-building, conflict resolution, networking, self-help groups and process organisational development"* (Parsons, Hernandez & Jorgensen, 1988). The strategies suggested by this model can be used to mobilise rural dwellers for improving the quality of their lives. The problem with applying this model to rural Uganda, however, is that organisations for delivery of social services are lacking in rural areas. Very often one community development officer is responsible for a whole district and many of these officers are not trained social workers.Yet the Department of Social Work and Social Administration at Makerere University adequately prepares students for generalist practice. Community work gets great emphasis while social administration, social policy and planning, and economics are part of the curriculum. However, most students seek employment in urban areas, sometimes in non-social work fields, probably because of harsh living conditions in rural areas and lower salaries.

Discussion

For a social work practice model to be effective and relevant to rural Uganda, it has to address the problem of poverty, respond to problems created by changes in the social structure, deal with barriers to progress, be able to impact organisational structures and deal with issues that are considered significant at the national level. I believe the integrated development model meets this criteria as this model puts emphasis on the development aspect of social work. Social development is the expected outcome of intervention. Social development refers to general improvement in the well-being of the population undergoing the process of economic growth and modernisation (Akande, 1992; Berger, 1974). Billups (1990:19) defines social development as:

> *"... the process by which individuals, families, groups, organisations, communities and societies progressively actualise or enhance their human potential through actively participating in naturally occurring, mutually beneficial transactions with their environments".*

Paiva's (1977:329) definition of social development includes:

"... creation or alterations of institutions so as to create a capacity for meeting human needs at all levels and for improving the quality of human relationships and relationships between people and social institutions".

In addition Mayakaduwa (1990) points out that other scholars have included concerns about justice and equity in their definitions of social development.

Although the integrated development model emphasises social change on a large scale, it also accommodates intervention aimed at addressing problems experienced by individuals and small groups. Consequently, the model incorporates some aspects of the ecological model. Like the integrated practice model, this model highlights individuals', groups', and institutions' capacity for positive change when empowered and given opportunities. It also accommodates generalist practice. However, community work, social policy, planning and administration knowledge is emphasised more than casework knowledge. Furthermore, the integrated development model allows social work to be part of economic growth and modernisation efforts. As Khinduka (1971: 69) points out:

"The stage of a country's general economic development is an overriding factor in determining its priorities in welfare. Since poverty in the third world is a pervasive condition of the masses and not merely the unhappy lot of some deprived groups, economic development should be viewed as a major and legitimate form of social work practice".

The integrated development model places social work at the same footing with other disciplines and professions working toward social and economic development. Team work and collaboration are key features of this model.

Social Development Specialist

Application of this model to rural Uganda will necessitate creation of organisational structures specifically aimed at facilitating rural development. The current system gives each Ministry such as Health, Agriculture, etc, autonomy to develop its programmes and projects at national, regional and local levels. However often the projects are not well coordinated. A Department responsible for coordinating rural development activities, and with offices at national, regional and district levels would make establishment of rural development teams easier. Expanding the function of a Community Development Officer to a Social Development Specialist

would give social workers more respect and recognition. Assessing peoples' needs and problems to ensure that programmes and projects respond to needs would be one of the Social Development Specialist's functions. Research and report-writing skills would be essential skills for this function. Mobilising and motivating people to actively participate in planned programmes and projects would be another function. This would entail employing communication strategies to disseminate information and to address concerns and fears. In addition to written material, radio programmes addressing local issues and educational television programmes could be utilised. Although most rural areas have no access to television at this time, various ways of making television sets available at central locations such as schools and community centres can be explored. Experimenting with use of solar energy, generators, and satellites may address the lack of electricity problem.

Communication strategies would be crucial in addressing issues related to health, illiteracy and family planning. Identifying problems and obstacles that impede peoples' effort to engage in development activities would be another of the Social Development Specialist's functions. For example, research has shown that rural African women find it difficult to get credit because they do not have land or cattle which can serve as collateral. They also do not have knowledge and experience necessary for dealing with financial institutions (Basgall, 1988; Beoku-Betts, 1990). Another example is the difficulty some rural African women have experienced regarding participating in commercial farming since by tradition women did not own or inherit land. Limited participation in cooperatives is also attributed to tradition which makes a rigid distinction between the domestic and the public domain (Ayisi, 1991; Hyden, 1970). A Social Development Specialist would facilitate a process of reexamining culture for the purpose of changing traditions and values which are unfair to some members of the rural community. Consciousness-raising and empowerment would be helpful tools in that process.

Developing Income-Generating Projects

As Midgley (1990) points out, social work in developing countries requires initiative and creativity mainly because of scarcity of resources and uniqueness of needs and problems. A Social Development Specialist will need to take initiative and mobilise rural residents for income-generating projects. In addition to craft-making which is organised by women's organisations, vegetable gardening, poultry farming, communal dairy farming and agricultural produce trade can be promoted. Woodwork, clothing production and food processing can also be organised. These activities would ensure adequate supply of nutritious food and would result in purchasing power which is essential for supporting local industries.

The trade in agriculture produce would support the bartering system for international trade. The activities would also motivate rural dwellers, including school leavers, to be productive members of society. In the case of school leavers who neither have chances for further education nor opportunities for employment, the activities would provide an alternative to migrating to the city. It has been observed that the rapid expansion of urban centres in Africa is creating numerous problems because services and other amenities are not being developed at the same rate (Riddell, 1978; Sai, 1986). Building on positive aspects of rural life would entail encouraging cooperation, mutual aid, communal ownership and self-help. Use of grant-writing skills would be essential for obtaining funds to finance some of the projects. Because of reported misuse of donated funds by some African governments, international non-governmental organisations are choosing to channel funds directly for specific projects.

Setting up and coordinating social services, and being part of the policy-making process are also functions that would be carried out by a Social Development Specialist. For example, a well organised foster care system in rural areas could be cost-effective and would address the problem of a growing number of orphans. Introducing social work in rural schools may enable extremely poor children, especially girls, to attain more years of formal education by dealing with problems pertaining to lack of school fees and uniforms. In addition to reducing illiteracy, which is estimated at an 80 per cent rate in rural areas, formal education enables people to be responsive to social change effort and to be actively involved in a democratic political process. In East Africa, it is also the main means of escaping poverty (Bhola, 1990; Foster, 1980; House, 1988).

When some small-scale industries are located in rural areas, social workers may be employed as Personnel Specialists. In addition to work related issues, the specialists would provide services which enhance the well-being of employees. Providing information pertaining to children's needs, family planning and money management may be one of the services. Planning and coordinating education programmes promoting literacy and better skills, and handling of personal and family problems such as alcoholism and domestic violence may be some of the other services.

The integrated development model requires a high level of expertise and a wide range of knowledge on the part of the practitioner. The practitioner's roles are numerous: educator, manager, planner, coordinator, mobiliser, policy-maker, trainer, administrator, innovator, fund-raiser, negotiator, supervisor, researcher, change facilitator, organiser, skilled writer, counsellor, advocate, broker and team-player. For details, refer to Table 1 below.
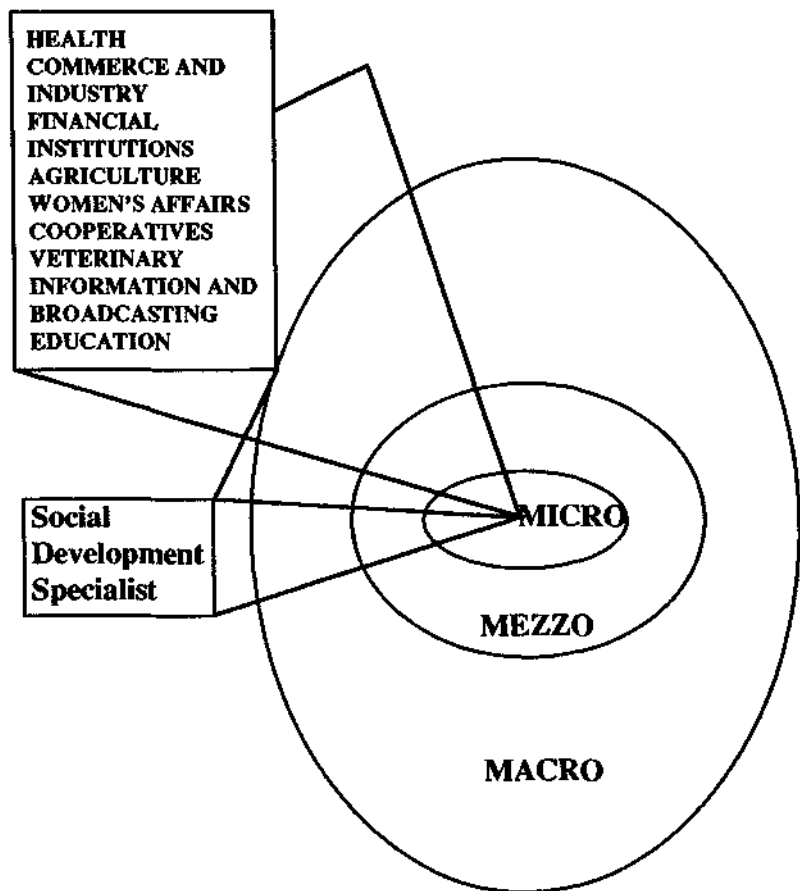
Table 1 SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST			
TASKS	**KNOWLEDGE**	**LOCUS OF INTER-VENTION**	**ROLES**
ASSESSING NEEDS/ PROBLEMS	RESEARCH AND REPORT WRITING	VILLAGES/ DISTRICT	RESEARCHER SKILLED-WRITER
MOBILISING PEOPLE FOR PLANNED CHANGE	COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE	INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS AND COMMUNITIES	MOBILISER EDUCATOR TEAM PLAYER
FACILITATING INCOME GENERATING PROJECTS	COMMUNITY AND GRANT WRITING SKILLS	YOUTH AND UNEMPLOYED ADULTS IN DESIGNATED VILLAGES	MANAGER MOBILISER INNOVATOR COORDINATOR ORGANISER FUND-RAISER AND CHANGE FACILITATOR
SETTING UP AND CO-ORDINATING SOCIAL ERVICES SERVICES	PROBLEM-SOLVING, SOCIAL WELFARE AND SOCIAL POLICY	INDIVIDUALS IN NEED OF CARE/ SUPPORTS, OR FUNCTIONING INADEQUATELY	PLANNER ADMINIST-RATOR SUPERVISOR TRAINER COUNSELLOR BROKER
PARTICIPAT-ING IN POLICY-MAKING PROCESSES	SOCIAL POLICY ECONOMICS POLITICAL SYSTEM	POLICY MAKING STRUCTURES AT NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL LEVELS	POLICY-MAKER NEGOTIATOR ADVOCATE

Providing potential social work practitioners with the necessary skills and knowledge while they are in the social work programme at Makerere University is essential. In addition to the social work courses, administration, economics, policy and planning and other social sciences subjects, students interested in rural practice should be given the option of taking management, extension services and some courses in women's studies. Offering optional classes focusing on specific fields of social work, such as school social work and community education may be worth experimenting with. Making sure that students get a chance to be placed in rural areas for their practicum may create an opportunity for dealing with practical problems related to practising social work in rural areas. This will necessitate block placements and practicum seminars at the end of these placements. Interest in rural practice may be encouraged by outreach efforts to get some students for the social work programme from remote rural areas. For qualified social workers, reasonable salaries and fringe benefits such as free housing may also encourage interest in rural practice.

Conclusion

Social work in Uganda is facing a challenge of marketing itself. The respect and recognition it gets will depend on the impact the profession is making on peoples' needs and problems. The current government has publicly indicated a preference for a people-centred approach to development and has set a goal of upholding justice and social equality. The political party structure is also encouraging open communication between government representatives and citizens. So, there are opportunities for the profession to carve a niche for itself. Collaboration with scholars and educators in other developing countries by sharing information may enable the social work professionals and educators in Uganda to address the question of relevance. Scholars and educators in developed nations, by engaging in exchange programmes, joint projects, and consultation, may enable the professionals and educators in Uganda to address the question of effectiveness. I believe the integrated development model of practice (see Figure 1) will enable social work practitioners to be relevant and effective in rural Uganda.

Figure 1: INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT PRACTICE

**HEALTH
COMMERCE AND
INDUSTRY
FINANCIAL
INSTITUTIONS
AGRICULTURE
WOMEN'S AFFAIRS
COOPERATIVES
VETERINARY
INFORMATION AND
BROADCASTING
EDUCATION**

**Social
Development
Specialist**

MICRO

MEZZO

MACRO

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