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## **Empowerment and Social Work Education and Practice in Africa**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Historically the development of social work in most African countries has been strongly influenced by and modelled after Western countries. This has often meant the development of social service programmes and systems that have had a traditional focus of social work (clinical, socialising, custodial, therapeutic and care-taking functions). Increasingly today, this traditional model of social work is being superseded by a model built upon human-focused or social development concepts (Osei-Hwedie, 1990). This model is based upon egalitarian principles which assume that all members of a society should have access to information, goods, services, opportunities and the decision-making process; and the assumption that there will be a special focus on the needs of disadvantaged groups. Thus, the structuring of social work activities in this model requires a corresponding reconceptualisation of education and practice.

What is needed is a conceptualisation of practice that will focus on both the immediate needs of people and the larger social and economic changes necessary to prevent future individual disruption and to improve the quality of life for all (Galper, 1980). This means linking together and integrating the knowledge and skills of the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of practice.

The conceptual base of education and practice that serves to best accomplish the above is that of empowerment. Empowerment is conceptualised as the discovery of individual health and strengths and the attainment of participatory competence (Kieffer, 1984). Utilising concepts taken from motivation and action theory (White, 1959; Locke, et al, 1981), the authors develop an empowerment model for social work practice. This model encompasses five dimensions of practice: personal empowerment (competency required for taking self-direction); social empowerment (comprising society's capacity for self-direction and control of community processes and resources); educational empowerment (the development of an educational system that prepares people for both their social and work

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life); economic empowerment (the development of the means to earn a sufficient income to live a life of dignity and to provide for the adequate fulfillment of the requisite needs of shelter, food and clothing); and political empowerment (involvement in democratic decision-making). Social work roles inherent in this model are ones that focus on that of colleague, political ally, facilitator, advocate, and mediator.

## **Introduction**

Historically, the development of social work in African countries has been strongly influenced by and modelled after the colonising home country (Hall, 1990; Midgley, 1981; Kendall, 1987). In most instances this has meant the development of social service policies and programmes which have centred on a traditional focus of social work (casework, socialisation, custodial care and therapeutic models). While traditional social work roles are not without their utility, the social problems and issues confronting most African countries call for a different emphasis if social work is to be a meaningful and viable profession on the continent. As long as social work remains principally involved in remedial and custodial services, the profession increasingly will find itself marginalised. To have a significant impact on people and situations, social work education and practice should be guided by an understanding of society and its effect on different groups and locations; programmes must be based on knowledge and understanding of specific societal conditions. Social workers must begin to unravel societal dynamics, especially those that breed poverty and disadvantage, and treat these systematically in practice.

Many of the needs that exist in African countries are little different from those which are not well addressed nor adequately met in other parts of the world. These needs include the oppression of specific population groups, conditions of poverty, homelessness, unemployment/underemployment, deterioration of family structures, urban problems, AIDS, and inadequate medical care and education. However, since the mid-1970's, the African socioeconomic crisis has escalated dramatically. The drought and famine of the 1980's, amidst high population growth rates; the unemployment and underemployment of about 50% of the continent's total labour force; malnutrition and mass poverty; and increasing income disparities have been devastating. Available data indicate that 33% of all African children are malnourished; and that 51% of pregnant women, 40% of non-pregnant women and 42% of all women suffer from nutritional anaemia (WHO, 1992). In the face of low economic productivity, misuse and mismanagement of national resources, heavy debt service burdens and adverse socio-political and environmental conditions, and the demand of economic structural adjustment programmes, most

African governments have difficulty meeting the needs of their people (UN, 1987; Osei-Hwedie, 1990). These socioeconomic realities directly affect the fiscal resources available for social services and the extent to which social welfare bureaucracies are developed (Rao, 1990). Given the nature of the social and economic environmental conditions and the types of social needs identified, it is readily understandable the limitations of a social work practice model focused primarily on casework functioning. Similar questions have been raised about the relevance of this model to adequately meet the real human services needs of people in the US (Perlman, 1975).

The search for new models of practice is especially urgent in Africa given its poverty status. For example, sub-Saharan Africa has about one-fourth of the world's poor. The absolute numbers of the poor are expected to rise from 184 million in 1985 to 216 million in 1990 and to 304 million in the year 2000. The population below the poverty line was 47,6% in 1985 and rose slightly to 47,8% in 1990. It is projected that the population below the poverty line will reach 49,7% by the year 2000. On the other hand, the per capita GDP growth in the year 2000 is expected to be lower than that of 1985 (UNDP, 1992). In the 1980's, Africa suffered a significant fall in per capita income from already low levels. Per capita income in the 1960's increased at a moderate rate of 1,4%. This rate declined to 0,2% in the 1970's and to -2,8% between 1980 and 1986. As a result the number of Africans in absolute poverty grew by about two-thirds in the first half of the 1980's alone to include more than half of the population. In countries such as Nigeria, Liberia and Niger, real incomes declined by over 25%. It is contended that even under the assumption that the continent achieves a growth of 4% per annum in the 1990's, sub-Saharan Africa will see an increase of about 85 million in the number of the poor by the year 2000 (Osei-Hwedie, 1993).

## **Human Focused/Social Development Model: A Framework for Practice**

Specific to the social problems and conditions in Africa, Rao (1990) identifies a number of priorities for social welfare activities and underscores the need for these activities to be tied to national development. Citing a 1987 United Nations Economic and Social Council report, Rao states:

*"Priorities include redesigning existing social welfare infrastructures to detach them from the negative aspects of their colonial heritage and reinforcing traditional social support networks of the family, kinship groups, and the community. Aligning social welfare to employment generation and alleviation of poverty, especially in rural areas, is a challenge faced by both governmental and nongovernmental organisations in Africa.*

*Current African realities require social welfare policies and programmes that derive from an overall social policy that is central to national development and social change rather than peripheral or merely reactive (p 197)".*

This perspective of social welfare is similar to that articulated by Galper (1980). He emphasises the need for social services to address not only the immediate needs of people, but also the larger social and economic changes necessary to prevent future individual disruption and to improve the quality of life for all. In making changes to improve the quality of life, Hall (1990) underscores the importance of a social development focus that impacts social disadvantage and structural inequality. A central element in the process of social development is the promotion of maximum community participation (Ankrah, 1987; Hall, 1990; Osei-Hwedie, 1990). While many African countries have long employed community development methods such as the creation of village development committees, the process has seldom been one of involving people at the local level in the identification of their own needs. Rather, the identification of community needs has often followed a top-down form of planning. This type of process only serves to reinforce the oppression of disadvantaged groups at the hands of an "enlightened" few. In discussing the underlying assumptions of a human focused/social development model for social services, Osei-Hwedie (1990) states:

*"This human focused development philosophy is based on the assumption that all sectors of society should have access to information, goods, services, opportunities and the decision-making process. This is an egalitarian principle which implies giving attention and emphasis to the most disadvantaged or vulnerable groups in society. Human focused development has also been referred to as a social strategy approach. The goals of this approach include improvement in the quality of life through the mobilisation of human and natural resources, equitable distribution and utilisation of resources, income and other benefits of economic progress, mass participation in socioeconomic activities and associated political actions; and special programmes that focus on disadvantaged groups" (pp 89-90).*

The adoption of this social development model for practice stresses greater involvement on the part of social workers in the tasks of social policy and planning, social administration, programme evaluation and community organisation. This requires knowledge and skills in working with professionals in the areas of economic development and planning, health, and education. It further requires a sensitivity to socio-cultural and political factors and knowledge of how to engage in effective social action strategies.

While many of the above areas are touched upon or are part of traditional social work education curricula, their application has most often been related to micro and mezzo level systems. Little attention has been given to their application to macro level systems. Thus, social service systems are most often reactive, rather than proactive, in dealing with current or anticipated human needs. This reactive stance is also related to Western values underlying a residual approach to the provision of social services. Adopting a human focused/social development model for social work practice, requires the identification and reconceptualisation of the base of social work values, knowledge and skills. The model must also have sufficient "elasticity" to be relevant and effective in locales that differ on the basis of a number of critical factors. Midgley (1981) argues for the development of a pragmatic approach to the practice and teaching of social work based upon local culture, values, needs, economics, and politics. In developing such a pragmatic approach, four major characteristics are identified as being salient. These characteristics are:

1. Social problems must be dealt with in a direct manner, but in ways that are not reliant on conventional casework methods. The social development model is one based upon direct services. However, the approach to providing these services must take into account factors such as traditional religious beliefs, the role of village headmen and chiefs, extended family and tribal systems, and cultural values that differ from the traditional Western emphasis on, and value of, the individual.
2. Practical versus theoretical skills must be emphasised. Practical development skills related to setting up and managing rural cooperatives, the growing of vegetables, raising of livestock, and the use of new technology to produce goods in areas that lack electricity, water and fuel are all potential examples of necessary knowledge and skills.
3. The emphasis of social work intervention must be directed toward the most pressing needs and social problems of developing countries. In particular, social work intervention in developing countries must be able to deal with the effect and ramification of dire poverty. Engagement in economic development activities aimed at providing for basic needs related to food, shelter and clothing are especially critical.
4. Social work must reflect the principle of "indigenisation". This means that social work must be practised in a manner that is appropriate to the people and the country. Social work practice and education that is relevant to and effective in meeting the needs of people cannot be successfully carried out as long as it remains solely centred on the development of practice knowledge, theory and professional roles which have been developed in the West.

The utilisation of the human focused/social development model serves to provide a framework through which social work can assist in fulfilling a meaningful and vital role in addressing the pressing social problems of African developing countries. Central to this framework is the connecting of individual needs to the larger social and economic changes required to be made in order to prevent individual dysfunction. A remedial approach, utilising primarily casework methods, is not likely to bring about this. Rather, there is a need to focus on a social work practice model that will enable social workers to function effectively utilising a social development perspective. Social work must develop a theoretical base that will move practice away from theory based upon concepts of individual deficits and toward theory that emphasises individual strengths and focuses on the underlying socioeconomic structural factors correlated with social problems. An effective practice model needs to have an "environmental" fit and be founded upon a base of knowledge which is primarily rooted in sociological and political concepts. It should also engender a knowledge base which is relatively culture neutral with an emphasis on concepts which have broad understanding and applicability.

One such model, which bears both promise and the need for greater development, is that of empowerment. The rationale for empowerment may be found in the "appropriateness" argument. Thus, the search for focus or emphasis must include finding new local ways, or revisiting old ideas and processes of problem-solving and service-delivery. This involves understanding and articulating local indigenous resources, relationships, helping and problem-solving networks; and the underlying ideas, rationale, philosophies or values. Basically, social work must develop processes and procedures which relevant groups, communities or individuals are comfortable with, understand and control. Thus, empowerment calls for appropriateness, which also requires reconceptualisation and a radical review of social work models and process.

The underlying notions are rooted in Freire's (1985) conscientisation approach and liberation theology of Latin America. Reconceptualisation is seen as focusing on the reformulation of concepts so that they are in line with efforts to empower marginalised groups in society. In general, practice is to be based on local experiences from which new 'constructs' are then created. This approach emphasises the rethinking, restructuring and strengthening of social work practice, and places social work practice in the context of civic and political society (Mupedziswa, 1992; Osei-Hwedie, 1993).

Reconceptualisation also calls for the radicalisation of social work and its role in society based on the argument that current social work practice in Africa is not relevant, appropriate, or particularly effective. Social work must shed its liberal character and adopt a more pragmatic and radical approach to get away from

institutions and processes which cause the social ills that social work is supposed to help eliminate. The profession must develop a more dynamic paradigm that marks a departure from traditional formulations and procedures. Practitioners, in this context, must assist the disadvantaged to develop the necessary skills to participate in national debates, organise for social justice, and demonstrate and agitate on behalf of themselves. The central element of a radical approach places emphasis on the desire for the disadvantaged to work collectively towards changing alienating conditions. This orientation means that social work focuses on structural change, inequality and social disadvantage, thereby taking a preventive stance. It also stresses self-reliance and popular participation aimed at enhancing people's capacity to work for their own welfare. Thus, social work is placed in the context of empowerment and capacity-building (Osei-Hwedie, 1993).

On the whole, the search for appropriateness in the context of social development also relates to the question of control. To redefine social work and chart its course also means setting the social work agenda. Social work's legitimacy and appropriateness are tied to the manner in which the agenda is set, who sets it and the interests which it serves (Osei-Hwedie, 1993). The remaining focus of this paper is devoted to defining the concept of empowerment, reviewing the literature pertaining to empowerment, and the explication of five different dimensions of empowerment practice for social work.

## **Empowerment: A Model for Practice**

To understand the concept of empowerment, it is helpful to look at notions about power and powerlessness. Societies consist of individual groups of people with differing levels of power and control over resources (Gutierrez, 1991). Both a negative and positive force, power is more than simple repression over or domination of groups. It is inherently about social interactions and the role of power within them, a notion of working on and through people.

At the micro level, power is embedded in social development. Solomon (1976) views an individual's power as developing through positive experiences within the family, giving the individual a sense of confidence and competency in social interactions. This social competency is reinforced by the individual's ability to manage social relationships outside the family and to use social institutions (eg church and school) to gain additional competencies. These additional competencies provide skills for performing other adult social roles which are valued by the society. By adulthood, the empowered individual has attained three spheres of power: the ability to get individual needs met (personal or psychological power), the ability to influence others (interpersonal or social power), and the ability to influence the distribution of resources (political power) (Gutierrez, 1991; Friedmann, 1992).

Within a larger context of the community or macro system, power refers to the domination of one social group or institution (eg, government) over others, often around the distribution of resources. According to Freire (1985), this domination may be something as simple as rules regulating social behaviour, imposed by the state through such agencies as the police and the courts. It also may represent the manner in which power, technology and ideology produce forms of knowledge, social relations, and other cultural forms that function to actively silence people. These forms of domination, over extended periods of time, become institutionalised within a society as “negative valuations” and result in the silenced group experiencing a sense of powerlessness (Solomon, 1976).

Powerlessness takes place within a construct of continuous interaction between the individual and his/her environment (Kieffer, 1984). The powerless individual assumes a role of object, being acted upon by the environment, rather than that of subject, acting in and on his/her world. The powerless person alienates him/herself from participating within the social reality of the environment, resulting in a passive acceptance of oppressive cultural givens about him/her (Freire, 1985). There is an attitude of self-blame, a sense of generalised distrust, a feeling of alienation from resources for social influence, an experience of disenfranchisement and economic vulnerability, and a sense of hopelessness in the socio-political environment (Kieffer, 1984). Thus, being powerless represents:

*“...the inability to manage emotions, skills, knowledge, and/or material resources in a way that effective performance of valued social roles will lead to personal gratification”* (Solomon, 1976:16).

Overcoming powerlessness requires the strengthening of the individual’s adaptive capacities to use resources within his/her socio-political environment and the development of the abilities to participate competently within that environment (Kieffer, 1984). Thus, empowerment is:

*“...a process of increasing personal, interpersonal, or political power so that individuals can take action to improve their lives”* (Gutierrez, 1991: 201).

Empowerment strategies must be focused on reducing, eliminating, and reversing those “negative valuations” held by those identified as powerful within the society (Solomon, 1976). According to Kieffer (1984), strategies utilising empowerment include both the development of empowering skills and the attainment of “participatory competence”. The notion of participatory competence includes:

- (1) the development of a more positive self-concept or sense of self competence
- (2) the construction of a more critical and analytical understanding of the social and political environment, and
- (3) the cultivation of resources (individual and collective) for social and political action (Kieffer, 1984).

Interventions taken and efforts made to develop or achieve any of these competencies are considered to be empowering skills. The empowered individual portrays that combination of understandings and abilities necessary to assertively participate in the on-going construction of his or her socio-political environment (Freire, 1985).

The empowerment practice model proposed within this paper uses, as its cornerstones, the notions of the individual embedded within a social and political environment and the development of participatory competency as a strategy to empowerment. The individual is viewed as an actor within a complex socio-political environment, making choices in his/her world within the social, political, and economic constraints of that world. Intervention strategies assist individuals to identify their concerns within a shared social and political context rather than as isolated individual problems. Thus, the development of social networks of empowering relationships increase the potential for social change.

The discovery of individual strengths and development of participatory competencies broadens the access and use of options and resources within the choices available to the individual. Key to this approach is the placing of competence and coping within a socio-political context. The development of competencies represents the individual's growing mastery over his/her environment, which, in turn, leads to increased motivation and direction for goal-seeking behaviour (White, 1959; Locke et al, 1981). This goal-seeking behaviour is not limited to the world of the individual. Achieving empowerment also necessitates the developing of skills and resources to confront the root sources which have created and perpetuated the oppression (Kieffer, 1984). Thus, the individual sees himself/herself as an agent in finding solutions and is transformed from a helpless victim to an assertive and efficacious person.

## **Empowerment: Dimensions of Practice and Social Work Roles**

Five dimensions of practice are identified within an empowerment model: personal, social, educational, economic, and political. These dimensions serve as a focus for practice and are inexorably intertwined with each other.

### ***Personal Empowerment***

This dimension reflects upon the client system as having the strengths and capabilities to positively impact its position in life. Personal power is based upon the competencies, self-esteem, and motivation of the client system. Germain (1991) relates personal power to the ability to engage in self direction. She states:

*"It is the power to make choices, reach decisions, and engage in socially effective action on behalf of the self and the collectivity – to be self-directing, self-managing, and self-regulating"* (p 26).

Empowerment within this dimension enables the client system to break free from entrenched habits. It entails a process of learning to move from only being reactive to life events to becoming proactive in shaping one's vision for life. The building of personal power requires an action-oriented approach to practice. The social worker must become a supporter, partner, and role model for the client in taking action (doing), rather than engaging in passive talking. The content for work is based upon the strengths of the client system and the development of new competencies that move the client toward achieving his/her identified life's aspirations, hopes and dreams. The context for taking action is in the client's environment, rather than in the worker's environment. Salient roles for the worker are those of broker, enabler, teacher, behaviour changer, and advocate.

### ***Social Empowerment***

Personal empowerment reinforces social empowerment. This dimension demands radical realignment of values and beliefs about control of decision making. It brings forth the hope of transforming social institutions, and strengthening group freedom, dignity and self-governance. Social empowerment increases a sense of responsibility and ownership and pushes governance to the masses. It underscores the notion that leadership direction and control are best exercised at the lowest levels of society (Block, 1991).

The nature of African societies underlines the importance of social empowerment. For example, Midgley (1981) emphasises that, in most Third World countries, clients are not always amenable to individualised intervention. In most African societies, the individual is a being within a societal or group context and finds character and expression of the self within the group. Given this cultural context, social work must look to the community to define its process and outline its practice boundaries. Social work practice must be based on the cultural milieu of the society in which it is evolved and practised, and must use the social structure model of that society. In this sense, the principles and ethics must embody the

values of the locality (Midgley, 1981). Social workers must understand institutionalised cultural values which give meaning and direction to a society. In this context, social work must facilitate the unearthing of activities and processes by which people understand and control themselves. A comprehensive understanding of people and their world view – economic, social, religious, psychological and political – is critical for the social worker. Midgley (1981) sees poverty, deprivation and inequality as the major and real problems facing developing countries. Social work must work together with communities and their resources, other professionals and para-professionals to solve these problems. Salient roles for the worker are those of data manager, advocate, community planner, consultant, and mobiliser.

### ***Educational Empowerment***

The fullest development of a nation's human resources require the free and ready access to meaningful educational systems. Effective educational systems prepare people for productive engagement in both their social and work environments. The lack of an adequate education serves to severely limit how one fully realises his/her hopes and dreams. These limitations can range from low self-esteem to an impaired ability to successfully compete for often scarce jobs in the workforce. Within Africa, many countries are hard pressed to offer but the most basic educational services to their populations. In the best cases, such as in Botswana, educational opportunities often diminish rapidly, beginning with junior high level education. The lack of opportunities, coupled with early school leaving, results in a tremendous influx of under-educated and unskilled young men and women into the workforce. Given unemployment rates of 40 to 60 per cent, this large pool of unproductive young people represents an exploding social problem that serves to feed other problems. This lack of education most often equates to living at a poverty level.

Basic literacy education, followed by accessible and flexible educational programmes for both young and older adults, needs to be a key component in any country's social development plan. Central to the practice of empowerment within a social development model is for social work to become involved in the creation of these opportunities. This task entails the ability to contribute positively to the shaping and implementation of relevant educational policy at the macro level. At the community level, social work tasks require involvement in the prevention of early school leaving and in the development of community based literacy and basic education projects. Salient social work roles within this dimension include that of advocate, mobiliser, consultant, teacher and planner.

### ***Economic Empowerment***

Economic empowerment is the ability of each able member in society to obtain sufficient income to live a life of dignity, and one in which the requisite needs of shelter, food, and clothing can be adequately fulfilled. There is not space enough within the confines of this discussion to talk about the structural factors underlying poverty and its impact on the human condition. However, the shaping of effective economic development must include a greater focus on the human impact of that development. This underscores the need for social work to develop the expertise and ability to shape policy at the macro level. At the community level it requires that social workers become better educationally prepared to engage in the development and management of cooperative economic development schemes. In many African countries, social workers in both the public and non-governmental organisation (NGO) sectors are involved in mobilising individuals to develop cash income projects. The extent to which they succeed or fail often rests on the abilities of those planning the schemes to select a saleable product, control costs related to the production of the product, and effectively market the product. These skills are typically not ones in which social work has much preparation. Salient social work roles in this dimension include that of advocate, planner, consultant, data manager, teacher, and administrator.

### ***Political Empowerment***

Political empowerment embodies the formation of democratic systems in which all citizens can participate in a manner in which they are heard and can influence the shaping of those policies that impact their lives. These democratic systems include both those at the community and national level. Gil (1990) notes the difficulty in engaging in social change-oriented politics at the electoral level. He states:

*“Electoral politics are geared primarily to winning by manipulating the voting of ill-informed electorates. This involves dichotomising issues into over-simplified alternatives, reinforcing unexamined assumptions and stereotypes, and generating distorted images through media-technologies”* (pp 18-19).

Although Gil (1990) suggests that fundamental social change is not likely to occur through efforts devoted at this level, he does argue that activity not be abandoned as it can serve as a “...defence against severe exploitation, oppression, and repression . . .” (p 19). More fundamental change can occur in the political arena through building strong social change movements at the grass roots level. By beginning to take control at the local level, coalitions can be formed that can serve

to build networks that can impact regional and national policies. The inclusion of the political dimension for empowerment is viewed here as a critical arena for social work practice. It is within the political arena that debates and decisions effecting the basic values of the society occur. For example, in most countries of Africa, the status of women as equal members of society is under much debate. Traditional cultural values are often used as a reason not to advance the status of women as full and equal members of the society in which they live. However, the principle of indigenisation cannot serve as a reason to keep certain members of society in a state of servitude. Tradition and cultural values are like all other systems; they are in a constant state of change. Thus, the attainment of social justice and equality for all groups in a society requires an ability to effectively engage in the political processes of both the community and nation in which one lives. Salient social work roles in this dimension include those of advocate, teacher and mobiliser. Critical professional tasks include helping communities, groups and individuals find a positive way of being political and sustaining related activities at meaningful levels.

### ***Implications of Empowerment for Social Work Education and Practice***

Social workers are inadequately prepared to meet most of the above demands. The best promise of development, therefore, lies with ordinary people's initiatives. Rahman (1990) emphasises that ordinary people are capable of social inquiry and analysis. These can be enhanced by practice and consultation (external input) given that self-development starts with one's own action. One cannot totally develop with someone else's ideas which do not fit one's own special circumstance or conditions of living (Osei-Hwedie, 1993). Thus, empowerment calls for radical changes in social work education and practice.

The notion of change in the structure of social work envisioned here is based on social justice for the communities that need the most help. For Africa, social work training should be consistent with local conditions. Social work practitioners and students should be equipped with the tools to penetrate cultural life and activities, and to work in, and relate to, local communities and their conditions (Osei-Hwedie, 1993).

It must be emphasised that empowerment through social work practice must be preceded by the indigenisation of social work education. The definition of practice must be in line with the conceptualisation of education based on local needs, processes, inputs, design, structure, and control. Social work education must do more than produce high-level manpower. Students and practitioners must gain sensitivity to, and critical awareness of their society and its needs, the services to

be rendered, and the procedures which may be appropriate in different contexts. More importantly, social workers must not see themselves as privileged and removed from society, "*...but as ordinary members of the society ready to use their newly-acquired knowledge and skill in the service of that society*" (Nyirenda, 1976). This perspective is critical if social workers are to be believable change agents. The shift in emphasis also means that social work education and practice must pay more attention to the nature and consequences of social conditions in which people live than has hitherto been the case. The consciousness-raising which lies behind social work's emphasis must be placed on self-directed learning, exploration and analysis. Students must be exposed to such an approach if, in the future, they expect clients to use self-directed learning, exploration and analysis successfully. In short, social work education must become a joint effort between students and lecturers, the same way social work practitioners implement problem solving as a joint effort with clients.

The current socioeconomic situation in Africa calls for a complete rethinking of national development and social welfare, and hence social work education. This also means taking a new look at social work programmes and deciding which ones are consistent with and relevant to national development needs and the requirement of empowerment. Social workers and their client systems must focus on the identification of deficiencies in economic, political and social structures and contribute to social development through institutional development and control, and the classification of values and goals. Social work educators must seek to make social work practice a conscious process for social action utilising innovative, improvised and outreach strategies in a cooperative and communal effort to free the minds, the hands and the energies of the poor and disadvantaged masses.

## Conclusion

For social work to positively address the many varied and complex social needs of African developing countries, a broad-based model of social work practice needs to be developed. Current models of practice which are reflected in Western social work education and literature have not been relevant either in the past or today. The failure of these traditionally focused practice models (ie clinical, socialising, custodial, therapeutic and care-taking functions) is not only evident in the developing countries of Africa, but also equally evident in addressing similar social needs found in the urban areas and among oppressed populations in the Western countries.

Within a human focused/social development model for social work practice, an empowerment model of practice has also been articulated. This model views the individual as interacting within a social and political environment. The degree to

which one interacts successfully is dependent upon both the individual's participatory competency skills and the opportunities for participation within the environment. The five dimensions of empowerment practice (personal, social, educational, economic, and political) represent the primary participatory competencies that serve as the primary thrust of social work intervention efforts. The model is based upon the strengths of the client system and views the development of empowering relationships as a means for increasing the possibilities of social change.

The development of this model holds forth a broad and comprehensive view of how a social worker would function in addressing client needs. The encompassing of such a model would require both the need for an expanded set of skills and knowledge as well as a different way of conceptualising practice and delivering services. While the delivery of traditional services focused on micro level systems would still be carried out, much greater emphasis would be placed upon addressing the underlying factors within mezzo and macro level systems that relate to the micro system needs.

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