

SOCIAL POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR AFRICA: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Social Policy Framework for Africa (2008) has implications for social work practice and education in Africa and beyond. It calls for a progressive social work that is aligned to the logic, substance, and principles of social justice and human rights. Social Policy Framework for Africa advocates for a social work practice and education that has clear philosophical and ideological foundations anchored on social democratic principles and values. These values will revolve around social justice, human rights, sustainable development, collectivism, solidarity, self-sufficiency, empowerment, human security, and faith in democracy. This is in resonance with the global definition of social work as described by the International Federation of Social Work and International Association of Schools of Social work (2014). In this paper, we engage on the social policy framework in African and look at its implication to social work.

Keywords: social policy, framework, social justice, social justice social work, and Africa

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The paper is about the Social Policy Framework for Africa (2008) which has existed without being implemented for over ten years. The paper seeks to create awareness on the existence of the framework, familiarize stakeholders with its content and to canvass the implications of the framework for social work practice and education in Africa. The paper presents the framework that has solid guiding principles that include social justice, human rights, sustainable development and solidarity. The paper shows the incongruence of the social policy status quo in Africa with the content of the framework. The paper reveals that social policy in Africa has tended to be residual in orientation. It has adopted a neo-conservative ideological posture with its concomitant characteristics of a means tested temporary and limited material assistance for the disadvantaged. The paper calls for a move from a social protection model of social policy in Africa to a transformative social policy paradigm, A transformative policy paradigm views the sources of social problems in Africa as emanating from structural factors that include failure to industrialize, unintegrated economies, poor linkages with international economic and trade systems, poor prioritization in development planning, corruption, mismanagement and waste of resources as well as weak and underdeveloped governance structures. A transformative policy approach views economic policies and social policies as co-requisites for a long-term developmental agenda. The paper argues that the Social Policy Framework for Africa has implications for social work practice and education. It calls for a progressive social work that is aligned to the logic, substance, and principles of the Social Policy Framework for Africa. It calls for a social work practice and education that has clear philosophical and ideological foundations anchored on social democratic principles and values. These values will revolve

around social justice, human rights, sustainable development, collectivism, solidarity, self-sufficiency, empowerment, human security, and faith in democracy. The interventions arising from such brand of social work shall have transformative, emancipatory, radical, and activist dimensions. The framework demands that social work uses alternative interventions such as consciousness raising, coalition building, social and political action activities, advocacy and lobbying as well as different variations of personal empowerment models. The framework has implications for social work and social policy research as it would anchor and guide research in the areas identified in the document. The research findings will ultimately feed social work and social policy practice and education.

2.0 THE SOCIAL POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR AFRICA: AN OVERVIEW

The Social Policy framework for Africa was conceived by the First Session of the African Union Labor and Social Affairs Commission in Mauritius in 2003. The framework was adopted in 2008 by the First Session of the AU Conference of Ministers in Charge of Social Development in Windhoek, Namibia. The framework was inspired by the mission and vision of the African Union Commission which seeks to build an integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Africa. The framework also draws from the African Union Commission strategic objective of achieving sustainable development. The framework is broad based and transcends neo-conservative parochialism and its obsession with macroeconomic figures with very little regard for the wholesome improvement of the quality of life of the people. The framework priorities issues of economic justice, social justice, human rights, and human security as co-requisites for inclusive development. In this regard, the framework identifies eighteen (18) thematic areas that are critical for the enhancement of the quality of life of most people (African Union, 2008)

The areas identified by the framework are: population and development; labor and employment; social protection; health; HIV and AIDS, TB, Malaria and other infectious diseases; migration; education; agriculture; disability; gender equality and women's empowerment. It also delves into children, adolescents, and youth; family; food and nutrition; culture; urban development; environmental sustainability; the impact of globalization and trade liberalization in Africa and good governance, anti-corruption and the rule of law. Furthermore, the framework also speaks to other issues that are identified by the framework include: drug and substance abuse; crime prevention; sport; civil strife and conflict situations; as well foreign debt. According to the framework, these issues are interrelated and thus require smart partnerships between governments, non-state actors, civil society, private sector, and other stakeholders (African Union, 2008)

The guiding Principles for the Social Policy Framework for Africa are as enunciated hereunder.

- Social policies must encapsulate the principles of human rights, development imperatives and be embedded in the African culture of solidarity
- It must be intricately linked to economic and political policies aiming at advancing society's well-being
- Policy for social development as a broader goal should be coordinated with but not subordinate to economic growth and political development
- Social policy formulation must include bottom-up approaches to allow for the participation of beneficiaries

- Social policy must have a long-term developmental perspective
- The different stakeholders must work together in well -coordinated partnerships that enable them to compliment and not compete with one another (African Union, 2008)

The Guiding principles as contained in the framework provide useful signposts for member states in the development of national social policies. Moreover, the framework provides an overarching scheme that recognizes the complementarity of economic, political, and social objectives. Furthermore, it moves African Union member states from a social protection orientation that emphasize palliative interventions to a transformative social policy agenda that tackles the root causes of poverty, deprivation, economic insecurity, inequality, unemployment, and other manifestations of underdevelopment that plague the continent. The framework also shows the interrelationships that exist between the different sectors of the economy and the importance of synergy in the pursuit of broader development objectives.

The Social Policy Framework for Africa has very useful recommendations at the end of the discussion of each sector. The recommendations among other things emphasize the implementation and monitoring of existing African Union instruments, declarations and plans of actions. Some such instruments include: the Tunis Declaration on Social Development; Declaration and Programme of Action of the Johannesburg World Summit for Sustainable Development; and the Ouagadougou Declaration on Employment and Poverty Alleviation in Africa. Moreover, the framework encompasses: Africa Common Position on Migration and Development; Africa-EU Declaration on Migration and Development; Plan of Action on the Family in Africa; African Charter on the Welfare and Rights of Children; African Union Policy Framework on Aging (2002); and the Continental Plan of Action for the African Decade of Disabled Persons (1999-2009). These instruments when used with instruments such as New Partnership for Africa's Development, African Union Agenda 2063, the Sustainable Development Goals (2015-2030) provide a useful starting point for developing social policies in Africa that are geared towards a qualitative improvement of the quality of life of the African people (AU, 2008)

3.0 AFRICA: THE CONTEXT AND SOURCES OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT

According to indices that are customarily used to measure social, economic, and political progress among nations, Africa is a perpetual underperformer. Poverty, unemployment, inequality, vulnerability, and deprivation are rife in Africa. Africa is also beset with unprecedented levels of civil strife, armed conflicts, corruption, intolerance, discrimination, and abuse of human rights. As per the United Nations Human Developments reports (2019), Africa dominates the bottom 20 countries in the low human development category. When measures such as Multidimensional Poverty Index are employed to reveal the depth of poverty among nations, African countries feature prominently among countries whose citizens suffer multiple deprivations (UNDP, 2010, 2014, 2016)

The 2017 Economic Commission for Africa report on Sustainable Development in Africa which measures the progress of the continent against the African Union Agenda 2063 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (2015 to 2030) reveals a grim picture for the African continent. The report notes that for the period between 1990 and 2013, poverty has declined by only 15% in Africa. It further reveals that decent jobs are limited in Africa with 60% of the

jobs considered vulnerable. The report indicates that only 1% of the Unemployed in Africa have access to unemployment benefit and only 19% (excluding North Africa) of the African population is covered by social insurance. The report shows that excluding North Africa, one in three workers in Africa live in extreme poverty. Other notable findings of the report are that in 2015, 355 million people in Africa were either moderately or severely food insecure and that a disproportionately high number of women and youth are affected by poverty and unemployment in Africa. The situation is aggravated by weak infrastructure (rail, road and air) that negatively impact on manufacturing which remains incompetent in most of Africa. The low tech, low performing, manufacturing sectors have translated into a sluggish job growth hence poverty remains stubbornly high (Economic Commission for Africa, 2017)

Amnesty International reports reveal widespread human rights abuses in African Countries. Millions of people in Africa are either internally displaced or are refugees who suffer hardship and misery of grotesque proportions. Illiteracy, ignorance, and ill-health are also rampant in Africa, Discrimination, violence, and ill-treatment of sexual minorities is rife in Africa. Contemporary slave trade that has taken root in some countries in North Africa further demonstrates the suffering of the African people. Africa is home to wanton human rights abuses and violations that have remained unattended for a long time (Amnesty International 2014, 2016).

The sources of Africa's problems are numerous and defy generalization. However, certain common denominators are found to contribute to Africa's problems. They include the legacy of colonialism; cold war politics; unfair terms of international trade; failure to industrialize; poor governance and weak democratic values, absence of human rights culture; ethnic polarization and conflicts and the greed of African leaders. The sources of Africa's problem though many, they are inextricably linked. The economic, political, and social challenges of Africa feed on each other and create a grim prospect for the future of Africa and its people (African Union, 2008, The African Exponent, 2016). The situation in Africa is likely to deteriorate as countries like the US exclusionist and protectionist policies under President Donald Trump. The assistance and donor support that has been rendered by the US in such areas as health, HIV and AIDS, poverty reduction and environmental protection is likely to go down with detrimental effects on Africa and its people. The upsurge of neo-conservatism as revealed by Brexit and the resurgence of right-wing parties and policies in Europe also spells doom for an African that has grown so dependent on bilateral and multilateral assistance for its development.

4.0 AFRICAN SOCIAL POLICY: THE STATUS QUO

The dominant social policy paradigm in Africa is one that sees social policy as a subset of economic policy. Social policy is subordinated to economic policy and political development. The thinking in most of Africa is that emphasis in development planning should place emphasis on achieving economic growth and once such growth is achieved, social policies are constructed to improve the welfare of the people. This trickle-down approach has not always worked as even in conditions of high economic growth rates, comprehensive social policies are hard to come by in Africa. The dominance of a neo-conservative ideological outlook that sees social welfare as primarily the domain of the family, community, benevolent neighbor, and charitable sources has meant that social policy has been seen to be synonymous with social

protection. This approach to social policy has meant that most social policies in Africa do not address the fundamental or root causes of social problems but rather symptoms of wider structural problems. The palliative nature of social policies in Africa reduces interventions to short term benefits without the essential developmental element that should be a part of progressive social policy (Adesina, 2007, 2008, Lucas and Badubi, 2017).

It is worth noting at this juncture that African social policy is also punctuated by a heavy reliance on donor support as well as bilateral and multilateral aid. The poverty of most of African and the precarious fiscal challenge of the African states have meant that social policy for most countries is financed externally which exposes it to influence, control and manipulation by the benefactors. Social policy in Africa lacks independence and originality. It dances to the tune of the financiers without due regard to its relevance and effectiveness in addressing the real problems afflicting the African populace (Adesina, 2011, Lucas and Badubi, 2017). The conditions for assisting heavily indebted African economies often impose a social policy regime that is punitive to the poor and disadvantaged people of Africa. Such social policy regime among others includes huge cuts in welfare spending and the imposition of user fees on poor service users. In many cases, these leads to a deterioration in the quality of social services as education, health, and housing

Another discernible feature of social policy in Africa is that it lacks coordination, consultation, and engagement between the different stakeholders. The conception and formulation of social policies is largely dominated by economists and politicians with the human service professionals only serving as implementers of policies that they had not input in. Beneficiaries of social policies are also excluded from the social policy making process in many jurisdictions in Africa. The result of this is some dissonance between policy formulation, implementation and use by service beneficiaries. Though the African Union has evolved clear guiding framework for African social policy, there is no evidence that such frameworks are applied in practice. There is hardly any reference to the Social Policy Framework for Africa in social policies developed in the continent in recent times. The Social Policy Framework for Africa thus remains in paper without serving the purpose it was developed. The biggest losers in the equation become the people of Africa particular the downtrodden members of the African continent (Adesina, 2007, 2008, African Union, 2008, Lucas and Badubi 2017).

5.0 SOCIAL POLICY AND SOCIAL WORK IN AFRICA: CANVASSING THE INTERFACE

Social policy and social work are inextricably linked. Ideally, their relationship should be direct, complimentary, and symbiotic. The definitions of both social policy and social work point to commonalities of purpose and principle between social policy and social work. Appreciate those definitions as stated below:

Lucas, and Badubi, (2017) note that ‘social policy refers to the socio-economic and political actions of government and non-state actors geared towards the improvement of the quality of life of people through the framework of social justice, human rights and sustainable development. Viewed in this way social policy is intrinsically intertwined with economy policy’ Pp 80

IFSW (2014) says that 'social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing'. Pp 1

The notable difference between social policy and social work is that whilst the former refers to socio-economic and political actions of government and non-state actors, the latter is a profession. The common denominators between social policy and social work revolve around purpose and principle. They both seek to enhance human wellbeing using among other principles of social justice and human rights. Social policy and social work both exist within a socio-economic and political environment which influences them and which they seek to impact on for the betterment of humanity. The interaction between social policy, social work and the socio-economic and political environment is vital to appreciate if meaningful progress is to be made towards resolving social challenges and social problems besieging Africa.

It is quite evident in Africa that social policy and social work have been grossly subordinated to economic and political developments. To that extent social policy and social work in Africa have been assigned and have accepted marginal roles in setting the agenda for human development and welfare. Social policy is narrowly defined to only focus on social assistance and social protection programmers, while social workers have been given the role of delivering the same social protection without being given the opportunity to input into the construction of the same policies. In this regard social work has become a willing and unquestioning implementer in chief of a social policy agenda that is not aligned to the causes of Africa's problems (Osei-Hwedie, 1992, Rwomire and Raditlhokwa, 1996, Mazibuko, 1996).

It is important to note that social policy and social work in Africa have become virtually silent on the influence of the economy and politics in the generation of social problems in the continent. They have not challenged economic and political ideologies that perpetuate oppression, exploitation, and disadvantage. Additionally, social policy and social work in Africa have not evolved a common but clear organizing framework to tackle Africa's problems. The existing Social Policy Framework that was put in place in 2008 has not found its way into both the practice of social policy and social work. It is against this backdrop that a common and comprehensive working schema between social policy and social work founded around the Social Policy Framework for Africa should be developed (Lucas, 2013). The social policy and social work schema should be anchored on human rights instruments and principles and should have a strong component of economics and politics as espoused in the 2008 Social Policy Framework for Africa

6.0 SOCIAL POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR AFRICA: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK

The existence of the Social Policy Framework for Africa (2008) has wide ranging implications for social work practice and education in the continent. First the framework provides a solid foundation and anchor for social work practice and education. It provides a clear ideological position from which social work practice and education can be based.

- Implications for Social Work education

Social policy is an integral part of social work education. Social work education at all levels namely undergraduate and post-graduate levels has social policy content. At graduate level, most social work programs in Africa and elsewhere have social policy as specialization. The Social Policy Framework for Africa (2008) presents first and foremost a useful reference material for the development of social work curriculum and the teaching of the subject of social policy. The framework advances guiding principles that lay a useful foundation for understanding the place of social policy in national development and the relationship between social policy, economic policy, and politics. That is to say, the framework removes any ambiguity on the scope of social policy. The framework's principles also help in ushering an ideological clarity for social work education. In this way social work and social policy are better placed to articulate clear mission, vision and values anchored on a clear ideological position. It is useful to note at this point that the framework's principles are in tandem with the different variations of the social democratic ideology.

This ideological clarity presented by the framework helps to order social work's thinking with respect to the root causes of the social problems that plaque Africa's landscape. In particular, the social democratic ideological posture helps social work to directly link social problems with the economy and politics of the continent. The framework along the same ideological reasoning also gives signposts on the types of interventions that would be appropriate to deal with structural problems that social work is seized with on an on-going basis. The framework thus compels social work to take very seriously what Mullaly (1993) calls structural and activist approaches that seek to dislodge structures and systems that perpetuates oppression and injustice. The teaching of social policy will then have to incorporate strategies that would help students to develop the skills to undertake appropriate interventions for structural transformation. The students will have to be helped to overcome the fear of power holders and be assisted to overcome their sense of powerlessness which often prevails in oppressive environments in Africa.

- Implications for Social work Practice

The Social Policy Framework for Africa is a useful springboard for social work practice to engage stakeholders on alternative views of social policy. The framework could be used as a consultative document for proposing a transformative approach to social policy to African Union Member States. Its emphasis on the complimentary and symbiotic relations between social policy, economic policy and politics could help break the narrow mindset that views social policy as a sub-set of economic policy. The framework could thus assist social work to propose social policy instruments along very clear and consistent ideological standpoint and value frame. In this regard principles of social justice, human rights, peace, sustainable development, solidarity and would permeate the social policy discourse between stakeholders. In practice, the application of such progressive values and the treatment of politics and economics as co-requisites for the comprehensive assault of structures that cause disadvantage will enable a challenge and possibly a review of the existing social policies in the continent. Practiced in this way, social work can explore radical intervention approaches such as social action, conscientisation, advocacy and lobbying, and policy practice. Networking with progressive social movements and aligning with party political formations that share common

values and principles shall also become viable options emanating from the framework. This form of social work practice shall also allow social workers to work and seek to change organizations from within as well as to work against agencies that are oppressive to their employees and service users. In such practice, structural or progressive social workers will not only put agencies to the test of human rights or social justice but will work towards ensuring that the highest attainable standard of service is rendered to service users. (Mullaly, 1993, Wharf, 1990, Lucas, 2013)

The Social Policy Framework for Africa also provides a useful basis for social work to push for participatory planning and policy making approaches that take seriously the input of beneficiaries in the decision-making processes. The bottom-up orientation of the framework shall help in evolving a social work world view that places the wholesome empowerment of individuals and communities at the core of its enterprise. Participation is emancipatory and it goes a long way in fostering a long-term perspective in the development agenda which is painfully absent in current social work discourse in Africa. The view that treats recipients of social work services as passive and unhelpful recipients of petty welfare handouts has been very disempowering to the poor in Africa and it needs to change and be replaced with a liberating views that looks at the poor and other disadvantaged members of society as active participants in the resolution of their problems. Participatory approaches will also ensure that public representatives and officials are accountable for their actions as service users will be assisted to know and appreciate their rights as voters and citizens.

- Implications for Social Work and Social Policy Research

The Social Policy Framework for Africa, in addition to the guiding principles, that will help guide social policy research efforts, also list, and discusses over eighteen thematic areas of social policy. At the end of each discussion, there are recommendations for each sector. The thematic areas present possible areas of research that could be embarked on by social work. The issues rose in the discussions of the thematic areas and the recommendations are also fertile areas for investigation by researchers. The framework's emphasis on the need for collaboration and synergy between the sectors as well as the linkages between economic and social policy open up avenues for multi-disciplinary research that shall help show the interrelatedness of the different sectors of the economy and the various organs of the state as they relate to the improvement of the quality of life of people. The focused research influenced by the framework will then feed into social work practice and education with the ultimate resulting of ensuring a decent life and dignity for all persons

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Pursuant to the preceding discussions on Social Policy Framework for Africa, the following recommendations are appropriate:

- The Social Policy Framework for Africa (2008) should be updated and be used as a blueprint for the review and development of social policies in all AU Member States
- The Social Policy Framework for Africa (2008) should be aligned and be used alongside Global, Continental, and Regional human rights instruments as AU Agenda 2063 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals to inform social policy decisions in all AU member states

- In line with the Principles and substance of the Social Policy Framework for Africa, social and social policy in Africa align itself with a social democratic ideological position and its principles of human rights, social justice, participatory democracy, and solidarity
- The thematic areas and sectorial recommended actions contained in the Social Policy Framework for Africa should be updated and be used for developing the social policy agenda for the continent
- Governments (particularly Ministers responsible for Social Development in Africa) should take the lead in building collaborative networks with Regional Economic Communities, civil society organizations, community based organizations, marginalized populations, the private sector and development partners in pursuing and actualizing the framework in particular in pressing for the simultaneous pursuit of social, economic and political objectives of member states
- The Social Policy Framework for Africa should permeate the social work and social policy curriculum in all institutions offering social work and social policy at graduate and undergraduate levels
- Emancipatory, structural, and radical forms of social work and transformative social policy be entrenched as an integral part of social work practice and education
- The Social Policy Framework for Africa should be used as a springboard for introducing transformative social policies
- The Guiding Principles of the Social Policy Framework for Africa should anchor social development, social policy, and social work efforts in the continent
- Social work and social policy in Africa should engage in discourse on economic development, job creation and trade as critical aspects of social development that could translate into decent and sustainable livelihoods for the African people. The best form of welfare social work and social policy should emphasize is decent and sustainable employment
- Social work and social policy research in Africa should be anchored and guided by the framework

8.0 CONCLUSION

It has been more than a decade since the Social Policy Framework for Africa was adopted by the African Union, Progressive as it is the framework has not found its way into the practice of social policy in Africa. It has also not impacted on the social work profession on the same continent. A review of the literature on social policy in the continent reveals that social policy remains a subset of economic policy in Africa. Social policies in Africa remain largely residual, means tested, and do not address the structural causes of disadvantage. It is imperative that the framework be utilized to give impetus to a transformative social policy approach in Africa which locates the cause of social problems on weak structures, systems and policies. It is also critical that interventions to resolve social problems should have systemic, institutional and broad policy dimensions. The framework, if fully utilized, holds potential to progressively transform social policy and the practice of social work so that they can meaningfully address socio-economic challenges besetting the continent. The framework can also be a convenient instrument for employing emancipatory social work approaches which could qualitatively improve the lives of the downtrodden in Africa. The framework can also be used to focus, guide, and streamline research so that it can be responsive to the challenges of the continent.

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