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THE VALUE OF SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY POLICIES TO POVERTY REDUCTION IN ZIMBABWE: A SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Since the colonial era, poverty has been central to national socio-economic development priorities for Zimbabwe. However, these development priorities could not be sustained largely due to lack of socially sustainable programmes. Such programmes are a social process through which communities are able to meet the diverse needs of existing and future generations by being responsive to their environments and contributing to a high quality of life. While social sustainability is centred on liveability, it is characterised by safe, inclusive, democratic, well-planned and equitable communities. In this light, it is contended that among other issues, poverty in Zimbabwe is a function of lack of social sustainability. As such, social work as a profession that seeks to promote social justice should prioritise social sustainability is calleviate the country's structural ills. This paper demonstrated that the apparent dearth of social sustainability in Zimbabwe is related to poverty and the ways through which social work practice can promote social sustainability concept could be applied to social work in order to promote pro-poor social development. The paper utilised Zimbabwe's indigenisation policy as a social sustainability policy.

KEY TERMS: social work; social sustainability; poverty; Zimbabwe

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The place of social sustainability in social work practice is largely indisputable. As such, this paper seeks to discuss social sustainability within the context of social policy, giving an example of the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Policy. The paper begins by conceptualising social sustainability, giving four basic principles before linking these to the contextual imperatives of Zimbabwe's social policy trajectory. All this is then assessed within the framework of social work.

Polese and Stren (2000; 229) describe social sustainability as "policies and institutions that have the overall effect of integrating diverse groups and cultural practices in a just and equitable fashion, social sustainability's function is to consolidate the entire society as a unit after understanding that each societal group is unique. The uniqueness of each societal group implies that each societal group should be capacitated to be able to work as a unit though made up of different groups. According to Polese and Stren (2000) policies that ensure that the populace's wellbeing is improved are enacted through promotion of an egalitarian society that is determined by a just conduct at all institutional levels. Taylor (2003) adds that social sustainability refers to policies that vitalize community involvement, volunteerism and local community development. According to Taylor (2003)'s definition, social sustainability is framed as active citizenship in a society that is centred on equity. Similarly, Harris and Goodwin (2001) define social sustainability as policies that promote a socially sustainable system that should attain fairness in distribution of resources and opportunity. Such a scenario also implies that there is adequate provision of social services that are inclusive of health and education, gender equity and political accountability.

Dillard et al (2009) believe that social sustainability's modern emanation lies in environmental sustainability policies and programmes. Magis and Shin (2009), are of the notion that social sustainability was adopted after realising the importance of place, community connections and active citizenship within an urban context and diverse groups of people. The diverse groups of people find themselves sharing limited resources and are motivated to work on more socially healthy ways. Harris (2000) postulates that social sustainability gained formal and international repute following the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) report to the United Nations in 1987. The report made the stipulation that sustainable development requires concerted attention to social, ecological and economic conditions. The 1987 report's proposition is that society must be sustained in its right.

Horner et al (2009) stipulate that social sustainability is founded on the Tradition of Sustainable Development. The tradition is Human Centred Development. As expounded by Magis and Shin (2009), three primary constructs define Human Centred Development. Human Centred Development is defined through the Basic Needs Approach, Human Development Approach and the Freedoms Approach. Streeten et al (1981) envisage that the Basic Needs Approach is the initial engagement that reorients human development whose designation is that the world's poor should be the primary beneficiaries of development. In this case, prioritization of people's full physical, mental and social development are considered potent. According to Atkinson (2008), the Basic Needs Approach focuses on enhancing the fulfilment of basic physiological needs to the communities. Streeten et al (1981) identified three objectives of the Basic Needs Approach which are; establishment of social infrastructure that enhances effective and efficient delivery of public services pertaining to health care, education, water and sanitation, facilitation of community participation in democratic processes relevant to their well-being and creation of remunerative livelihoods whose income is able to meet sustenance costs.

The Human Development Approach that popularises development as humanness was championed by Haq and the United Nations Development Programme in 1999 (Magis and Shin, 2009:10). The approach is a transcendence of the Basic Needs Approach (UNDP, 2010). The purpose of the Human Development Approach is creation of an enabling environment for human enjoyment and creativity backed by good health (Townsend, 2012). It is believed that creativity fosters widened community choice pertaining to social, economic and political spheres (UNDP, 1999). Haq (1999) is of the view that Human Development is composed of equity, sustainability, productivity and empowerment.

The freedoms approach defines Human Centred Development as related to people's ability to sustain themselves and have an influence on their surrounding world (Sen, 1999). This implies that lack of freedom signals lack of development and poverty. Five freedoms that are essential are outlined by Sen (1999) which are protective security, political and civil rights, transparency guarantees, economic facilities and social opportunities.

The principles of social sustainability

Magis and Shin (2009) elaborate on four principles that anchor social sustainability. These are; human wellbeing, equity, democratic governance and democratic civic society.

According to Prescott-Allen (2001), human wellbeing involves ensuring that the fulfilment of basic needs is done. Such a fulfilment guarantees economic, political and social freedoms. The means through which qualitative improvements on human lives are done is economic development (Tinker, 1997). The true axiom of economic development is improved human welfare (Haq, 1999). This is because sustainable development policy's concern

is an improvement on the quality of life for people (Organisation for Economic Corporation and Development, 2001).

Polese and Stren (2000) contend that social sustainability is equated to the extent to which inequalities in society are minimised. As such, Hart (1999) states that communities and governments play a collaborative role in providing equitable rights, opportunities and outcomes. There is therefore a relationship between poverty and inequality since in a poor society, there is a rift that exists between the few rich and the poor majority in terms of accessing social services. This is because the rich are able to access high quality services such as good health facilities while the poor are unable to access high quality services. Also, in a society characterised by inequality, resources are stolen from the poor by the powerful.

The respect of human rights is centred on democratic institutions. When there is democracy, people are endowed with the skills essential in making effective and productive choices and seek for accountability from the government. Government in turn must be answerable to the generality of the citizenry. More so, government is mandated to facilitate citizen participation in political and civic undertakings that affect their lives (Sen, 1999). Arguably, citizen participation is a precursor to poverty reduction. The current discussion contends that citizen participation is better achieved in an environment where civil society institutions are given space by government. This therefore points towards the need for strong civil society to consolidate citizen participation as a ploy to eradicate extreme poverty and deprivation in developing societies.

The United Nations Development Programme (2002; 53) regards civil societies as "a third pillar of 21st century human development strategy." Civil society promotes poverty alleviation efforts through volunteerism, whistleblowing and promotion of democratic institutions (Salamon, 2004). Such efforts reduce poverty as they recalibrate government and community focus to have efforts on addressing pressing issues that mire people in poverty.

Social sustainability is also effectively achieved where democratic governance prevails. Odo (2015; 2), defines democratic governance as availability of choices and cherished values (including freedom); and accountability in governance". As according to the definition, poverty can be reduced when there is democratic governance which avails wide choices for different individual groups. The aspect of accountability also implies that the government is answerable to the citizenry in making sure that the needed services are always catered for.

SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE AND SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

The place of social sustainability to social work practice remains critical. As per social sustainability principles articulated above, social work is mandated by society to ameliorate human suffering, alleviate distress and enhance people's capacities to elicit positive change in their lives.

Social sustainability complements and strengthens social work efforts through informing social policy. It is social policy that is key to addressing poverty. Peeters (2012:18) is of the notion that social work works hand in glove with social sustainability towards achieving sustainable development. In this case, social work collaborates with social sustainability in the formulation of pro-poor sustainable policies that are anchored on social work values of service to humanity, dignity and worthy of individuals and social justice (International Federation of Social Workers, 2014). To that effect, the social dimension of sustainable development when formulating propoor social policies needs to be explored by social work (Peeters, 2012b: 14).

Promotion of human wellbeing is another central principle of social sustainability which conspires with social work. Mitchell (2017:13), alludes that social work has a mission to fulfil as per requirement of the profession's ethics and values. It is required for social work to enhance human well-being and facilitate access to basic needs of all people. Such is done through ensuring that attention to making availability of needs is met. Social work conspires with social sustainability in facilitating the empowerment of vulnerable, poor and oppressed groups (Mitchell, 2017:9). Therefore, social work infers with social sustainability in improving the quality of life for individuals, groups and communities (Organisation for Economic Corporation and Development, 2001). According to the European Association of Schools of Social Work (2014), the implication for social work practice in promoting social sustainability lies in social work's contribution towards promoting three pillars of humanwellbeing. Initially, social work has to encourage and facilitate research into the role of social work in alleviating tragedies such as drought that lead to food shortages. After coming up with the needed information, policy is then influenced to come up with sustainable copying mechanisms such as adoption of mechanised irrigation facilities such as drip irrigation. Social work is also implied to promoting human-wellbeing in social sustainability programmes by fostering the essence of social development and wellbeing through sustainable and interdependent communities (Mitchell, 2017). Human well-being is also attained by enhancing standards in social work education and practice that initiate sustainable social development outcomes in communities (Peeters, 2012).

The implication for social work practice in promoting social sustainability also lies in social work having a role to play in promoting democratic governance. In this case, it could be argued that social work has a role to play in ensuring democratic governance by advocating for accountability from the government. Mobilisation and empowerment of the citizenry has to be a social work responsibility so that citizens know their democratic rights and seek for accountability. Legitimacy of rules and institutionalisation of the rule of law should also be

sufficiently pursued if sustainable development is to be attained (Jaysawal, 2013:15). In case of the government failing to meet its democratic duties, social work can mobilise citizens for social action till democratic governance is delivered.

You (2012) argues that, democracy since Athenian origin has always been government by the people with direct and full participation of the citizens in all matters affecting them. Therefore, social work has to fulfil this through enhancement of participation of the citizenry in governance. Devolution of powers from one central position to lower governance structures accessible to the general population has to be promoted through social work involvement in national planning.

As a principle of social sustainability, social work is also implied of promoting democratic civil society. Democratic civil societies assist in strengthening democratic governance (Medeiros, 2009). To this effect, social work in Zimbabwe should facilitate the establishment of democratic civil societies that strengthen democratic governance. As according to Karl Marx as cited in Jaysawal (2013; 1), "civil Society embraces the whole material intercourse of individuals with a definite stage of development of productive forces". In civil societies, people learn the value of group action and social solidarity (Jaysawal, 2013). As such, civil societies initiated through social work in Zimbabwe may mobilise citizens for group action that will in turn lead to democratic governance.

APPLYING THE SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY APPROACH TO PRACTICE: ZIMBABWE'S NATIONAL INDIGENISATION AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT POLICY

As a way of redressing poverty in Zimbabwe that was originating from what was a skewed ownership of productive assets, the government of Zimbabwe adopted the indigenisation and economic empowerment initiatives under the Indigenisation Economic Empowerment Policy. and As according to the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act of 2008 (Chapter 14: 33), an indigenous Zimbabwean is "anyone who, before independence was subjected to unfair discrimination presumably on the grounds of their race, and includes a descendant of such a person". Zimbabwe's Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Policy was adopted under the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act of 2008 (Chapter 14; 33) (Chowa, 2013). It is postulated by Anderson (2010) that the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Policy which falls under the third Chimurenga phase also involves the Land Reform Programme. The policy was intended to ensure that indigenous Zimbabweans own control of foreign owned companies that operate in Zimbabwe (Murombo, 2010). This means that 51% of shares in foreign owned companies were to be controlled by indigenous Zimbabweans (Shumba, 2014).

The indigenisation concept "...foregrounds the status of being underprivileged and racial discrimination that occurred during the colonial era" (Shumba, 2014; 13). To this end, Zimbabwe's indigenisation concept concurs with the principles of social sustainability that include the principle of equity (Magis and Shin, 2009). Also, as expounded in Magis and Shin (2009), social sustainability is defined through the three constructs which are the Basic Needs Approach, Human Development Approach and the Freedoms Approach. The Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Policy could be argued to be socially sustainable since apart from meeting the physiological needs of indigenous Zimbabweans through land ownership and economic control, it also intended to facilitate their freedom through ensuring that Zimbabweans are enabled to sustain themselves and influence the economic world around them through economic empowerment programmes. This is supported by the government's claim that indigenisation is a way of empowering indigenous Zimbabweans for a Zimbabwe that is truly independent and whose resources and economy are controlled by Zimbabweans (Ministry of Youth, Indigenisation and Empowerment, 2013). According to Murombo (2010), indigenisation allows workers to be strategic partners of business who participate in strategic economic decisions. Their involvement motivates them and room is given for them to acquire skills, education and creativity which are prerequisites for carrying out such a task. This is evidently clear that indigenisation policy is a social sustainability policy as the above allusion is in tandem with social sustainability's principle of democratic governance (Magis and Shin, 2009).

Basing on the principle of democratic governance of social sustainability, people are endowed with skills, creativity, and information to make economic choices, and the voice and freedom to actively get involved in government issues pertaining to their lives. Foreign owned companies were to cede 51% of their shares to indigenous Zimbabweans through partnerships with business people, community share trusts and worker share trusts (The Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act, 2008). The social sustainability property of the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Policy is revealed through its agenda of reducing poverty through the policy's principles of eliminating poverty and promoting economic empowerment (Mawowa, 2007).

The indigenous policy was a social sustainability policy that was meant to address economic inequalities that were created during the colonial times by ensuring that Zimbabweans become shareholders of the economy instead of being mere employees of the economy (Ministry of Indigenisation and Empowerment, 2013). In other words, the policy was remedying socio-economic injustice and inequality that could have led to most Zimbabweans being poor since they have for long been neither controlling nor owning the assets and means of production. This proves that the indigenisation policy was a social sustainability policy meant to empower local Zimbabweans through

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enhancing them to be shareholders of the economy. As evidenced above, the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Policy squarely fits into being a social sustainability policy. Within the frames of a social sustainability policy like the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Policy, social workers are indebted of having failed to play a sufficient role in the reduction of poverty through the policy's implementation. To this effect, the indigenisation policy's failure to have created intended equity and reduction of poverty could be suggested to have been partly caused by lack of social work involvement and participation in its formulation, implementation and monitoring.

How social work fits in the indigenisation policy?

Social work plays a pivotal role in the formulation, monitoring and implementation of social sustainability policies. Social work is there to inform social sustainability policies such as the once effected Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Policy in Zimbabwe. Social work fits in the indigenisation policy since it is a profession that is a domain of practices with a systemic place in society (Peeters, 2012). Below is an illustration of how the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Policy could have been utilised as a tool for poverty reduction in social work practice.

Initially, social work is an important ingredient in social sustainability policies such as the indigenisation policy since it has to empower communities. The Webster dictionary as cited in Parsons (2017) defines empowerment as the process of giving authority. Parsons (2017) suggests that empowerment embraces the notion of social workers giving power to communities. Peeters (2008) suggests that empowerment pertains to individual and community participation over their own lives and democratic participation in community life. Empowerment is done through mediating structures and social work is key to formation of social structures that empower people to democratically participate in social sustainability policy activities. Zimbabwe's indigenisation policy could be argued to have failed since the policy lacked social work involvement in empowering communities. Had social work been maximally involved in the indigenisation policy, it would have been ensured that the intended beneficiaries who are the communities would have benefited from reduced poverty. Otherwise, due to social work absence in the indigenisation policy, only politicians managed to monopolise the process at the expense of the majority. Social work can get involved in empowerment process through formation of strong social work institutions that are there to empower the communities and ensure that the government grants political power and respect legal rights to communities.

It could also be argued that Zimbabwe's indigenisation policy could not be fruitful in reducing poverty since as according to the World Food Programme (2017), 63% of the 13, 8 million people still live below the poverty datum line, four years after the implementation of the policy. This could be argued to have been a consequence of lack of democratic governance. Ndakaripa (2016) argues that consultation during the formulation of the policy was not done by the government. The implementation of the policy was mainly dominated by ZANU PF. Social work practice in such cases should advocate for democratic governance through calling for popular participation (Jaysawal, 2013). Popular participation through social movements includes the voice of the community in social sustainability policy formulation and implementation of social sustainability policies is vital since through democracy, strengthening of socio-economic and political freedoms of the communities is done (Jaysawal, 2013). Once the socio-economic and political freedoms are guaranteed, it is then ensured that equity is promoted and economic empowerment will have nothing to do with partisan allocation of resources as was witnessed during the Land Reform Programme of the year 2000 (Ndakaripa, 2016). That way, poverty is reduced.

There is also need for democratic civil societies to assist in strengthening democratic governance (Medeiros, 2009). As according to Karl Marx as cited in Jaysawal (2013; 1), "civil Society embraces the whole material intercourse of individuals with a definite stage of development of productive forces". In civil societies, people learn the value of group action and social solidarity (Jaysawal, 2013). Social solidarity in civil societies educates people to engage in active citizenship and as a result, man will find the essence of participating in political and economic affairs of the country. In doing so, citizens begin to shape their own development destiny in social sustainability policies such as the recently ZANU PF initiated indigenisation policy. If such policing involves people, they become informed of what the people need as supported by the adage that "nothing for the people without the people".

CONCLUSION

There is an inextricable relationship between social work and social sustainability policies in sustainable development. Social work theory is mandated to inform sustainable policies through policy research. When the formulation of social sustainability policies embraces social work knowledge and values, sustainable development is achieved.

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