

The post-1994 transformation of social work in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the transformation of social work in South Africa in response to the transition to a developmental welfare approach. Always moulding and shaping itself in response to its social context, social work in South Africa, as elsewhere, is a reflection of the broader political landscape. In South Africa the social work profession has struggled to assert its independence and become self-regulating. It is unique in the Western world in that since 1978 it has been regulated by a legislatively constituted statutory council. While the profession has tried to transform itself in the new democracy, outside pressures have found it wanting and deeply divided. Thus, despite progress in other areas social workers have not yet been successful in forming a strong, united professional association and this severely limits its ability to lobby politicians and advocate on behalf of clients. It seems, however, that the tide is turning and social workers are gaining recognition but, once again, the challenge remains deciding on the extent to which the profession cooperates with the government's agenda for change. Social work educators took the lead in setting education standards in response to higher education policy and are also playing a part in devising practice standards through their involvement in the social work board which falls under the umbrella of the Council for Social Service Professions. However, education and practice are somewhat out of step and professional unity remains a pressing issue on social work's transformation agenda.

The adoption of a social development paradigm in South Africa has had a profound effect on the social work profession. This article takes a historical view of the restructuring of the welfare sector and its consequences for social work (Gray, 2000; Joint Universities Committee for Social Work, 2001). As in most parts of the Western world, social work in South Africa evolved in response to political processes that legitimised the profession as the chief provider of social welfare services. Hence the growth of the social work profession in South Africa was intimately tied to the development of government social welfare service provision, a history well documented elsewhere (see McKendrick, 1990). For 40 years, under the apartheid government, social work enjoyed institutional support and played a dominant role in the provision of organised welfare services, both in government and in the private, voluntary welfare sector. But this situation came under serious threat as the unfolding events described in this article show. First, we set the scene and outline the scope and context for the transformation of social work to meet the requirements of a developmental welfare approach. In particular, we focus on changes to the structural context of the non-government and government welfare sectors and to human resourcing within them which impacted most heavily on social work. We describe the rise of the 'social service professions' – which resulted in the initial withdrawal of government support for social work and the elevation of other occupational groups to the status of 'social service professions' despite their lack of professional organisation – and the consequent transformation of the Council for Social Work into the Council of Social Service Professions and the changes for social work. Then we examine social work's response to this transformation agenda.

Changes to the welfare structure

In 1994 when the African National Congress (ANC)-led government came to power, there were two non-government welfare sectors in South Africa: the formal voluntary or private welfare sector and the informal or alternative welfare sector. As the following discussion

shows, these two sectors have different histories and are now combined to constitute the not-for-profit, non-government or NGO welfare sector.

The formal voluntary welfare sector (WOs)

Organisations and institutions within the private or voluntary welfare sector, as it was called in the apartheid era, were heavily subsidised by the apartheid government as key partners in welfare provision. These subsidies were based primarily on social work salaries. Prior to 1994 the government and voluntary welfare services were collectively referred to as the 'formal welfare sector'. Given its prominent position in this sector, subsequent changes brought about mainly by alterations to the system of financing welfare organisations – or WOs as they were called – would have a profound effect on this non-government sector and thus on social work (see Lombard, 2008, this issue). When the ANC government came to power there were just over 2,000 subsidised social work posts in the voluntary welfare sector, which constituted a quarter of all social work positions. Also at that time, in keeping with the funding formula, most of these social workers were engaged in casework and statutory services for which they would be heavily criticised in the White Paper for Social Welfare of the Republic of South Africa (hereafter RSA) (RSA Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997).

The National Coalition of Social Services (NACOSS) was formed to represent the interests of services within the voluntary welfare sector. Previously, the Welfare Liaison Committee (WLC) (1993–1995) had played an advocacy role, speaking on behalf of and strengthening the NGO sector by interacting with and lobbying government on social welfare services and sharing information with its constituency. NACOSS continued the WLC's role in advocating for change at the legislative and policy level. The name change in 1995 followed constitutional changes and the need to align with the developmental paradigm in the new political dispensation. NACOSS is essentially a coalition of national and provincial voluntary welfare organisations and has played a major role in the transformation process in advocating for NGOs and, through press conferences, particularly over the last two years, keeping the issues in the public domain. It comprises 20 NGOs, including the National Institute for Crime Prevention and the Rehabilitation of Offenders (NICRO), the National Women's Federation (NCVV), South African National Epilepsy League (SANEL), South African National Council for Child and Family Care, South African National Council for the Blind, the Salvation Army, and South African National Council for Alcoholism (SANCA). Collectively, NACOSS represents a network of 3,500 community-based voluntary welfare organisations (Loffell, 2000; Lombard, 1997; Lombard & Janse van Rensburg, 2001). It represented the interests of the private, voluntary welfare sector in the unfolding policy-making process. However, its efforts initially did not meet with much success since government support to this sector diminished through its failure to increase subsidies generally and to subsidise social work services in line with actual costs and on a par with remuneration levels within the government sector. Consequently, many social workers moved to government services where salaries and benefits were far better while those dissatisfied with opportunities left the sector or moved overseas.

The informal, alternative welfare sector (NGOs)

There was a huge growth in black, community-based organisations during the 1980s as the struggle against apartheid intensified, and these non-government organisations or NGOs – outside the established or formal welfare organisations described above – gained prominence at this time. Most received foreign funding and attempted to address the needs of the neglected black majority. They served as a conduit for external funding from those working to dismantle apartheid. With the advent of democracy in 1994, this non-government sector was bound to exert a huge influence on future policies and practices within the welfare and development arenas. The South African National Non-Governmental Organisations' Coalition (SANGOCO) emerged in 1995 to coordinate NGOs' input into government policy and to ensure that the rich traditions of civil society – forged in the resistance to apartheid – continued to serve the people of South Africa.

Whereas SANGOCO represents a very broad base of NGOs, another body representing the interests of NGOs more narrowly defined – as its name implied – was the National Welfare, Social Service and Development Forum (NWSSDF). The funding of non-governmental or not-for-profit organisations changed with the introduction of the State Lottery. Nowadays NGOs have to apply to the National Lotteries Board for grants and the NWSSDF sometimes serves as a partnership vehicle for such applications.

Thus, a strong civil sector emerged and it was this voting population that the African National Congress' election manifesto for social transformation, the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP), aimed to reach (African National Congress, 1994). The RDP laid the foundations for social development in South Africa even though within three years of the new democracy the more orthodox programme for economic development embodied in the Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy had already replaced it (Gray, 2006). Nevertheless, RDP principles remained highly influential in the formation of policy within the welfare sector. However, the process which had the most dramatic impact on social work was the transformation of human resourcing within welfare which culminated in the formation of the Council for Social Service Professions.

Restructuring the Department of Welfare

The restructuring of the Department of Welfare in government has been beset by problems. There were five Director Generals of Welfare between 1994 and 2000. At the Welfare and Population Development Portfolio Committee on 15 March 2000, in reporting on her department, the then Director General, Angela Bester, said that there had been a high staff turnover over the last few years with resignations from 136 officials.¹ Consequently, the Department of State Expenditure had turned down the funding of 107 new posts proposed by the prior Director General on the grounds that the Department had incurred excessive budget rollovers. In a media release two years later, on 10 October 2002, following the departure of Ms Bester, the Council for Social Service Professions voiced its concerns about the 'persistent and continued change in the leadership of the Department', which did not 'augur well for stability, sound management and development in the broader social services field'. It ended with the statement that South Africa could not afford to have its social services undermined and compromised by an incompetent and unstable state Department for Social Development. Thus, while major strides had been made in rewriting welfare policy, the government's capacity to deliver services and to implement developmental welfare policy was lagging behind. A huge thrust in the restructuring involve human resource changes within welfare.

The advent of the 'social service professions'

Despite the teething problem described above, including leadership issues and other challenges facing both the government and non-government sectors, the former Department of Welfare pressed on with the transformation or democratisation of welfare services. Not only did this involve broadening welfare provision to previously excluded groups but also broadening the occupational base of those offering welfare services. As already stated, social work had long enjoyed a dominant role in welfare and, since the profession had been supported by the apartheid government, it was the only occupational group that was professionally organised. It was regulated by a statutory Council for Social Work which had been established in terms of the National Welfare Act (Act 100 of 1978), subsequently amended and renamed the Social Service Professions Act (100 of 1978). Social work in South Africa was unique in this respect for in the international context, e.g., the UK, USA and Australia, the formulation of professional standards and codes of practice was done by professional social work associations with social work education regulated by the Council for Social Work Education (CSWE) in the USA and the Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW) in the UK (though in the latter case, as in South Africa, there is now a broader council for those involved in the social care sector). In South Africa the Joint

¹ <http://www.info.gov.za/annualreport/2001/sd01.pdf>

Universities Committee (JUC) with membership accorded to each school of social work represented the interests of the social work education sector.

Until 1992 when the process to transform the council for social work began, the council protected the interests of social work by, inter alia, determining and maintaining standards of professional conduct and of education for social work. It also established a registration system, initially for social workers and later (in 1989) for 'social auxiliary workers', who were adjuncts to social workers and student social workers. Legislation was enacted to support the development of this new occupational group and education programmes were introduced to train 'social auxiliary workers' and the name of the council was changed to reflect this. Besides advancing and protecting the interests of social workers and social auxiliary workers, the council had an advisory role to the Minister of Welfare on matters relating to social work and social welfare. An attempt was made to devise minimum standards for the education and training of social workers but this was unsuccessful due to the divided nature of the profession, which at one point had seven different professional associations. Also, although ostensibly open to all social workers, most black social workers chose not to register with the council as they did not consider it representative of all South Africans and in protest against those who were denied membership as they lived in the so-called 'independent homelands' and were thus not considered South African citizens. Thus, Mazibuko and Gray (2004: 135) argued that:

The development of professional social work associations in South Africa was hampered and confounded by the establishment of the Council for Social Work. Not only did some see it as a further attempt by the apartheid government to control the social work profession and its role within welfare, but others saw it as taking over functions which, in other contexts, were the province of professional associations. Perhaps the government did not want social workers to unite across racial divides and pressurise them into changed policies in harmony with the values of the social work profession. Or maybe the divides were so wide that they were impossible to cross at that time given the real divisions created by the apartheid government's homelands policy.

Given the dominance of social work within the welfare sector, despite the important role played by other occupational groups such as child and youth care workers and those involved in community development, it is not surprising that:

Previously excluded or marginalised groups were waiting in the wings as the transformation or democratisation of the social services progressed. Since the social work profession was tied to the apartheid administration it was bound to be vulnerable and open to attack as a reflection of all that was wrong with the previous system. It must also not be forgotten that in the Government of National Unity, welfare initially remained a Nationalist Party portfolio. Thus some saw the profession as elitist, especially since its professional and regulatory structures were predominantly white. Its services, said to be largely casework oriented, were a luxury given the vast sea of unmet need. (Gray, 2000: 100)

Thus, as new policy-making processes got underway, social work came under attack. A powerful political force emerged that preached that what South African welfare needed was social development rather than social work. Social workers were quick to point out the synergies between social work and social development but to no avail. Criticisms prevailed that social work was ill-equipped for social and community development. It soon became clear that political processes were driving the changes and that there was a strong agenda for the transformation of welfare. High on the agenda was redress for past injustices. This meant broadening welfare services to the black population. Where social work had been selective, social development would be inclusive. Yet hidden within this agenda was the continuation of policies based on race in South Africa, which were now being presented as just, equal,

representative² and democratic (Johnson, 2004). Thus, early development policy embodied in the RDP eventually, ten years later, gave way to black economic empowerment, known as BEE. This effectively meant favouring better-off blacks and widening the gap between rich and poor in South Africa (Gray, 2006; Kane-Berman, 2004; Lodge, 2002; McGrath & Whiteford, 1994; Rose, 2005; SAIRR, 2005; Sparks, 2003; Terreblanche, 2002). At the same time, the dominant mode of welfare provision became, not people-centred participatory development as outlined in the White Paper, but an unsustainable social security system (Joffe, 2004). It would seem that social work has remained silent on these developments, although in 2001, the Joint Universities Committee on Social Work Education (now the Association of South African Social Work Education Institutions) made a presentation to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Social Development in which it noted the 'contradiction between the participatory, democratic and person-centred approaches of the White Paper for Social Welfare and the macro-economic policy of growth, employment and redistribution (GEAR), favouring inter alia reduction in social expenditure and profits above people.'³ This was seen as 'inimical given that social development calls for an alignment of social and economic policies'. Nevertheless social workers, as they had done before, continued to conform to and support the government's policies.

Social workers contributed willingly and cooperatively to the consultation processes that led to the development of the White Paper for Social Welfare (see Letsebe, 1997) even though the draft discussion document (and subsequent White Paper) openly criticised the welfare systems over reliance on professional social workers. It declared that there was a need to expand the human resource capacity within welfare 'through the employment of other categories of social service personnel' (p. 32). It criticised educational institutions training social workers in therapeutic and restorative work saying that they were ill-equipped 'to respond appropriately to the most important social development needs in South African communities' (RSA Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997: 32). Such denigration of the social work profession hit hard and social work, being a divided profession, was ill-equipped to respond to the onslaught. Retraining and training became an important objective of the then Department of Welfare. In announcing his ten-point plan for welfare in 2001, the Minister of Social Development, Dr Skweyiya, said that social workers must be re-orientated (to social development) and should understand that this is a crisis situation. The training of social workers would eventually become guided by developments in national education, particularly the National Qualifications Framework and the rationalisation of higher education. Furthermore, social workers were confused about their role in social development. In fact, the White Paper was unclear about the roles of the various occupational groups it mentioned as playing a role within developmental social welfare. These groups included the following, discussed below.

Child and youth care workers

This occupational group had made great strides in organising itself and in developing education programmes for child and youth care workers, most of whom offered services within children's institutions and were largely untrained (Gray & Gannon, 1998; Gray & Sewpaul, 1998). The first professional graduates of the Bachelor of Technology (BTech) degree in Child and Youth Care entered this fledgling profession in 2001. The former director of the National Association of Child Care Workers (NACCW) came to play a large role in transforming child and youth care within the welfare sector, serving as advisor to the second post-1994 Minister for Welfare, Geraldine Fraser-Moloketi. There was a great deal of confusion as to the differentiation of roles between social workers and child and youth care workers, and about the relationship between child welfare and child and youth care. Thus, an inter-ministerial committee was established (the Inter-Ministerial Committee for Youth at Risk). Its draft report again made disparaging remarks about social work overlooking its contribution within child welfare (see Gray & Sewpaul, 1998). However, it failed to produce a

² The term 'representative' means reflective of the country's population profile; hence it is used to refer to the proportion of black staff employed in welfare.

³ <http://www.pmg.org.za/docs/2001/appendices/010613JUC.htm>

final report. During the national consultation on human resourcing of welfare, the NACCW engaged an overseas consultant, Jim Anglin from Victoria University in Canada – where the former director of the NACCW had done her masters degree in childcare – to advise the Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) on the transformation of child and youth care in South Africa. At the same time, the first Director General of Welfare engaged James Midgley from the University of Berkeley to advise on the transformation of social welfare and to assist in the implementation of social development in South Africa. By 2003 a professional board for child and youth care had been established in terms of the Social Service Professions Act (Act 110 of 1978); in 2004 members were elected to this board for the first time and a National Standards Setting Body (SGB) for child and youth care work was also established.

Community development workers

Social work had long been criticised for failing to engage more fully in community development. There were some training programmes for community development workers based in various locations offering different levels of training, some of which involved social workers. For example, at the University of Natal (subsequently the University of KwaZulu-Natal), a programme to train community development workers had been developed through the Community Service Training Program (CSTP). This programme evolved into a diploma programme offered jointly by the Department of Social Work and CSTP (Gray, 1996; Gray & Bernstein, 1989; Gray & Russell, 1988; Gray & Wint, 1998) and subsequently by a department of community development, which, in 2006, amalgamated with social work. To some extent the criticism that social workers were unable 'to respond appropriately to the most important social development needs in South African communities' (RSA Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997: 32) was warranted. For the most part, social work is an urban-based profession whereas the most important social development needs were, and still are, in rural areas, especially in the former homelands where black poverty is rife. In 2001 the welfare Minister reported that 45 per cent of the population lived in rural areas; most rural people were poor; and most poor people – 72 per cent of the population – were black, with rural women and children the poorest of all. There are relatively few rural social workers working at the grassroots level. Part of the problem is the lack of infrastructure in these rural areas and, where community-based organisations do exist, they cannot afford to employ professional social workers; hence the need for trained community development workers willing and able to work at the grassroots level. However, social work is rallying to retain its community development role within developmental welfare and incentives to encourage social workers to work in rural and poor communities are being explored.

Probation workers

Although social workers had long played a part in probation work, the White Paper for Social Welfare listed probation workers as a new occupational category without acknowledgement of social work's prior role in this area. In the pre-1994 apartheid Department of Social Welfare and Pensions, social workers doing statutory work had been referred to as Probation Officers and, whether they were based in government departments or voluntary welfare organisations only social workers registered with the statutory social work council, were allowed to do statutory work. Social workers working in child welfare agencies, which were government-subsidised voluntary welfare organisations, were delegated statutory functions. Only registered social workers, therefore, were able to do what is nowadays referred to as child protection work, namely the removal of children from their families and placement in children's homes, foster care or adoption (see September, 2006). Social workers supervised these placements. As regards the development of this 'social service profession', an SGB has been established and processes are in training for the creation of a professional board for probation workers. Although the regulations to establish a professional board for probation officers were approved by the Minister of Social Development, the probation sector has decided to reconsider its application for professional status via its own independent board, the reason being that probation officers are largely social workers. As has happened in the various 'social service professions', developments were largely driven by one or two individuals, or a group advocating for a particular 'profession' or 'occupational group', without sufficient investigation of its functional status. Thus, the fact that most probation officers are also social workers has

not been properly investigated or acknowledged. There are problems with this process since, when key facilitators and/or advocates resign from government, as has happened in the case of probation work, matters tend to take a different turn. Thus, the initial drive for a professional board for probation officers came from a strong advocacy group within the sector, and when two key facilitators resigned from the government department a review revealed that probation officers, were in fact, leaning towards applying for recognition as a speciality field in social work. This was the situation at the time of writing.

Thus, we see that, initially, part of the motivation behind the transformation of human resources within the welfare sector was geared towards removing social work's dominance and allowing other occupational groups to develop with government support as social work had done through the apartheid years. The occupational groups waiting in the wings saw avenues open before them to promote their interests and to sideline social work politically even though social workers and child and youth care workers continued to work together in their complementary roles at the coalface. Beginning at the end, where eventually the transformed Council for Social Work became the Council for Social Service Professions, with the majority of its members nominated by the national government Minister of Welfare, one can, and indeed should, marvel at the political astuteness of those who spotted the gaps as they opened before them (Gray, 2000). The NACCW was a case in point. Ironically, as it had done under apartheid, social work once again was supportive of and conformed to government policy and engaged in the process of transformation in good faith despite its own professional division and uncertainties. Without strong professional organisation, however, social work proved unequal to the task of negotiating its interests within the new structure proactively. Instead its transformation, driven by its attempt to counter criticisms levelled against it, was reactive. Further, many social workers who had openly fought for change had become part of the new government bureaucracy.

While most professions protect their professional domain, social work was forced to accept that it was not the only player in social welfare. In 1996 the South African Interim Council for Social Work was constituted and mandated by government to design legislation for a new Council to place greater emphasis on professional practice, democracy, transparency, equity, accountability and community involvement (Lombard, 2000). On 8 June 1999 the first representative South African Council for Social Service Professions was constituted and legislation was passed to bring all welfare related occupations into the existing regulatory framework via amendments to the 1978 Act, which also made provision for the establishment of professional boards for each 'social service profession' as it professionalised. As already discussed, social work was first off the mark, followed by child and youth care work while probation officers – most of whom were social workers – initially pressed for an independent professional board but, more recently, as outlined above, have been reconsidering this move. Importantly, when this process began there was some resistance to social work and a strong need to transform the social work profession from its shape and form as an organ of apartheid. With the separation of pensions and grants into a separate agency, there is greater pressure within the Department of Social Development to implement policies and programmes and to deliver services. This has had a positive impact on perceptions of social work with the realisation that it is the leading profession in service implementation. However, due to the negative image of the profession in its 'outing' period, students did not enter the profession and many social workers – both practitioners and academics – went overseas to work, with the result that there is now a severe shortage of social workers in South Africa. Though all the social service professions mentioned in the White Paper for Social Welfare, with the exception of community development workers, have been brought under government regulation and, with a Minister favourably disposed towards social workers, there is once again recognition of social work's status.

In short, the adoption of social development had far-reaching consequences for social work. As we have seen, initially it led to the 'marginalisation of social workers . . . a withdrawal of government support for social work, an undermining of the social work profession, and a questioning of social work's relevance' (Gray, 2000: 100–101). Instead, the White Paper for Social Welfare elevated other occupational groups to the status of 'social service professions' even though they were not professionally organised, with the exception perhaps of child and youth care. As already outlined, social workers had 'claimed' the professional ground in

welfare as their exclusive domain. Thus, opening up the field in this way was a step in the right direction. It was rather the way in which social workers initially allowed this process to unfold that led to their marginalisation: They did not involve themselves in, nor did they protest against, this demarcation of 'social service professions'. However, had they fought back at the time, they would have been fighting a losing battle given the new administration's determination to transform all the Afrikaans white-dominated structures of the profession and political manoeuvring from other quarters, which led to the formation of the Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP). In order to ensure transformation, the Minister for Welfare nominated 13 of the 19 members on the first CSSP, which had only six elected social work members.

The SACSSP is an umbrella body for the occupational groups now labelled 'social service professions' and their respective professional boards to protect and promote the interests of their members; maintain and enhance the prestige, status and dignity of the relevant profession and the integrity of its practitioners and students; advocate for minimum service conditions; determine minimum standards of education and training of persons registered with the professional board; promote lifelong learning and research in the relevant professions and occupations; market the relevant professions and occupations as career options; determine the qualifications for registration of practitioners; regulate practice and register practitioners and students; determine standards of professional conduct and codes of ethics; regulate the professional conduct of registrants; promote efficient and responsible practice; consult and liaise with other professional boards; assist in the promotion of social welfare; advise the Minister, where appropriate; and guide the profession and protect the public (Mazibuko & Gray, 2004). However, the SACSSP is not a professional organisation and the nub of the problem is that social work needs to become better organised professionally if it is to succeed in gaining better recognition as a legitimate role-player within developmental social welfare at the institutional level (as discussed below).

To summarise the discussion thus far, changes in non-government and government welfare structures led to consequent changes to human resourcing within the welfare sector. Most crucial for social work was the rise of the 'social service professions' and the initial withdrawal of government support for social work with the elevation of other occupational groups to professional status despite their lack of professional organisation. Social work played its part in social welfare's transformation agenda to identify but, more importantly, to recognise the role of other players in social welfare service delivery. Along with this initiative came a gradual acknowledgement that all the so-called 'social service professions' had a role to play in transforming the welfare system, including the constitution of the statutory Council of Social Work.

We now turn our attention to social work's response to the challenges consequent upon these developments from 1994 onwards. Having set the scene and outlined the scope and context for the required transformation of social work, we will see that meeting the requirements of a developmental welfare approach raised further challenges, which can only be fully understood within the framework of the shift from apartheid to democracy. Thus, we focus more specifically on social work's transition within a multiracial democracy and its changing role in a more inclusive developmental welfare system.

Social work's response to the transformation agenda

How then has social work theory and practice succeeded in meeting the requirements of the developmental social welfare policy framework? Has there been any discernible impact from the implementation of developmental social work theory? How have the changes affected social work education in South Africa? What progress has there been towards professional unity and what is the status of South Africa's membership in the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) given that it was granted conditional membership contingent on the formation of a unified professional body representing all social work associations in South Africa within two years (that is, by 2003)?

Despite the difficulties facing social workers in the first decade of democracy, they have remained committed to the developmental approach. McKendrick (2001) highlighted key features of 'apartheid' social work deriving from its colonial, race-based history which, in the face of transformation, led to a phase of questioning and introspection. According to McKendrick, apartheid social work dealt mainly with white people, without regard for black poverty, using remedial, individualistic, casework interventions associated mainly with social control. It was excessively preoccupied with professional status and kept others out of 'their' field through legislation that not only regulated the social work profession but assured its key role in welfare provision. In reflecting on the impact of the changes on social work, we believe that the profession responded as follows. First came the revision of professional priorities in the transition from apartheid to a multiracial democracy. Second, and related to this, came social work's involvement in transforming welfare from an exclusive racially based system to an inclusive one benefiting all South Africans. Third, social work had to decipher its role in developmental welfare, and fourth, it had to make changes to social work education. The events that have fashioned this path have already been discussed. Here we discuss social work's response to them.

Social work makes amends in the transition from apartheid to a multiracial democracy

Welfare in South Africa evolved in the aftermath of colonialism in the early years of the 20th century when it was essentially modelled on the British welfare system. With the advent of apartheid in 1948 came the further entrenchment of race-based social engineering, which ended with the transition to a multiracial democracy between 1990 and 1994. Though the new welfare system retained the partnership model of social provision characteristic of the apartheid welfare system, it introduced a developmental approach that was articulated in the White Paper for Social Welfare. Policy makers in the new South Africa were faced with the challenge of broadening services to all South Africans. This was a major challenge given that the system they inherited was highly regulated and heavily bureaucratic, inefficient and extremely costly to maintain given its fragmented and racially divided nature. Social workers played a pivotal role in this divided welfare system: they were paid by government either directly or through the subsidy system (Louw, 1991) and the government closely monitored their activities (Ntusi, 1998).

According to Ntusi (1998), the apartheid government saw the progressive stance of some social workers in advocating for the poor and seeking a fair redistribution of resources and services as indistinguishable from socialism and communism. In a country where these ideologies were viewed as antagonistic by the ruling government, it was difficult for the profession to receive outright state support without being suspected of sabotage and subversive intent (Ntusi, 1998). Nevertheless, despite the intense pressure on social workers, some believed that social work, more than any of the other 'social service professions', had to assume responsibility for human rights violations and for failing to uphold its core social justice values. For Lombard (2000), with some notable exceptions, most social workers, though they were not alone among the professions, wittingly or unwittingly maintained the apartheid system. McKendrick (1990) claimed that, due to the exigencies of their context, individual professionals knowingly engaged in inappropriate and perhaps at times even morally wrong practices. Despite a few welfare initiatives prior to 1994, by and large the social welfare sector in general, and social work in particular, failed citizens by not openly opposing the injustices of apartheid: neither social work nor any other profession escaped the prevailing conservative political climate (Lombard, 2000).

In recognition of the profession's complicity in racial injustice, social work made a submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) on 20 February 1998 wherein it apologised for: (i) social service practices that were destructive to the wellbeing and dignity of persons, families and communities; (ii) the failure of individuals and organisations to honour the stated principles of the welfare sector by taking a firm stand against injustice; and (iii) not taking action to resist and confront grossly unfair, inhumane and discriminatory practices within welfare (Lombard, 2000; Patel, 2005). In acknowledging the wrongs of the past, social workers accepted the government's transformation agenda and the developmental social

welfare approach. The profession committed itself to playing an active role in working towards the achievement of social justice and human rights (Ntusi, 1998).

Since social work had always played a major role in the non-government welfare sector, it was influential in getting NGOs to support and adopt developmental welfare principles, especially with regard to inclusive service provision (Lombard, 2005; Morifi, 2004; Nel, 2003; Patel, 2005; Venter, 2003). In both the government and non-governmental sectors, the profession promoted awareness of people's right of access to social grants and other welfare benefits. It addressed inequities by providing equal opportunities for clients to participate in their own development. It advanced social justice by participating in social reform and structural changes. A study of NGOs by Lombard (2005) found that social workers in South Africa were successfully balancing their traditional counselling, therapy and statutory roles (90 per cent) with the developmental roles of community development (88 per cent) and prevention (92.72 per cent).

Changes to social work structures in the transition to an inclusive welfare system

Although welfare has never been the exclusive domain of social work, as already noted, social workers have, in the past, zealously guarded 'their' turf and through legislation actively discouraged others from usurping their role. For example, the Social and Associated Workers Act (RSA Department of Social Welfare, 1978) granted social work full professional status (McKendrick, 2001). Patel (2005) questioned the credibility of this legislation, seeing it as a vehicle for the political control of social work activities. Suspicion on the part of those involved in anti-apartheid activism severely affected the effectiveness of these policies as apartheid neared its end and sought vigorously to transform them once in power. Thus, high on the agenda was the transformation of the Council for Social Work to which, as we have already alluded, most black social workers did not belong because of apartheid homeland policy and which others, both black and some white refused to join.

Those social workers who were actively involved in this professional transformation process were criticised by some for marginalising social work. Nevertheless, they forged ahead and after prolonged consultation changed the structure and legislation regulating social work and the social service professions as already described. Still, problems of representivity ensued, for the underlying transformation agenda required that board membership reflect the country's population profile. Thus said the current Director General of the Department of Social Development at the inauguration of the 2nd South African Council for Social Service Professions in 2004: 'The Council is still faced with the substantial challenge of playing a leading role in ensuring the transformation of our sector. The skewed outcome of the recent elections for members of Council is one additional indicators (sic) of the work that still has to be done' (cited in Madonsela, 2004: 2). Although similar remarks had followed each professional council election since 1994, nowhere on any public platform had it ever been explicitly spelt out that the so-called 'skewed' outcomes referred to the high proportion of white Afrikaans professionals and their active participation in successive council elections. Representivity was then 'rectified' by the Minister's appointment of black professionals to the Council such that they comprised the majority membership of professional boards.

Despite these statutory boards, and greater cooperation between social workers on the ground, organisationally the social work profession in South Africa remains racially divided. If the profession is to unite, then racial issues need to be openly addressed since white elected members with commitment to and passion for the social work profession who have worked side by side with black elected and appointed members have been left feeling demoralised by this turn of events. It smacks of exclusion for those who have worked unstintingly for transformation over the last 12 years. Real representivity means that members of boards are elected by members of the profession without government intervention in election processes. The appointment of members on the basis of race raises the question of 'how the professional boards for social work and social service professions will put a stop to exclusionary practices?' so that social workers who accept the principles of inclusion will not in future be excluded by other categories of social service professionals. For each social service

occupation, the challenge is to clearly demarcate core professional boundaries in order to strengthen one another's capacity to work in concert to achieve the goals of social development.

Social work practitioners could strengthen their professional boundaries if they were able to unite into a single professional association (Mazibuko & Gray, 2004). Beyond apartheid, a professional social work association should no longer be racially divided. But despite the gains made, unification remains a utopian goal (Drower, 1991; Gray, 1990). From the 1960s onwards, social work academics have been united in a single body, the Joint Universities Committee which has long been a member of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW). In 2005 it became the Association for South African Schools of Social Work (ASASWEI). However, there are enduring divisions among social work practitioners (Drower, 1991, 1996; Gray, 1992; Mazibuko & Gray, 2004) and South Africa is no longer a member of the IFSW as already mentioned.

Over the years there have been several attempts to unite social workers in South Africa, the most recent being the formation of the Interim Committee for Social Work Associations (ICSWA) in 1996. In July 1998 ICSWA was granted conditional membership in the IFSW, which it lost due to ongoing disunity in the profession (Lombard, 2000; Mazibuko & Gray, 2004). Three professional bodies remain, the strongest being the private practitioners' association, despite the re-endorsement of unification during the 2004 National Conference for Social Service Professions. At the 6th Pan African Conference of the IFSW held in Kenya in 2005, yet another steering committee was established which met with the professional associations during June and July of that year. Consequently, at a national consultative workshop in August 2005, agreement was again reached on the need for a single unified professional association (Discussion Document on the Establishment of a United Professional Association for Social Workers, 2005). However, once again participants disagreed on the nature of a united body though to resolve the impasse the IFSW had indicated they would accept a federation with affiliated associations. Two referenda on the establishment and nature of a unified association followed. The first was nullified due to a one per cent (1,176 respondents) response rate and a mandate was given to the steering committee to repeat the voting process (SACSSP Newsletter, 2006). Although the second referendum received even fewer votes (n= 984) than the first, part of the mandate was that the results would be accepted regardless of the response rate. The low response rate was due as much to confusion about the second referendum as to apathy towards the process. To decide on a way forward, 105 social work professionals, representing various NGOs and government departments, attended a meeting in July 2006 where the decision to accept the outcome of the second referendum was unanimous: a unified professional association was needed (SACSSP Newsletter, 2006). Thus, the steering committee was mandated to take the process forward to achieve professional unity (SACSSP Newsletter, 2006). As had happened before, a minority group pressed for unity while the full membership of the profession remained disengaged.

Defining social work's role in developmental welfare

Social workers committed themselves to the developmental paradigm with the adoption of the White Paper for Social Welfare (RSA Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997). Ntusi (1998) argued that at the time of the White Paper process, the change of government and political ideology opened a window for the profession to make or break its image as an advocate for the disadvantaged and vulnerable. In the first few years of democracy, the challenge was to define what developmental social welfare implied in operational terms, but this has yet to be achieved. In 2005 the Deputy Minister for Social Development, Jean Benjamin, reported that there had been much debate about developmental social services and social development. Yet this new paradigm, which aims at collective empowerment, has never been clearly understood nor has it properly informed service delivery (RSA Department of Social Development, 2005a: 3). Contra this, the emerging discourse on social development and developmental social welfare had claimed that significant progress had been made (Gray, 1996, 1997a,b; Lombard, 1996; Mazibuko, 1996; Sewpaul, 1997). Two book publications, by two social work academics, articulated the

nature of developmental social welfare, namely Gray with Mackintosh (1998) *Developmental Social Work in South Africa* and Patel (2005) *Social Welfare and Social Development in South Africa*. South African scholars, practitioners and policy makers acknowledged the leadership and mentorship of Professor James Midgley in implementing social development. This evolving social work literature affirmed the social work profession's commitment to shaping developmental practice within social welfare and social work's role in spearheading the transformation of social service delivery.

There was some agreement that developmental welfare implied (i) a focus on poverty (Gray, 1996); (ii) a rights-based approach in the pursuit of social justice, equity and sustainable development (RSA Department of Social Development, 2004; September, 2005); (iii) strength and empowerment theories and people-centred practice models; and (iv) integrated multi-pronged interventions that built self-reliance and fostered participation in decision making at the individual, family and community levels (Streak & Poggenpoel, 2005). One of the initial interpretations was that developmental social work practice meant 'more community work' (Lombard, 1996). However, as their understanding of developmental social work began to take shape, social workers realised that they could not pursue community development at the cost of abandoning rehabilitative and protective casework (Sturgeon, in Gray with McIntosh, 1998). In any case, social work had never vigorously pursued community work and claims by decision makers that all social workers should focus exclusively on community development were ill-informed and unrealistic. Hence the Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for Social Development in the Eastern Cape Province met with resistance when – during a Community Development Conference in February 2003 – she called for social workers to change their 'name' to community developers (RSA, 2003). It was not the role of politicians to shape professional identity. Only specialised training and practical experience should define a social workers' designation. In any event, community work and community development had long been an accepted social work role.

In South Africa, social work's involvement in community development had developed alongside civil society initiatives to respond to the impact of apartheid policies. In protesting against apartheid, communities started to organise themselves from within which, in the 1980s, resulted in the establishment of numerous grassroots civic organisations and many social workers joined these progressive (alternative) organisations (Louw, 1991; Patel & Taback, 1989). These, in turn, gave birth to indigenous community development workers who claimed the domain of community development. The Black Consciousness Movement, for example, initiated many community-based development programmes founded on the principles of African self, help, collectivism, communitarianism and community action (Patel, 2005). These community-based organisations paved the way for social workers' engagement in community and social development since the social welfare model that emerged from the activities of progressive organisations was strongly oriented towards a developmental approach to social welfare (Patel, 2005). Even under strict apartheid government control, as early as the 1970s, social workers mobilised communities from the inside and acted as change agents on the basis of what the community wanted (Shaw, 1973). Within a developmental approach to service delivery, social workers cannot be detached from the community and there is sufficient evidence documenting social work's role in community development (Gray & Russell, 1988; Green & Nieman, 2003; Lombard, 2005; Patel, 2005). Social work training in South Africa has long focused on community work. Lombard (1989) found that the curricula of most South African Universities included community work as a core method of social work.

Yet ignorance or denial of social work's contribution to community development persists. For example, in Chapter 3 (3.2.1) of the Health and Welfare Sector Education and Training Authority (2004) Draft Sector Skills Plan 2005–2009, it is claimed that 'the majority of social workers and workers in the development sector have not been trained in community development models'. Statements like this misrepresent social work and create a political platform for external forces to define the boundaries of social work and to shape the nature of its practice. Evidence of social work's future role and responsibility in development is enshrined in the minimum standards for the four-year Bachelor of Social Work qualification registered in terms of the National Qualification Framework in 2003 for compulsory implementation by all social work training institutions by 2007. Here it is explicitly stated that

social work should address poverty, oppression and injustice in society (Lombard, Grobbelaar & Pruis, 2003) and the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) project established in 2004, which should also become compulsory from 2007, will also ensure that professional registration hinges on annual credits for continuous professional learning. Although the profession remains divided, its education programmes comply with international education standards.

Changes to social work education

In its presentation to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Social Development on 13 June 2001, the JUC (now ASASWEI) reported an overall decrease in student enrolments in social work across South African universities. This was attributed to the diminishing status of social work on a national and institutional level; the perception that the Department of Social Development marginalised social work and failed to recognise the legitimate place of social work in the social welfare sector; the poor salaries and service conditions of social workers; and the lack of job opportunities for social work graduates in view of subsidy cutbacks to social welfare agencies and the subsequent freezing of social work posts. Further, it was reported that this problem persisted even though most schools of social work had taken significant steps to align their curricula with, and to meet the requirements of, new legislation inter alia three policies from the Ministry for Welfare and Population Development: the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997), the Social Welfare Action Plan (1998) and the Financing Policy for Developmental Social Welfare Services (1999) and two from the Department of Education: the White Paper for Higher Education (1997) and the South African Qualifications Authority Act (1995).

The JUC noted that there were several factors hindering the transformation of social work education, not least financial constraints preventing staff appointments and hampering the implementation of education programmes. There was a need to employ tutors for additional help to students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and for financial aid to cover tuition fees and the cost of transport to field practice sites. Most schools of social work had been affected by financial cuts to universities. There was also a shortage of suitable candidates to fulfil equity⁴ requirements. Salaries of academics were not commensurate with positions in the public and private sectors, which attracted black social workers. There was also a lack of leadership and unity among staff in some universities and prospective students did not perceive the Department of Social Development as taking social work seriously. Compounding this situation was the decline in a service orientation among the general public. Many people simply did not see studying social work as a worthwhile educational investment. The inherent contradictions of policy proposals, and the gap between policy and practice, diminished the legitimacy of welfare. The poor image and low morale of social workers, together with the severe financial difficulties experienced by many non-government organisations, impeded the continuing education of social workers. This, in turn, resulted in, inter alia, a lack of a shared conception of social development between academics and some practitioners, which frustrated students in their field placement experiences. Also, a lack of consultation on the transformation process was noted between the Department of Social Development and academic institutions. For example, the JUC had not been consulted on the unilateral decision to change the name of the department from the Department of Welfare to the Department of Social Development. This change of name was seen to marginalise social welfare as well as social work.

Higher education reforms also had a profound effect on social work education. Despite these factors hampering its development, the four-year Bachelor of Social Work degree has been standardised across the 16 universities offering social work. This was a major achievement. Social work was one of the first professional disciplines to register minimum national standards for its qualifying bachelor degree on the National Qualification Framework (NQF). Within welfare this was to be expected since, as outlined previously, social work was the only

⁴ As with representativeness, the term 'equity' is being used here to refer to the employment of black social work academics. Part of the problem was that eligible appointees could get better paid jobs in the government welfare and private business sectors.

'professionalised' social service profession and was thus the best organised in terms of legislation, the statutory Council for Social Work having been in operation since 1978 (Mazibuko & Gray, 2004). Commencing in 2005, these standards would become compulsory from 2007 onwards (see Sewpaul & Lombard, 2004).

However, education and practice were not aligned. Although draft standards were circulated to social work practitioners, few responded. Nevertheless, educators took the lead and social work practitioners began to see the relationship between education and practice standards. In a sense, important revisions to 'the curriculum', which had been accomplished during the 1990s by some universities, were producing graduates who began to influence understanding of developmental welfare in practice. There is a good relationship between the universities and the Council which is driving practice standards, and the South African Social Service Profession's new code of professional conduct is to be integrated into university training programmes.

Thus, social work educators have taken a lead with the standardisation of social work following international moves towards global standard setting. This has to be seen in light of the broader role of the profession in our society and the role played by universities in getting professionals to conform to the dictates of employers and funders (Schmidt, 2000). In South Africa, as in most other countries, this means conforming to the dictates of government since most social workers are government employees. Where they are employed in the private sector, the same principle pertains: the employee wants professionals trained to fit into and to conform to organisational policy. In South Africa, as elsewhere, there is constant tension between the requirements of the workplace and the profession's mission. For social work, as for most other professions, codes of ethics dictate loyalty to the employing organisation and it is still, as ever, true that he who pays the piper calls the tune.

Despite the changes relating to social work education standards, there remains a lack of clarity with regard to the role of social work within the developmental welfare system and social work in South Africa continues to be a low status profession with poor salaries and service conditions. This situation persists despite a two-year investigation which resulted in an increase in social work salaries, albeit mostly within the government sector. Thus, the marginalisation of the non-government sector continues. NGOs are still subsidised on the basis of social work salaries and many do not have the resources to increase social work salaries nor would this be high on their list of priorities given the expanded demand for social services. Instead the government could work to build the capacity of non-government and community-based organisations, especially in rural areas, and deploy social workers to play leadership roles in capacity building, empowerment and sustainable development in local communities. Perhaps such support will be forthcoming once the first graduates of the NQF-regulated Bachelor of Social Work degree course enter the job market in 2009.

Positive developments have been changes in higher education and the development of education standards for social work (as outlined above), which will result in a memorandum of understanding between the Council and the Department of Education to bring training into line with resourcing needs within developmental welfare. Practice standards and quality assurance are the province of the Council and the formation of the social work board has advanced this process. However, much work remains: social workers need to become better organised professionally and more vocal in advocating continued recognition of their value to society. We conclude on a hopeful note, seeing evidence that the tide is turning with signs that the government is again recognising the importance of social work. However, we believe that the way in which it establishes its position will continue to be contingent on its professional organisation. As long as government pipers call the tune, social work's position will be at the behest of the major employing organisations and those who pay for their services. Thus, it is likely that social work will remain a highly regulated profession in the foreseeable future and a great deal hinges on the ability of the Department of Social Development to effectively implement services in the next decade.

Conclusion

In this article we have examined the transformation of social work in response to the transition to a developmental welfare approach in South Africa. If the first decade of democracy was one of policy development, the second is one of policy implementation. As we entered this next phase, the signposts were clear: Focus on 'pro-poor policies and delivery mechanisms in key areas' (First Lady, Zanele Mbeki, in Boyle, 2005: 1) and 'accelerate the pace of restructuring to overcome poverty and inequality and improve service delivery' (RSA Minister of Finance, 2006).

The ground has been laid: social security administration has been moved to an independent body to allow the Department of Social Development to focus on service delivery. There is evidence of some stability in its leadership. There are renewed efforts to work cooperatively with stakeholders in the welfare sector, including social workers. There has been a significant increase in funding to welfare, which, though insufficient for the expansion of social service delivery and unlikely to benefit clients, is expected to benefit government-employed social workers as well as those in NGOs since, due to the intervention of the Gauteng Social Services Funding Crisis Committee (see Lombard, 2008, this issue), subsidies to NGOs have been standardised at 75 per cent of the government social work salary rate with investigation of further options underway. While not sufficient, and not yet applicable to all provinces, it is a step in the right direction. Further, to attract new social workers, the department has made bursaries available for social work students. Nevertheless, as Lombard (2008, this issue) shows, there are still huge gaps between NGO and government organisations.

As we have seen, during the first decade of democracy social work was tossed about in the sea of changes, all the while working cooperatively with government to create a developmental welfare system as envisioned in the White Paper for Social Welfare. There is still a long way to go. The problem of implementation remains. So what is required of social work?

Social work needs to establish its professional boundaries. It must remain relevant and responsive to society's needs and reposition itself as a major contributor to developmental social welfare. Crucial to this is the way in which it responds to the social service crisis (see Lombard, 2008, this issue) while at the same time addressing professional concerns, not least the poor salaries and low morale of social workers and the need for a united professional social work association. A comprehensive audit of the role played by social workers in transforming social services is needed. On the basis of such information, social workers could demand a costing model for social service delivery based on mutually agreed norms and standards and parity in the distribution of welfare budgets in the nine provinces. They could insist that the Recruitment and Retention Strategy for Social Workers in South Africa (RSA Department of Social Development, 2006) applies to social workers in all sectors. They could also advocate for reasonable workloads in terms of the government department's caseload norm of 1:60 (RSA Department of Social Development, 2005b). To ensure the viability of non-government organisations, social workers employed in this sector should develop grant-writing strategies and skills (Matube, 2005). Benchmarking criteria for the performance assessment of social workers could be part of this audit as well as guidelines to assess NGO progress towards organisational transformation. This could be aided by a strong National Social Services and Development Forum to debate critical issues, to engage in policy formulation and evaluation, to determine collective solutions, and to lobby for the social welfare sector. Developmental services should be based on strong partnerships, mutual respect and power-sharing with government (see Gray & Crofts, 2004; Lombard & Du Preez, 2004).

In its Discussion Document: Policy on Financial Awards to Service Providers (RSA Department of Social Development, 2004) the government indicated its awareness that its strong political statements on the relevance of the profession had exacerbated low morale by undermining social workers' confidence in their ability to deliver developmental welfare services, and recognised the need to change this public perception lest the profession continue to be an 'unattractive occupation for young people'. Importantly, then, there are signs

that the Department of Social Development is finally recognising social work's importance in the face of increasing pressures for the effective implementation of welfare services now that social security is no longer part of its brief. The Department's future hinges on its ability to deliver services and it needs social workers to deliver these services. So social work is an ideal position to sustain and improve its effectiveness in the second decade of democracy. McKendrick (2001) predicted that social workers would contribute to the reconstruction of a different South Africa beyond apartheid. The first decade of democracy provided ample opportunity for the profession to contribute to the development of welfare policy (Ntusi, 1998). The second offers possibilities for social workers to take the lead in service delivery and policy implementation. Social workers are looking out on a decade of hope. Can they rise to its challenges?

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