# DEVELOPMENTAL SOCIAL WORK IN SOUTH AFRICA AND KENYA: SOME LESSONS FOR AFRICA

**Antoinette Lombard**
Professor and head, Department of Social Work and Criminology, University of Pretoria
antoinette.lombard@up.ac.za

**Gidraph Wairire**
Social Work academic, University of Nairobi
wairire@mail.uonbi.ac.ke

## ABSTRACT

*Africa's governments have made a commitment to both the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Social development has created a platform from which developmental social work could make a contribution to achieving the MDGs. An analysis of developmental social work in South Africa and Kenya reveals that developmental social work could position itself as a major partner in social development, but, to be recognised for its contribution, developmental social work needs to address a number of challenges and have a clear political mandate. Lessons are drawn from the South African and Kenyan experiences to strengthen social work on the continent.*

**INTRODUCTION**

The African continent's commitment to taking ownership of its own development and to propelling a united continent towards peace and prosperity is embedded in the African Union and its mandated initiative, the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development was a new global consensus on the need to put people at the centre of development (United Nations: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1995) that provided a platform for social development in addressing poverty. The development agenda was strengthened by the adoption of the Millennium Declaration in 2000 and the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2001. The MDGs not only emphasise the global commitment to development but also provide an opportunity for Africa to engage and participate as a united front in this global process.

Being closely associated with the poor and vulnerable in society, social workers are key social partners and change agents in development and should therefore play an important role in the national effort to reduce inequality and eliminate poverty (Lombard, 2008a).

Current challenges to development in South Africa and Kenya must be seen from the contextual viewpoint of colonial history. In addition, South Africa is dealing with the legacy of its apartheid past, while Kenya still faces the consequences of the structural adjustment programmes of the 1990s. These realities, as they relate to both countries, contribute to the prevailing poverty, unemployment and inequality, coupled with wide ranging social problems such as crime and violence and the impact of HIV and AIDS leaving many vulnerable. Unemployment and poverty have also contributed to the vulnerability of the youth to drug addiction and criminal activities.

While both countries have experienced increased economic growth over the past few years, slower growth rates have been recorded as a result of the global economic crisis. In Kenya, political violence following the contestation for the leadership of the country after the 2007 general elections resulted in lower economic growth and tribal conflicts. The two countries also have different levels of economic development, with South Africa being classified as a lower middle income country and Kenya a low income country.

The commitment of the respective governments to respond to these

challenges is evident in their adoption of the MDGs and social development goals that shape their development agendas. The social development agenda is also supported by the respective countries' commitments to fundamental human, social and economic rights as enshrined in the Bill of Rights in the Constitution of South Africa (Republic of South Africa (RSA), Act 108 of 1996) and the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual in the constitution of Kenya (Laws of Kenya, 2001). The adoption of a social development policy introduced a new paradigm for social welfare and hence for developmental social work in South Africa. While no formal policy for developmental social work exists in Kenya, the Kenya Vision 2030 (Government of the Republic of Kenya (GoK), 2007) creates an enabling environment for social work to address the development challenges facing the country. As the discussion will indicate, social work is a growing profession in Kenya and not yet regulated. The country is thus in need of a clear policy that gives formal legitimacy to developmental social work. Although social work's developmental orientation is not yet formalised and fully recognised by government, social work is nevertheless closely associated with addressing the development challenges facing the country and for purposes of this article aligned with the definition of developmental social work.

The purpose of the article is to define developmental social work, examine the way social work is practised in South Africa and Kenya, review the major challenges facing developmental social work in these two African countries and, finally, draw lessons for developmental social work in the rest of Africa.

## DEVELOPMENTAL SOCIAL WORK IN SOUTH AFRICA AND KENYA

Developmental social work is defined as an integrated, holistic approach to social work that recognises and responds to the interconnections between the person and the environment; links micro and macro practice; and utilises strength-based and non-discriminatory models, approaches and interventions, and partnerships to promote social and economic inclusion and well-being (cf. Patel and Hochfeld, 2008; Lombard, 2007; Patel, 2005; Mayadas and Elliott, 2001; Gray, 2006; Midgley, 1995). Developmental social work affirms the commitment of the social work profession to social justice and human rights and to the eradication of poverty and inequality. It is practised within a developmental social welfare system (Gray, 2006) and positions social work as a role player and partner in social development in the social welfare sector (Lombard, 2007).

Developmental social work needs an enabling environment mandated by a policy and legislative framework. In the following discussion, it will become apparent that the progress of developmental social work is directly linked to the way in which the social work profession is recognised and regulated in South Africa and Kenya respectively.

**Developmental social work in South Africa**

South Africa's developmental approach to social welfare evolved from the country's unique history of inequality and the violation of human rights as a result of colonialism and apartheid (Patel, 2005). Social workers have always played a major role in welfare service delivery in South Africa, in both the governmental and non-governmental sectors, and they saw the new democracy as an opportunity to contribute to the achievement of social justice for all South Africans (Lombard, 2008a). This enthusiasm, however, met with many challenges. Social work could not escape the reality of the deeply divided South African society dictated by its history and, in view of the social justice and human rights nature of developmental social work, had to claim its position as partner in social development. This process started with a submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1998 on the social welfare sector's contribution to the abuse of human rights during apartheid (cf. Patel, 2005; Lombard, 2000). This was only the first step towards uniting and preparing social work for its developmental role. Other challenges included clarifying the confusion as to what developmental social work entailed. It also meant addressing stumbling blocks such as high workloads, low salaries and the discrepancy in salaries between non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and government; constant staff turnover, political sidelining and scaling down of subsidies (Lombard, 2008b; Green, 2008). It took 10 years following the adoption of the White Paper for Social Welfare for the National Association of Social Workers: South Africa to be launched in 2007. However, three years later, the organisation is still struggling to establish a national, united voice for social work.

The Constitution of South Africa (RSA, Act 108 of 1996), with its enshrined Bill of Rights, forms the overall legal framework for all development in the country and hence for developmental social welfare. More specifically, developmental social work is mandated by the White Paper for Social Welfare (RSA, 1997), which is in line with the Copenhagen Social Development Commitments and is informed by the principles of the national Reconstruction and Development Programme, adopted in 1994 to direct the country on its path of integrated socio-economic development.

On the level of implementation, specific policies were developed to implement the White Paper for Social Welfare, including, inter alia, the Financial Policy for Developmental Social Services (1999) and the Integrated Service Delivery Model (2006). Existing legislation pertaining to children, senior citizens, social assistance and domestic violence was amended or new legislation developed. However, despite the progress made in providing policy and a legislative framework, there are still many challenges ahead in shaping and institutionalising policies for the effective implementation of developmental social work. For example, the revision of financing policies to support developmental welfare strategies is a burning issue, as these are currently not adequately funded (Patel and Hochfeld, 2008) in the absence of national norms and standards for service delivery.

The funding challenge directly relates to the partnership embedded in developmental social work. The relations in the partnership between government and the non-governmental sector in South Africa have been strained over the past decade (Patel and Hochfeld, 2008; Lombard, 2008b). The government either provides services themselves or outsources them to NGO providers (Department of Social Development, 2005). The lack of funding of NGOs to render developmental social services was compounded by the fact that social security has for decades received the bulk of the social welfare budget.

Following a protest march by the NGO sector and broader civil society in 2005, some progress has been made in the areas of subsidies for social service delivery and improved salaries for social workers, albeit mainly in the public sector (Lombard, 2008b). In a further attempt to resolve matters, the National Welfare, Social Service and Development Forum, with the support of the National Coalition of Social Services, organised a national campaign of protest marches and pickets throughout the country in August 2009 to call for a just dispensation for the sector, including equal pay for equal work. The protest march was also intended to demonstrate commitment on the part of NGOs to both a continued partnership with the Department of Social Development and helping to strengthen the department's capacity to serve the poor, the vulnerable and the marginalised and to combat the conditions that generate social problems (National Welfare, Social Service and Development Forum, 2009).

It was a significant milestone for developmental social work when the government acknowledged the neglect of social services (Department of Social Development, 2005) in favour of social security and hence the lack of planning for exit levels in social security (Department of Social

Development, 2006). A further milestone for developmental social work was government's declaring of social work as a scarce skill, which reflected open political support for the social work profession. The political acknowledgement of the role of social work in society paved the way for promoting the developmental role of social workers. This was instrumental in the formulation of the recruitment and retention strategy for social work (Department of Social Development, 2004) and the launch of a comprehensive scholarship programme for the training of undergraduate social work students.

In order to practise, social workers have to register at the South African Council for Social Services Professions (SACSSP), which is a statutory body that regulates social service professions in terms of the Social Service Professions Act (110 of 1978), as amended. The majority of social workers are employed by government, drawn by higher salaries than those offered by NGOs.

South African institutions for higher education geared themselves for preparing social work students for developmental social work. In 2003, minimum standards for the Bachelor of Social Work programme were registered on the National Qualification Framework, the implementation of which became compulsory for all social work training by 2007. Social work training in South Africa is provided by 17 institutions for higher education and regulated by the SACSSP. In October 2009, the SACSSP had 14 841 social workers and 4193 student social workers registered on its data base, in relation to a population of 49 million (Statistics South Africa, 2009).

In strengthening the capacity of social workers in South Africa, the White Paper for Social Welfare (RSA, 1997:32) paved the way for the appointment of other categories of social service personnel in South Africa, especially in the light of an "over reliance on professional social workers". These include social auxiliary workers, child and youth care workers, community development practitioners, youth workers and probation officers. Progress towards this end is slow (Gray and Lombard, 2008). Twelve years after the adoption of the white paper, it remains the case that only social workers and auxiliary social workers are registered at the SACSSP. A major reason for this is the lack of thorough planning in terms of demarcating roles and responsibilities across and within the sector. However, progress in this regard has been made. The scope of social work practice was recently documented (SACSSP, n.d.), and drafting of the scope of social auxiliary work and child and youth care workers is currently under way.

Despite the extensive government scholarship for undergraduate social work studies, the numbers for social workers in the country remain inadequate because of capacity constraints within higher education institutions; these constraints are in the process of being addressed. The shortage of social workers impacts negatively on developmental social work. Research by Green (2008) indicates that social workers are, for the most part, taken up by short-term issues and individual intervention, with hardly any time for long-term development efforts because of the survival needs of client systems and acute poverty issues. This remains a challenge for developmental social work, particularly in relation to bridging micro and macro interventions and finding a balance between the rehabilitative, promotional, preventive and developmental functions of social work. It is, however, envisaged that the compulsory continuing professional development for the renewal of annual registration, which will be effected by the SACSSP from 2010, will have a positive effect on the progress of developmental social work in South Africa.

**Developmental social work in Kenya**

There is no single comprehensive legislative act or policy that directly and specifically confines itself to developmental social work in Kenya. One reason for this is that social work in Kenya is still a growing profession that is yet to be fully recognised by the state. The legislative framework and thus mandate for developmental social work in Kenya is rather to be traced in different Acts of Parliament and policies by different government ministries, such as the Children Act 8 of 2001 (Kenya Gazette Supplement No.95, 2002) and the Sexual Offences Act 3 of 2006 (Kenya Gazette Supplement No. 52, 2006).

The most notable framework for developmental social work in Kenya is the Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation (ERS), which played a major role in the recovery (albeit slow) and growth of Kenya's economy. The growth was not only positive for education, health, gender and the environment but also provided more resources for meeting the Millennium Development Goals across the economy (GoK, 2008).

The ERS gave rise to important schemes for boosting people's livelihoods at grass roots level. These schemes include, inter alia, the Constituency Development Fund (CDF), the Local Authority Transfer Fund, the Constituency Bursary Fund/the Secondary School Education Bursary Fund and the Constituency AIDS Fund. In accordance with the principle of decentralisation in development, decision making responsibilities for local development initiatives are redistributed down from government ministries

and departments to constituencies. Through the CDF, for example, different communities across the country have managed to create tangible infrastructure, such as classrooms, health centres, roads and village polytechnics. CDF supported projects are typically highly participatory and have empowered many communities. Moreover, if well implemented, the CDF has the potential to reduce inequalities in terms of opportunities and resources and by extension facilitate maximum realisation of individual potential, particularly amongst Kenya's poor and vulnerable groups.

The ERS expired in 2007, making way for the Kenya Vision 2030, which was launched in 2006 as the new long-term development blue-print for Kenya. According to the Kenyan government, the Kenya Vision 2030 is motivated by a collective aspiration for a better society by the year 2030. Its aim is to create, by that year, a globally competitive and prosperous country with a high quality of life. It also aims to transform Kenya into a newly industrialised, middle income country by providing a good quality of life for all its citizens in a clean and secure environment (Kenya Vision 2030, GoK, 2007).

The Kenya Vision 2030 is founded on three pillars: economic, social and political governance (GoK, 2007). The economic pillar aims to achieve an average economic growth rate of 10% per annum and endure until 2030; the social pillar seeks to create just, cohesive and equitable social development in a secure environment; while the political pillar aims at realising an issue-based, people centred, result oriented and accountable democratic system (GoK, 2007). This vision creates the enabling environment necessary for developmental social work in Kenya.

As indicated above, social work in Kenya is still a growing profession. Furthermore, social work training institutions are limited in number and are unable to meet the country's demand for social work professionals. Social work training in Kenya is provided by five institutions for higher education, which include two public and three private universities. Many social work institutions have been unable to commence postgraduate programmes in social work owing to the paucity of government funding. This in turn often frustrates many social workers, who silently quit the profession after undertaking post-graduate training in other non-social work fields. The consequence of the limited numbers of social workers in the country is that they have not been able to lobby strongly for a legislative Act of parliament that could give developmental social work in Kenya a new face and public recognition. Worse still, due to the limited numbers of social work

professionals, many social work tasks and roles end up in the hands of non-social work personnel.

A critical analysis of developmental social work in Kenya reveals that social work roles have not been limited to social workers alone. In the civil service, probation officers, children's welfare officers in the Children's Department-Ministry of Gender, Women and Children, and district development officers execute social work tasks in different parts of Kenya. The situation is further exacerbated by the fact that only a few social workers are fully involved in Kenya Vision 2030, even though said development blue-print is largely interdisciplinary. The social work voice, sentiments and aspirations may therefore not be fully heard, rendering social workers practically powerless to make any significant difference to development. This implies that social workers are still challenged to fulfil their generalist practice roles in addition to extending them to a developmental perspective.

The experiences and achievements of the two countries have highlighted particular challenges and lessons for further promoting and establishing developmental social work in Africa.

## CHALLENGES AND LESSONS FOR DEVELOPMENTAL SOCIAL WORK IN AFRICA

The SA experience shows that for the social work profession to flourish, it should be recognised as a profession and hence regulated in order to position itself as a role player in social development. This recognition should be supported by a political mandate and directed by a specific social welfare policy embedded in a developmental approach. The political mandate must be drawn from broad national policies and legislation as well as specific legislation regulating the profession. Regulation of social work by law implies that government has a statutory obligation to develop social work and would therefore be more committed to developing the profession.

One of the challenges facing the profession is that its impact on social development is not visible to policy makers. It is critical that the profession demonstrates its role and contribution to addressing social development goals, such as the MDGs, more directly. While there is a growing emphasis in both countries on the contribution of social work, the challenge of addressing the structural barriers that keep people in poverty remains (Green, 2008). Social workers' responsibility and role with regard to removing the social, political, economic and cultural structural determinants of poverty and inequalities should be demonstrated in their strategies, actions and

achievements in addressing injustices, marginalisation and social exclusion. It includes speaking out on injustice (Gray, 2006), advocating for human and socio-economic rights and ensuring that the voices of the marginalised and poor are heard and respected.

Speaking out on injustices also includes creating platforms from where social workers can engage in planning, monitoring and evaluation processes impacting on social development. To have their voice heard, it is critical that social workers negotiate for representation on national and regional structures such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development and United Nations agencies and structures where regional and national development plans and actions are formulated and decided, such as the South African Government's Plan of Action (RSA, 2009) and Kenya Vision 2003. Negotiations for representation, however, require a united front. Social workers are thus challenged to first strengthen their capacity within to enable them to boldly negotiate a space for the promotion and recognition of the profession. Where national bodies for social work do not yet exist in a country, schools of social work are challenged to take the initiative to mobilise social workers for developmental social work.

A critical challenge for social workers to be recognised for their role in social development is to demonstrate competency in implementing developmental social work. The South African experience clearly indicates that the lack of clarity on what developmental social welfare entails has a major impact on the progress of developmental social work. Social workers in practice should be re-trained in developmental social work in order to re-orientate themselves towards their developmental role. This can be achieved through continuing professional development. At the same time, the curriculum should prepare social work students for developmental social work. The Association for Schools of Social Work in Africa (ASSWA) can play a role in developing developmental social work in the Africa region.

For developmental social work to succeed, the South African experience demonstrates the critical role of partnerships between government and NGOs. One of the key themes for developmental social welfare is the role of state and civil society (Patel, 2005). In developmental social work, service beneficiaries should be central to all development and partnership initiatives. NGOs are well positioned to render services on a grassroots level and have a responsibility to include the voices of the poor and the marginalised. Given its overall responsibility for the well-being of civil society, government should create an enabling environment if developmental social work is to achieve social development goals. This includes a clear mandate and

direction on social welfare's role in social development and funding of social welfare services rendered on behalf of government. Government also plays an important role in facilitating an enabling environment to regulate the profession, determine standards for training and attract people to the social work profession.

For effective developmental social work, it is critical for social workers to demarcate their developmental role in relation to other role players in the field of social service delivery. The challenge is twofold: the title of 'social work' has to be protected, and at the same time social workers should create the space for other category workers in the social welfare sector. The experience of South Africa shows the importance of a human resource strategy for all the role players in the social welfare sector. It is therefore critical that social work has a well-defined scope of practice for developmental social work.

**CONCLUSION**

Social development has its origins in Africa (Midgley, 1995). It is therefore appropriate for the region to demonstrate how developmental social work could contribute to building a better Africa and a better world for all the people of the African region. Research provides the key to advance social work in Africa from a developmental perspective. A comparative study on social work in African countries can provide the baseline data to obtain a comprehensive profile of the status and recognition of social work in Africa. This baseline research will open up many avenues for further research and also indicate where African countries can support one another in establishing social work as a regulated profession.

To act collectively as a region, it is critical that African countries identify key areas, themes and common and specific priorities for developmental social work. Research should include practice models and relevant strategies that could best serve Africa's communities in achieving social development goals. Research on the alignment of social work curricula with developmental goals can inform the re-design of the curriculum for developmental social work as well as the agenda for re-orientating social work practitioners for developmental social work.

The promotion of developmental social work in Africa requires a united front of social workers in the region. Schools of social work are well positioned to take up the challenge because the region has already established the ASSWA, which has the full support of the International Association for Schools of

Social Work. However, schools of social work in Africa are challenged to become active members of ASSWA and to hold the leadership accountable to mobilise the region to promote developmental social work. A strong ASSWA will not only be able to provide leadership to social work educators and practitioners in promoting developmental social work in Africa but will also be empowered to negotiate a position for social work on regional structures from where the profession can meaningfully influence the setting of the social development agenda to include a social work perspective.

**REFERENCES**

Department of Social Development. (2006). *Linking social grants beneficiaries to poverty alleviation and economic activity*. Discussion document, 1 November.

Department of Social Development. (2005). *Media statement: social development launches new approach to service delivery*. 23 November.

Department of Social Development. (2004). *Recruitment and retention strategy for social workers in South Africa.* (Second Draft).

Gauteng Welfare, Social Service and Development Forum (GWSSDF). (2009). *Updated plans for social service march on Friday, 28 August*.

Government of the Republic of Kenya. (2008). *Millennium Development Goals; Status Report for Kenya -2007.*

Government of the Republic of Kenya. (2007). *Kenya Vision 2030, A globally competitive and prosperous Kenya.*

Gray, M. (2006). "The progress of social development in South Africa." *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 15 (Supplement 1):S53-S64.

Gray, M. & Lombard, A. (2008). "The post-1994 transformation of social work in South Africa." *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 17(2), April:132 – 145.

Green, S. (2008). "Perspectives of some non-governmental organisations on progress towards developmental social welfare and social work." *The Social Work Practitioner-Researcher/Die Maatskaplikewerk Navorser-Praktisyn*. Theme Issue: Ten years On: Challenges and Innovation in Developmental Social Welfare, 20(2): 174 – 191.

Kenya Gazette Supplement No. 52. (2006.) *The Sexual Offences Act No.3 of 2006, Government Printer,* Nairobi.

Kenya Gazette Supplement No.95. (2002). *The Children Act No.8 of 2001, Government Printer,* Nairobi.

Laws of Kenya. (2001). *The Constitution of Kenya, Revised Edition 2001, Government Printer,* Nairobi.

Lombard, A. (2008a). "The implementation of the White Paper for Social Welfare: a ten-year review." *The Social Work Practitioner-Researcher*, Theme Issue: *Ten Years on: Challenges and Innovation in Sevelopmental Social Welfare,* 20(2):154-173.

Lombard, A. (2008b). "The impact of social transformation on the non-government welfare sector and the social work profession." *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 17(2):124-131.

Lombard, A. (2007). "The impact of social welfare policies on social development in South Africa: An NGO perspective." *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*, 43(4):295-316.

Lombard, A. (2000). "Enhancing a human rights culture through social work practice and training." *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*, 36(2):124-140.

Mayadas, N.S. & Elliott, D. (2001). "Psychosocial approaches, social work and social development." *Social Development Issues*, 23(1):5-13.

Midgley, J. (1995). *Social development: the developmental perspective in social welfare*. London: Sage.

Patel, L. (2005). *Social welfare & social development.* Cape Town: Oxford: Southern Africa.

Patel, L. & Hochfeld, T. (2008). "Indicators, barriers and strategies to accelerate the pace of change to developmental welfare in South Africa." *The Social Work Practitioner-Researcher/Die Maatskaplikewerk Navorser-Praktisyn*. Theme Issue: Ten years On: Challenges and Innovation in Developmental Social Welfare, 20(2): 192 – 211.

Republic of South Africa. (RSA). (2009). *Government's Plan of Action*.

Republic of South Africa. (RSA). (1997). Ministry for Welfare and Population Development. 1997. White Paper for Social Welfare. Notice 1108 of 1997. *Government Gazette*, 386(18166). Pretoria: Government Printers.

Republic of South Africa. (RSA). (1996). *Constitution of South Africa*. Act 108 of 1996.

Republic of South Africa. (RSA). (1978). *Social Services Professions Act*. Act 110 of 1978.

South African Council for Social Services Professions (SACSSP). n.d. *Scope of Practice: Social Work*.

Statistics South Africa. (2009).Statistical release P0302. Mid-year population estimates, http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0302/P03022009.pdf (Accessed on 27/09/09).

United Nations: Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (1995). World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/wssd/text-version/index.html (Accessed on 2009/08/21).