



SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN IKWERRE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

Every member of the community desire to stay safe, healthy, and wealthy in all manners. To enjoy all amenities of the society, to have a vibrant economic status as well as excellent public services. Social services and social workers have an important role in helping people to improve their community life. This study has attempted to provide an overview of social work practice and community development giving the comprehensive study of Ikwerre Local Government Area (LGA) of Rivers State. This study aims to develop an understanding of community development as a core component of social work practice in Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State. The researcher found out that Ikwerre Local Government does not have enough social infrastructural facility to service the needs of local people in the community. Thus, this necessitates the role played by social workers to ensure community development in Ikwerre LGA. The theoretical framework employed is the Social Planning and Social Action Theories. The study is descriptive and employs the content analysis from existing works of literature and research data to explain the community development issues in Ikwerre Local Government. The study conclusion presents a need for professional social workers in the area, thus, the recommendation that; an increased number of professional social workers should be employed into government parastatals to advise and give necessary support to leadership and development issues. Also, an increased awareness at the community level on the formation of community-based organizations, such awareness campaign should be carried out via opinion leaders in the communities and the campaign should highlight the benefits opened to individuals and members of associations and the communities both locally and internationally. The community-based organizations should seek ways of partnering with all tiers of government for development projects in Ikwerre Local Government Area, and that government should encourage community-based organizations by supporting their developmental efforts or by subventions in the locale.

Keywords: Social work, Social worker, Community Development.

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INTRODUCTION

Every individual in society aspires to live a healthy, tolerant, safe, inclusive and fair life. Social work services have an essential contribution to make in achieving that goal. Work education has many challenges, but with the effort of educators, field practitioners, and social work trainees it is turning towards meeting local needs and adopt local techniques to resolve issues of an individual, the group, and the community by adopting Community development skills. The history of social work originated from the works of charity organizations. The emergence of the Charity Organization Society in England in 1880 is regarded in most works of literature as the foundation for the administration of social welfare. The Charity Organization was initiated with the main purpose of coordinating charitable works for individuals and groups displaced as a result of the industrial revolution. According to Iwarimie-Jaja (2007), social work as a problem-solving approach has the following underlying assumptions:

- Social work like all other professions has problem-solving functions
- Social work practice is an art with a scientific value foundation
- Social work as a profession came into being and continues to develop because it meets human needs and aspirations recognized by society.
- The scientific base of social work consists of three types of knowledge (a) tested knowledge (b) hypothetical knowledge that requires transformation into tested knowledge and (c) assumptive knowledge (or practice wisdom), that requires transforming into hypothetical and thence into tested knowledge.
- The knowledge needed for social work practice is determined by its goals and functions and the problems it seeks to solve.
- Professional skill is expressed in the activities of the social worker.

Statement of the Problem

The importance of social infrastructural facilities in grassroots development and poverty reduction cannot be overemphasized whether in urban or rural environments. McNeil (1993) shows that adequate infrastructure reduces the costs of production, which affects profitability, levels of output, employment, and labour increase. When it does not work, citizens suffer, particularly the poor. Thus, economic renewal and societal welfare become halted.

A place like Ikwerre Local Government Area does not have enough social infrastructural facilities to service the need of the dwellers among the communities. The existing condition of health care and education services in Ikwerre shows that there is a lack of social infrastructural provision compare to that of Port Harcourt or Obio/Akpor LGA. This is because the spatial distribution of those facilities is also not equitably distributed across the state and mostly located at urban centres. Port Harcourt and Obio/Akpor Local Government Areas have a high level of population which is as a result of a high level of industrialization. Because of this condition, some people in the rural areas of Ikwerre have a low level of accessibility to social infrastructure. Rural areas in Nigeria are generally deprived of basic needs of life such as housing, medical care, postal communication services, education, transport facilities, recreational, neighbourhood utilities, credit facilities, and horizon for self-improvement. Studies in Nigeria show a high degree of inequality in income distribution (Modupe 1986, World Bank 1997), and in the provision of social-economic opportunities and facilities between rural and urban areas.

According to Mabogunje (1977), rural areas like Ikwerre Local Government is less favoured, as the average per capita expenditure of a poor rural household in Nigeria is one-

fifth of the non-poor in 1992 (World Bank, 1997), whereof the extremely poor, 85% lived in rural areas and more than two-thirds of them lived on farm produce. Given the above scholastic contributions, there exist a gap in empirical literature regarding the role of social work in theory and practice centred on community development in Ikwerre Local Government of Rivers State, thus, to fill this gap, this study will investigate the social and infrastructural delivery arrangement of Ikwerre LGA to ascertain whether the quality and quantum of infrastructural facilities are far from satisfactory in Ikwerre Local Government Area.

The Objective of the Study

The aim and objective of this study is to develop an understanding of community development as a core component of social work practice in Ikwerre Local Government Area.

Scope of the Study

The scope of the study covers all the autonomous communities in Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria.

Area of the Study

Ikwerre is a Local Government Area in Rivers State, Nigeria. Its headquarter is in the town of Isiokpo. Created in 1991, having a Total of 530 sq. mi (1,380 km²). Ikwerre land lies roughly within the coordinates of 4°:50N 5°:15N, 6°:30E 7°:15E. The Ikwerre inhabit the upland part of Rivers State. The population status of Ikwerre LGA as at 2006 census count stood at 188,930, giving the recent projection at over one million populations, and as such it has an area covering 655km² and has a density of 405.2/km² and was projected to be 256,400 in 2016 (2006, NPC). Ikwerre is natively known as Iwhuruoḡha. It is both a Local Government Area and an ethnic group widely regarded as one of the sub-Igbo group in Rivers State. They speak Ikwerre dialect, which is sometimes considered a separate language in the Igboid family, as a result of the quest for Ikwerre's recognition as a separate ethnic nationality associated with that of the Niger Delta. The religion of the people is mostly Christianity and Omenueli (African Traditional religion). Related ethnic groups to Ikwerre include Ogba people, Ekpeye, Etche, Abua, Kalabari, Ngwa. The people are predominantly farmers and fishermen, with a recent civilization which has turned the whole of Rivers State to mostly civil servant states.

METHODOLOGY

Explorative research methodology has been used to explore the role of social work practice and community development in changing the lifestyle scenario in Indian society. The paper is designed using secondary sources, academic articles, online journals, and self-observations to comprehend and analyse the new wave of social service buffeting the lifestyle of the weaker sections, downtrodden, orphans, etc. in India.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Community work is concerned with working collectively with communities and groups for positive social change, inclusion, and equality. Over the past fifty years and more, voluntary and professional community work has supported communities in seeking such change.

According to Gordon (1995), Community work or community development involves an analysis of social and economic situations and collective action for change based on that analysis. It is centred on a series of principles that seek to go beyond consultation to participation and beyond capacity building to consciousness-raising and empowerment. It recognizes the changing and often hidden nature of the structural inequalities based on 'race', class, gender, and disability to name but a few. It seeks to be transformative rather than conforming and empowering rather than controlling. Community work is not a process that takes place in a short timeframe as it seeks to address deeply rooted inequalities and forms of disadvantage. It is recognized that it takes varying lengths of time to achieve tangible results depending on the community involved. Although various definitions of community development and community work are used by different organizations and groups, definitions generally have a number of common elements.

By definitions, Alli (2019) defined community development as being "about promoting positive social change in society in favour of those who benefit least from national and global social and economic development, it seeks to challenge the causes of poverty and disadvantage and to offer new opportunities for those lacking choice, power, and resources".

The essentials, distinguishing elements of community work as social work are that it

- Involves and enables people to work together to influence, change and exert control over the social, political, and economic issues that affect their lives.
- Is about a collective focus rather than a response to an individual crisis.
- Challenges inequitable power relationships within society and promotes the redistribution of wealth and resources in a more just and equitable fashion.
- Is based on participative processes and structures which include and empower marginalized and excluded groups within society.
- Is based on solidarity with the interests of those experiencing social exclusion.
- Is understood as including both geographic communities and communities of interest.
- Presents alternative ways of working, seeks to be dynamic, innovative, and creative in approach.
- Challenges the nature of the relationship between the users and providers of services.
- Is open and responsive to innovation from other countries and seeks to build alliances with other organizations challenging marginalization in their own countries and globally.

It involves strategies that confront prejudice and discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, class, religion, socioeconomic status, age, sexuality, skin colour, or disability. Social workers in community development are involved in the developmental activity composed of both a task and a process. The task is the achievement of social change linked to equality and social justice, and the process is the application of the principles of participation, empowerment, and collective decision making in a structured and coordinated way.

The Roles of Social Workers in Community Development

As it is found in other forms of generalist practice, social workers have great and unique roles to play in community development. Zastrow (2008) and Dhavaleshwar (2016) identified the roles of social workers in community development as follows:

- **As Community Organizer;** performing major roles in organizing the community on critical issues by harnessing the available resources of the community.
- **Caseworker:** attempting to proffer solutions to individual problems in a holistic manner using a micro-type intervention approach.
- **Group Work:** community development focuses on the Psychosocial needs of the problematic groups of the community, constitutes Teams, Committees, and invites delegates to fulfil the tasks of psychosocial needs of group members.
- **Need Analyser:** in order to fulfil the societal needs, scientific need analysis must be undertaken, by which needs to be priorities. Therefore, social workers analyse the needs of the community with the help of community members and priorities them.
- **Project manager:** A project or Programme sanctioned for community benefit is always headed by professional social workers. A social worker has a vital role in the need analysis, implement and manage the project, as they trained in preparing and administrate projects and they know every pulse of the individual, group and community.
- **Facilitator:** Social workers facilitate the various benefits provided by the government NGOs, international agencies like WHO, UNICEF, WTO, UNO, etc. to the poor, socially excluded, disadvantaged, or disempowered individuals and groups, and marginalized sections of the society.
- **Middle manager:** who helps the community members to take the services from government; especially he is a middle manager in arranging social security programs, general insurances and health insurances provided to the various beneficiary of the society. He is the true middle manager between employer and employee in collective bargaining and in to get sanction with the various benefits from the employer in the view of labour welfare.
- **Counsellor:** every individual of the society has a unique character in nature, therefor individualizing the people and fulfilling their needs is the biggest task before social workers. Meaningful and scientific interaction between social workers and every individual of the society is expected in the preview of counselling, which is the only solution to address the issues of community members also individuals whose behaviour is problematic. Such effort helps to improve tolerance among all and it leads to community development.
- **Researcher:** social worker takes the scientific investigation of the social and individual issues. Every community (Tribal, Rural, Urban) have its own issues which are the major obstacles of the development, scientific as well as an emotional investigation by the social worker may help every, individual groups community, and forecasted community development may possible.

Theoretical Framework

Social work like other disciplines is theoretically structured. A comprehensive textbook or manual of community development does not exist, however, a theory is well documented in the literature by a number of modern-day experts in the field. For the purposes of more in-depth analysis of the micro implications of community development theory. we find it helpful to seek an explanation from the following theories:

1. **Social Planning:** This theory assumes that the task of achieving a complex industrial transformation and environment requires highly trained and skilled planners who can facilitate and guide the social and structural change process. According to Kirst-Ashman (2010), these experts include city planning departments, planning agencies,

and community welfare councils which could form the local government. The role of a community planner known as a community social worker includes the gathering of facts, synthesizing, and analysing data to provide a concise picture of the community problems, serving as a program designer, implementer, and facilitator. Community participation in this approach or model varies from micro to macro depending on the community's attitude towards the problem being addressed. It focuses on identifying needs and arranging goods and services for people who need them. Social planning models deal with the more industrial change of resources and setting up services for the solution of social problems. This model is less sensitive to process than other areas of community development.

2. **Social Action Theory:** This model recognizes that, in every community, there are those who are oppressed and disadvantaged and, who therefore need to be organized, probably in solidarity with others, to check the excesses of those in power so as to ensure social justice, equality, and equity and resource distribution. The rationale behind this model is to seek changes in the socio-cultural arrangement or in the status quo of the major institutions of the community. Equally, it also seeks to influence, modify, or change any policy that has adverse effects on particular groups of people in the community.

Social Work and Community Development

According to Iwarimie-Jaja (2011), social workers have a special interest in the welfare of the people. They are employed in social work institutions or social welfare agencies, and they design social welfare programs to prevent, alleviate, or remove social problems identified in individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Given the level of the adverse socio-economic and environmental impact of oil exploration in Ikwerre Local Government Area. Social work practices can enhance social security and social work programs at various levels, such as governments at local and federal levels, Non-Governmental Organizations, Inter-governmental organizations, co-operatives (private and corporate), as well as the international oil companies.

The target groups of this social work method can be individuals, groups, families, communities, agencies, or departments. The basic methods of social work such as social casework, social group work, community development, play a very important role when administered to host communities. While social casework is used with individual beneficiaries in the administration of social services. Social group work is used with families, and groups, which are at the heart of every society. Social group work is also used in working with neighbourhood groups. It is also used to improve the effectiveness of working for various committees, which are part of social welfare administration. Community development can be the deliberate use of resource mobilization and equitable distribution of services at the community level. Social welfare planning for the vulnerable group is an important component of social welfare administration. Social work professionals and only related professions are the only ones that can perform the task defined in our definition above. According to Iwarimie-Jaja (2011), delivering social welfare services refers to social work or social welfare intervention.

In the 1960s and 1970s for example, the attention of social work was focused on the issue of trying to improve living standards for everyone, and whether economic growth was the way to go. The intervention of agencies implies a significant degree of active involvement and participation to accomplish social work tasks and objectives. Thus, social work intervention involves intentionality, cognition, strategy, and interpersonal relations:

- **Intentionality:** refers to the immediate or long-range plan and aim related to specific outcomes
- **Cognition:** involves the knowledge and information needed from the implementation of the intention
- **Strategy:** explains the means by which the intentions are carried out
- **Interpersonal relations:** is viewed as the abiding awareness of the immediate and anticipated meaning of the human association as it affects and is affected by the intervening process (Iwarimie-Jaja, 2011)

In the practice of social work and welfare administration, all theories and research findings that have a direct bearing on understanding people's problems and enhancing peoples social functioning can be applied in the field of sociology; which focuses on social interaction in a group context, and behavioural psychology, and legal frameworks. This informs the study of oil exploration as it affects humans in society, particularly the host communities in Rivers State, to enable the goals of social work practice in the Niger Delta Region. Such goals include the following:

- Enhance the problem-solving, coping, and development capacity of people.
- Link people with systems that provide them with resources, services, and opportunities.
- Promote the effectiveness and human operation of systems that provide people with resources and services.
- Develop and improve social policy.
- Enhance human wellbeing and alleviate poverty, oppression, and other forms of social injustice
- Pursue policies, services, and resources through advocacy and social or political actions that promote social and economic justice.
- Develop and use research, knowledge, and skills that advance social work practice (and)
- Develop and apply the practice in the context of diverse cultures.
(National Association of Social Workers, 1982:17).

Community development in Ikwerre Local Government Area

It is a common and accepted norm in Nigerian society that it is the responsibility of the government to provide basic social amenities for the populace. The government has been trying to provide these amenities to various communities: which include the provision of good road networks, educational institutions, electricity, markets, amongst others. There are many agencies established by the government in charge of community development both in rural and urban areas, like the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), that has made it possible for Ikwerre Local Government Area to have a good road network, and pipe-borne water. In Aluu Town Omoko Community, an express road is being constructed by NDDC, also Omoigwe, Omoada, and Mbodo, etc., cannot be left out in the development of the present administration. The 24 hours' electricity supply in some parts of Ikwerre Local Government Areas was made possible by NDDC, especially in Ubima and Aluu surrounding villages in Ikwerre Local Government Area. During the past administration, Governor Rotimi Ameachi led administration reconstructed all the primary schools in Rivers State, Ikwerre inclusive. This rebranding has brought a lot of development as pupils and students were found sitting in comfortable desks and learning. Presently, at the time of complying this

paper, the present Governor, Nyesom Wike just commissioned a road project in Isiokpo and yet another at Omerelu constructed by NDDC. Experience however shows that although the government on her part has been trying to provide some items of amenities to the various communities. Human needs are insatiable and the government alone cannot meet all these needs. More so, the vastness of the local government area conspicuously reveals that the government alone cannot salvage the life of the people, talk more of addressing all developmental needs at once. Hence, there is a need for the people to form themselves into organizations as explained in the social action theory to articulate their experiences and views identify faults as well as initiate moves for the realization of the identified needs of the people. The people of Ikwerre Local Government Area have taken great strides in community development; yet, social workers need to be involved professionally to give room for a lasting and sustainable development process. The role of the community police popularly known as OSPAC has driven away deviants in the sense that road users can now drive freely from Aluu to Omagwa, Airport to Ubima, Igwuruta to Omerelu, Omoanwa to Apani, and other metropolitan areas. The way the OSPAC has carried out its activities has given residence and indigenes free movement and security.

CONCLUSION

Social work education and profession have greater responsibility in the process of community development. Hand-by-hand support of education and field practice can contribute to the welfare of the various sections of society. Therefore, there is a need for well-qualified, practice-oriented, and committed social workers, they can work to improve the socio-economic status, and quality of life for community members. Ikwerre has giving way for the people to decongest from Port Harcourt into its areas, such movements need strict urban sociological planning because it is the next fast developing centre that urbanization will encroach due to the fact that the location is the closest to Port Harcourt City.

Recommendation

Giving the foregoing, the study conclusion presents a need for professional social workers in the area, thus, our recommendation is as follows:

- Increased numbers of professional social workers should be employed into government parastatals to advise and give necessary support to leadership and development issues.
- Increased awareness at the community level on the formation of community-based organizations, such awareness campaign should be carried out via opinion leaders in the communities and the campaign should highlight the benefits opened to individuals and members of associations and the communities both locally and internationally.
- Community-based organisations should seek ways of partnering with all tiers of government for development projects in Ikwerre Local Government Area.
- Government should encourage community-based organizations by supporting their developmental efforts or by subventions in the locale.

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