



Publisher

African Journal of Social Work

Afri. j. soc. work

© National Association of Social Workers-Zimbabwe/Author(s)

ISSN Print 1563-3934

ISSN Online 2409-5605

Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-commercial 4.0 International License

Indexed & Accredited with: African Journals Online (AJOL) | University of Zimbabwe Accredited Journals (UZAJ) | SCOPUS (Elsevier's abstract and citation database) | Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) | Society of African Journal Editors (SAJE) | Asian Digital Library (ADL) | African Social Work Network (ASWNet) | Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) - South Africa | SJR | CNKI - China | Journal Publishing Practices and Standards (JPPS) | EBSCO | DOI

Social work's contribution to socio-economic development—why, how & who?

Noel Garikai MURIDZO

ABSTRACT

Real development should be seen as more than just economic growth. Social Workers have important roles in the development of Africa. Mupedziswa, Sewpaul, Lombard, and others have put forward developmental social work as an approach that addresses issues affecting people at the macro level, nipping underdevelopment causal factors in the bud. Developmental social work abandons the reactionary and residual approach to problems. To celebrate Africa Day, the Africa Social Work and Development Network holds annual indabas where social work scholars and practitioners make presentations and discuss identified themes. Answering the questions why, how & why, this article presents one of the presentations delivered at Africa Day Indaba on 25 May 2023 and the ensuing discussion on social work's contribution to the socio-economic development of Africa. The presentation adopted a developmental social work lens

KEY TERMS: Development, developmental social work, social development, socio-economic development, social problems, social work

KEY DATES: Published: June 2024

KEY DECLARATIONS: Funding: None | Conflict of Interest: None

PRESENTER DETAILS

Noel Garikai Muridzo, PhD, Director of the School of Social Work, Midlands University, Harare, Zimbabwe, and President of International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) Africa, 2016- 2024

Current and previous volumes are available at:

<https://ajsw.africasocialwork.net>



HOW TO REFERENCE USING ASWDNET STYLE

Muridzo N. G. (2024). Social work's contribution to socio-economic development - why, how & who? *African Journal of Social Work*, 14(3), 133-139. Presentation delivered at Africa Day Indaba, 25 May 2023. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ajsw.v14i3.4>.

Oluwagbemiga Oyinlola: On this note, I have one of the eminent speakers here who, before I move on to questions and comments from last year's conference, I would love to welcome the African Regional President of the International Federation of Social Workers. And that is Dr Noel Garikai Muridzo. So, it is a pleasure to have you here. I mean, I know we have both had a lot of conversations around African social work and I still have memories of my interview with you during COVID-19 when it was tough for many of us. For someone like me working at the same time in the hospital, it was a very crazy moment. But at the same time, I feel so honoured to welcome the African Regional President. And I am so happy that we have the whole African president of all social workers here. It is so interesting. So, over to you, sir. Because of our time, over to you. You can make your presentation. Let me allow you to share your screen.

Noel Muridzo: I want to start by acknowledging you, as the Master of Ceremony, Olu, and also to acknowledge colleagues who are joining us. I see Professor Sewpaul is here. I also want to recognise members of the Africa Social Work and Development Network, Dr Rugare Mugumbate, and colleagues for the work that you are doing. My presentation today will be on social work's contribution to the socioeconomic development of Africa. Asking the questions, why, how, and who? I am from Zimbabwe currently with the School of Social Work, Midlands State University, based in Harare. Midlands State University has campuses in Gweru, Harare, Zvishavane, Kwekwe, and Bulawayo. The main Campus is located in Gweru, where I am originally from. I came to town (Harare), to attend the School of Social Work. I am honoured to work for MSU having been born and bred in Gweru. Why Development? Perhaps our starting point is on how we conceptualise social work and development. By definition, we would all agree and use the International Federation of Social Workers and the International Association of Schools of Social Work's (2014) definition of social work. In that definition, we will find that social work is not just a practice-based profession, but also an academic discipline. The definition goes further to talk about our DNA and who we are. Social workers have mandates around social justice, relationships, empowerment, and liberation of people. These values and principles are at the core of social workers and what we do. Now, how do we liberate people? How do we advance social justice, relationships, empowerment, and liberation of people, and create cohesion where there is no development, and where there is poverty? At the core of social values is emancipating people from poverty, servitude, and social ills. When we connect the dots we see that social work is intertwined with development because that is what we are and what we do. This then, puts social work on a collision course with issues connected to development or underdevelopment, because that is what the profession is all about. By nature, social work is a political profession that addresses development and the lack of it. So, we can connect the dots between development and social work in our definition itself. Social workers are concerned primarily with the vulnerable and poor challenging inequalities and underdevelopment responsibly. I invite you to read Lombard (2014) and Sewpaul (2014) for insights. Now, what is development? I put across the argument that development is more than just economic growth. You and I would agree that the old debate of looking at development in terms of economic growth is bankrupt because it does not translate into 'real development.' Real development must address social indicators such as poverty, servitude, social ills, and others. Development also has to address new emancipatory values of social work. Development includes themes such as democracy. Development has to address the empowerment of peoples. I am glad we listened to the previous presentations where presenters looked at issues to do with women. So, real development encompasses the participation of women and other vulnerable groups. You want to argue and look at development from these perspectives. So when you look at the concept of development, you also want to appreciate that development addresses issues such as climate change and its effects. Development encompasses these 'new' concepts. So, in these arrows that I have put there (on the presentation). I would challenge us to then put in what we call development. It was deliberate to leave blank spaces (in the presentation) of what constitutes development. You can add themes of what you think constitutes development. So, development is more than economic growth. We can move now to the question who? Who is affected by underdevelopment? Who is affected by underdevelopment and how these issues or selected social development issues in Africa have affected or resulted in the underdevelopment of Africa? When we look at war on the African continent, would you say there is development even if there is economic growth? Currently, we have disturbances in Sudan, DRC, and other hotspots on the continent. We also have issues to do with poverty. Poverty is at our doorsteps as Africans. How we define poverty could also be different from how we look at development and underdevelopment. Would we say there is development when many live in poverty, even if there is said to be overall economic growth? I will leave that for

another day and presentation. We now have COVID-19 and how this pandemic has not only reflected the issues of underdevelopment but amplified the divide between the 'haves' and 'the have nots.' The divide between the Global South and North. The divide within the Global South and Africa in particular. We had glaring issues around COVID-19, including also for persons with disabilities, children, and other vulnerable groups and how they are affected by exclusion. You heard in the first presentation about women's participation, what social workers can do, and what policymakers can do to enhance women's participation. But when you talk about development and underdevelopment in Africa, you cannot miss issues around corruption and how that has robbed the continent of the needed development and change in people's lives. But lastly, also, issues around climate change. You see how climate change is impacting the livelihoods of people and robbing them of their livelihood and a chance out of development. But also, when you speak about addressing climate change, we talk about these alternatives to the energy mixes and alternatives, but what are these alternatives speaking to my grandmother in the rural areas? While it is good to propose alternatives that address climate change, we need to consider determinates to access and availability of alternatives. One of the questions to ask ourselves is does my grandmother in the rural area have access to these alternatives? If not, can we call this development? It is important not to leave others behind in the development discourse, arguments, and agenda on the continent. I feel that the questions of who should also speak to who is affected by underdevelopment and who should be part of this movement as we move to whatever we would want to call development. We need to have this in our thinking. We can move on to the next slide. Now, this is just to illustrate the point about COVID-19. I took this picture from Hungwe and others (Upcoming). The picture is contained in a report on how women with disabilities were faring under COVID-19 and how COVID-19 affected them. They are developing journal articles (see Chadambuka et al., 2024; Hungwe et al., 2024). The next slide is just illustrating the issue around war. And here, I took pictures from Sudan. I also took pictures on the internet of the war situation in DRC. Now, let us ask ourselves what is missing in the development discourse and what are the issues that we need to also look at when we talk about development. Can we talk of development when there is no peace? Can we talk of development where there is war, poverty, nonparticipation of women and other vulnerable groups, and other social ills? These issues speak to and answer who is affected by underdevelopment. This slide will speak to the missing link or what I would call what is missing as far as development is concerned. Can you help me, Rugare, to enlarge? My eyesight is betraying me. Can you please enlarge that? Sorry. Thank you much Rugare. Going by the previous slide, remember, I spoke about who? I deliberately left social workers as part of this development discourse. There are many factors contributing to why social workers are missing. Lack of specialisation in different fields of social work could be one of the reasons. There is the issue around the exodus of social workers on the continent due to many, many reasons. You can read Mugumbate (2016) where he speaks about social workers migrating and offers some of the reasons. His reasoning provides insights into why social workers could be missing in the development agenda on the continent and the impact it has. Now we have agreed that social workers are important in the development discourse and part of the answer to the questions of who and how? What else can social workers do? The issue of further research, further research in issues that are development oriented. Maybe the issue is not about missing research, but whether we share findings. Do we have ways for this information (data) to be consumed? That also could be an issue. We will come back to that when we talk about the Africa Social Work and Development Network; how the Network has also changed this narrative and how this can also be a vehicle to share and debate research findings. Again, in terms of the capacity-building in business development and the entrepreneurial skills of social workers themselves, speaking to the social work curricula. So, there are many ways in which social workers are missing. You can also add into the arrows why you feel social workers are important in the development agenda and are missing. You can also add to this discussion what is missing from social work. That said we can move on to the next slide and try to answer how we do this. Can you move up, Rugare? Thank you. One of the things that I am arguing is an infusion of Afrocentric philosophies or the African voice in the development discourse or agenda, which is relevant to social work. I am glad also, that Rugare, in his presentation, talked about the different initiatives that the Africa Social Work and Development Network is doing. The argument that I am making is that the Africa Social Work and Development Network is promoting African knowledge that is relevant to development. This work is relevant to social work intervention on the continent. I move on to what Mupedziswa (2001), Sewpaul (2014), Lombard (2014), and others have put forward as developmental social work. You can read also Lombard & Kleijn (2006) and many others on

developmental social work. I am glad that Professor Sewpaul is part of this meeting and colleagues can also ask her to expand what she meant by developmental social work. The philosophy is about moving away from remedial social work and dealing with the causes of problems rather than symptoms. By nipping problems in the bud so that social workers tackle underlying causes of underdevelopment rather than react to symptoms of underdevelopment. We address developmental aspects and emancipatory issues for social work. Developmental social work is inspired by Ubuntu thinking (philosophy). Earlier on Rugare presented on creating more sustainable livelihoods, but at the same time not rejecting all past practices. So, the argument is, that while remedial social work remains relevant because we will also need it, emphasis should be on developmental social work. How? Collaboration and networking are one of the many ways we can work toward real development. Now, this brings about the Africa Social Work and Development Network as a vehicle where professionals collaborate, network, and exchange ideas. This is important for social workers in Africa to share practice experiences and how we have used these in the development agenda and intervention. So, my argument is, that the Africa Social Work and Development Network is contributing to the development of Africa through such dialogues, networks, and forums. So, the Network is important in answering questions of why, how, and for whom social work can contribute to the socio-economic development of the continent. The Africa Social Work and Development Network is part of the answer to how. How do we go towards the socio-economic development of Africa? Rugare, can you just go back? I will just run through the issue of research and publication which is important. Continuous professional development is important for us to realize real development. Professional development important will contribute to development. Why? We have new issues, ideas, and interventions coming up. It is important to have continuous education as a social worker. Continuous education development makes us relevant to the development discourse that we are talking about. Engagement and advocacy are important. Earlier the first presentation touched on how social workers can advocate for political and economic policies. I do agree with the argument that social workers can also be part of the development agenda through advocacy, and policy engagement. This argument was put forward by Olabisi arguing that policy formulation should be part of social work and social workers must be involved in the formulation of political and economic policies. Yes, of course, social work is a political profession. We cannot run away from politics. Lastly, we need to be involved and keep pace with new trends as social workers for us to remain relevant and promote development on the continent. New issues come up every day. Issues such as climate change and how that is impacting the livelihoods of people. Continued professional development is one of the ways social work can keep pace and contribute to the development of Africa. This also answers the question of how. Let us not forget the role of social work education and curriculum in shaping the developmental social work philosophy. Mupedziswa's (2001) quest for relevance, answers how social work education could contribute to developmental social work.

Ladies and gentlemen, with that, I would say that social workers can use developmental social work to tackle sources of underdevelopment and answer the questions of why, how, and for whom social work can contribute to the socio-economic development of Africa. Thank you for the opportunity to present. Happy Africa Day.

Oluwagbemiga Oyinlola: Thank you so much, Dr Muridzo, the African Regional President. I feel so delighted to listen to you again. It is always refreshing. It has always taken me back to my textbook from university, like, oh, boy, remember what you were told back in school. As a clinician and as a practitioner, I always find it so refreshing when I read the introduction to social work. What does it mean? Where do I start from? How do I move forward? It's such a great moment for us today. Thank you so much, the African Regional President. And on this note, I have, as the master of the ceremony, one of my obligations to recognise eminent scholars who are present here at this conference. I have the honour of seeing one of our very prominent professors, Professor Vishanthie Sewpaul. And then I saw Professor Rodreck Mupedziswa. I saw so many, eminent scholars. We appreciate your presence here. It means a lot to us.

Blessing Bhaiseni: Mine is not a question, Dr Mugumbate. It is just a comment to Dr Muridzo. Thank you very much, especially for bringing the dimension of our development or social work. We need social work to speak to the aspects in Africa, to the challenges in Africa. Our challenges might not be the same in Europe, and might not be the same in other first-world countries. Therefore, I think it will be very, very important for us to look into how social work can be suited to address the challenges in Africa. Thank you.

Sharlotte Tusasiirwe: We have a question in the chat there from Gebru. Gebru, do you want to ask your question? He is asking how can we contribute to economic development and, I think, be independent of Western involvement. So, I think he's grappling with –especially where we get the funding and our reliance or our dependence on Western nations. So how do we achieve our development without really relying on resources from Western countries? Over to you, Dr Noel.

Noel Muridzo: Thank you very much for the question. Let me also acknowledge Professor Mupedziswa here. You see, as his student, I have to answer this very well. Thank you very much. Independence and development. My argument has been, yes, we need economic development. But when we talk about development, it is more than just economic development. But I do acknowledge that how do we talk about development without also emancipation in terms of the needs and basic needs? And the argument is, therefore, that development is more than just the economic growth argument that is put forward. Maybe the issue around what then are the alternatives that Mupedziswa and others have put forward? I am arguing that developmental social work can provide an answer. When you look at developmental social work and what it entails, you will find the underlying argument that addresses causes of problems nipping them in the bud and not reacting to problems. You are looking at addressing the sources and the macroeconomic challenges. This could be through policies or perhaps through advocacy. This could also be in terms of addressing livelihood and empowerment issues. Attending to issues that are affecting people at the micro level. As social workers, we start to help people help themselves in terms of meeting their livelihood needs, including the majority who are in rural areas where they live. And once they emancipate themselves and work for themselves, perhaps the argument is they are also meeting their needs. But perhaps also development at a national or international level. Mugumbate and previous speakers looked at how we strengthen African countries to trade amongst themselves. But remember, the issue of development is not to say we want to do away with linkages with others. It is perhaps how we are doing it, without compromising ourselves. Others can also add their voices. Thank you.

Oluwagbemiga Oyinlola: Yeah, I have, Professor Mupedziswa. Before we move on to Professor Mupedziswa, we have an acknowledgment from Professor Vishanthie Sewpaul who said she enjoyed your presentation and it is important. An event like this opens space for dialogue which resonated with many of us here. And then Olabisi Adebawo, says solutions to African economic, social, and political problems must be Africa-tailored, and tailor-made for Africans. Social workers should be incorporated as active stakeholders in the educational system, mostly during the pre and post-curriculum design and implementation. Again, decolonising the inherited colonial educational system has become imperative mostly in African countries like Nigeria, where the system is really in a reoccurring crisis. So, there is a question from [George] who is asking how we weave social work into our sub-regional and regional political entities to liberate our continent using the Ubuntu practitioners. I am glad to see George from Sierra Leone. I think. Yeah, I think from Sierra Leone.

Oluwagbemiga Oyinlola: I am coming Professor Mupedziswa.

Rodreck Mupedziswa: Okay. Thank you so much. Wow. That was a fantastic presentation. You know, I enjoyed that, Dr Muridzo, wonderful, wonderful presentation. I think you provided a very concise and straightforward argument there. I was just wondering, you know, we cannot talk about development without focusing on the 17 SDGs. And we feel that you have issues, you know, the key sort of mantra if you like, which says leaving no one behind. And you did talk about climate change and issues around it. And I am just wondering whether as social workers, what role can we play? You know, we talk about climate change, but somebody in the back of beyond, you know, somewhere out there, have not even heard about this term, this concept. And we know that social workers are supposed to be, you know, in all those areas you may find they are social workers. Do you see a role for social workers in educating, ordinary people, the vulnerable out there, you know, in terms of climate change and its impact, that sort of thing? Otherwise, thank you very much. I am enjoying listening to the proceedings and I am happy to see many faces, you know, people who are supporting this wonderful initiative. And Jacob, greetings to you. Thank you. Right. So that's my question. Do you see social workers playing any role in terms of this mantra, leaving no one behind? And yet we know that the majority are being left behind as things stand. Thank you.

Noel Muridzo: Thank you for the comments and questions. I will start addressing George and say, yes, there is a role for social workers, and such networks and coming together as associations, as social workers, gives us a collective voice in the global arena. In addition, this is an opportunity to share ideas. So, yes, we can as a collective

voice contribute to development. I am glad as a network, we can come together and have a voice. Through publications, we can also cascade our thinking, research, and knowledge to the world. So, there is a way through collective engagement and the network is part of that engagement. Let me talk about Prof Mupedziswa's comment. Yes, social workers have a role to play, but maybe social workers are the ones who might also be left behind. Social workers must familiarise themselves with the concept of climate change. In addition, we also need to look at the social work curriculum, and adopting these new concepts such as climate change is important, like all other concepts. So, we, as social workers and also as educators, need to move with the tide in terms of curriculum review and development including new issues such as climate change. Making the curriculum relevant empowers the social workers who are practicing. We also need to generate new knowledge through research. So, yes, I agree with you Professor Mupedziswa. There is a scope for social workers also to educate communities and work with them. Earlier on I raised the need for energy alternatives. Instead of advocating for green energy without providing alternatives will not be accepted and sustainable. So, we are giving my rural mother in the rural areas an alternative to the fuel she is using? We just telling her that the current fuel (means) is not good for the environment without giving sustainable, affordable, and accessible means. A balance is needed. I argue that social workers have many roles to play.

Noel Muridzo: Thank you.

Oluwagbemiga Oyinlola: Thank you, Professor Mupedziswa. Thank you, Dr Noel. Thank you everyone.

References

- Chadambuka, P., Muridzo, N.G., Hungwe, C. & Mugari, Z. E. (2024). They do not perceive us as people”: women with disabilities’ access to key social services during the COVID-19 pandemic: a Zimbabwean case study. *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work*, 9(2), 290- 303.
- Hungwe, C., Chadambuka, P., Muridzo, N. G. *et al.* (2024). Effects of COVID-19 on the livelihoods of women with disabilities in Zimbabwe: a study of three low-income areas in Harare Metropolitan Province. *Urban Forum* (2024).
- International Federation of Social Workers. (2014). Global definition of social work. Retrieved from <https://www.ifsw.org/global-definition-of-social-work/> on 20 May 2023.
- Lombard, A. & Kleijn, W. (2006). Statutory social services: an integral part of developmental social welfare service delivery. *Social work/Maatskaplike Werk*, 42(3), 213- 233.
- Lombard, A. (2014). A developmental perspective in social work theory and practice. In H. Spritzer, J. Twikirize, & G. Wairire (Eds), *Professional social work in East Africa: Towards social development, poverty reduction, and gender equality* (pp. 43-56). Fountain Publishers.
- Mugumbate, J. (2016). World social work day celebrations in Zimbabwe: An opportunity to promote social justice. *International Social Work*, 59(4), 452 – 458
- Mupedziswa, R. (2001). The quest for relevance: Towards a conceptual model of developmental social work education and training in Africa. *International Social Work*, 44(3), 285-300.
- Sewpaul, V. (2014). Social work and poverty reduction in Africa: The indelible reality. In H. Spritzer, J. Twikirize, and G. Wairire (Eds), *Professional social work in East Africa: towards social development, poverty reduction, and gender equality* (pp. 29 – 42). Fountain Publishers.