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Book review

Book title: The Social Work, Social Welfare, and Social Development in Nigeria: A Postcolonial Perspective

Authors: Mel Gray (University of Newcastle, Australia) and Solomon Amadasun (Deakin University, Australia)

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REVIEWER DETAILS

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In the book *Social Work, Social Welfare, and Social Development in Nigeria: A Postcolonial Perspective*, Mel Gray and Solomon Amadasun offer us a thorough analysis of social work and welfare within postcolonial Nigeria. The book benefits from the combined backgrounds, experience and expertise of Professor Gray and Amadasun, well-versed in social work globally and in Africa (Mel) and in Nigeria (Solomon). Amadasun, who grew up in Nigeria and was educated at the University of Benin, brings awareness of the local social welfare landscape while Gray, who grew up in South Africa, has extensive international experience, having worked and taught in South Africa and at the University of Newcastle in Australia, where she has global collaborations in research and education.

The authors critically examine the historical development of social welfare in Nigeria, including the colonial legacies that shape contemporary social welfare provision, development planning, and social work practice. Central chapters like *Revisiting the development of social welfare and social work in Nigeria* and *Nigeria's social development record* serve as foundational readings that trace the historical roots and ongoing challenges in the country.

Gray and Amadasun strongly detail how Nigeria's minimalist structure of welfare provision, combined with the residual effects of colonialism, has made it difficult for social work to gain full legitimacy and professional recognition. This is particularly evident in the chapter titled *Nigerian social work and its quest for professional recognition*, where the authors highlight the challenges of professionalisation within a system that has yet to fully embrace social work as an essential component of national development. The chapter *Child welfare – a system in need of care* focuses on the inadequacies of Nigeria's child welfare system, while *Social exclusion, gender, and disability in Nigeria* and the social work response unravels the intersectionality of exclusion faced by vulnerable groups, particularly women and people with disabilities. I found the chapter on human trafficking more useful because it addresses an important social issue in Nigeria but also the large part of the region of West Africa. Gray and Amadasun analyse how these social problems are being addressed by social workers, but they also critique

the limitations of existing policies and interventions, urging for more contextually and culturally relevant frameworks that align with Nigeria's unique sociocultural and economic realities.

A particularly useful aspect of the book is the inclusion of specific details about Nigeria at the beginning, such as information on its various ethnic groups and poverty rates. These details help to set the context for the discussions that follow, giving readers a better understanding of the country's socioeconomic challenges.

While the postcolonial framework is central to the text, a deeper engagement with African scholars could have enriched the discussions and contributed to a more authentically African viewpoint. For example, in Chapter 3, the work of the African Social Work Education Association (ASWEA) developmentalising social work (ASWEA 1973, 1974 and 1977; Kreitzer, 2023; Mwansa, 2011) is missing yet the works of the International Association of Schools of Social Work, International Federation of Social Workers, International Council of Social Welfare and International Council of Social Development were acknowledged. The ASWEA was a pan-African organisation that existed between 1965-1989, based in Ethiopia. It had observer status of the Organisation of African Unity (now African Union) and had membership of 50 social work and development training institutions and 100 individual academics from 50 African countries. I would have expected to read about how people like Selassie Seyoum Gebre and Arega Yimam from Ethiopia and others promoted social development and about the literature they produced. Another drawback is the relatively weak emphasis on development-focused social work, despite the extensive coverage of welfare-oriented social work practice. In relation to this, given the book's stated aim of addressing Nigeria's social development challenges, more chapters with a developmental focus rather than primarily welfaristic, would have offered a more balanced contribution. The final shortcoming is a significant issue in academic and literary circles and applies to me too: the external publishing of African works. This book was published in the United States of America and in the United Kingdom. While external publishing provides wider exposure, it also creates barriers to accessibility, particularly for African scholars and readers due to the high costs of importing these works. This, in turn, perpetuates a cycle where local African publishing industries remain underdeveloped, negatively affecting both the economy and the availability of locally produced literature. Further, archiving of the book was with the Library of Congress, in the USA and the British Library, ensuring more access for people in these countries, not and in posterity.

Despite these shortcomings, *Social Work, Social Welfare, and Social Development in Nigeria* offers valuable knowledge into the intersection of postcolonial theory, social welfare, and social work practice. The book challenges readers to rethink social work in a way that is informed by local realities, rather than relying solely on Western models. Scholars, practitioners, and policymakers alike will find the book an essential resource for understanding social work and welfare in Nigeria and for crafting solutions that are both sustainable and contextually appropriate.

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