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Feasibility of entrepreneurship development as a secondary method of social work practice: food for thought

Kabo DIRADITSILE and Dolly NTSEANE

ABSTRACT

This paper considers the feasibility of entrepreneurship development as a secondary method of social work practice. This is an area where social work profession plays a pivotal role in Botswana. The paper is based on the narrative approach and documentary research methodology to explain this phenomenon. It examines the evolution of social work in Botswana and other African countries and highlights the lessons learnt from the primary and secondary social work methods. It argues that as long as social work remains principally involved in remedial and custodial services, the profession will increasingly find itself marginalized. Hence, it concludes that although entrepreneurship development in social work practice has not yet been fully attained in Botswana, the current situation where a significant number of the social workers are employed in entrepreneurship development sectors should be fully applauded, recognized, encouraged and emulated. Therefore, the paper advocates for adoption of entrepreneurship development in social work on a wider scale across Africa and other regions to address the twin challenges of rising youth unemployment and high levels of poverty. The paper recommends that for positive change to be realized and/or for social work to meaningfully address socioeconomic challenges in Botswana and elsewhere in Africa, it must reappraise its curriculum to give it radical-transformative dimensions that include entrepreneurship development as part of its methods.

KEY TERMS: social work, social development, youth, entrepreneurship, poverty, Botswana

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INTRODUCTION

The premise of this paper is to spark debate and further research among social work scholars and practitioners to consider the feasibility of entrepreneurship development as a secondary method of social work practice. Social work methods may be divided into two categories, namely primary and secondary methods where primary methods are believed to be the roots of social work. These include, inter alia: case work, group work, community work or development and social organization. Secondary methods are secondary because they facilitate the primary methods; these are social research, social action and social welfare administration. On this note, this paper argues that social work will benefit immensely from incorporating social entrepreneurship or entrepreneurship development as a secondary method.

BACKGROUND

Developing countries have undoubtedly experienced a significant surge in unemployment, manifested through, to a large extent, the decreasing standard of livelihoods and pervasive effects of poverty (Asiamah et al., 2021). Like other African countries, Botswana has not been spared the problem of youth unemployment. In 2011, out of about 2,024,904 people living in Botswana, about 941 371 or 46.5% were youth at the time of enumeration (Statistics Botswana, 2018). Nationally, data gleaned from the various sources show that Botswana's official unemployment rate is high, ranging between 20% and 30% indicating that the majority of youth are unemployed (Statistics Botswana, 2018). The government of Botswana has been struggling to find different ways to increase employment opportunities for the youth but with little success. Noticeably, some of the contributing factors to high youth unemployment in Botswana include, inter alia: jobless growth, skills-mismatch, lack of work experience, unskilled labour (Nthomang & Diraditsile, 2016). However, the Government of Botswana did not simply fold its arms in the face of this time bomb that the high rate of youth unemployment is. It set out to ensure that the youth receive opportunities to realize their full potential. In recent times though, much debate and theorization has focused on developing effective implementation tools for policies and programmes that facilitate sustainable development (United Nations, 2018).

For the unemployed youth in Botswana, the implementation of development programmes has focused mainly on the delivery of socio-economic programmes by government through the following Ministries: Youth Empowerment, Sports and Culture Development (MYSC), Office of the President, Agricultural Development and Food Security, Nationality, Immigration and Gender Affairs, Local Government and Rural Development and; Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources Conservation. These programmes are aimed at youth empowerment through entrepreneurship development (Diraditsile, 2017; 2021). Notably, social workers play a pivotal role as coordinators of poverty eradication business ventures in all Districts and Town Councils along-side economists, statisticians and information management specialists (Government of Botswana, 2020).

However, since independence in 1966, there has been repeated disappointment at the overall failure of government development programmes for the youth. As a result, the country is grappling with high unprecedented proportions of youth unemployment which has become a threat to the social, economic and political stability of the country. The social work profession which is tasked with the responsibility to address the situation does not seem to be winning the battle (Nthomang, 2018). It is even more complex and controversial because given Africa's colonial heritage; the social work profession's interventions in most countries on the continent have in the main, remained fixated on the remedial approach which tends to emphasize social control rather than social change (see, for example, Rankopo & Ose-Hwede, 2011; Mugumbate & Maushe, 2014). The approach is clearly ineffective, particularly where the goal is the realization of poverty reduction, as the approach tends to emphasize relief as opposed to sustainable initiatives aimed at promoting self-reliance (Midgley, 2014). On this note, this paper builds on prior publications in Botswana that advocate for developmental social work and/or the social development approach (see, Mwansa, 2010; Mupedziswa, 2018). From the above scholarly work on social development, this paper argues that, there still exists a large gap in the literature in Botswana, Africa and elsewhere around the globe regarding the interface between the social work profession and entrepreneurship development.

Of the various challenges that Botswana has had to grapple with, youth unemployment ranks among the most critical. Due to high youth unemployment, thousands of young people have had to go without many necessities of life. Therefore, given the reality of poverty and unparalleled proportions of youth unemployment in Botswana, the social work profession plays a meaningful role as improving the welfare of the marginalised is one of its key mandates. As a result, this paper makes an argument that there is a need for the social work profession to redefine itself and assume a new character. Hence, the paper is about the role of social work in entrepreneurship development to address the twin challenges of youth unemployment and poverty. It argues that for the developmental approach to be realized, the social work profession must capture issues and problems which have traditionally been conceptualised as being outside the domain of social work. The paper proposes that social work must consider entrepreneurship development as one of its secondary methods on the grounds that, if the profession

remains principally involved in remedial services, the profession will increasingly find itself marginalized and lacking relevance in the 21st century.

Considering the foregoing, the paper is structured as follows: Following an introduction, the paper presents section two, which gives an overview of the social work profession in Botswana. This is followed by section three which discusses methods of social work practice. Next, is section four which focuses on social work and entrepreneurship development, and section five which discusses the need to redefine social work profession. Section six focuses on the lessons learnt about social work profession in Africa. Finally, the last section draws a conclusion and the way forward.

OVERVIEW OF THE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION IN BOTSWANA

Though social work is relatively a young profession in Botswana, it is worth to note that there is a substantial body of evidence that talks about the evolution of social work practice in Botswana (see, Rwomire & Radithokwa, 1996; Osei-Hwedie, 1995; Osei-Hwedie, Ntseane & Jacques, 2006). According to Lucas (1993), the history of social work in Botswana is inextricably linked to the development of social welfare following the Second World War, particularly for ex-service men who had fought on the side of the British. In this regard, due to social work colonial heritage, the profession has promoted a remedial approach; which Mupedziswa (2018) notes that it refers to the type of social work which seeks to provide remedies to social problems once they have occurred. Notably, this is the approach that has prevailed in Botswana and most countries in sub-Saharan Africa since the inception of the profession.

However, this paper does not intend to recount the history of social work in Botswana and Africa which by now has been documented since some decades back. The paper intends to talk about the recent development of the social work profession in Botswana. Currently, the University of Botswana offers qualifications in social work ranging from diploma, bachelor, masters and doctoral (Osei-Hwedie et al., 2006). There are three more training institutions that offer social work at certificate, diploma and bachelors' level. This means the profession is growing as compared to the eighties and nineties where the University of Botswana was the only academic institution offering social work qualifications. It is worth to point out that most social work graduates in Botswana are employed in the various government ministries and departments as social welfare officers. Some work in the private sector in a variety of contexts, while others are employed by non-governmental organizations, community based organisations and faith based organisations (Macheng & Mupedziswa, 2016).

Within government employment, some social workers across the country work in schools, hospitals, while others serve in the army, prisons and police force. Noticeably, since the formation of the Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Culture Development in 2007, quite a substantial number of social workers that are employed in the ministry as programme officers do not use the title 'social worker'. These social work graduates are responsible for implementing youth policies and other empowerment programmes that are aimed at poverty eradication among the youth. One of their responsibilities is to foster youth development and empowerment through entrepreneurship development; to finance youth to start income generating business enterprises; and to adjudicate the business proposals. Moreover, they monitor and evaluate funded business enterprises in the ministry. Let us commence by considering the social work methods, the nature and the role of these social work graduates in an entrepreneurial environment in the section below.

METHODS OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

There is a substantial body of evidence that talks about social work methods in the scholarly literature; hence this paper does not intend to regurgitate what has been documented already. However, this paper gives a brief overview of the social work methods, of which fall into two main categories, namely; primary and secondary methods. Other social work scholars summarize them as the direct and indirect methods, with the relationship between the two methods having been succinctly explained in the literature (see, Jacques, 1993; Sheafor & Horejsi, 2006). On this note, this paper acknowledges the main primary methods (direct practice) and secondary methods (indirect practice). Notably, social work methods are purely professional knowledge, not borrowed from any other disciplines; these methods and application differentiate social work and many other social sciences that are merely based on theoretical knowledge (Howe, 2009).

Having briefly enunciated social work methods, it is worth to note that primary methods are a systematic and planned way of performing an activity, which is fundamental to social work, thus case work, group work and community development. Whereas on the other hand, the other methods (social research, social action and social welfare administration) are regarded as secondary since they facilitate the primary methods. It was important to explicitly and implicitly explain the western social work methods on the grounds that the social work profession has historically been heavily influenced by the psychoanalytic and social treatment approaches (Jacques, 1993). Consequently, emphasis was given to micro practice aimed at remediating the individual and family. In Botswana,

as mentioned earlier in this paper, there is the Directorate of Public Service Management which employs all civil servants, and this of course includes those in the social work profession (Mupediziswa, 2018).

Arguably, the total number of social workers across all sectors in Botswana is rather small. According to Macheng et al (2018) there were 456 social workers in the Ministry of Local Government, 80 in the Ministry of Health, and 512 in the Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Culture Development (MYSC). Moreover, an unknown number are employed in various sectors inter alia; Botswana Defence Force, Botswana Police Service and various NGOs. Interestingly, a significant number of the social workers are employed in the MYSC and their responsibilities are to foster entrepreneurship development. Hence, it is the premise of this paper that the rest of the African continent and elsewhere around the globe can take a leaf from the manner in which social work operates in Botswana. The social workers employed in the MYSC have embraced a transformative agenda anchored on the ideals of entrepreneurship development. This should be commendable henceforth this paper argue that for the social work profession to meaningfully discharge its mandate, the profession must reappraise its moral, philosophical and value foundations in line with the situation, circumstances and realities of the nation.

Within a social development paradigm, according to Midgley (2014), the mandate of social work is gradually shifting its primary focus from the provision of material support to the promotion of entrepreneurship. Thus, social workers are now increasingly engaged in addressing the economic dimension of the profession which has been left out for too long (Hugman, 2016). Among the various role players required for an integrated entrepreneurial strategy to stimulate small, medium and microenterprises, the social welfare sector is probably the closest to the poor (Lombard, 2014). The provision of social support is by its nature a temporary relief and not a permanent solution to poverty alleviation. Proponents of a social development approach in social work, Midgely & Conley (2010) argue that social work should engage in the economic development of society. They further argue that social workers influence human, social and economic capital development in both a direct and indirect manner. Social workers can directly contribute to community economic development by supporting local people in establishing a variety of economic projects, including cooperative micro-enterprises and savings associations.

SOCIAL WORK AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN BOTSWANA

This section of the paper is based on the findings of a study conducted by Diraditsile (2020) on “Understanding the dynamics of youth development and socio-economic empowerment: a study on social policy and strategic responses for improving youth employment and livelihoods in Botswana”. The main aim of the study was to explore overall social governance towards solutions for addressing youth unemployment in Botswana; to identify how youth intervention programmes can be modified and improved to address youth unemployment effectively; to enhance the capacity of the government and private sector in designing and implementing social policies and empowerment programmes for promoting youth employment. The data was collected using in-depth semi-structured interviews with 20 Programmes Officers and 25 key informants drawn from the MYSC. The participants were drawn through systematic sampling. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Waseda University and a permit was also sought from and granted by the MYSC.

Although, the study was not on social work and entrepreneurship development, however, it came out from the findings that all the 20 programmes officers who were interviewed were social workers by training, and out of the 25 key informants, 21 of them were also social workers. On this note, these social workers are responsible for fostering entrepreneurial development among the youth in order to improve the youth livelihoods. Since entrepreneurship development can be defined differently with a lot of different connotations, in this paper, the term refers to the process of enhancing entrepreneurial skills and knowledge through structured training and institutional building programmes focused on individuals who wish to start or expand a business (Ifeoma, Purity & Yusuf, 2018). Conspicuously, there is a substantial body of evidence showing that entrepreneurship development contributes to poverty eradication when it creates employment through the establishment of new entrepreneurship or the expansion of existing ones and they increase social wealth by creating new markets, new industries, new technology, new institutional forms, new jobs and net increases in real productivity, increases income which culminates in higher standards of living for the population (Ifeoma et al., 2018) then it is logically to state that if the number of entrepreneurs of any given country increase, the poverty indicators will decrease and vice versa. Adeoye & Afe (2015) note that, a better approach to the eradication of poverty should be to break the generational chain of poverty by empowering the youth to be self-reliant through vocational skill acquisition programme targeted at the youth.

In light of the foregoing, the critical questions that we have to ask ourselves are: Can entrepreneurship be regarded and/or considered as one of secondary social work methods in Botswana and elsewhere in Africa, and around the globe? That is, can the social work profession be amenable in order to incorporate entrepreneurship development as part of social work education, to provide solutions to the challenges facing the overall unmet needs of their clientele? These are not easy questions to answer, however, in order to provide some answers to these questions, there is need to reflect on the social work profession in the context of Botswana. The reflection begs even more questions, inter alia; what is social work? How is the profession defined in Botswana and what it

is meant to do? What is the profession doing currently and what are the results? Has social work succeeded in meeting its objectives? If not, why and what are the challenges? How can social work be effective in order to meet the needs of the poor in the 21st century? In an attempt to answer the above questions, it is the contention of this paper that the profession should redefine itself and assume a new character. We argue in the next sections.

SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION: THE NEED TO REDEFINE

Social work as a profession seeks to assess, support, and care for people who need a helping hand. For some, this is a brief moment in their lives, for others the care needed is sporadic or for a longer term (Lucas, 2015). Importantly, the Botswana National Association of Social Workers states that the social work practice is in a unique position to influence the delivery of services to various clienteles in a number of ways. Notably, social work profession is traditionally known for advocating for social justice, human rights and peace (Lucas, 2015). These are inextricably linked and are all premised on respect for the dignity and worth of human beings. Moreover, social work has a history of concern for the underclass. The profession's history is characterized by a commitment to the improvement of the quality of life of all persons (Mwansa, 2010). However, it is widely acknowledged that social work in Africa has failed to meaningfully respond to the myriad social problems that beset the continent (See, Rwomire & Radithokwa, 1996; Mabvurira, 2018; Mugumbate, 2020).

The profession has been assigned and accepted very narrow roles in the development agenda. In most African countries, social workers are found in the departments or ministries of social welfare or social services where they are charged with the responsibility of administering inadequate welfare programmes (Macheng et al, 2016). This paper argues that social work profession must capture issues and problems which have hitherto been conceptualized as being outside the domain of social work. Otieno et al (2018) notes that traditional techniques used in social work have become obsolete and ineffective in meeting the contemporary needs of the dynamic population. They further argue that the loss of relevance of traditional techniques has led to the development of new social work techniques that seek to achieve social transformation among the youth. These innovations, which are being implemented through youth empowerment organisations, are important not only to the social workers that utilise them and their clients, but also for the upcoming professionals and institutions that provide services to the youth. Moreover, Lombard (2014) further emphasize that socio-economic factors have introduced a new dimension in social work called entrepreneurship, and have changed the landscape of social work.

Perhaps, social workers in other Africa countries and elsewhere around the globe can learn from Botswana's social work experience, thus, challenging the social work profession to be imaginative and flexible in order to be relevant to the national development discourses. Lucas (2015) notes that, the profession must be proactive, it must forge links with politicians and policy makers in order to influence policy making so that it can influence many social policies in favour of its clientele. In addition, this paper argues that, for effective social work practice to be implemented, the social work profession must, ideally be able to produce graduates who are more knowledgeable in social research and entrepreneurship development.

According to Diraditsile (2020) social workers who add entrepreneurial skills to their helping skills, experience a significant increase in impact in their duly responsibilities to empower the youth, unlike those who are still stuck and are emasculated by the remedial approach of social work. Across the African continent, there is a growing consensus among scholars that the remedial approaches employed by the social work profession have largely lacked relevance (Mabvurira, 2018), rendering the interventions of the professional patently ineffective, particularly if viewed in the context of the fight against mass poverty. It is therefore the argument of this paper that, what is needed is a paradigm shift of some sort, because the remedial approach leaves much to be desired as it seems to create fertile ground for promoting a dependency syndrome. The argument that runs down the gamut of this paper is that the social work profession in Botswana, Africa and elsewhere around the globe, ought to seriously consider moving in the direction of the social development approach and consider entrepreneurship development as one of the secondary methods of social work practice.

SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE IN AFRICA: LESSONS LEARNT

Over the past decades, a compendium of studies have been conducted on the social work profession in Africa on a wide array of the roles of social workers in the continent regarding indigenization of social work practice (see, Chogugudza, 2009; Rankopo & Ose-Hwedie, 2011). Almost all these studies generally conclude that the problem with the current social work practice in Africa is that following its development in the West, it came to Africa grounded in values and ideologies stemming from capitalism, and individualism, all of which are un-African. Moreover, Mabvurira (2018) notes that, western ideas permeated social work institutions despite the ethical conflicts between traditional African cultures and values and the western norms on which social work was based. Despite the political independence of most African countries, the profession has remained stuck in western methods, values, principles and standards.

It is widely acknowledged that Social Work in Africa has failed to meaningfully respond to the myriad social problems that beset the continent (Mupedziswa & Kubanga, 2016). The profession has been assigned and accepted very narrow roles in the development agenda. On this note, this paper argues that social workers have a historical involvement in entrepreneurial activity, and the study of this history is part of any social work curriculum. Noticeably, pioneers of the social work profession such as Jane Addams and Mary Richmond embodied social entrepreneurship by creating organizations to pursue social, economic, and environmental justice (Sheafor & Horejsi, 2006).

Today's social workers are tasked with the same mission. As the world faces an array of economic crises, social work education could prepare future social work professionals to carry on the social entrepreneurial legacy of our founders (Savaya et al, 2008). The professional future of social work depends on its own capacity of self-confrontation and the reconstruction of its intervention styles in face of the re-identification of the social problem (Fernando, 2015). It has been mentioned elsewhere in the paper that social workers who add entrepreneurial skills to their helping skills, experience a significant increase in impact. In light of the foregoing, the critical questions that we have to ask ourselves are: Has social work succeeded in meeting its objectives in the African continent? How do we make social work effective so that it can meet the needs of the contemporary society? Let us attempt to answer the questions in the following section.

WAY FORWARD: SOCIAL WORK AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT

It is worth to note that contemporary society has become more complex, and along with the need for higher expertise and wider knowledge. Therefore, because the problems and phenomena that contemporary society is facing are very complex, an analysis from a multilateral perspective is essential. For the social work profession to achieve the foregoing, social work educators must engage in meaningful discussions about the ways social work education can empower and educate the graduates (Lucas, 2015). As a part of this discourse, this paper challenges social work educators to consider entrepreneurship development as one of the secondary social work methods on the grounds that experience in Botswana has proven that social workers who add entrepreneurial skills to their helping skills, experience a significant increase in impact.

This does not seem to be a new debate as Tan (2004) notes that, when the ethos and practice of social work is joined with entrepreneurship, the profession can continue its legacy as the profession of social change leaders for the masses. There are evident set of weaknesses (new and old) that arise as (new) challenges to social work (Fernando, 2015). As such, this paper argues that, there is need to (re)think about new directions and new paths to social work practice and inculcate entrepreneurship development in the education curriculum. Social work is being confronted by the extreme need to define and create solutions to today's complex social problems. We are witnessing an increase of debates around the entrepreneurial activity as a privileged strategy to address the scenarios of structural unemployment and job insecurity. Entrepreneurship takes place under the new social policy trends: active social policies (Jongman, 2020).

Noticeably, Hershatter & Epstein (2010) suggest that upcoming social work scholars do not subscribe to the same disciplinary and organizational silos as older generations; they search for solutions to a variety of social problems not addressed in current curricula. Therefore, although millennial might be interested in long-term careers in solving social problems, they are not necessarily tied to specific professions through which to attack social problems. Millennial students in Botswana do not confine themselves to traditional social service delivery systems, and they feel comfortable blurring traditional sector categories of private, public, and nonprofit in an effort towards change (Diraditsile, 2020). Considering this, social work curricula need to infuse programmes with social entrepreneurial training in order to effectively meet the needs of an ever-changing society and student body.

Social work educators need to be willing to reshape the curriculum to equip students with the values of profession and the business sense to engage and/or promote social entrepreneurial organizations or engage directly in entrepreneurship development activities. In light of these realities, this paper proposes that social work education must include entrepreneurship development in its body of knowledge in order to develop students who possess forward thinking knowledge, skills, and abilities to respond to the complex social problems across the globe. In doing so, social work schools could attract emerging social entrepreneurs with an educational experience that develops competencies related to cultural humility, social and economic justice, and the social environment, as well as build an understanding of social problems at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. Jongman (2020) also note that in the current curriculum of social work at the University of Botswana, there should be a compulsory course in business such as entrepreneurship, marketing, and business management to give the social workers an appreciation of the business environment.

CONCLUSION

This paper sought to argue for an approach that requires social workers in Africa to reappraise their moral, philosophical and value foundations in line with contemporary situations, circumstances and realities of the

continent. Clearly, it does not seem unreasonable to argue that, the rest of the African continent can take a leaf from the way the social work profession in Botswana is moving from the remedial approach into the social development approach in this case, entrepreneurship development is a method/strategy of shifting from remedial to social development approach. This shift can help social workers in Africa and elsewhere to innovatively address the twin challenges of youth unemployment and mass poverty. Though this has not yet been fully attained in Botswana, the current situation where most of the social workers are employed in entrepreneurial development sectors should be fully applauded, recognized, encouraged and emulated. Currently, the University of Botswana has conducted a study with the intention to review its social work programmes both at undergraduate and graduate levels with the intention to align it's the curriculum with the contemporary challenges besieging the country. Notably, if African social work programs plan to re-appraise their curriculums, such programs will have to reconsider the topic of entrepreneurship development. Although many of our social work founders engaged in social entrepreneurship through the creation of the charity organization society and the settlement house movement, contemporary social work education has shied away from entrepreneurial activity. However, if given an additional curriculum and training, students in Bachelor of Social Work programs could be the most suitable to create such organizations due to their concern for social justice and their understanding of anti-oppressive practices and meaningful consumer participation. This could result in a generation of social workers leading the creation and development of social enterprise organizations. These social workers would be concerned not solely with profit but also with social justice, paving a way for social entrepreneurship as one viable strategy to solve social problems.

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