



Workshop Report:

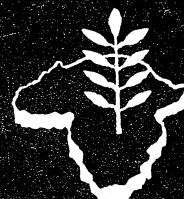
The Social Implications of Structural Adjustment Programmes in Africa

Paper presentations and edited proceedings of a
Workshop held at University of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe

from 23rd September to 2nd October, 1991

edited by Nigel Hall

School of Social Work, Harare, Zimbabwe
and
International Association of Schools of Social Work,
Vienna, Austria



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“Implementing Structural Adjustment Programmes in Africa: Some Implications for Social Work Practice and Training”

Nigel Hall *

Introduction

The main elements involved in the African economic crisis include deteriorating levels of public and private investment, mounting foreign debt, inflationary budget deficits, incapability of maintaining public expenditure on social services (in particular health and education) and the maintenance of infrastructure generally. This is made worse by drastic declines in production in key sectors and increasing rates of unemployment and overall poverty. Structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) are only the most recent in a long series of similar attempts at resolving this economic crisis in Africa during the course of the last three decades of post-independence. Structural adjustment programmes (and previous policies, eg those termed “stabilisation programmes” and “economic reform programmes”) have had immense impact on the countries undertaking the reforms, and in many cases have created further hardships for vulnerable groups within these countries, however these groups are defined.

This paper considers the issue of the implementation of structural adjustment programmes in African countries. The aftermath of these programmes is so profound that almost every aspect of life is affected. As such it is important that social workers become aware of the resulting consequences and consider the implications for their own practice. It is also necessary to consider ways in which knowledge about structural adjustment and its social effects can be incorporated in the curriculum of schools of social work in Africa.

Structural adjustment measures are seen as critical to revitalising the economies of African countries, to improve the efficiency of resource allocation, and to promote growth and employment. However it is also recognised that SAPs also create economic hardships, both for the majority, but especially for the very poor and most vulnerable groups in society.

Is There an Alternative to SAPs?

Whether SAPs are or are not effective is the subject of intense debate. Many may feel there is little alternative in a situation of chronic under-development, brought about in part by mismanagement of national economies. Others may point to the structural inequalities in relationships between North and South, where, through massive annual interest payments, developing countries are placed in a situation of permanent debt bondage. However the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) has recommended an alternative to the orthodox adjustment programmes, called the “African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes for Socio-Economic Recovery and Transformation” (AAF). One fundamental difference between the AAF and SAPs is that the AAFs first goal is not the accumulation of foreign exchange for debt repayments, but long-term economic development in the interests of the majority. For example, whereas SAPs chiefly aid export crops, the AAF advocates devoting between 20 and 25% of public investment to improving rural infrastructure, broad-based agricultural productivity and rural employment. The specific goals of the AAF programme for economic self-reliance include:

- a) enabling peoples to feed themselves, by achieving a proper balance between the production of food for domestic consumption and the production of agricultural exports;
- b) lessening import dependence, moving away from the present situation in which too many essential items, intermediate inputs and capital goods are imported;
- c) realignment of production patterns with consumption so that people consume more of what is domestically produced in the areas of food, clothing, housing and basic services; and
- d) managing debt and debt-servicing in order to allocate scarce foreign exchange according to development priorities. (see UNECA, 1989, cited in ECEJ, 1990:74).

Although the proposals suggested by the AAF strategy might be preferable to the SAPs, it is questionable whether African countries have ever really been given a chance to implement a self-directed strategy, and the possibility of this in the future appears bleak. If the economic crisis is now so severe that structural adjustment has become essential, the issue becomes one of making the most of this approach, as it appears unrealistic that other alternatives are available at this time.

Implications for Social Work Practice

Social consequences of structural adjustment

Social workers will have to deal with the consequences of these programmes, at least in their initial stages - although it does not seem possible to distinguish “short-term” from “long-term” as the effects of structural adjustment may create difficulties over many years. Such consequences as increased poverty brought about by devaluation of currencies, a widening income gap between rich and poor, increasing malnutrition with the removal of subsidies on basic foodstuffs and a spiralling rate of inflation (at least in the “beginning phase” of the programmes) will create hardships for both the traditional “vulnerable” groups and indeed for the majority generally.

The vulnerable groups of the population, such as children, severely handicapped people, and the elderly, cannot be drawn into the productive system and are likely to suffer very much from the consequences of adjustment policies. They require some form of support, although there is no clear plan of action in most adjustment measures to ensure their integration into society. There should be, therefore, complementary policies to protect such groups during periods of adjustment until resumption of growth permits low-income households to meet their basic needs independently. The programmes should include, for example, employment-creation schemes and nutrition support for the most deprived groups.

The United Nations positively links the deteriorating social and economic situation in Africa, but also Latin America and much of Asia, to the adoption of structural adjustment measures. For example the United Nations Children's Fund has documented how foreign debt and structural adjustment programmes have contributed to rising infant mortality, closed health clinics, empty schools, growing malnutrition and the spread of preventable diseases. UNICEF have noted that over the course of the 1980s, average incomes fell by 10% in most of Latin America and by over 20% in sub-Saharan Africa, while in many urban areas, real minimum wages have declined by as much as 50%. UNICEF has noted (1990:8): "...it is essential to strip away the niceties of economic parlance and say that...the developing world's debt, both in the manner in which it was incurred and in the manner in which it is being "adjusted to",...is simply an outrage against a large section of humanity".

The negative social impact of SAPs arises from the fact that the stringencies of the programmes severely affects vulnerable groups and that special measures to protect these groups have often only been added as an afterthought. Many programmes have not included an awareness of the social consequences of adjustment as a pivotal part of the planning process. An exception to this situation, and perhaps the best example of attempting to cope with the social dimensions of adjustment is the Programme of Action to Mitigate the Social Costs of Adjustment (PAMSCAD) in Ghana.

Social work - a marginal activity?

Social workers in some respects see themselves as a vulnerable group. There is the feeling that they play a very marginal role in society, usually of a remedial nature, are never consulted by policy makers and planners and have not developed their own professional status and authority in society. Partly this remains the fault of social workers themselves. Their very preoccupation with "vulnerable groups" is itself a marginalising process as social workers will always find themselves dealing with casualties after the event. If social workers are to take on issues such as structural adjustment and to be heard by policy-makers, they must take on an advocacy role, if possible in the planning stages of these programmes. This means that social workers must work even harder to gain professional credibility and public exposure, so that they are taken more seriously by their own governments.

Social development orientation in social work

There is a need to encourage a social development orientation in social work which should be proactive rather than remedial and which should be oriented more towards group and community work methods than casework (although casework is still a vital aspect of methodology). In addition social workers should be more concerned with the plight of the majority in African societies following the adoption of SAPs, which inevitably means an orientation towards those living in the rural areas, who often constitute over 70% of the population in a given country. Social workers should be concerned with issues of poverty, deteriorating health conditions, the homeless, street children, women in development (WID) and the need for income generation. Specifically this will also mean that social workers should attempt to engage with groups and communities in ways that promote participation and empowerment.

Social work roles and structural adjustment

- (1) Social workers need to assist people as much as possible to be self-reliant and to enhance their capacity to generate income for themselves and their families. A post-SAP society is likely to be a poorer society for the majority, at least in the "short-term". It becomes important therefore that social workers use their skills in project appraisal, project proposal formulation, development of income-generating projects, etc, to assist people in survival.
- (2) Social workers need to formulate a concrete action plan aimed at working with those groups further marginalised by the SAP process, for example the elderly and children.
- (3) Social workers need to establish a higher profile for their profession with those involved in decision-making and planning. This will mean promoting the profession generally and developing stronger National Associations of Social Workers, linked to the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW).
- (4) Social workers need to engage in research into the consequences of the adoption of SAPs. A particular area of interest is to try to develop research tools that can assess the impact of SAPs on the population generally, or groups within a particular country. There is a need to try to separate the consequences of general poverty from that relating directly to the results of SAPs. In certain cases there may be beneficial effects resulting from SAPs and again social work research could aim to identify these and examine the particular reasons responsible for success rather than failure.

Implications for Social Work Training

As most African countries have either embarked on SAPs, or are in the process of doing so, and as the consequences can be severe for the population generally, it seems appropriate that social workers should familiarise themselves with the topic of structural adjustment and the various issues involved with this. Social workers themselves need to be trained in order to understand the complexities involved in macro-economic policies such as SAP, and in turn impart their knowledge to students, or at least be in a position to discuss the issue with students, some of whom may be better informed than themselves!

This has relevance in terms of the curriculum as students need to be made aware of issues concerning the introduction of SAPs. They should be familiar with the topic of structural adjustment, not only in terms of its effects on vulnerable groups, but its rationale, social and economic implications, etc. This knowledge, combined with a social activist/lobbyist role and a concern to become involved as professionals (perhaps through national professional associations, initially as student members) might provide the needed impetus to involvement in mainstream social policy and planning. Social workers must develop their public *persona* much more than they have to date. Placing the social responsibility of social workers in dealing with issues related to structural adjustment firmly on the curriculum, provides the necessary first step in this process.

This will have implications for the training of social work students who will need to be encouraged to consider innovative ways of working with the rural poor and engaging with communities. More emphasis on fieldwork training and practical experience generally would be useful in this context.

Fieldwork training

Practical fieldwork training has an indispensable role to play in developing an awareness on the part of social work students regarding the social consequences of SAP. This can be achieved by encouraging students to analyse situations of poverty and deprivation in ways that extend beyond the immediate individual, family, group or community concerned. Students should be encouraged to reflect on and analyse situations, rather than simply responding to the "presenting problem" in an uncritical way. Effective supervision in field practice situations will assist students to enhance their critical skills in this regard.

Development of a curriculum

The curriculum should aim to cover the following five critical areas:

1. To provide an overall understanding of the concept of structural adjustment.
2. To understand the historical background prior to the adoption of these programmes, ie gain an awareness of the reasons why countries have opted for SAPs.
3. To understand the implications of adopting SAPs and in particular the consequences this will have for the majority, as well as the 'vulnerable groups' in society.
4. To identify appropriate social work roles in relation to assisting these groups.
5. To facilitate the acquisition of relevant skills which may assist clients/client groups suffering the effects of structural adjustment.

Use of the curriculum

The curriculum could be used as a discrete or separate course on its own, or more likely as one module within an established existing course (such as Social Policy, Socioeconomic Development, or similar type of course). In being treated as a separate topic on its own, this has the advantage of giving some weight to the subject and encouraging a more comprehensive overview. Alternatively the material generated through the curriculum could be infused into existing courses on the Certificate, Diploma, Degree or other programme. The idea of the infusion approach is to recognise the complexities of the 'social dimension' of SAPs and to examine how structural adjustment has affected individuals, groups and communities on a multidimensional level. For example there is no reason why the effects of structural adjustment should not be examined as a topic within methods courses - ie Casework, Groupwork and Community Work. In addition other courses such as Human Growth and Development, Community Health, Integrated Social Work Methods and similar courses could all include sections relating to the consequences of structural adjustment on the particular situation under consideration.

Perhaps the most useful approach is to develop a mixture of these two - a specific module on the subject of SAP and an attempt to infuse our knowledge of the social effects of SAP into the curriculum generally.

Core and elective courses

In devising the curriculum, social work educators should consider whether knowledge on issues relating to structural adjustment should be contained within core, or foundation courses (ie compulsory course areas), or within elective courses, where the student has a degree of choice in selection of the course area. My submission would be that the input on SAP should be in the core area, due to the fact that the consequences of SAP will be profound and experienced at all levels of the social system.

Linking with training on human rights

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) are presently cooperating in the production of a curriculum on Human Rights training for Schools of Social Work. Although consideration of human rights issues may traditionally be seen as a concern that involves the civil and political rights of individuals, increasingly social workers are also concerned with the social and economic circumstances which brings about an infringement of human rights on a broader level. SAPs are a part of this situation as the social consequences resulting from the programmes may exacerbate the already serious economic situation in these countries. Increasing inflation, retrenchment and cost-sharing measures create even harsher burdens on the poor majority.

In the context of the Third World, human rights are infringed on a massive scale that leads to death and disability for many. Human rights are inevitably linked to personal and collective survival, dignity and development. Poverty, lack of access to basic social services, malnutrition and inequitable distribution of resources generally should be issues of concern to social workers everywhere.

The development of a Human Rights Curriculum is therefore a very similar exercise to the development of a curriculum concerning the issue of structural adjustment. Both are concerned with basic issues of social justice and equity. The International Federation of Social Workers has stated that: "...social work has from its inception been a human rights profession, having as its basic tenet the intrinsic value of every human being, and has as its main aims the promotion of equitable social structures which can offer people security and development while upholding their dignity" (IFSW, 1988:2).

Gender issues

The issue of gender needs to be carefully considered within the curriculum. Although women should not be separated as a "vulnerable group" on the same level as children and the disabled, it should be recognised that they will inevitably bear a heavier load in relation to their family-caring and other responsibilities. However the effect of structural adjustment on men, the increasing stress of trying to earn a living wage, fear of redundancies and actual redundancy will also create problems for them as a group. Gender is an important variable to consider in any social work curriculum and in a similar way should be considered in a curriculum relating to the effects of SAP.

Conclusion

The development of a curriculum, which can address some of the issues resulting from the adoption of SAPs by many African governments, is an urgent task for social work educators. There are several dimensions to this task, some of which are listed below:

1. The need to develop a coherent identity and vision for the profession of social work in Africa. In particular to encourage a social development perspective for social work and to find ways to further the involvement of social work in social policy and planning.
2. The need to develop a concern for basic human rights on social and economic levels (ie social justice and equity) and to link this with issues relating to structural adjustment.
3. The need to train the trainers - to inform social work educators, practising social workers and students with regard to the background, rationale and implications of structural adjustment programmes.
4. The need to promote innovative, creative and dynamic ways of working with those affected by structural adjustment and to incorporate these methods in the social work curriculum.

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**** Key Conclusions and Recommendations of the Workshop***

**** Appendices***

Key Conclusions and Recommendations of Workshop (following discussion)

This section summarises some of the key conclusions and recommendations resulting from discussions which took place during the Workshop. After the main presentations the group considered some of the major consequences of structural adjustment, summarised here as the *positive and negative effects of SAPs*. The group then recommended possible areas of social work intervention, and these are listed as *roles for social workers*:

Conclusions: Positive Effects of SAPs

SAPs -

- * emphasise accountability and probity - governments are compelled to be accountable;
- * provide a channel to acquiring much-needed funds from donors;
- * give us a chance to develop a critical outlook on our own situation (ie realising that problems are not always external) and the opportunity to reorganise present stagnant political and economic structures;
- * enhance self-reliance;
- * may lead to re-emergence of Pan-Africanism (ie everyone is in the same boat);
- * promote efficiency and effectiveness of workers - there is more emphasis on quality;
- * enhance our awareness of the needs of vulnerable groups (although does also worsen their situation);
- * reduce the likelihood of 'blaming the victim' - ie there may be less social stigmatisation as victims are clearly the result of social policy.

Conclusions: Negative Effects of SAPs

SAPs -

- * marginalise the majority;
- * devalue local currency, while cost-recovery measures reduce purchasing power of the majority;
- * deliberately create unemployment and under-employment through retrenchment;
- * open up the market which could lead to unfair competition, marginalising small-scale businesses and forcing them to close;
- * create inflation due to constant devaluation, increasing the costs of imports and raising prices generally;
- * remove government subsidies and reduce social services subsidies, leading to increasing impoverishment and stagnation;
- * compound social problems (eg falling standards in education and health care);
- * erode cultural values, eg traditional hospitality (through increasing poverty);
- * increase social tension and conflict - there is less social justice;
- * increase the likelihood of crime and deviancy;
- * increase the propensity for family disintegration (through greater poverty);
- * place a larger burden on women through their income-maintenance role and responsibility for the caring of the family;
- * increase the migration of skilled human resources to 'greener' pastures (ie "brain drain" is accelerated);
- * increase the likelihood of foreign political interference.

Recommendations: Suggested Roles for Social Workers

Social workers should:

1. educate themselves about structural adjustment and conscientise the public through:
 - * organising networks in both urban and rural communities to identify their problems, needs and resources;
 - * guiding people to be self-reliant;
 - * training people how to lobby for funds;
2. adopt an integrated social development approach;
3. advise regarding planning, research and implementation of policies;
4. devise concrete action plans aimed at dealing with social problems;
5. clearly identify the target groups requiring most urgent attention;
6. adopt a social action approach;
7. work in a closer way with NGOs;
8. adopt a proactive and preventive approach rather than a remedial and reactive approach;
9. conduct feasibility studies before implementation of projects and programmes;
10. encourage an awareness of gender sensitivity;
11. organise themselves into Associations to make their views known.

Role of IASSW and ASWEA in relation to Schools of Social Work in Africa

Dr Vera Mehta, Secretary-General of the IASSW (International Association of Schools of Social Work) explained the role and function of IASSW in supporting Schools of Social Work. The group concluded that an effort should be made to revitalise and strengthen the role of the Association of Social Work Education in Africa (ASWEA), one of the five regional bodies of the IASSW. It was felt by the group that this organisation should be taking more responsibility in guiding schools of social work and social work education in the African context. However it appears that due to organisational and other difficulties this has not been possible in recent years. It was felt generally that our links were much stronger with institutions outside of Africa, but that within Africa linkages were very weak.

Dr Mehta emphasised the need to impart skills developed in working with vulnerable groups to students. These skills should centre around the need to develop a social development focus. Dr Mehta pointed out that over 70% of the population in developing countries live in the rural areas, but most schools of social work are based in urban areas, neglecting the needs of the majority. There is a need to develop more innovative ways of reaching the rural community, eg mobile training teams of faculty and students could be engaged in outreach work. Social work education should encourage students to develop skills in planning and in reaching the community through encouraging participation.

Schools need to examine their theory base, fieldwork and research and these should be geared to meet the needs of the rural population. Fieldwork in particular has an important role to play in training. Field supervisors and faculty staff should be brought together more often and materials/approaches developed which students can use. In this context, a more systematic form of training is required to provide a justifiable focus for social work intervention in developing countries. There should be a more organised and comprehensive approach which will bring different training institutes together and help to develop common approaches. Consideration should be given to the type of field placements which would be useful. Field supervisors and instructors have an important role to play in developing materials which students can use in a practical sense to help "empower" people facing hardships.

Each school of social work should develop its own mission statement which would enshrine the highest values and traditions of social work education as part of a global community of social workers. However in this context, as Dr Mehta indicated, "we need to think globally and act locally".

In the African context we need to act in a more collective, regional way, and present African social work at international fora such as the World Bank, IMF, WHO, etc. IASSW already has consultative status at some of the major international bodies, but would benefit from a strengthening of its own regional bodies. In this context ASWEA should be strengthened and supported. One of the problems we face in Africa is that we have not sufficiently strengthened our regional cooperation; this is more than developing public relations, it is thinking and acting in a collective way.

A discussion then followed on the issue of social work training and curriculum development in the African context. It was noted that although as educators we might wish to arrange for students to spend considerable periods in rural fieldwork placements, this type of outreach may be too costly and therefore unrealistic. It was noted that the situation is different in Ghana where agencies within all 110 districts are used to place students for periods of three months each year. Also in Egypt, in the third year Diploma course at Helwan University, the whole group will travel to a deprived rural area (with their lecturers) where they will stay for a month. Although there are limited resources, we need to emulate these examples, and work at generating new strategies regarding developing outreach programmes, and in developing an appropriate training methodology and curriculum.

The following list presents the main conclusions:

Some concrete proposals to develop a training methodology and curriculum

1. More emphasis should be given to the development of 'macro', 'meso' and 'micro' skills, where students are encouraged to develop a more systematic approach in the context of a social development framework. These skills will require students to investigate, research and suggest specific proposals to alleviate hardship. In addition students will need to become aware of the social implications of SAPs. Some of the activities that social work students could be involved with, in collaboration with local community groups, include the following:

- * facilitating/organising planning bodies or groups;
 - * helping to identifying priorities;
 - * identifying appropriate goals and strategies;
 - * undertaking feasibility studies;
 - * designing specific services;
 - * developing action plans;
 - * implementing the action plans;
 - * follow-up activities; and
 - * evaluation and feedback.
2. Key social policy issues should be included in the curriculum.
 3. Awareness of the consequences of structural adjustment should be infused into courses such as social planning or community development.
 4. Students need to be trained to be receptive to interdisciplinary approaches and should be flexible enough to work with others in different professions.
 5. Dialogue should take place with senior members of governments and NGOs on the social consequences of adjustment.
 6. Visits should take place to field projects with a view to developing case studies which can reveal the impact of SAPs on the lives of ordinary people. It is important to compile resources and materials in this area.
 7. The faculty in schools of social work should organise a one or two day orientation on needs assessment and impact assessment techniques and methodology.
 8. Students should be trained to analyse various needs and problems and be able to classify and prioritise these.
 9. Country research projects and comparative regional research on the effects of SAPs would be valuable and there should be exchange of information between different Schools in Africa.
 10. Research on SAP should be undertaken by students. This should also include projects, term papers, or essays.
 11. Students need to be aware and sensitive to the possibilities of "grounded theory". Fieldwork is indispensable in creating this awareness. Students should be encouraged to go and live for specified periods with identified vulnerable groups, with the aim of getting to know the reality and hardships people face. This can be extended more systematically in terms of a rural fieldwork unit or "action demonstration project". In this way the School becomes an agent of change with high visibility and a pro-active stance.

Drama Code and Discussion of Work of Paulo Freire (facilitator: Trish Swift)

At one stage during the Workshop, the participants organised themselves into groups and developed drama codes to illustrate the effects of structural adjustment. The dramas portrayed the consequences of retrenchment and increasing poverty within the family. This was a very direct experience and indicated in stark terms for most participants the very severe consequences that can befall those included in the category of 'vulnerable groups'. Discussion of the drama was conducted using the psycho-social approach pioneered by the Brazilian adult educationalist, Paulo Freire. Key conclusions of this discussion indicated that social workers should work to overcome the powerlessness and "culture of silence" that many clients - and indeed social workers themselves - find themselves in. Social workers need to overcome their own "reactive mind-set", develop better strategies and engage more creatively in dealing with some of the problems that confront them.

Appendix A

List of Participants

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The following presented papers, but were unable to attend the Workshop:

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Also attending:

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Appendix C

Structural Adjustment Workshop - Press Release

A Workshop sponsored by the Austrian Government through IASSW was recently held in Harare, Zimbabwe from 23rd September to 2nd October 1991. Following a similar format to the 1989 Bombay Workshop on "Macro Development Projects Revisited", the Harare Workshop focused on the topic "The Social Implications of Structural Adjustment Programmes". The meeting drew together social work academics from twelve Anglophone African countries. The Workshop, which lasted nearly two weeks, considered the socioeconomic consequences of introducing structural adjustment policies in various African countries. Although these policies are aimed at improving the economies of the respective countries, the participants observed that the plight of vulnerable groups (eg children, elderly, the unemployed) appeared to be even worse under conditions of austerity, removal of price controls, "cost-recovery" measures and retrenchment.

The Workshop resolved that social workers need to become much more involved in policy formulation at an early stage, rather than only dealing with the social casualties of economic policies. In addition, the participants felt that there is a need for social workers to become more aware of the issues involved in macroeconomic planning, and in dealing with the social consequences of such policies. Issues of curriculum development for schools of social work were considered, as it was felt important that social work students become more informed about this topic.

The Workshop concluded that social workers need to develop new skills and more effective strategies in situations characterised by increasing stress and poverty. A Curriculum Development Committee was elected by the Workshop participants to continue the process of developing a core curriculum related to issues of structural adjustment and social development.

Workshop Committee
School of Social Work
Harare