



Original Article

Relationship between Social Work, Alliances, and Inclusivity: Way Forward for a New Eco-Social impact in Kenya

Dr. John Mathenge King'au, PhD^{1*} & Peninah Mumbua Mwanzia¹

¹ Laikipia University P. O. Box 1100 – 20300. Nyahururu, Kenya.

* Author for Correspondence ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1439-8884>; email: johnkingau@gmail.com.

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Alliances and inclusivity for social work have become increasingly important in the recent past as implementing agencies seek to realise sustainable development from engagement and facilitation of communities. The current scenario of social education and practices has largely encountered aspects of exclusion and non-sustainability. The role of social work for innovation and sustainable development cannot be underestimated. It postulates that social workers have equal opportunity to draw from practice the values that bring about positive societal changes. Organisations and institutions have a role to play in this regard. It is the role of the service institutions in Kenya to promote ideas, concepts and systems that embrace innovative approaches which enhance sustainable development. This paper looks at how alliances can be effective in promoting the principles of innovative social work practices and sustainable development in Kenya. The role of research in social work forms the basis of the conceptual analysis for the discussion. Various concepts that enhance or hinder innovative social work approaches and sustainable development are also discussed. The achievement of national and international development goals like Kenya Vision 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) largely depends on the creativity and innovation of social approaches and strategies. This paper strives to lift up the paradigm shift of social work education and practice as envisaged by social workers in Kenya and suggest possible intervention strategies necessary for co-building a new eco-social world. The author uses documentary analysis to explore challenges encountered and possible solutions. Empirical data was collected between March and May 2022 through semi-structured interviews with social workers, literature review and document analysis. This article recommends a strategic focus on the modalities and components of social work interventions as a way of enhancing the outcomes of co-building a new eco-social world.

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INTRODUCTION

Social work by its character, theory, and practice is envisioned to support an opportunity for greater community participation in grassroots development and allow actors to respond pro-actively to emerging issues such as social workers are in most cases exposed to societal challenges. Social work is a profession based on dealing with social issues (IFSW, 2010). However, these issues are differently defined according to the context. What is considered an issue in one context may not be regarded as such in another.

There exist some basic features of a new eco-social world order based on the premise of the International Social Work Day theme observed in 2022 of 'Leaving No One Behind'. Postulated by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW). Definitely, this may have a significant influence in the coming years by providing a new way forward towards an eco-social world characterised by proactive social work and partnerships among social workers and the society served. A new approach for co-building social work partnerships that acknowledges and strengthens the contribution made by social work practitioners and

educators in Kenya is required to produce the kind of knowledge that the sector desires, according to Okatta (2022), in a paper presented during the 2022 World Social Work Day Conference hosted by St. Martin CSA on 7th April 2022, Nyahururu, Kenya. The presenter noted that "the social day theme emerged from the COVID 19 pandemic, the climatic crisis, and the need to co-build a new eco-social world based on values that shape policies and practices to ensure sustainability and good quality life cycles – not only for each human being but for each part of our eco-systems on which we all depend". This comes from a period when the pandemic has left many with devastating effects on health, economic, social, and other major ones. In a key address to participants at a conference held on 25-25th May 2022 (ASWEK) in Maasai Mara University, the President of ASWEK observed that 'for Kenya to achieve the global social work agenda, Kenyan social work professionals must step forward and resolve to work together through a united front'. This outlines the desire for Alliances and Inclusivity going into the future.

Background Information

As a whole, social work should go beyond being aware of developmental issues to actively work towards implementing practices that support equal access (Ferguson, 2008). Social workers may lack interest and know-how in promoting changes in co-building social work partnerships and structures that may address some of the underlying issues. However, they can make use of existing alliances to facilitate education and practices that ensure inclusivity and sustainability. Further, social workers can use the Multi-Sectoral Approach (MSA) currently being used in the development arena in dealing with public health and social and societal challenges. The MSA entails engaging with multiple partners from different sectors so as to share resources, knowledge, and expertise and achieve joint outcomes in working toward the shared goal (Subhash, 2017). According to the Association of Social Work Educators in Kenya (ASWEK), “the next generation of social workers need to have access to excellent and quality learning opportunities that incorporates knowledge, deriving from research experience, policy and practice” (ASWEK 2022, p. 1).

Social Work in Kenya

According to Lombard and Wairire (2010), there is no single comprehensive legislative act or policy that specifically confines itself to social work in Kenya. The authors allude that social work in Kenya is still a growing profession and that it is yet to be fully recognised by the state. Further, it is noted that the legislative framework and thus mandate for social work in Kenya is rather to be traced in different Acts of Parliament and policies by different government ministries. As stated by Lombard and Wairire (2010), the most notable framework for social work in Kenya was the Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation (ERS), which played a major role in the recovery (albeit slow) and growth of Kenya’s economy. The ERS gave rise to important

schemes for boosting people’s livelihoods at the grassroots level. These schemes include, inter alia, the Constituency Development Fund (CDF), the Local Authority Transfer Fund, the Constituency Bursary Fund/the Secondary School Education Bursary Fund, and the Constituency AIDS Fund. In accordance with the principle of decentralisation in development, decision-making responsibilities for local development initiatives are redistributed down from government ministries.

The Kenya National Social Protection Policy (2011) aims to provide key social protection actions in the areas of social assistance, social security, and health insurance with an overarching goal of ensuring that all Kenyans live in dignity and exploit their human capabilities for their own social and economic development (the Republic of Kenya, 2011). The targets for social assistance include older persons, Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC, young people, and people with disability. Several programmes have been implemented in the past and the country has had cash transfer programmes such as Orphans and Vulnerable Children Cash Transfers, Older Persons Cash Transfer, Hunger Safety Net Programme, and the Urban Food Subsidy. Other Social Assistance Programmes include the school feeding programmes, relief food programmes for ASALS and *Kazi Kwa Vijana* a public works initiative for youth employment initiatives all geared toward creating amelioration of pain and suffering of needy citizens (GoK,2007). Whereas all the different social protection programmes are being implemented in the country, poverty is still a major challenge in Kenya. Some of the Programmes are donor funded and there is a lack of sustainability after donor withdrawal.

The Kenya Vision 2030 was launched in 2006 as the new long-term development blueprint for Kenya. According to the Kenyan government, the Kenya Vision 2030 is motivated by a collective aspiration for a better society by the year 2030. Its aim is to create, by that year, a globally competitive and prosperous country with a high quality of life. It also

aims to transform Kenya into a newly industrialised, middle-income country by providing a good quality of life for all its citizens in a clean and secure environment (GoK, 2007). The Kenya Vision 2030 is founded on three pillars: economic, social, and political governance. The economic pillar aims to achieve an average economic growth rate of 10% per annum and endure until 2030; the social pillar seeks to create just, cohesive, and equitable social development in a secure environment; while the political pillar aims at realising an issue-based, people-centred, result oriented, and accountable democratic system (GoK, 2007). This vision creates the enabling environment necessary for developmental social work in Kenya. As indicated above, social work in Kenya is still a growing profession. Furthermore, social work training institutions are limited in number and are unable to meet the country's demand for social work professionals.

Implications for Social Work Practice

A good first step may be to provide more information on practising social work on transformative approaches and innovative strategies. There is currently no process in place for disseminating practice principles to social workers other than through the ASWEK website (ASWEK, 2022). Many social workers may not even know that these approaches exist. As more social workers become interested in co-building, there will have to be some improved method for sharing the information that already exists. Recently, ASWEK promoted some of their practice standards through the use of their membership (ASWEK, 2022), so using promotional-based methods such as these as a manner for dissemination of these ideas may be useful in the future. Many social workers may find the information useful and beneficial if they know the knowledge is available. How to best adapt these co-building strategies remains a significant idea. Once there is increased awareness of the problem, another way social workers can get involved is to advocate for policy changes. Although there are

some laws and policies that regulate therapy practices, because the Internet is a global system, there are questions about which jurisdiction would have responsibility for the enforcement of the laws

Statement of the Problem

In this current global moment, it has become paramount to find solutions to existing and emerging issues in society; but finding such solutions requires institutional capacity, human capabilities, and inclusivity, a future that can bring everyone on board to contribute towards realising a just and equitable society. In response to such a challenge, social workers require redesigning social work as a “network of institutions and a network of capacities”. This implies creating “approaches for Co-Building a new Eco-Social World that leaves no one behind”. Thus, there is a need to incorporate the perspectives of multiple experiences. This is why this paper envisages how deconstructing exclusion and ensuring the inclusion of all people in social work goes a long way to realising the New Eco-Social paradigm.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this research was majorly qualitative. It is based on the perceptions of the social workers who engage in social work and community development processes. It seeks to recognise the practices these organisations have developed and the knowledge they have acquired relating to social work. This study was conducted in Nakuru Laikipia and Nyandarua Counties, Kenya. The methodological perspective employed in this paper is phenomenology. According to Taylor *et al.* (2016), phenomenology seeks to understand social phenomena from the perspective of the actors. Primary information was gathered through oral interviews of social workers who participated in a social workers' workshop. Purposive sampling was used to interview the social workers. This allowed the researcher to gather data from the respondents on the relevance of the issue under

research. Between March and July 2022, literature searches of relevant databases were conducted. The results were screened for relevance for this study based on the study at hand. In addition, the author supplemented the results from the literature search by drawing on the respondents’ dataset.

Key questions evaluated

- Which values, policies, and practices have been embraced in your organisation/ institution to ensure that no one is left behind towards Kenya Vision 2030 and UN Sustainable Development goals?
- How can these values, policies, and practices contribute to building a new inclusive Eco-social world?
- What challenges do you encounter in the course of your social work?

FINDINGS

Values, Policies, and Practices

The majority of institutions and practitioners reviewed during the unstructured interviews stated that social teaching enables them to serve all people. They stated that the activities they are involved in recognise human potential, natural resources, and

the environment as the foundation of economic and social activity. Some of the core values listed by the respondents included equality for all, respect for the earth and stewardship. These values according to the respondents, had the conviction that people are born equal hence organisations and core workers should be committed to developing processes that promote equality. Further, it was noted that they believed that the physical earth has rights and needs to be respected in and of itself not just as a stage for human activity. On stewardship, the respondents stated that all human beings are co-responsible for protecting the dignity of everybody and everything. The respondents cited approaches such as holistic that embracing all aspects; participatory involves others in reason, dialogue and decision making as well as inclusivity. These approaches refer to how practitioners perceive development and social processes should take place. From their statements; ‘strategies employed should be those that facilitate learning and empowerment of the target depending on identified issues within the community and those engaged. Table 1 indicates the best practices that each respondent from the sampled institution mentioned. The most mentioned practices as per responses given were; strategic partnership, core values, vision, mission statement, commitment to promoting good environmental practices and developing institutional sustainability mechanism.

Challenges to Table 1: Best Practices of Social Work as per Institutions/ Practitioners

| Respondents | Institutions | Best practices |
|-------------|-----------------|---|
| 1 | Institution I | Concept that takes into account all the dimensions of life (environment, economy, socio-cultural, institutional, and political Short-term training to cover community needs Taking into consideration the local know-how. Strengthening/development of community organisations |
| 2 | Institution II | Adapting the curricula to the training needs of the target groups/communities. Choice of strategic partners to ensure institutional sustainability. Clear definition of the values that we wish to adopt |
| 3 | Institution III | Definition of the target group Define the mission and vision Establishing a monitoring system and evaluation mechanism |

| Respondents | Institutions | Best practices |
|-------------|-----------------|---|
| | | Identifying indicators (environmental, socio-cultural, political, and economic) Assessing the impact on livelihoods. |
| 4 | Institution IV | Involvement of the community from initiation onwards Develop learning community Develop capacities – human, physical and financial 8. Sustainability – financial, human, physical assets 9. Democratic governance Develop among all actors of the institution an acceptable philosophy, core values, vision, and mission statement identify partners for various activities within the development of the institution |
| 5 | Institution V | Strong commitment to promoting good environmental practices Women and youth involvement Good partnership with concern-institution Publication and documentation of activities |
| 6 | Institution VI | Developing good governance structures and putting them in place Simple documentation for best practices Identifying new strategic partners and enhancing existing ones and drawing engagement structures Developing and motivating quality human resources Developing institutional sustainability mechanism. |
| 7 | Institution VII | Focusing on mission and visions Involving stakeholders in implementing activities Documentation of all implemented activities Developing human resources to meet the challenges and rising matters Making sure that pillars for sustainability are in place and used |

Enhancing Innovative Social Work Approaches and Sustainable Development

Social workers' interviews indicated that there might be a correlation between those who expressed concern about their social work impact, knowledge, communities' ownership, and their relationship to respective agencies. Although these workers were not in fact, inexperienced, it appeared that the concerns represented a common experience associated with the approaches employed. Approaches employed shared many features such as inclusivity, lack of ownership, and non-sustainability in development projects. Practitioners' capacities and experiences were also noted as being significant in social workers' strategies used in engaging the community. Many examples of access and exclusivity in the field were shared and these are often related to approaches

employed. In simple terms, those who had had positive and fruitful experiences of social work did not experience significant difficulties in their social work, whilst those who had had negative and often very painful experiences, particularly in the field, were both sensitive to their practices and community ownership of projects that they facilitated.

The challenges and gaps identified by the sampled respondents are summarised as follows;

- Lack of commitment to adopt feedback from the clients
- Ineffective monitoring tools/instruments/methodology
- Un-timeliness and inadequate time period for implementing planned actions

- Lack of resources/commitment among social workers
- Financial implications while implementing activities planned
- Self-evaluation of target group level
- Lack of clear standard approaches to social work
- Absence of backstopping and support system especially for the capacity building and if it is to be provided it would require more resources, both human and capital
- For some activities, there is a long time before impact can be felt and therefore sometimes becomes difficult to monitor the process of achieving the objectives.
- Lack of systematic information on challenging issues and critical factors.

The acknowledgement of the challenges and the acceptance of options available for action require a long-term commitment from social work that is responsive to the specific needs of a wide range of stakeholders. A recognition that knowledge systems and social worker ingenuity in practice and policy are needed to meet the challenges, opportunities, and uncertainties perceived. This recognition will require a shift to social work development models.

DISCUSSIONS

First, the workshop discussed a move from traditional engagement based on services strategies to eco-social collaboration through transformative approaches and strategic partnerships of social workers from both national, regional, and institutional perspectives, which should involve partners from the private and public sectors. This implies a growing emphasis on the responsibility of involved institutions for the re-engineered development and implementation of the eco-social strategies. The implication of this for the

institutional collaboration strategies and practices will need to be thoroughly discussed and followed up at all involved Public and Private institutions in Kenya and globally.

Second, as noted from the findings, social work engagement has a long-term perspective and shifts from a known project approach to eco-social programmes developed and implemented by social workers consisting of private and public-sector partners nationally.

The social institutions should thus endeavour to identify key actions for three periods: short-term (the next three years), medium-term (three to six years from now), and long-term (six to 10 years from now). Social work institutions are expected to lift up these actions and integrate them into the strategies and operational plans within their networks in order to show how they will contribute to the realisation of the social workers' shift of co-building through social work education and practice. A key element is the development of area-based clusters of excellence in prioritised social mandate areas, such as climate change and sustainable development, health, social innovation, and societal transformations, among others. This implies for social work, there is a need to develop with all partners in their networks a long-term collaboration strategy that will allow them to engage successfully in future for the cluster of knowledge and practice in eco-social co-building potentials.

Thirdly, while a large part of the social work conceptualisation for the workshop forum came from the IFSW, it cannot be successfully comprehended without a considerable shift in social workers' mindsets undertaking institutional mandates, as reiterated by the key-note speaker.

Fourth, the long experience of social workers in working in their respective agencies and networks may provide relevant input for emerging eco-social networks and collaborations paradigm shift. For example, the Association of Social Work Educators

in Kenya (ASWEK) has encouraged social work institutions to network as partners. This can be a relevant model for how other grassroots practitioners could engage one another in matters of social work.

There is also ample opportunity for developing new eco-social alliances that are based, for example, on existing extensions and new innovative approaches. What all will have to incorporate, however, is an acknowledgement of the unique, innovative nature of these approaches. This implies that each engagement needs to contribute to social workers' capacity building in an integrated way, that is, it needs to show how it will integrate capacity building in various areas, including projects and programmes, research infrastructure and knowledge transfer.

Fifth, it is important that social work networks that want to enhance as a cluster of excellence in social work knowledge and practice need to build on their joint activities through existing strengths, capacities, and potentials. This implies, for example, that both on the local and the national level, the core of the networks should be formed by like-minded institutions. But that does not apply to all partners since the aim is to use these networks for strengthening social workers' capacities among institutions that are currently not eco-social compliant. This requires proactive engagement when it comes to the diverse collaborations

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to review existing social workers' knowledge of a new eco-social dispensation in Kenya. It focused on values, policies, and practices that have been embraced, the relationship between alliances and inclusivity as well as challenges encountered in the course of social work implementation. This study has provided some insight into the experiences of social workers attempting to engage in traditional approaches and transformative approaches. On the other hand, this paper shows that it is possible to co-build a new eco-social world by forming strategic

partnerships and alliances and ensuring no one is left behind. Thus, for service providers, alliances and collaborations will lead to increased transformative changes in social work. The study further concludes that for social workers, there is a need to be aware and sensitive to the various forms of inequalities that cause segments of society to be left behind in development projects. This calls for action for all social workers to brace themselves for more meaningful engagements with diverse partners and networks that will ensure that no one is left behind.

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