

ZIIBALOGZII PHILOSOPHY: AN OGONI-AFRICAN CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE IN NIGERIA

Burabari Sunday Deeza

Department of Religious and Cultural Studies,
Faculty of Humanities,

Ignatius Ajuru University of Education Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

E-mail: burabarisunday@gmail.com

Abstract

The persistent calls and initiatives to rid social work education and practices of their predominately Western orientation in order to make them more applicable to African contexts are a result of culturally distinct orientations, varying developmental stages that imply various sets and intensities of social problems, as well as various social, economic, political, and spiritual realities. All these demanded an indigenous Philosophy, theoretical underpinnings, models, and methodologies. However, most social work philosophical theories and workplace approaches in Nigeria are based on Western paradigms that do not resonate with indigenous African values, beliefs, Philosophy, culture, and rights. It is in response to this identifiable gap that this study focused on *Ziibalogzii* Philosophy-which places emphasis on values of human solidarity, empathy, human dignity, holding that a person is a person through others- as an African philosophical foundation for Social work practices in Nigeria. The paper adopted the qualitative research method, with reliance on primary and secondary source materials interpreted analytically on the subject matter. According to the study, there are numerous familial and kinship networks and organizations, including *Pya-be* (compound or family), *Bua-wuga* (extended families), *Pya-gan* (Kindred or clan), *Pya-gbo* (age groups), *Pyabuen* (community), town unions, and philanthropists, that serve as channels and sources of social care and protective services. The study argued that current social welfare initiatives, including fundamental social amenities in Nigeria, are utilized by governments to earn political points and hardly take into account the rights of the populace. The study came to the conclusion that while social work practices in Nigeria should be founded on the principles of *Ziibalogzii* Philosophy, western theories and philosophies of social work might still be used as references.

Key Words: African Philosophy, Social work, *Ziibalogzii* Philosophy

Introduction

Nigeria faces several social issues and development-related difficulties, just like all other societies. Without a doubt, social work is a structured response to the many social issues that people face. The majority of social work theories and workplace strategies, however, are based on Western paradigms that are unrelated to indigenous values, beliefs, culture, and rights. This is true throughout Nigeria. This approach stands in contrast to indigenous perspectives that uplift the collective and the process. According to Ioakimidis and Trimikliniotis (2020:25), neither social work historiography has addressed its troubling past of complicity with racist and colonial ideologies nor has it given students access to the breadth of its rich radical histories. In their 2014 article, Alvarez-Uria Rico and Parra Contreras (2014:15), analyses the political activism of many social work pioneers who have pushed for social change beyond the reformism of casework. According to Alvarez-Uria and Contreras (2014:17), erasing these intricate genealogies causes prejudice to persist in the formation of social work identity.

The persistent calls and initiatives to change social work education and practices away from their predominately Western orientation in order to make them more applicable to African contexts are a result of culturally distinct orientations, varying developmental stages that imply various sets and intensities of social problems, as well as various social, economic, political, and spiritual realities. The decision was motivated by the realization that ideas and concepts developed in the West for specific contexts may not always translate to the same outcomes in other environments. All these demand locally relevant knowledge, theoretical bases, models, and approaches. The best way to develop these is from the ground up. Unmistakably acknowledged in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2007:200), respect for indigenous knowledge and Philosophy, cultures and traditional practices contributes to sustainable and equitable development and proper management of the environment. According to Spitzer and Twikirize (2014:66), the success of any social work intervention on the African continent depends heavily on the use of regionally appropriate cultural practices, indigenous knowledge systems, and African philosophical and ethical principles.

In light of this, social work practice, research, and training all require a dual function. Focusing on local circumstances while also considering how to conform to worldwide standards is necessary (Kebede, 2014:23). Furthermore, Rankopo and Osei-Hwedie (2011:20) contend that social work education and practice that take into account various viewpoints and cultural justifications for social reality are more pertinent than those that attempt to transcend all cultural boundaries. This emphasizes the value of local knowledge and indigenous Philosophy in social work practice. The debate over indigenization of the social work profession in Africa is becoming more heated as people are recognizing the value of locally and culturally appropriate models and approaches to helping. The disputes center on the necessity of a purposeful reorientation of social work away from its historically individualistic and remedial nature, which has proven ineffectual in addressing the fundamental problems in Africa, as extensively articulated by Twikirize (2014:85). The profession needs to be oriented to concentrate on the structures, institutions, and systems that have a significant impact on people's welfare and the wellbeing of communities, according to the main reasons. Because societal problems manifest differently in Africa than they do in the West, and because of this, the change that is proposed (indigenisation) is based on these differences. Scholars, practitioners, and policy makers have been advised not to view efforts to indigenize the profession as an effort to eradicate anything foreign and not to continue bemoaning the inadequacy of social work theory that has been imported from the West.

It is in response to this identifiable gap that this study focused on *Ziibalogzii* Philosophy as an African philosophical foundation for social work practices in Nigeria. *Ziibalogzii* Philosophy emphasizes ideals of human solidarity, empathy, and dignity and holds that a person is a person via others. The paper used a qualitative research approach and relied on primary and secondary sources that were analyzed according to the topic. The study revealed the existence of a wide range of familial and kinship organizations and networks, including *pya-be* (compound or family), *bua-wuga* (extended families), *pyagan* (Kindred or clan), *pya-gbo* (age groups), *pyabuen* (community), and influential members of the community, etc., in providing both material and non-material aid for the young, old, widowed, ill, unemployed. The study came to the conclusion that while social work practices in Nigeria should be based on traditional African philosophies,

history, culture, values, and ethics, it was still possible to refer to western ideas and philosophies of social work as reference.

Defining Social Work

A revised Global Definition of Social Work was adopted in 2014 by the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW).

Social work is defined as a practice-based profession and academic discipline that supports societal development and transformation, social cohesiveness, as well as the empowerment and emancipation of individuals. Social work is fundamentally based on the values of social justice, human rights, group responsibility, and respect for individual differences. Social work involves people and systems to address life difficulties and improve welfare. It is underpinned by theories from the social sciences, humanities, and indigenous knowledge (IASSW & IFSW, 2014:250).

At the national and/or regional levels, the aforementioned term might be expanded. In social work, the process of empowering people entails assisting individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities in enhancing their economic, political, interpersonal, and personal strength and impact. Through organizations and advocacy, social workers work to help clients gain the ability to comprehend their surroundings, make decisions, accept responsibility for those decisions, and change their circumstances. Additionally, social workers try to achieve a more fair distribution of resources and power across various social groups. The profession of social work has long been known for its emphasis on equality and social justice.

In essence, social work is typically portrayed as an institutionalized activity or service that aims to help individuals in challenging conditions live better lives and normalize their social, psychological, and material circumstances. The assistance may be given directly, materially, through financial or material aid, institutionally, through administrative measures, psychologically, through emotional support, counselling, and therapy, as well as the development of the capacity for self-healing, self-rehabilitation, and self-integration, and physically, through medical treatment and body care.

Today, the treatments that focus on building the resilience and independence of problematic people and communities, especially of families in danger or challenging situations are prevalent and place a strong emphasis on prevention (Barker, 2003). As a career and practical endeavour, social work focuses primarily on issues like:

1. Promoting the well-being of individuals, families, groups, and communities;
2. Assisting individuals, families, groups, and communities in developing their skills and capabilities;
3. Assisting individuals, families, groups, and communities in utilizing their own resources as well as those of the community in the process of rehabilitation and normalization; and (Grinnell, Unrau, 2010:11; Cummins, Sevel, Pedrick, 2011:55)

Social workers do a variety of specialized and intricate tasks, including acting in the capacities of advocate, counsellor, mediator, researcher, educator, manager, case manager, facilitator, community change agent, broker, etc. The human interaction serves as the foundation for practically all types of intervention in social work today, whether it comes from institutions, communities, private organizations, or the governmental sector (Barker, 2003:88). The practice of social work is a complex and multifaceted activity that addresses both individualized and personal issues as well as larger social issues like poverty, unemployment, and domestic violence. It is guided by values and principles like social justice and human rights, which are essential, guiding ethical-philosophical foundations and models.

The Conceptual Basis of *Ziibalogzii* Philosophy

Ziibalogzii is a difficult concept to define, much like many African concepts. The concept has traditionally been seen as the worldview of the Ogoni indigenous people and a key factor in the formation of beliefs that influence social behaviour. In its most basic form, it represents personhood, humanity, morality, and humaneness. It has also been referred to as a Philosophy of life.

Ziibalogzii comes from the Ogoni terms *zii*, which means one, *ba*, which means hand, and *log-nu*, which means to wash. *Ziibalogzii*, which literally translates to "the state of being human," is a concept developed from the traditional Ogoni reciprocal, collaborative way of thought (one hand washes the other). This indicates the importance of interdependence and reciprocity in human cooperation, collaborativity, and

interconnectedness of all. It implies that one's existence is always dependent on how they treat other people, i.e., by recognizing their humanity and developing friendly relationships with them. By referencing the idea that people are "human together," it highlights the importance of intimate relationships and the preservation of traditional village life. This demonstrates the value of relationships and the respect and awareness of those around them (Deezia, 2022).

Ziibalogzii becomes a point of origin for actions and attitudes. The importance of being aware of one's potential to give and/or receive increases. It basically states that nobody can be self-sufficient and that interdependence is a reality for everyone. This demonstrates how essential reciprocity and interdependence are to human connection, cooperation. It argues that a person's lifespan is consistently determined by how they treat other people, specifically by recognizing their humanity and establishing positive relationships with them. By referencing the idea that people are "human together," it highlights the need of strong relationships and the preservation of traditional village life. This demonstrates the importance of relationships as well as how perceptive and considerate they are of those around them.

As an ancient Ogoni Philosophy, *Ziibalogzii* Philosophy creates and preserves a community based on justice and reciprocal care. It is used to denote empathy, reciprocity, dignity, harmony, and humanity. *Ziibalogzii* discusses how human are connected, how they share a common humanity, and how their strong relationships owe them a duty to one another. *Ziibalogzii* is the knowledge of their natural tendency to encourage and support one another while keeping the needs of the community at the forefront of their deeds. Through "brotherhood" or "sisterhood," the *Ziibalogzii* Ogoni humanist concept links the individual to the group. It provides a significant contribution to indigenous "ways of knowing and being" and is viewed as a spiritual way of being in the larger socio-political context of the Ogoni society, with shifting historical emphasis and (re)contextualization throughout time and location. In addition to its theological and theoretical features, this approach is a practical, everyday manifestation of spiritual Philosophy (Deezia, 2022). It is a way of knowing that fosters the improvement of the human condition, with emphasis on what makes one human.

The Ogoni proverb *aba tenaalukue*, which literally states that "a person is a person via other individuals," helped to establish this shared worldview. This proverbial

Ogoni expression expresses a fundamental respect and sensitivity for others. It can be seen as both a factual account and a guide to morality or good manners. It establishes what "being with others" entails and what defines "being with others." In light of this, *Ziibalogzii* Philosophy provides a decolonized evaluation of the philosophical and religious order of being human. In the Ogoni atmosphere of vibrant and self-assured cultural diversity, homogeneity is best kept at bay. It provided a foundation for the revival of African identity and contested the symbiotic relationship between colonized and colonizer. As a Philosophy, it established the foundation for the resurgence of formal dialogic participation, which was common in Africa before to industrialization.

Ziibalogzii is a traditional Philosophy at its foundation, with seven branches in communal enterprise, leadership legitimacy, value sharing, collectivism and solidarity, interconnectedness, respect, and dignity. It is engrained in Ogoni culture as a social Philosophy, way of life, moral code, and behavioural pattern. The fundamental value is concerned with the creation and upkeep of connections that are mutually affirming and elevating in order to safeguard each person's dignity. Fairness is embraced and demanded by *Ziibalogzii* Philosophy, which establishes a strong foundation for their common humanity. Even though they are increasingly being questioned in urban areas, these values have persisted for thousands of years and continue to be the foundation of traditional African culture. Their interconnectivity, shared humanity, and the duty they have to one another as a result of their tight links are heavily emphasized in the *Ziibalogzii* Philosophy. It is a conscious recognition of their deep-seated desire to boost one another up and be there for one another, always placing the needs of the community at the center of everything they do. It argues that one's behaviour toward others, particularly embracing their humanity and forging bonds of compassion with them, is inextricably linked to their very existence. By utilizing the notion that individuals are "human together," it emphasizes the importance of connections, respect, and awareness of those around them. It also emphasizes the essential qualities of relational intimacy and care of traditional village life.

The findings of this study also show that the *Ziibalogzii* Philosophy's notion of "communing with others" alludes to a basic link between all living things in both natural and spiritual environments, not simply living humans. *Ziibalogzii* is a philosophical and theological Philosophy that unites the physical and spiritual worlds as a consequence.

Based on a totemic framework, this philosophical and religious system holds that each individual should view themselves as connected to and interconnected with the spiritual realm on the vertical axis and with other nonhuman species and the greater environment on the horizontal axis. As a result, according to the *Ziibalogzii*religio-philosophical theory of human existence, personhood and humanness are inextricably linked to the dynamic (bio) physical and spiritual worlds through a web of interconnectedness and relatedness, with one's actual and current web of communion—for example, current family ties—taking precedence over potential or future links.

The *Ziibalogzii* moral principle reveals the essential relationships that make up the social order. The *Ziibalogzii* moral code recognizes and values the fact that the elements of social reality are determined by one another or are connected by law. One's behaviours will be asocial or antisocial in the short term and self-defeating in the long run to the degree that one's understanding of self-interest does not take into consideration one's responsibilities toward society as a whole. The saying *Nu Mfo Ne Mbugura-a* (I shall reap what I have sowed) or the idea that the aggrieved party will undo the effects of one's efforts could both imply this. In Ogoni-African society, beneficence, justice, and respect for persons are thought to work together to affect moral behaviour. The first ethical tactic, *beneficence*, entails providing benefits while preventing damage, permitting the one-sided transfer of resources to individuals whose dependency prevents reciprocity. *Justice* is the second ethical tactic (Deezia, 2022). This necessitates an equitable distribution of duties and benefits to guarantee that rights and obligations are appropriately balanced and that everyone can take pleasure in the process. *Respect* for persons is the idea of maintaining a person's right to make their own decisions for the good of society.

People are the most important thing to *Ziibalogzii*, a socio-religious Philosophy founded on the value of reciprocity, consideration, harmony, hospitality, respect, and responsiveness as well as the fundamental interdependence of human existence. People serve as a living example of the relationship between the physical universe and the cosmos. Furthermore, it makes no distinction between the individual and the collective. Instead of perceiving a community in individualistic or collectivist terms, *Ziibalogzii* refers to a state of being that ties the community and individuals relationally into an ecological completeness of fullness and sufficiency. Its main goal is to maintain the

community's purity and dignity while encouraging active participation and serving as community members. Respect for human life, a desire to assist others, friendliness, sharing, caring, trust, and unselfishness are qualities that *Ziibalogzii* is known for. *Ziibalogzii* appears to be a set of guidelines for appropriate social behaviour. It is based on universalism, and its bounds are elastic and permeable, making it useful and practical in a variety of contexts.

***Ziibalogzii* Philosophy as a Philosophical Root of Social Work Practices**

Ziibalogzii Philosophy in Social Work is a concept that existed in Africa since time immemorial. It speaks of the idea that everyone is entitled to humanity or dignity, regardless of their sex, age, status, or any other factor. *Ziibalogzii* Philosophy is the basis of one's identity and sense of self and is founded on the moral precepts that are passed down through enculturation and socialization from generation to generation. *Ziibalogzii* Philosophy, according to its ethics, emphasizes the ideals of human solidarity, empathy, and dignity, and holds that one becomes a person via others. This is viewed as a guiding principle for people within a community that governs their behaviour and relationships with each other. It is this conduct that westernized forms of theories devoid of rectitude, sharing and harmony which exist in *Ziibalogzii* Philosophy find themselves unwelcome in the African context.

Therefore, in each given context, *Ziibalogzii* Philosophy serves as a pillar for the rationalization and alignment of professional as well as operational operations. It serves as a benchmark for evaluating the relevance of a programme, intervention, or strategy, and it allows for the verification of deviations from the intended standards. The Ogoni-African concept of acceptable indigenous ideas and actions is echoed in *Ziibalogzii* Philosophy. Indigenization is the process of contextualizing a phenomenon, approach, or ideology to meet the demands of the community. *Ziibalogzii* Philosophy in this instance is a method of indigenizing social work in order to solve the problems encountered by Africans and people of African origin.

The root of social work practice could be traced to the principles of *Ziibalogzii* Philosophy which emphasizes on values such as human solidarity, empathy, and human dignity. *Ziibalogzii* Philosophy holds that a person becomes a person via others. This idea was founded on a network of blood or marital ties that made everyone their

brother's keeper. People lived together in harmony, with a good sense of belonging, solidarity, and affinity. It is a caring communal system that was eager to ensure that no one was deprived of the basic necessities of life. Enshrined in the socialization, education, belief and practice of the people were the Welfarist values of friendliness, kindness, hospitality, charity, honour and respect for the elderly, and the defenseless. As a result, social work was not just practiced as an independent profession by a group of trained professionals as we have today, but was a value system imbibed by all. Every member of the society had duties assigned to them, making each one an informal social worker. As such, it may be said that this approach of practicing social work primarily relied on the kinship structure. The pre-colonial Nigerian society had extended families that included grandparents, parents, uncles, aunts, brothers, nephews, nieces, cousins, and sisters, all of whom lived close to each other, in contrast to the nuclear family system of Western societies, which appears to be slowly encroaching on African society today. Family members had an unmatched commitment to reciprocate with one another. Within the family, members care for, share, interact with, and educate one another.

Based on the principles of *Ziibalogzii Philosophy*, kinship groups met the recreational, religious, legal and economic needs of their members. In addition to helping the elderly, the sick, and the unemployed, they also provided informal education, social planning and development, leisure activities, and housing and food for incoming immigrants. The provision of social services and aid also involves other institutions including age classes, traditional rulers, elders, local religious leaders, and other powerful members of the society. A comprehensive examination of the traditional (pre-colonial) Ogoni social structure indicates the existence of a wide range of familial and kinship institutions and networks, which are best illustrated by the situation among the indigenous Ogoni people of southern Nigeria. They take on the responsibility of helping the underprivileged and needy members of society both materially and spiritually. The *pya-be* (compound or family), *bua-wuga* (relatives), *pyagan* (Kindred or clan), *pya-gbo* (age groups), *pyabuen* (community), etc. are a few examples of these institutional systems.

In addition to families, communities also have programmes to assist the elderly if the family is unable to do so. In Ogoni, it was discovered that community support is given by members of the community, depending on their capacity, either working

together to assist the family with a specific activity, like building a home, or providing direct contributions, like food. Support is offered through programmes like age group or women's groups, among others. The communities have a long history with these models. For instance, as echoed by a study informant, Ogoni community members, who are primarily farmers, pastoralists, and fishers, honoured the old in the following ways:

The valuable portions of the butchered goat, such as the fillet and abdomen (*korkoi*), were typically saved for the older people in the community, and some of the fishermen were also saving some fish for elderly care. This was typical. Older folks felt respected and reassured that the community members were properly caring for them (Nwideede25/08/2022,Bori, 85 years).

These kinds of arrangements make sure that no elder is ever left without assistance. However, participants observed that this valuable indigenous form of support is in decline due to selfishness, moral decay, and feelings that the government and other institutions can help. Community members no longer feel obliged to provide for the elderly, nor are there strong mechanisms to ensure that this form of support is revitalized and maintained. It was clear from this study that elderly individuals lacked proper care and support from their families and communities, forcing them to continue working until they pass away.

The findings also imply that there are both traditional and cutting-edge methods of taking care of orphans, which largely depend on the age of the child. In the past, taking care of children was seen as a shared obligation. As a result, shaping children's behaviour was a shared community obligation that parents accepted. Indigenous cultures used initiation rituals and storytelling to impart knowledge to young people. Due to the adoption of the "modern lifestyle," some parents no longer want their kids to be punished by other members of the neighbourhood when they misbehave, hence this trend is now changing. Some kids have become deviants and involved in crime because they do not fear the community. Modernization and the creation of official institutions of child care, such daycare centres, are two significant changes in care. As a result, rather than playing their customary duties, families relinquish the responsibility of providing care to institutions.

The results also demonstrated that communities have policies for caring for orphans, which generally rely on the child's age. These arrangements have their roots in

customary norms and ways of doing things. For instance, the following observations are consistent with experience from the Luawii-Ogoni community:

When parents pass away and leave children under the age of 18 without suitable care, family members choose someone else to look after the orphans. If an orphan needs breast milk, one family member who is of childbearing age is designated and given a specific diet along with heated milk to encourage the mammary glands to produce enough milk. The strategy makes sure that infants continue to receive breast milk and reside with their family. (Barikui 10/10/2022, Luawii. 55 years)

This approach was also used to help children who were orphaned and those who lost their parents while they were very young due to causes other than death, such as illness or incarceration. As shown in the following passage, when a kid reached the age of 18, he or she would then take up the duty of caring for his or her siblings under the supervision of the community:

If one of the orphaned children had reached the age of 18 or older at the time of the parents' passing, he would be permitted to care for the other siblings and given a supervisor who would lead, direct, advise, counsel, listen, and assist them financially and emotionally. The selected supervisor had to be of a reasonable level of wisdom and moral character in the eyes of his or her society (Barikui 10/10/2022, Luawii. 55 years).

Thus the common expression *aba nee naa bee kpoa-nwi* (it takes a village to raise a child). These arrangements do help children maintain family and community ties. However, as a result of modernization, urbanization, and globalization, they are going through significant changes. At this point, the question that comes to mind is, does the parenting village still exist?

The findings also supported the idea that societies had long maintained widow care systems and arrangements that changed over time and were based on cultural norms. A general and historical practice learnt from Ogoni is that traditionally, widows were treated as 'a property for inheritance' (Nanu-Nwanee 15/12/2022, Bori. 60 years). As a result, after the husband (the family's primary provider) passed away, the other family members had to select an inheritor. The choice of the inheritor was based on a number of criteria, including: being of good behaviour and repute; having the financial

means to care for the widow and his own family; being married or having his own family. Further evidence points to situations where the inheritor was permitted to engage in sexual activity with the widow, such as in the Luawii-Ogonicommunity, although the practice is now discouraged to lower the risk of HIV transmission. Due to the rising number of widows and orphaned children, this strategy is currently encountering difficulties. Families' capacity is also consistently being exceeded. As a result, widows in metropolitan areas are given entrepreneurship and income-generating skills training so they can start their own income-generating businesses that will enable them to support their families. As such, organizations like *Waa-ua-dam* created self-help groups for women and other people who care for HIV/AIDS orphans in order to assist them make money.

For the Ogoni indigenous people, *Ziibalogzii Philosophy* has been very helpful in delivering justice and resolving conflicts. It was discovered that the Ogoni people address difficulties and successes when they return home at the end of the year, including resolving any possible conflicts in their families and communities. On such circumstances, people who misbehaved are subject to penalty and consequences. Family and community gatherings often address a variety of concerns, including but not restricted to matrimonial proceedings, maintenance claims, theft, and abuse. The penalties may include paying fines in the form of goats, bulls, sheep, or in other ways that the family or community may see appropriate.

Additionally, the indigenous Ogoni people think that those who utter lies to settle disagreements are more likely to be cursed or would instantly die. This idea is related to belief in the magical powers of the leaves of a plant known as *kionor*. So, people are not allowed and actually fear to give false explanations because they know they would mysteriously die. Thus, the *kionor* leaf is perceived as a sacred object in Ogoni and every member of the community has to respect its magical powers. In this regard, *Ziibalogzii Philosophy* was employed to attain social justice and to settle disputes among family and community members. One of the informants said:

There are community leaders called *Mene-bue*. They set boundaries between farmers and maintain good farming practices in order to conserve the environment. So, we sometimes consult them in their areas as local leaders when holding

meetings for matrimonial conflicts. In some other families, the tree leaves known as *kionor* have been used to settle disputes between family and community members. Sometimes we use *kionor* for solving matrimonial and affiliation cases (Nornubari, 05/12 2022,Ogoni. 85 years).

The research also showed that Ogoni communities have employed the *Ziibalogzii* ideology to overcome challenges, particularly famine. Members of the Luawii-Ogoni community produced their own food and stored it in traditional granaries. In this way, the populations' access to food was guaranteed, even during emergencies like famine, fire outbreaks, and floods. Community members, for instance, took involved in helping catastrophe victims construct homes. In these situations, women typically gathered grass while the males typically went in search of poles in the forest, though some also stayed at home and made mud bricks.

Modern Social Work Practices and its Challenges in the Contemporary Nigeria

Modern social work in Nigeria has its roots in the activities of Christian missionaries who arrived Nigeria in the 15th and 19th centuries respectively (Onu, 2018:197; Eche, 2018:10) to spread their Christian religion. The fundamental presumption that Christian missionaries brought to social work practice was founded on Christ's teachings on compassion, volunteerism, love, joy, peace, patience, and kindness. They started schools where knowledge of the bible, singing hymns, reciting sectarian catechisms, and chanting psalms were the norm. Some of the Ogoni communities where mission schools were established from 1900 include Bane (Roman Catholic)-1914, Luubara (Anglican)-1926, Kono (Methodist)-1930, Okwale (Methodist)-1933, Bon-ko (Methodist)-1934, Uegwere/KonoBoue (CAC)-1935, Buan (Anglican)-1938, Baen Town (Methodist)-1939, Wiiyaakara (Methodist)-1940, Boue (Anglican)-1940, Taabaa (Methodist)-1942, Bane (Roman Catholic)-1943, Gwara (Roman Catholic)1945/50, Luawii (Methodist)-1953, KonoBoue (Lutheran)-1949, Kaani Methodist school-1936 etc. Some of these schools today are either dilapidated, or have been taken over by the Rivers State Government (Nwibakpo-Golden, 07/02/2023. Bori, 45 years)

Additionally, they set up medical facilities, supplied medications, taught basic nursing techniques and midwifery, as well as maternal and child welfare programmes. In exchange for the educated converts being hired to increase missionary activity, these social services were largely intended to convert more people to Christianity.

However, during World Wars I and II, which brought with them more complicated societal issues that needed professional social work intervention, social work in Nigeria developed into a more professional practice. Young people who mimicked the returnees' dress code and other deviant behaviours, such as smoking, drug and alcohol abuse, prostitution, etc., were negatively influenced by the way of life of the returning troops from both World Wars. As they launched numerous programmes and activities geared at assisting these delinquents who were being inspired by the way of life of the returnee soldiers, the Salvation Army and the Green Triangle organization were at the forefront of western social work in Nigeria. The Green Triangle built Boys' and Girls' Clubs where delinquent individuals' talents and potentials were handled, whereas the Salvation Army established industrial schools where delinquent children were transferred for training and readjustment (Atolagbe, 1989; Mbah, Ebue&Ugwu, 2017:15). Along with this, the Roman Catholics in Badagry operated reformatories.

After gaining its independence, Nigeria's new government made an effort to continue the colonial administration's social welfare legacy. The Social Security Act of 1961 for those over 55 and the Invalidity and Survivors' Grant for those who suffered workplace injuries were among the introductions. The beneficiaries of the grants were invariably the worker's surviving family members (Ekpe & Mamah, 1997:75). Other social development ideas that were implemented following independence included the aforementioned services. These social care and protective solutions in Nigeria did share the trait of becoming moribund, though.

Ekpe and Mamah (1997:75) suggested that one reason these social development ideas went out of style was due to the social welfare services' discrepancies over who should oversee them, how they should be executed, and how they were to be set up. For instance, Decree 12 of 1974 established social welfare services as a crucial component of the Social Development Directorate, whereas the Social Welfare Department finally launched in 1989 under a different ministry, the Federal Ministry of Culture and Social

Welfare (Ogbonna, 2017:15). Ogbonna claims that the Social Welfare Department was tasked with:

Coordination of intergovernmental and interstate social welfare activities, conduct research and surveys in various aspects of social welfare, and training of professional social workers, and the organization and coordination of welfare agencies' training, execution of international casework, promotion of legislation on issues affecting social welfare in Nigeria, conduct research on international matters affecting social welfare, and leading interactions with social welfare organizations at national and international levels (Ogbonna, 2017:20).

In addition to these reported contradictions, the Nigerian political environment since 1960 made matters more difficult (swinging from military to civilian regimes, as well as coups and counter-coups). All of these delayed social development projects even more (Okoye, 2014b:75). Political contradictions in particular accentuated poverty, which fueled continual rural-urban migration. As a result of those in political positions being more concerned with maintaining their positions of power than the welfare of the populace, healthcare and social amenities received little attention. Members of society decided to revert to the old welfare systems as a result in order to live. Even in cities, it was recreated. Social groups multiplied, and they contributed to helping one another in times of need and adversity (Okoye, 2014b:76). This became one issue that persisted in devaluing the social work profession in Nigeria.

The National Directorate of Employment (NDE), community banks, directorate of food and rural roads infrastructure, better life for rural women, National Poverty Alleviation Programme (NAPEP), among other enormous welfare initiatives, are just a few of the ways that Nigeria's successive governments have attempted to address rural and urban issues (Agbola, 2002:55). However, unemployment and poverty are still on the rise. Could there be a problem with our social development programmes, how they are carried out, or who carries them out?

In contrast to affluent nations, the government in Nigeria is the sole provider of social welfare services, which include the majority of social work services. They consequently made the decision to use the system as they saw fit, frequently to their

advantage. In fact, social welfare initiatives, including fundamental social services, are utilized by governments in Nigeria to score political points and are seldom ever given consideration as human rights. Because of this, the social assistance system is inoperable and appears to be the government's lower priority (Ogbonna, 2017:16; Mbah, Ebue & Ugwu, 2017:15). Due to these problems, age groups, local unions, philanthropists, and community-based organizations and religious organizations became the organizations to rely on for social care and safety. As a result, these channels continued to provide social protection and care while the government clung to the notion of using these services for political purposes.

Another issue involves confrontations between social workers in Nigeria and other professionals who assert that they perform the same tasks as social workers. This is largely due to illiteracy and a lack of legalized professionalization (Okoye, 2014a:22). The majority of the three tiers of government's ministries, agencies, and parastatals, which trained and qualified social workers are expected to fill, are run by non-practitioners. However, due to the fact that social workers are now working in the majority of federal healthcare facilities, this is rapidly changing. It is envisioned that professionalization will expand the positive change in federally funded healthcare institutions to other industries and areas of social work practice (Ogbonna, 2017:16).

Foster care, child abuse and neglect, poverty, politics and governance, migration, unemployment and underemployment, elderly care, HIV/AIDS, the rehabilitation of physically disabled people, and community development are just a few of the issues that continue to weigh on the population's ability to cope. Human survival in Nigeria is currently threatened by a climate of insecurity brought on by kidnapping in the South-East, militancy in the South-South, ethno-religious violence, terrorism, natural and man-made calamities. Empirical data reveals a consistent decline in Nigeria's government's ability to address its citizens' security and welfare issues (Okoye, 2014b:77; Abegunde & Akinyemi, 2014:13). Additionally, it appears counterproductive for public welfare that fewer foreign donors, bankers, and policymakers are considering domestic conditions before providing aid to the Nigerian government (Abegunde & Akinyemi, 2014:58; Mbah, Ebue & Ugwu, 2017:18). Nepotism and tribal emotions significantly worsen the social development of the nation and have an impact on how resources and opportunities are divided, including how policies will be advantageous to different

geographic blocs. The success of the social work profession in Nigeria would be advanced by developing ways to handle some of these complicated problems, which have seriously slowed down the growth and development pace of the field in Nigeria.

Concluding Remarks

Every society deals with social issues to differing degrees. Without a doubt, social work is a structured response to the many social issues that people face. This paper has shown how social work evolved from its *Ziibalogzii* philosophical foundation, which emphasizes values of human solidarity, empathy, and dignity, and holds that a person becomes a person through others; where the extended family/kinship system was the main institution of social intervention; to the colonial era, where church missionary organizations were at the fore; and finally to modern times, where social welfare agencies of government are in place. It demonstrates how Nigeria is faced with a new set of social issues as it transitions from a rural-based social setting to a more complex urbanized social setting. This new set of issues calls for a more scientific social work approach based on the principles of *Ziibalogzii* Philosophy. The adoption of *Ziibalogzii* Philosophy will address social development in Africa, and Nigeria in particular, in a novel way. Respect for spirituality, collectivism, consultation, and interconnection shall be upheld and demonstrated in a variety of areas of influence, including religion, professional field and traditionalism. With *Ziibalogzii* Philosophy Social Work Practice, professionals will respect individualization, self-determination, social justice, confidentiality and cultural diversity.

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