
Social Welfare, National Reconstruction and Social Development

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This article is a report on the regional consultative conference convened by Concerned Social Workers and the School of Social Work, University of Witwatersrand, 21-22 June 1991

Introduction

The regional consultative conference was part of a research programme with two main purposes; firstly, to document the nature and scope of grassroots social services programmes affiliated to or in alliance with the United Democratic Front and the Congress of South African Trade Unions between 1985 and 1990, and secondly, to evolve principles, guidelines and recommendations for welfare policy in a non-racial and democratic South Africa. The study found that an alternative, authentic model of social service delivery had begun to emerge in South Africa in response to rapid social change. To facilitate conference proceedings a discussion document (Patel 1991) outlining this alternative perspective on social welfare was circulated to all delegates before the conference.

Conference Aims

The regional consultative conference was convened with the aim of stimulating further debate over social welfare policy. An important subject of discussion was the need for a major change from a racially discriminatory, piece-meal and charity

model of social welfare provision to one which recognises the role of social welfare in national reconstruction and social development. Through workshops, the conference aimed at estimating the willingness of the welfare sector to make such a change and also aimed at identifying obstacles which could impede a change in focus. The conference had to decide on practical steps to be taken by the welfare sector in an attempt to implement appropriate policies and programmes.

Delegates included representatives from academic institutions, national and regional welfare organisations, religious and political organisations, rural development projects, and state and provincial departments. Participation by such a wide range of people helped to ensure vibrant debate.

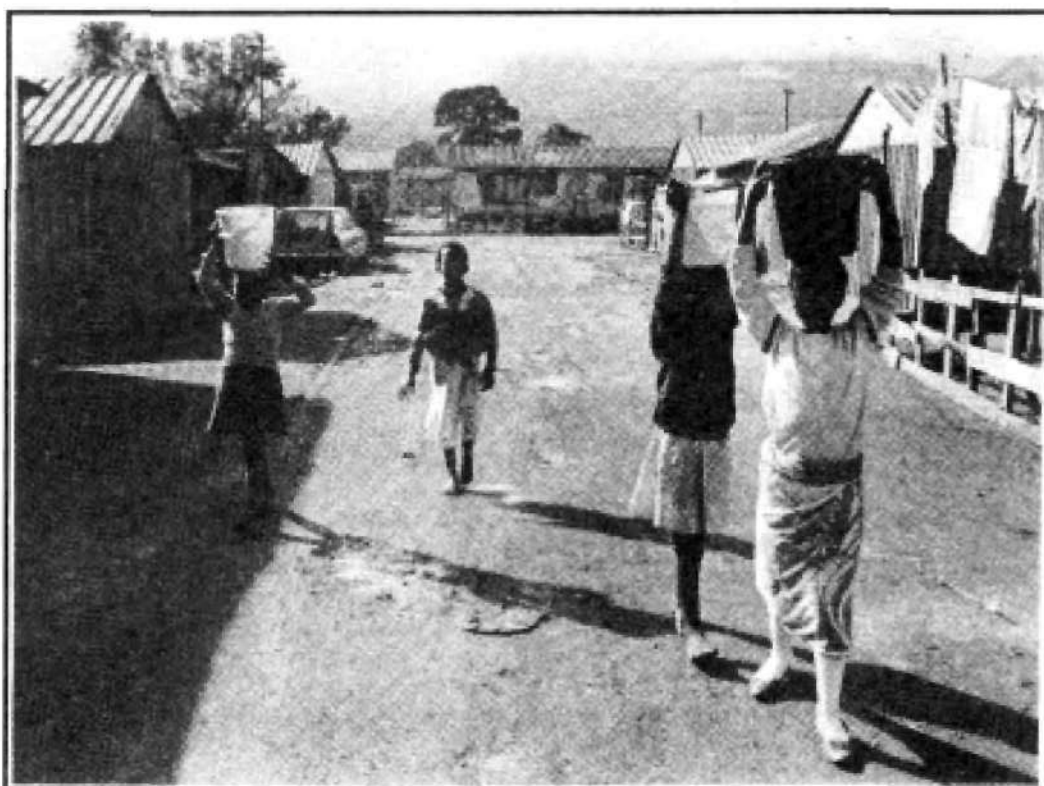
The First Plenary Session

The keynote address was delivered by Ms Terezinha da Silva, national director of social welfare (Ministry of Health) in Mozambique. Ms da Silva's address was provocative and relevant. In describing social, political and economic conditions in Mozambique, she illustrated links between social welfare policy formulation and the political economy. She raised various issues relevant to the development of social welfare policy in South Africa. These issues include the influence which foreign debt and foreign aid have on the type of social service programmes initiated and on social welfare policy formulation. She noted the severe constraints on the development of alternative social welfare policies and programmes caused by the lack of personnel, and technical and financial resources. She also mentioned the limitations placed on the development of appropriate social welfare policies and social services through social service linkages to a department of health, especially during times of acute social need.

Non-government organisations, she said, can assist in the development of social services, but the state cannot be allowed to neglect its responsibilities in social service provision.

The Workshops

Workshops were held on the second day of the conference. Morning sessions covered a range of issues and aimed to provide a forum in which different views were shared. The afternoon workshops concerned the restructuring process in social welfare with the aim of helping delegates identify practical steps towards dismantling apartheid welfare and building a unified welfare system.



The state cannot be allowed to neglect its responsibilities in social service provision. *Photo: Medico Health Project*

The workshop on the nature and philosophy of social welfare addressed four key issues, including:

a) a conception of social welfare

There was agreement that any new conception of social welfare should include equality of opportunity and affordability, recognising and accounting for the uniqueness of individual needs, and emphasis on growth and development of all. The relationship between social welfare and social development should be clarified and acknowledgement should be given to social welfare as a mechanism of redistribution and an instrument for the promotion of national reconstruction.

b) aims and objectives of social welfare policies and programmes

Aims and objectives agreed on were the need for improvement in material conditions, maximum development of human potential and the promotion of individual and collective self-reliance. Other objectives identified were the need to assist individuals and groups to achieve optimal development, building grass-roots democracy and addressing the material and mental health needs of people. Facilitating favourable economic conditions was also necessary if people's needs were to be met.

c) values underpinning social welfare policies and programmes

Participants gave various concepts such as social justice, egalitarianism, accounta-

bility, democratic participation, self-reliance, freedom, honesty, inter-dependence, tolerance and responsibility. It was acknowledged that definitions of these values are open to wide interpretation.

d) principles informing social welfare policies and programmes

Participants agreed that principles should include the promotion of national unity and social equity, participation and appropriateness. Participants suggested that specific principles addressing the need for and the role of affirmative action, and concepts of affordability, accessibility and appropriateness should be made. It was accepted that the initiative and direction of programmes and policies should originate at grassroots level, but programmes should also have an appropriate regional and national aspect.

The Role of the Government in Promoting Social Development

Participants agreed that in order to underline the responsibilities of those in power, the term "government" should be used rather than "state". Two central conclusions arose from the deliberations of this workshop; firstly, that the government should take responsibility for meeting people's basic needs, and secondly, the non-governmental welfare sector must work in partnership with the government in developmental welfare. It was acknowledged that the extent to which the government would be able to implement its responsibility, and the way it did so would rely on the prevailing political ideas, the availability of resources and on other key players involved.

A debate occurred over the scope of the welfare sector. Most participants favoured the welfare sector encompassing health, education, housing, etc, although a number of questions were raised regarding the placing of welfare within the structure of government. Some of these questions include the extent to which a single ministry encompassing broad social development policy might become an over burdened and cumbersome bureaucracy, and the extent to which welfare work might become subordinate to the health profession within such a ministry. Concern was expressed, however, that if welfare were placed separately at the administrative level, it might become isolated from aspects of government with which it has to interact.

It was resolved that effective collaboration between government and the non-government welfare sector would be achieved by a national welfare plan, for

mulated in consultation with non-governmental groups, and by joint government-community planning and co-ordination of structures at the local, regional and national level.

Development of Personnel

This workshop produced a number of objectives aimed at enhancing the training of professional and voluntary workers. These include involving consumers at all stages of service provision for maximum participation of communities, and ensuring that professionals are adequately equipped for community development work and that the benefits of inter-disciplinary team work are increased. Further objectives included the need to encourage self-awareness among workers in the field of social welfare to enable work across class and cultural barriers. The workshop also saw the need for a forum to examine the nature of professionalism in social work and the attitudes of social workers towards different categories of volunteers.

Accreditation procedures and career opportunities for workers at different levels of the welfare structure and the encouragement of the development of appropriate training were also discussed. Finding a systematic paradigm for training, incorporating different types of workers in the field of welfare was given as a priority, and agreement was reached on the formation of a Council of Social Workers to represent all social workers. This council would be open to a variety of criteria for training and practice.

Social Security and Redistribution

This workshop identified the present bureaucratic, discriminatory and inefficient structure of welfare as a primary obstacle to the just distribution of resources. It was argued that an over-arching social welfare policy and a unitary department of welfare was needed to redistribute resources effectively. It was noted that the creation of a single state department would assist in overcoming present disparities in benefits. Another primary concern was the need to create the means by which grassroots organisations would be able to participate in policy formulation so that relevant information is taken into account in the formulation of social security policies.

This workshop expressed concern over unemployment, suggesting that the



Children and the unemployed were identified as priority target groups for state attention. *Photo: Medico Health Project*

state should pay greater attention to job creation schemes. The workshop identified children and the unemployed as priority target groups, and the development of a compulsory pension scheme as an objective of priority.

Restructuring Social Welfare

The afternoon workshops all focussed on restructuring social welfare services and debated the question of organisations already involved in restructuring their services, and what was required of them in order to advance the restructuring of social services.

Many of the organisations represented, it seems, had already begun addressing the issue of racial discrimination, but most agreed that restructuring social welfare involves more than redressing racial segregation. It was found that few organisations were introducing the principles of developmental social work. However, some organisations were attempting to allow for grassroots decision making, while others had begun to review present methods of service delivery and were attempting to identify more relevant means of providing their services.

All workshops noted national unity, affirmative action, consumer participation, non-racialism, accessibility and redistribution of resources as among the objectives of a restructuring process. Obstacles to the attainment of these objective were identified, such as the slow pace of the change process, the absence of indigenous models of service delivery and of a national awareness of welfare

rights, fear of change and the fact that most white social workers (two thirds of South Africa's social workers) do not speak an African language.

The workshops on restructuring noted a number of areas for immediate attention and action, including the continued deracialisation of welfare organisations and the setting up of evaluation procedures to monitor the removal of discrimination. The workshops also found that specific time frames for the removal of discriminatory practices were necessary and the restructuring of apartheid welfare should address all levels of service provision, that is, local, regional and national.

Finally, the workshops on restructuring social welfare identified a number of areas for immediate attention and action. These include; the continued deracialisation of welfare organisation and addressing the removal of all forms of discrimination with equal vigour, and establishing evaluation procedures and specific time frames to monitor the removal of discrimination. More attention should be given to the use of advocacy and social action strategies, through the formation of pressure groups to ensure the successful demise of apartheid welfare.

Conclusion

The final plenary session was a panel discussion which highlighted the themes and issues raised during the workshops. It was clear that the conference had not only covered considerable ground but that it had succeeded in facilitating debate among a wide range of interest groups within the field of welfare. While differences of opinion had certainly arisen much was held in common. It is hoped that the welfare sector will pursue the initiative set by this regional consultative conference in order to ensure the further development of the welfare policy debate.

References:

Patel, L. 1991, "Principles, Guidelines and Recommendations for Developmental Social Welfare Policies and Programmes in a Democratic South Africa". Concerned Social Workers/ School of Social Work, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

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