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Social Development in a Society in Transition

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Abstract: *Voluntary organizations play a vital role in complementing governmental efforts in meeting human needs and in strengthening democracy. This case study documents South Africa's collaborative approach to social development partnerships in a changing national and global context. It also outlines the tensions and challenges facing the state and the voluntary sector in a plural democratic institutional context.*

The South African welfare policy makers have drawn on the lessons of both First World and Third World countries in restructuring the welfare system toward a social development perspective. The democratically elected government in 1997 adopted a national policy – White Paper for Social Welfare (Department of Welfare and Population Development, 1997). Key policy principles include a focus on social rights and equity to address past disparities in the allocation and distribution of resources and partnerships between the public sector and civil society to promote individual, family and community empowerment. Welfare programs are no longer considered to be separate from economic development, but are integral to political stability, economic and social well being in a society in transition and in a changing global context.

A unique feature in the redesign of the welfare system has been the consolidation of the partnership between the public and voluntary sectors in meeting needs through a community-based approach. This approach to co-operation is similar to the 'collaborative partnership model' of Gidron, et al. (1992), which involves action by both parties, but where services are substantially funded by the government and delivered within overall national policy guidelines. Organizations, however, still retain discretion in the design, organization and management of the delivery of services. Given the limited institutional capacity of the new democratic government to deliver the services itself, collaboration with the voluntary sector is imperative if the government is to achieve its ambitious social development outcomes. Service agencies are becoming more integrated, accessible, equitable, less discriminatory, more relevant and responsive in their strategies to meet local needs. However, there is the danger that South African voluntary organizations may compromise their autonomy and independence as they continue their struggle for survival in a public management milieu that is driven by increasing efficiency and accountability. As voluntary organizations become delivery agents for the government, concerns about goal displacement, co-optation and increasing bureaucratization are mounting. In this respect South African voluntary organizations may face similar problems to organizations in other parts of the world when they become 'deliberate instruments of public policy' (Lynn Jr., 2002:58; Patel, 1998; Kramer, 1990).

A combination of factors has hampered the pace of transformation of social services at a time when the social costs of the transition are growing as seen in rising unemployment, the escalation of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and increasing domestic violence. Resource constraints coupled with the complexity of the change process and inadequate institutional capacity are some factors hampering the change process. The huge backlog of services for the poor and vulnerable as a result of the country's apartheid past present significant delivery challenges for the government and in the management of popular expectations from civil society groups, notably the trade union movement and AIDS advocacy groups.

This paper documents the South African experience of collaborative partnerships between the state and the voluntary sector in the delivery of developmental social welfare services. A brief overview of the South African context and the new institutional perspective to social development policy is outlined, which involves the mobilization of diverse institutions such as the market, the community, and the state in promoting human well-being (Midgley, 1995). The new democratic government has led the transformation of the welfare system through the

adoption of enabling policy and legislation and the development and implementation of institutional frameworks to support the transformation of social services.

Whilst state-voluntary sector partnerships have been significant in transforming the nature and scope of service delivery, dilemmas remain about the sustainability of this approach to social development in a transition environment (Van der Berg, 1998). Informal community-based organizations that are localized, people-driven and focused on the needs of the disadvantaged and populations at risk are extensive, and are currently outside the public financing system even though they qualify for funding. There are sound reasons why these organizations should be funded because of their potential to innovate, respond rapidly to local needs, deliver appropriate services, and reach the poor and disadvantaged more effectively. Fowler (1988) argues that these characteristics provide non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations with a comparative advantage in promoting development at local level. However, should these organizations become partners with the government, they face the risk of compromising their comparative advantage, as they become more bureaucratized and driven by government agendas rather than that of local communities. This is a tension that needs to be addressed if informal voluntary organizations are to be engaged as potential partners and assume an enlarged role in service delivery.

Overview of South African Context

Both colonialism and apartheid shaped the evolution of the nature, form and content of social welfare policy in South Africa. Successive colonial rulers such as the Dutch and the British nurtured an exclusive group consciousness, which manifested itself in racial and social supremacy. This in turn found expression in the Afrikaner nationalist ideology of apartheid, which was adopted as the government policy in 1948. The welfare system of the apartheid era provided extensive social services for whites and was modeled on welfare state policies, which developed in commonwealth countries while policy for blacks was residual or non-existent (Patel, 1992).

A significant strength in South Africa is the tradition of partnership between the government and the voluntary welfare sector (McKendrick, 1990). The expansion of state welfare for a white minority was accompanied by the growth of voluntary organizations to address the 'poor white problem' in the first half of the twentieth century. Philanthropic and religious organizations expanded throughout the apartheid era and collaborated closely with the government in the delivery of welfare services for a small welfare elite. Many organizations effectively became public service contractors although they retained a fair degree of discretion in the design and management of programs. Most voluntary welfare organizations also engaged in substantial fundraising and faith-based organizations contributed to welfare services mainly for whites. Apartheid means the total separation of races and the institutionalization of differential social welfare benefits and services for different race groups. As apartheid in social welfare and separate development for the different race groups was implemented for white, African, Coloured and Indian population groups after the rise of Afrikaner nationalism, some services were delivered through voluntary organizations on a differential and unequal basis.

A parallel voluntary sector took root through the colonial and apartheid period that was made up of organizations that were mainly localized, less formal and in opposition to the apartheid system of welfare. These formations were ideologically distinct from the mainstream and were established because of the failure of the existing welfare system to address the needs of the majority of the population (Patel, 1992). Oppositional organizations were supported by communities themselves, progressive faith-based organizations, and foreign donors.

The anti-apartheid organizations developed alternative models that later shaped national public policy in a democratic society. Their work focused on a people-centered developmental approach to social welfare, and they advocated redistributive social policies, a mixed economy of social welfare, equitable partnerships between the state and the voluntary sector, and a leading, proactive role for the state as a facilitator of development (Department of Welfare and Population Development, 1997; Patel, 1992).

Opposition movements experimented with social and community-based development, support and care strategies, advocacy, and the building of human capacities through education and economic empowerment interventions. They were critical of the remedial, inappropriate, ineffective, low impact and expensive social programs, which were not focused on the structural causes of the problems and social conditions facing communities. Their critique resonated with Midgley's work on the uncritical application of North American and European models of social welfare in the Third World (Midgley, 1981).

A powerful new vision emerged and played a vital role in shaping South Africa's developmental approach to social welfare. A two-year consultative process with governmental and non-governmental stakeholders resulted in a new national consensus and the adoption of a new welfare policy by the democratic government - *White Paper for Social Welfare* (Department of Welfare and Population Development, 1997).

Research on welfare policy options for post apartheid South Africa reviewed the international perspectives to social policy including the strengths and weaknesses of welfare state approaches and new global trends. Development theory promoting egalitarian solutions provided a foundation for the policy including an emerging body of knowledge on social development (Patel, 1992; Midgley, 1995; United Nations, 1995; United Nations, 1988). South African policy makers took account of welfare policy shifts internationally away from Keynesian social democratic policy options toward a neo-liberal paradigm. The notion that the role of the state and welfare expenditures should be limited because generous welfare provisions fostered dependency and consumed scarce resources, by diverting funds away productive investments, was rejected in favor of harmonization of social and economic development. Positive strands of the old welfare system and international trends were integrated with country specific conditions.

Public-Voluntary Partnerships in Social Development

In 1999, the size of the voluntary sector was estimated to be 98,920, almost double the number estimated in the early 1990s (Swilling and Russell, 2002; Dangor, 1997; Development Resources Centre, 1993). The operating budget of the sector was estimated to be R9.3 billion representing 1.2 percent of gross domestic product in 1998 and provided employment equivalent to 645,316

full-time employees. Volunteerism is also significant with an estimated 1.5 million volunteers actively involved in culture, recreation, advocacy, politics, faith-based initiatives, and the social services amounting to volunteer labor worth R5.1 billion (Swilling and Russell, 2002).

Close to a quarter of the non-profit organizations focused specifically on social services and include welfare organizations, faith-based organizations, community-based organizations and informal family and community networks (Swilling and Russell, 2002). These organizations have expertise, infrastructure and other resources that contribute significantly to reconstruction and development and could complement public provision.

In order to integrate the progressive not-for profit organizations into the welfare system, policy and enabling legislation was developed to promote an inclusive partnership. The Welfare Laws Amendment Act No. 106 of 1996 authorized financial awards to non-profit organizations rendering developmental social welfare services and to broaden the activities to be funded.

The Non-profit Organizations Act No. 71 of 1997 created an administrative and regulatory framework within which relations between the state and civil society could be funded and managed. The legislation provides for voluntary registration of a trust, a company or association not for gain established for a public purpose, and where the income and property cannot be distributed to its members or office-bearers except as reasonable compensation for services rendered. Organizations are required to meet minimum standards of accountability. It was envisaged that voluntary registration could serve as an incentive to donors and the public to support the non-profit sector. After extensive lobbying by the non-profit sector, the government adopted the Taxation Amendment Act of 2000 and created a more favorable tax regime to support non-profits and committed itself to support the non-profit sector. These governmental initiatives demonstrate an 'activist-administrative' style of governance, which could undoubtedly advance state-voluntary sector relations (Midgley, 1995).

New finance policy, integrated program financing and service agreements are being concluded to align social development programs with the new policy directions, service delivery priorities and to enhance program efficiency, effectiveness and accountability. Representative and legitimate advisory structures were also instituted to facilitate participation in policy formulation and monitoring. In 1995, approximately 2,500 organizations were directly involved in contractual relations with the government to deliver social welfare services (Department of Welfare and Population Development, 1997). These organizations are generally large social service agencies, have developed infrastructure and employ professional staff. Figures are not available of the current number of organizations supported by the government.

The new policy also recognized partnerships with less formalized and community-based organizations. Informal community-based organizations are considered to have a comparative advantage over formal welfare organizations in that they are more accessible at a local level when targeting the poor (Patel, 1998). At least 53 percent of the non-profit organizations referred to in the study above were localized, less formalized and community-based (Swilling and Russell, 2002). These organizations are widely believed to play an important role in poverty alleviation, promote indigenous support networks such as savings schemes, income generation, and provide HIV/AIDS care and support, and are widespread across the African continent

(Swilling and Russell, Motala and Husy, 2001; 2002; Patel et al., 1995; Fowler, 1995). Further research is needed to assess the nature and dynamic workings of these formations and to explore collaborative partnership models that would build on their strengths and not compromise their uniqueness.

Institutional Arrangements

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act No. l08 of 1996, locates responsibility for social welfare - now renamed social development - in the national and provincial spheres of government. Social welfare is not a function of the local government, but services such as childcare and primary health care are local authority responsibilities. Provincial governments may, however, delegate certain responsibilities to local authorities – to date only one province has done this through the adoption of enabling legislation.

Inter-sectoral collaboration takes place between other government departments who are partners in promoting development such as the Departments of Health, Justice, Safety and Security, Education, Labor, Public Works, Housing, and Sport and Recreation. These Departments also fund community-based voluntary organizations but to a lesser extent than the Department of Social Development. Overcoming duplication and fragmentation both within and between government departments remains a challenge.

Government-nonprofit relations have been classified into different models based on two distinguishing activities: financing and the authorizing of services on the one hand and the actual delivery of services on the other. Gidron, et al (1990) identified four types of government-nonprofit models to describe the complex relations between the parties. The Government-Dominant Model refers to government financing and direct provision of services whilst the Third Sector-Dominant Model is characterized by voluntary financing and delivery of services. A hybrid of the two types is referred to as a Dual or parallel-track model where non-profits could either supplement or complement public provision.

The South African collaborative partnership model has features of state dominance in financing and Third Sector dominance in relation to delivery of services. A hybrid type of relationship also exists in relation to the delivery of specific types of services. An analysis of government expenditure over the past three years indicates that the government allocates approximately 62 percent of its budget for welfare services to voluntary organizations involved in the welfare field. The remaining 38 percent of the welfare services budget is allocated to services that are publicly funded and delivered. In some provinces, this division between public and voluntary financial support outlined above is less favorable to the voluntary sector especially in the more rural provinces with limited voluntary organizational capacity. The welfare services budget is made up of two components: social assistance being allocated 90 percent, and social welfare services receiving 10 percent of the total budget (Department of Welfare and Population Development, 1997). In view of the increases in social assistance and the introduction of new programs, welfare services' funding has in fact declined in many provinces. This has been detrimental to the delivery of services

Partnerships in Promoting Community-based Services

The transformation of the welfare system toward a social development perspective involved the delivery of quality, non-discriminatory, accessible and appropriate social services to promote individual, family and community well being and empowerment.

Voluntary organizations funded by the government are required to realign their programs with the government's new priorities through the delivery of services that are family centered, community-based, and generalist in nature. The capacity of social workers was to be expanded through the employment of other categories of personnel such as auxiliary social workers, development workers, child and youth care workers, and volunteers. This is necessary because of the lack of human resource capacity especially in rural areas.

The dominance of casework as a method of social work and the over-reliance on rehabilitative and protective services was challenged as inappropriate. The new policy advocated a balance between rehabilitative and protective services on the one hand, and preventive and developmental programs on the other (Gray, 1998; Patel, 1992). Developmental service delivery functions were redefined to include, among others, the increased use of peer and lay counseling services, group and community development strategies, community education, and rehabilitation. Other service functions included community advice and information services, the strengthening of community networks and support systems, services and support at household level promoting sustainable livelihoods, and linking social assistance and development strategies. Capacity building and the provision of employment support through specially designed public works and micro-development were also promoted. Program priorities were set and included service rendering to women, children, youth and families, the elderly, people with disabilities and special needs such as mental health, substance abuse, crime prevention programs through the development of restorative justice and services to people with chronic illnesses and HIV/AIDS.

Achievements and Challenges

One of South Africa's most significant achievements has been the recognition and consolidation of the partnership approach to the delivery of services, and social programs to address poverty and vulnerability and enhance social integration. Other achievements are in the policy and legislative domains including the development of strategic planning frameworks to guide program implementation.

Voluntary organizations contribute in excess of a billion rand to the social development sector through fundraising from corporate donors, contributions from religious organizations, and development sponsors. Forty-five to 60 percent of the budgets of voluntary organizations come from the government (Department of Welfare and Population Development, 1997). Corporate and foreign donor funding declined in the earlier years of the transition as government-to-government bilateral and multi-lateral aid became more popular. However, new initiatives to build partnerships between African countries and their northern counterparts have received a new impetus with the formation of the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

Race as a criterion determining access to services has been removed through legislation. Services are being expanded to under-serviced communities, and voluntary organizations that were previously excluded from funding, are now beginning to receive funding. However, since budget allocations to the welfare services component has not increased, the government has not been able to extend funding on a large scale to previously excluded voluntary organizations as rapidly as expected. This has resulted in low morale in the voluntary sector. The redesign of the system has, in some instances, negatively impacted the existing infrastructure. The challenge remains to consolidate the sound foundations and parts of the system that works well whilst re-organizing the system as a whole.

However, a greater challenge for South African policy makers and service providers has been the implementation of the de-institutionalization policy. Close to 87 percent of the social welfare services component of the budget in 1995 was spent on residential institutions, especially for the white elderly (Department of Welfare and Population Development, 1997; Van der Berg, 1998). Means testing in institutions was applied but was less successful with people who had no community support systems, which in turn increased their vulnerability. De-institutionalization has also been challenged on grounds of reverse discrimination and the inhumane treatment of vulnerable persons. Voluntary agencies responsible for these services have been under great pressure to realign their programs and budgets with the new developmental direction for social welfare and found these aspects of the policy particularly difficult to implement.

Furthermore, the majority of voluntary welfare organizations deliver statutory services mandated in terms of legislation such as child protection. These services are mainly casework services. This situation is likely to persist for the foreseeable future unless additional financial resources are allocated to community-based development. Protocols for the contracting of services are in the early stages of implementation. Responsibilities between the government and its non-governmental partners for certain programs still need to be concluded. Responsibilities between national, provincial and local spheres of government also need further refinement.

Voluntary social service agencies and community-based organizations receiving public funding are required to target their services at the poor and populations at risk. It can be assumed that services do reach the poor, but how effective these interventions are has not been determined. Since voluntary welfare organizations are under-represented in rural areas, the impact of these organizations in addressing the needs of the ultra-poor is limited and is progressing slowly. Many non-profit organizations working in rural and under-serviced urban areas are hampered in their outreach work due to violence, a lack of infrastructure, transport, appropriate skills, and access to other resources to sustain local development efforts. Strengthening community-based efforts and innovation in under-serviced communities remains a major challenge (Patel, et al., 1995).

A new trend emerging in the voluntary sector is toward income generation strategies and entrepreneurial initiatives to achieve sustainability, cross-subsidization of social programs, and the diversification of their funding base whilst increasing their independence from the government (Patel, 1998). The following examples illustrate this trend. Organizations in the disability field formed an empowerment partnership with other commercial consortia bidding for

large public contracts and the licensing of public services. An institution for mentally disabled children won a contract to bake the bread for one of the local prisons. Government funding for income generation programs for unemployed women has resulted in one of the projects exporting African designed crafts.

These are important innovations that need to be researched especially in relation to the impact of entrepreneurial activities on the mission and core services of voluntary organizations. Are these activities likely to distort the goals of voluntary organizations? Do voluntary organizations compromise their comparative advantage as development partners with the government when they engage in service contracting? Should public funds earmarked for basic needs be used to generate commercial ventures to cross subsidize services? These innovations also illustrate the blurring of the boundaries between the not for profit and for-profit sectors.

Conclusion

There has been a significant shift in political commitment to social welfare and development with a focus on pro-poor policies, which needs to be maintained. Whilst the *White Paper for Social Welfare* provided an excellent long-term perspective, its mission can only be realized incrementally despite increased social investment expenditure. A range of social, economic, political and institutional factors have also impacted on service delivery outcomes (Republic of South Africa National Treasury, 2001; Swilling and Russell, 2002).

South Africa's partnerships approach has major advantages in meeting needs and in addressing the capacity constraints of the new democratic government, and is possibly the most appropriate option in the local context. The approach has evolved through colonialism and apartheid and has been firmly established as integral to the democratic government's social development policy and strategy. Local development partnerships are considered to be significant in meeting needs and to strengthen democracy through participation in development.

Whilst the government recognizes the autonomy of the partners creates opportunities for joint decision-making and respects the right of organizations to engage in advocacy, there are real dangers that voluntary organizations may become quasi-government agencies. An over-reliance on public funding could also lead to organizations loosing their autonomy, and compromising their advocacy role. This is particularly pertinent in the case of the large voluntary organizations. The future of community-based non-profit organizations as development partners with the government remains uncertain. Community-based organizations located largely in poorer communities where poverty has persisted, could be significant partners in service-delivery or be the 'springboards for the re-emergence of broad-based social movements' (Swilling and Russell, 2002).

These potentially conflicting interests are managed in the society through a range of mechanisms which could be characterized as corporatist and, which mediate the relations between the state, business, the labor movement, and civil society. The labor movement and civil society have been critical of the government's fiscal policies designed to achieve macro-economic balance and privatization. They have argued that the government's *Growth and Redistribution Strategy* adopted neo-liberal solutions to promote economic growth, which undermined its capacity to

meet its social development commitments and address the legacy of the past (Terreblanche, 2002; Midgley, 2001).

Economic growth has been slow and has been accompanied by the restructuring of the economy to be globally competitive. The economy is also more vulnerable to the negative effects of globalization and the prospects for high levels of growth in the immediate future are slim. The challenge will be to ensure that the country's social goals remain on the national agenda and that pluralist mechanisms established to manage the relations between the parties are effective. Unlike many developing countries, South Africa has a strong civil society that will need to continue to monitor public expenditure trends, government delivery of social development, and continue to play an advocacy role to promote accountability.

In addition to economic and political factors impacting future prospects for social development, there are also institutional factors, which have hampered the country's capability to produce the desired results. These include over-ambitious policies, inadequate financial policies, administrative arrangements, and a lack of suitably trained personnel to implement the programs. The change in management efforts required to reorient welfare services toward a new development perspective cannot be under-estimated. All of the above factors have hampered the government and the voluntary sector from responding quickly and effectively to the development challenge.

The case study illustrates how a country's distinctive historical and socio-political context shaped the nature, scope and form of state-voluntary relations. The case study also demonstrates the complexity of managing change in a society in transition from apartheid welfare to one based on a social development approach. Research on the voluntary sector is relatively new and this exemplar of social development partnerships in a society in transition could make a contribution to expanding our knowledge in this field (Kramer, 1990).

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