

# Promoting social and economic equality: Social workers' contribution to social justice and social development in South Africa and Uganda

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## Abstract

This article explores how social workers in South Africa (where social work is regulated by law), and Uganda (where social work is not professionally regulated), draw on the premises that social work is a human rights profession embedded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, their respective countries' constitutions, and developmental social work to claim their role in promoting social and economic equality. The case studies from both South Africa and Uganda show that developmental social work includes social, economic and environmental development activities and that social work can become a significant role player in promoting social and economic equality through its commitment to social justice and human rights.

## Keywords

Developmental social work, Global Agenda for Social Work, human rights and social work, social justice, social development, socio-economic rights

## Introduction

Understanding the dimensions of inequality requires an international analyses and perspective (Ife, 2012). Hence, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), the International Association for Schools of Social Work (IASSW), and the International Council for Social Welfare (ICSW) 'recognise that the past and present political, economic, cultural and social orders, shaped in specific contexts, have unequal consequences for global, national and local communities and have

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negative impacts on people' (The Global Agenda, 2012: 1). With the launch of The Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development at the United Nations Social Work Day in 2012, social workers, educators and social development practitioners committed themselves to supporting, influencing and enabling structures and systems which can constructively address the root causes of oppression and inequality, and to working together to create a more socially just and fair world (The Global Agenda, 2012), where the fundamental freedoms and rights of individuals and groups are protected.

At present, the full range of human rights is available only to a minority of the world's population (The Global Agenda, 2012), but many social workers are working toward changing that situation. Social workers' commitment to social justice and human rights is evident from how they promote social and economic equality amongst people who are marginalized and excluded from social and economic processes. Social workers draw on the value of social justice to address poverty-related deprivation and oppression (Banerjee, 2005). Social development is a viable way to respond to many of the existing social injustices (Banerjee, 2005).

This article explores how social workers in South Africa and Uganda draw on the premises that social work is a human rights profession (Ife, 2012) and hence mandated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948), their respective countries' constitutions, and developmental social work to claim their role in promoting social and economic equality. At a regional level, both South Africa and Uganda are states that are parties to the Organization of African Unity's (OAU's) African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (OAU, 1981).

This article starts by discussing social and economic rights in relation to the constitutional mandates in South Africa and Uganda. Next, social work and social justice in relation to human rights are contextualized. The following section investigates developmental social work as a vehicle that social workers can use to promote social and economic equality. Two case studies are then presented from South Africa and Uganda respectively, followed by a discussion on how these cases reflect developmental social work. Finally, a conclusion is drawn on social work's role in promoting social and economic equality and implementing the Global Agenda.

## **Socio-economic rights and a constitutional mandate**

Socio-economic rights are fundamental human rights, as captured in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948), which all human beings have and cannot live without, and which justify the assumption that all people deserve to be accorded respect and protection (United Nations, 2004). Social and economic rights are 'access' rights which impose positive duties on the state to make provision for available resources (Brand, 2005). This opens the possibility of denying people access to resources on discriminatory grounds, which therefore highlights the importance of the right to equality, which posits that a socio-economic benefit provided to one class of needy people should be extended to all others (Brand, 2005). There are several conceptions of equality, the most important of which are broadly covered in the concepts of 'formal equality' and 'substantive equality' (SAHRC, 2012). Formal equality refers to the notion that individuals in similar situations should be treated alike, but this view overlooks the importance of context, where there are individual differences. The construct of substantive equality fill this gap by referring to the notion that individuals in different situations should be treated differently, focusing on the quality of results, and equality of opportunity (SAHRC, 2012: 5).

Using the Human Development Indices, the *Human Development Report. The Rise of the South: Human Progress in a Diverse World* (UNDP, 2013) places South Africa in the 121st and Uganda in the 161st position in the world, with a Human Development Index of 0.629 for South Africa and of 0.456 for Uganda. In both countries, there is a widening gap between the rich and the poor. The

Gini coefficient was 0.7 in South Africa in 2011 (RSA, 2011a), whereas in Uganda it rose from 0.32 in 1990 to 0.48 in 2012 (UNDP, 2013).

South Africa is a highly unequal country, which is reflected in extreme inequalities in income and access to opportunity, unemployment and poverty (RSA, 2011a). Approximately 29.2 percent of the population is under the age of 15 years (Statistics South Africa, 2013). Of the total population of 52.98 million, the overall unemployment rate is 25 percent, and the youth employment rate for the age group 15–24 is 52.9 percent (Statistics South Africa, 2013). In view of the entrenched roots of poverty and inequalities after more than a century of colonial exploitation and apartheid, it is important to acknowledge the progress that has been made so far with democracy, namely restoring the dignity of all South Africans and improved access to education, health services, water, housing, electrification and social security (RSA, 2011b). However, the quality of education remains low and with regard to gender, single-headed households remain the poorest; women continue to earn less than men; and decades of racial discrimination in the workplace have led to a social stratification based on skin colour, with social and economic institutions largely reinforcing these inequalities (RSA, 2011a).

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996) includes a Bill of Rights which enshrines the rights of all people in the country and affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom. Given the country's history, it is self-evident 'that equality became one of the fundamental values of South Africa's Constitution and section 9 of the Bill of Rights provides for equality before the law and equal protection of the law, freedom from unfair discrimination, positive measures to advance equality and further provides for the equal enjoyment of all other rights and freedoms' (SAHRC, 2012: 5). South Africa's Constitution is renowned for its entrenchment of a range of socio-economic rights, including environmental rights and rights to land, housing, health care, food, water, social security and assistance, education and children's rights to shelter and to basic nutrition, social services and health care services (Brand, 2005). To give effect to this section 9(4) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Parliament enacted the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000 (RSA, 2000). This Act is guided by principles of equality, fairness, equity, social justice, human dignity and freedom for all. The Act makes provision for equality courts and places specific duties on independent institutions such as the South African Human Rights Commission (the SAHRC) and the Commission on Gender Equality and other bodies set up to assist complainants in bringing complaints to the equality courts. The National Development Plan is envisaged as a path to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030 in South Africa in order to deliver on the promise of an inclusive, just society in accordance with the Constitution (RSA, 2011b).

Like South Africa, Uganda has a constitution which enshrines the rights of all people. Although South Africa has a significant higher Gini coefficient than Uganda, both countries experience a widening gap between the rich and the poor. The Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) estimated Uganda's population at 34.1 million people in mid-2012, with more than a half of this population aged 15 years and below, and an annual growth rate of 3.2 percent (UBOS, 2012), indicating a very young population and a correspondingly high dependency burden. The country has posted progressive economic growth rates averaging over 7 percent for the last two decades. Income poverty was reduced from 56.4 percent in 1992 to 24.6 percent in 2012 (UBOS, 2012). These gains have been attributed mainly to the country's macroeconomic policies and the liberalization of the economy. In spite of the above economic gains, Uganda still ranks among the poorest countries of the world in terms of human development. Inequalities are reflected in gender, regional, and rural-urban differentials in various key indicators. About 94 percent of Uganda's poor people live in rural areas (Ssewanyana and Kasirye, 2010). With regard to gender, it has been reported that female-headed households constitute the majority of the poorest households (UBOS, 2010). The gender inequality

index stands at 0.517 (UNDP, 2013), reflecting perpetual imbalances in the condition and position of men and women in the country.

Uganda's 1995 constitution provides for the protection and promotion of human rights and freedoms, including the right to social justice, socio-economic development, and equality and freedom from discrimination in any form (Republic of Uganda, 1995). The fourth chapter of the Ugandan constitution outlines the full range of these rights, from the fundamental rights to life and equality of treatment, to rights to education, health, and a clean and healthy environment, among other rights. Specific mention is made of the rights of more vulnerable groups such as children, women, persons with disabilities and other minority groups. Article 52 of the Ugandan constitution provides for affirmative action in favour of these marginalized groups. The Uganda Human Rights Commission established in accordance with Article 51 of the Ugandan constitution has the overall mandate to advance and monitor the promotion and protection of human rights. Furthermore, the equality principle has been operationalized in the Equal Opportunities Commission Act (Republic of Uganda, 2007), which tasks the government to ensure access to equal opportunities by all Ugandans, irrespective of tribe, religion, sex, political opinion, race or any other considerations. A setback to these rights and freedoms can be cited in the recent enactment of the Anti-homosexuality Act 2014 which criminalizes same sex relationships thus limiting individual freedoms based on sexual orientation.

In both countries, socio-economic rights can be protected as statutory entitlements in national legislation, and therefore they can be enforced against the state and society by the poor and those otherwise marginalized to ensure that their plight is heard and attended to (Brand, 2005). This strengthens social work's position to promote social justice and human rights.

## **Social work, social justice and human rights**

Since its inception, social work has been a human rights profession. Its most basic principle is honouring the intrinsic value of every human being, and one of its main aims is therefore the promotion of equitable social structures which can provide people with greater security and development while upholding their dignity (United Nations, 1994: 3).

Ife (2012: 6) argues that a human rights perspective can strengthen social work and that such a perspective also provides a strong basis for an assertive practice that seeks to realize social justice goals in various locations. Weil (2004, cited in Delgado and Staples, 2008: 24) asserts that social justice implies a commitment to fairness, adding that in 'society, social justice should foster equal human rights, distributive justice, and a structure of opportunity and be grounded in representative and participatory democracy'.

Social justice encompasses economic and environmental justice (see Center for Economic and Social Justice, n.d.). The practice of environmental justice 'hones in on those people most affected by environmental degradation', namely the poor and marginalized peoples (Besthorn, 2012: 271). The injustices and inequalities which arise from environmental issues or concerns draw attention to social inequities (Miller et al., 2012: 271). Likewise social inequities are linked to economic issues as economic justice includes the right to work; the right to income; food, free education, the right to safe housing and the right to medical care (Cowger, 1989). If social work is to be strengthened through a human rights perspective to realize social justice goals (Ife, 2012), it needs to focus on sustainable development, which 'ensures the well-being of the human person by integrating social development, economic development, and environmental conservation and protection' (Human Rights Education Associates, n.d.: 1).

The three-generation typology of human rights (Ife, 2012) is a useful perspective in recognizing social workers' role in human rights from a broader justice and sustainable development perspec-

tive, because it provides a platform for social work to integrate social, economic and environmental development.

First-generation human rights, also referred to as civil and political rights are individually based and are about fundamental freedoms which are regarded as imperative for the effective and fair organization of a democracy and civil society, such as the right to be treated with dignity, the right to public safety and freedom from discrimination based on issues such as religion, race and gender (Ife, 2012). In first-generation human rights practice, social workers focus on the protection of people's civil and political rights by using advocacy models, amongst other things, in working with refugees, prison reform, work on behalf of people whose relatives have disappeared, and work in community legal centres (Ife, 2012). Hoefler (2012: 3) asserts that the key difference between advocacy practice by social workers and that by members of other professions is that social workers always 'have the goal of securing or retaining social justice as the primary motivation for their advocacy'.

The second generation of human rights refers to those rights which are known as economic, social and cultural rights (Ife, 2012). They are based on a tradition that the collective, in the form of the state, should provide for the needs of the individual, at least at a minimal level (Ife, 2012). Ife (2012) refers to second-generation social work practice as direct practice, organizational practice, policy development, research and action. In direct practice, social workers are in contact with people who are poor and vulnerable for many reasons. Social workers then focus on the right to adequate income, income security and standard of living; the right to adequate shelter and housing; the right to an adequate standard of health care; the right to education and the right to meaningful work (Ife, 2012). With regard to organizations, the focus is on management roles and organizational development by helping organizations to provide more effective social services (Ife, 2012). Another critical level is the need to get a more committed response from government in respect of the public expenditure involved in realizing these rights (Ife, 2012). In a context of declining resources and a lack of infrastructure for welfare structures, social workers should be politically active in finding ways to effect policy change so that adequate levels of social provision can be made to people who need it (Ife, 2012). Midgley (2010a: 20) proposes that the investment of resources for social development requires brokering, 'but it also involves wider advocacy for social justice such as when community members face entrenched inequalities in resources and power or when they are exploited or discriminated against'. The second-generation rights thus include policy analysis, advocacy and research (Ife, 2012).

Third-generation rights include the right to economic development, the right to benefit from world trade and economic growth, environmental rights such as the right to breathe unpolluted air, the right to access clean water, and the right to experience nature and the right to live in an interconnected and harmonious society (Ife, 2012). These rights only have meaning if they are defined at a collective level (Ife, 2012). Third-generation social work practice encompasses community development which is more concerned with collective rights, either as a community or as a nation (Ife, 2012). Hence, it involves macro-practice, including a political dimension. For social work practice to be effective in community development, Ife (2012) argues that it should operate along six dimensions in order to incorporate third-generation human rights, namely: social development; community economic development; political development; cultural development; environmental development; and personal or spiritual development.

None of the three generations should be emphasized at the expense of the others, and hence human rights should rather be recognized for their 'indivisibility and interconnectedness' (Ife, 2012: 53). The three-generation typology of human rights provides a strong conceptual framework for developmental social work practice.

## **Developmental social work**

Developmental social work recognizes and responds to the interconnections between social, economic and environmental development (Center for Social and Economic Justice, n.d.) in order to expand human freedoms and capabilities (Sen, 1999). Within a broader three-generation human rights conceptual framework (Ife, 2012), developmental social work extends the profession's commitment to uphold social justice and human rights to include economic and environmental justice. It thereby positions social work as central in contributing to the eradication of poverty and in promoting social and economic equality in a sustainable manner. Developmental social work links micro and macro practice by shifting, and not excluding, the remedial and maintenance functions to the social change function of social work (Midgley, 2010a); it challenges the sources of injustices that contribute to marginalization, social exclusion and the oppression of individuals, groups and communities, and employs empowerment, strength-based, advocacy and non-discriminatory approaches and social investment strategies to promote social and economic inclusion and social integration (Lombard, 2007, 2008; Lombard and Wairire, 2010; Midgley, 1995, 2010a; Patel, 2005). The implementation of developmental social work is premised on self-determination, participation and partnerships (Midgley, 2010a; Patel, 2005).

In South Africa, the developmental approach to social welfare evolved out of the country's unique history of inequality and the violation of human rights under the systems of colonialism and apartheid (Patel, 2005). The adoption of the White Paper for Social Welfare (RSA, 1997) gave rise to a new social welfare system that is more just, equitable, participatory and appropriate in meeting the needs of all South Africans (Patel, 2005). This shift has charted 'a new path for social welfare [and social work] in the promotion of national social development' (RSA, 1997: 7).

The developmental approach is incorporated in the minimum standards for the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) programmes. The BSW programme is a four-year professional degree in South Africa. Social work training in South Africa is provided by 17 institutions for higher education. In order to practise in South Africa, social workers have to register at the South African Council for Social Services Professions (SACSSP), which is a statutory body that regulates social service professions in accordance with the Social Service Professions Act 110, 1978 (RSA, 1978) as amended. Renewal of annual registration is based on evidence of Continuous Professional Development. Student social workers register at the SACSSP in their second year of study in order to do their practical work. Social work has been declared a scarce skill (Earle, 2008), in relation to a population of 52.98 million (Statistics South Africa, 2013).

In Uganda, the history of professional social work is linked to British colonial rule. As in the case of South Africa and many other African countries, since its inception, the profession has largely adopted a remedial approach. Services were mainly based in urban areas and focused on the control functions of the colonial government (Republic of Uganda, 1959), although there has been some involvement of social workers in community organization and mobilization to improve the general standard of living of people in the rural areas (Ssenkoloto, 1973: 1).

The shift to address the need to refocus the role of social work towards social development has been mainly initiated at the training level, with institutions of higher learning reorienting their social work curricula towards a more developmental focus. Currently, 21 higher education institutions in Uganda offer a bachelor's degree programme in social work. As early as 1992, the social work curriculum was described as 'an already developmental and broad-based approach rather than a clinical orientation in social work education [that] prepares the professional for a practice stance in the great variety of agencies and fields' (Ankrah, 1992: 59). This approach is also reflected in the current mission statements of social work higher education institutions such as the Department of Social Work and Social Administration at the Makerere University, which states that it aims 'to

produce social work practitioners who are development-oriented and thoroughly grounded in skills and theories of social work practice, relevant to local and international standards' (Makerere University, 2011: 4). At the policy level, the change in focus from a remedial welfare to developmental welfare approach is so far only reflected in the change of the name of the responsible government ministry – from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare in the 1980s to the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development since the 1990s. Social workers' engagement in developmental social work is reflected in their practice fields as well, with over 70 percent of social workers employed by NGOs and predominantly involved in community development activities, while the government employs only 15 percent of social workers (Twikirize et al., 2013).

Social work in Uganda is not regulated. Hence the concept of 'social work' is not protected. Nor does everyone practising social work have the requisite skills and competencies. In spite of this, social workers play a significant role in the various sectors in which they are employed, particularly through community level interventions.

### **Case studies of NGOs**

Two case studies, respectively in South Africa and Uganda, were documented for purposes of analysing the role of social work in promoting socio-economic equality. The Future Families case study is based on the Future Families Annual Report (2011) and verified by the Executive Director and site visits in March 2013. The Uganda case study is informed by information from an interview on 3 April 2013 with the founder and director of Anaka Foundation.

#### ***Future Families, South Africa***

In less than a year, Future Families transformed itself from a project of Child Welfare Tshwane NGO to a fully-fledged Non-Profit Organization (NPO) in 2010. It was launched by a social worker who is also the Chief Executive Director of the organization. The NPO's focus is on how to *live* with HIV and AIDS. An Orphan and Vulnerable Child Care Model has been designed to reach 2500 children and families per month by developing a network of care workers in the community. Five social workers work in five communities respectively, each with a team of three social auxiliary workers, seven team leaders and six care workers working under the social worker.

Future Families offers care and support to orphans and vulnerable children and families infected or affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic through various programmes. To achieve this goal, care workers from the community are trained to reach out to families and orphans and vulnerable children. Specific themed information such as immunization, tuberculosis, financial planning, vocational planning which addresses key indicators of child protection, household economic strengthening, HIV education and prevention, schooling and health education, is passed on to families to equip them to create their own future in more effective ways. All the work is monitored by the social workers with the help of the social auxiliary workers and team leaders.

The Future Families' Mamelodi (township) support group is housed on premises provided by the Ford Motor Company. The initial aim was to provide physical and psycho-emotional care to HIV-positive unemployed adult residents of Mamelodi. Members of the group were introduced to anti-retroviral treatment which turned around their health condition in a positive manner. An income-generating opportunity in the form of beadwork was initiated, followed by a life-skills/social skills component and a skill training and employment component. The outstanding outcome of this programme is the self-growth and personal strengthening of members of the support group in a supportive and safe environment. Membership changes continually, as membership to the group is limited to one year. During this time, members are assisted with planning for

independence, accompanied by individual and group therapy to come to terms with, and live a constructive life with their HIV status. Many members of this group have become staff members, educators and care workers within the Future Family organization.

The Future Families' Plant Propagation Nursery Programme is a small nursery in operation at the Ford Care Centre. Here three garden assistants grow seedlings on a small scale for a company which supplies farmers with plants for essential oils, and on a larger scale, grow vegetable seedlings. These are used to supply gardens started for orphans and vulnerable children's families in Mamelodi. Thus far, 210 gardens have been cultivated. The plant propagation project is managed by an ex-support group member. Future Families has also trained and assisted other organizations to start gardens, and now a commercial venture has been initiated to start producing vermicompost. The Mothusi HIV/Aids education project (the word *mothusi* means helper), presented by three HIV-positive women, all ex-support group members, is a project aimed at educating members of the public about HIV/AIDS, the importance of knowing one's status and about living constructively with the virus, or preventing becoming infected.

Another programme of Future Families is a refugee and asylum seekers support group which targets single mothers from different countries, cultures and traditions who have fled civil war and destruction in their own countries to seek asylum in South Africa. Other Future Families' programmes include, among others, the Granny Programme, The Mothusi HIV/Aids education project and the Vhutshilo Peer education programme.

In summary, Future Families fully embraces developmental social work. Projects are inclusive of those who are affected and target social, economic and environmental development in a sustainable manner.

## **The case of the Anaka Foundation, Uganda**

The Anaka Foundation is an indigenous NGO that operates in the Anaka sub-county, in the Nwoya district, one of the remotest communities in northern Uganda, a region that has suffered insurgency for over 20 years at the hands of the Lord's Resistance Army led by Joseph Kony. Over 65 percent of Anaka's population of 12,597 lives on less than 1USD per day (UBOS, 2011). The organization was born out of the individual efforts of one social work professional who was moved to action by the suffering of the children in his community. The social worker started by helping 23 children of school-going age from his home village (Anaka) who were not attending school due to household poverty and also lacked the most basic necessities of life. For two years, he assisted them to access education, food, decent shelter and medical care using his own family resources, until 2006, when the foundation secured the first round of external financial support from the European Union. Through this support, the foundation was legally registered as an NGO, and the scope of its interventions expanded from basic education and medical assistance to livelihood support to the households in the region considered most vulnerable to poverty. Households are organized in groups of 30 to 40, and were then trained and supported to start income-generating activities, especially rearing goats and poultry. Through another grant from Heifer International, heifers, oxen and ox ploughs were distributed to selected households through groups. The number of supported households reached 300 in five years. In 2011, a milk processing plant was established in the community to facilitate commercial dairy farming. This facility serves the target population, as well as neighbouring communities.

The project also incorporates interventions to improve access to safe water, hygiene and sanitation. Through funding from individual sponsors in New Zealand, the organization has installed 12 protected springs in seven parishes. In 2010, a parallel project targeting only women (named 'Women can do it') was started. In this parallel project, through groups, women were assisted to



start keeping poultry and rearing other animals to generate an income. The organization plans to bring together the different groups in the target community to form a cooperative society in order to increase the community's access to markets. A key component of the interventions is to create awareness of children's rights at the community level. The initial goal of the organization was child development, but the approach quickly progressed from individual child assistance to community-based interventions. The organization currently depends on community volunteers to implement and monitor interventions.

## Discussion

Both case studies demonstrate the commitment of social workers to human rights and social justice. Furthermore, it is evident that social workers have the vision, capacity, competencies and resourcefulness and thus the 'hope as well as the know-how' (Sen, 2012: xi) to facilitate integrated social, economic and environmental development. Both case studies are examples of developmental social work in action.

The three-generation human rights conceptual framework (Ife, 2012) is reflected in the programmes and activities described in these case studies. With regard to civil and political rights, the rights to information, to be treated with dignity, freedom from discrimination and being safe in hostile environments are relevant to people who are poor, living with or affected by HIV/Aids, and asylum seekers or refugees. The mere launching of the projects discussed in these two case studies and the nature of the programmes indicate that social workers advocate for the rights of these groups, even in oppressive environments, as Ife (2012) explains. Human development is visible in the levels of empowerment and strength development of participants and service users. With regard to second-generation socio-economic rights, the case studies include many relevant activities and achievements, including access to health care, education, safe water, sanitation, food, employment/income and social security. Third-generation rights feature in all the community development initiatives, including income-generating projects, the level of social cohesion, the decision-making and power structures within the community, the environmental protection programmes, and activities and personal capacity development in empowerment and resilience.

Gray and Coates (2012: 241) emphasize that the environment must be protected to support human sustainability, and therefore affirm that issues such as food security, land protection, sustainable farming practices and actions against global warming and pollution 'are supported and valued because they are seen to support human well-being'. With regard to income and sustainable livelihoods, Peeters (2012: 287) observes that the development of new socio-economic relations 'through bottom-up economic projects is crucial for a just and sustainable future'. Midgley (2010b) explains that community-based economic development projects and programmes contribute positively to poverty alleviation and that community social workers need to be directly involved in economic development projects that contribute to poverty alleviation. Midgley and Conley (2010) outline how social workers can influence human, social, and economic capital development in both a direct and indirect manner. The case studies mentioned here show how human capital can be generated through preschool education, food security, and health care, as recommended by Midgley and Conley (2010). Examples of social workers' contribution to direct community economic development include income-generating projects, after-school homework classes, job training, and job referral programmes, as also suggested by Midgley and Conley (2010).

The main focus of the interventions is thus on poverty eradication and reducing inequalities to enable individuals, households and communities to access basic services and meet their needs. The projects and programmes are aimed at vulnerable groups, including women, children and older persons. The interventions in these programmes show how social workers can embrace people's

right to development, with the emphasis on the social inclusion of those who are often associated with poverty (Staub-Bernasconi, 2012), treating people with dignity, and valuing the 'inherent worth of the individual' and 'the right to self-determination' (Ife, 2012: 13).

Sen (2012: ix) points out that, to reduce poverty, it is necessary to enhance people's power, especially that 'of the afflicted people, to make sure that the facilities are expanded and the deficiencies removed' (Sen, 2012: ix). The ethics of participation inherent in developmental social work includes members of civil society who volunteer their time and expertise, service users, business partners and other role players. The participation of people in their own development is an outstanding feature in both case studies, resulting in development of their inner strength, empowerment and resilience, which will take them to the next levels of development. For example, care givers who become team leaders or start studies in social auxiliary work, and previous service users (namely orphans and vulnerable children) who become care givers themselves. Priority areas of intervention are agreed upon through community meetings, while at the group level, self-governance and individual participation is enhanced through locally selected group leaders and committees. Accountability is an important indicator for sustainable development, and both case studies monitor and evaluate intervention outcomes.

Midgley (2010a: 14) states that community-building on a macro-social work practice level implies 'that strengths and empowerment are integral elements in bringing about change at the community level'. The link between micro and macro practice is evident in the support given to individuals within a context of structural injustices and in influencing policy on a macro level. In both case studies, it is evident that human rights are relevant for each level of social work, as Wronka (2011) argues. The place of rehabilitation and maintenance in the broader social change function in developmental social work is demonstrated in the 'interconnection between ecological environmental concerns, human rights and justice and the quality of human life' (Schmitz et al., 2012: 285). Resilience for social change can be ensured by 'enhancing people's capabilities' and by building social capital (Peeters, 2012). Furthermore, 'Community-building, networking and alliances with other social actors have a pivotal role in a change-orientated social work practice' (Peeters, 2012: 295).

An outstanding challenge is the fact that external funding is intermittent (Founding Director Anaka Foundation, Uganda, 2013), which in turn constrains the possibility of deepening and widening of interventions to benefit more communities. This brings to the fore the gap between social workers' commitment to promoting socio-economic equality and resources available to achieve this goal. Midgley (2010a: 15) argues that '[a]lthough it is indeed highly desirable that strengths and capabilities be emphasized and that oppression be resisted, concrete investments in the form of resources and services are needed'.

The case studies demonstrate that human rights and social and environmental justice are intertwined (Schmitz et al., 2012). Gray and Coates (2012: 239) believe that environmental social work broadens the efforts of social workers towards achieving social justice 'by highlighting the extent to which the poorest and most marginalized populations are hardest hit by environmental fallout'. Both case studies show that developmental social work includes social, economic and environmental development activities, and that social workers have a central role to play in taking the lead in lifting people out of poverty and addressing social and economic inequalities.

## **Conclusion**

The cases of South Africa and Uganda show that it is not being members of a regulated profession (as in the case of South Africa), but rather training in social work and the adoption of developmental social work as a practice framework that enable social workers to promote social and economic

equality. Although in principle there are many professional advantages in the regulation of social work and protection for the status of 'social workers' by law, including having a broader empowerment base for advocating for people's socio-economic rights, it is not in itself a prerequisite for a social worker to be effective.

The commitment to the implementation of the Global Agenda and, in particular, promoting social and economic equality, starts with knowing what human rights, and in particular, what socio-economic rights are, and how these rights relate to social work. To this end, 'information is power' (Wronka, 2011: 443); therefore it is essential for social workers practising in a human rights framework to know the content of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948) and other important international, regional and national human rights covenants in providing the grounds on which a claim for human rights can be made in any particular context (Ife, 2012).

Within the context of the first pillar of the Global Agenda, reporting on how social workers promote social and economic equality in essence provides an overview of the extent to which they have contributed to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and how strongly they are prepared to align themselves with the major focus of the Global Agenda, namely to prepare for the post-2015 development agenda. Healy (2012: 240) suggests that the Millennium Development Goals 'represent a shift to using measurable targets to plan and assess global progress on development'. The case studies from both South Africa and Uganda show that social work can become a significant role player in promoting social and economic equality through its commitment to social justice and human rights. Developmental social work provides the necessary link between human rights and social, economic and environmental justice and sustainable development, and it is a vehicle for social workers 'to work together, at all levels, for change, for social justice and for the universal implementation of human rights, building on the wealth of social initiatives and social movements' (The Global Agenda, 2012: 1).

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