BOOK REVIEW

Wilberforce Kurevakwesu

Midlands State University, School of Social Work, Zimbabwe
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4167-3052 *kurevakwesuw@staff.msu.ac.zw*

Mel Gray and Solomon Ahmadasun (2023). S*ocial work, social welfare, and social development in Nigeria: A postcolonial perspective*. Routledge. ISBN 978-1-003-38212-6 (ebk). Pages 186.

The lack of African social work literature and an overreliance on Western literature have led to calls for African scholars to produce rich social work texts to support Africa's decolonisation agenda. In *Social Work, Social Welfare, and Social Development in Nigeria: A Postcolonial Perspective*, Mel Gray and Solomon Ahmadasun offer a key text on social work in Nigeria. Nigeria has the largest economy in Africa, is its most populated country, and is one of the most ethnically diverse countries on the continent. The book provides a context-specific overview of social work, social welfare, and social development in Nigeria, addressing the unique social problems of the country. Professor Mel Gray, a celebrated veteran social work author, is one of the leading voices on social development worldwide and has made significant contributions to social development discourse for over 30 years. Solomon Ahmadasun is also one of the leading voices in Nigerian social work circles.

A thorough exploration of the whole book will allow the reader to grasp the primary emphasis of the authors, which is to "…appeal for government to recognise the profession's valuable contribution to Nigerian welfare and social development…" (p. 7). To this end, the book starts with a detailed overview of Nigeria and postcolonial scholarship in African social work—which suggested the title of the book and sets the stage for the chapters. The authors managed to capture attempts to decolonise African social work from the first wave of decolonisation through the seminal work of Shawky (1972) and Ragab (1982) down to the third wave of decolonisation which "…argued for a much more radical transformation of social work…" (p. 6).

Social Work, Social Welfare, and Social Development in Nigeria: A Postcolonial Perspective is organised into ten chapters. In chapter 1, the introduction, the authors give an overview of Nigeria—putting into context the information provided by the authors on ethnic groups, the states, and poverty levels per state in Nigeria. This helps readers to grasp the context of the book and make sense of everything in the subsequent chapters. Chapter 2 provides a historical

context for the development of social work and social welfare in Nigeria starting from pre-colonial indigenous support systems to the current state of social work and social welfare. The chapter goes beyond descriptive historical accounts to extend an understanding of social workers' struggle to gain professional recognition in Nigeria. This makes chapter 2 the core of the book together with chapter 3 as they provide the foundational elements of the analysis made by the authors throughout the book. Chapter 3 gives a glimpse of Nigeria's social development record which is "…poor… in the face of vast human and natural resources …signalling the persistent paradox of poverty amid plenty, despite successive development policies and national development plans" (p. 37)—a situation that characterises almost all African countries. Some of the factors responsible for this poor social development record include violent conflict and institutional failures together with the shortage of services and resources and a lack of political will. Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 focus on key areas for social work practice in Nigeria, i.e., child welfare, gender and disability, mental health and ageing, and human trafficking respectively. Chapter 8 discusses Nigerian social work and its quest for professional recognition. The authors bemoan the lack of recognition for social work in Nigeria and introduce a 7R-lexicon which comprises regulation, relevance, recognition, representation, relational connections, rights, and research as key strategies that can help advance the legitimacy and recognition of social work in Nigeria. These strategies can provide insights for social workers in other countries facing similar problems. Chapter 9 focuses on social work education in Nigeria on ways that can be used to enhance its relevance. The final chapter, chapter 10, concludes by emphasising the relevance of social work in Nigeria whilst appealing to the government to recognise its value. Importantly, the authors acknowledge that most of the social development problems affecting Nigeria are outside social work's purview, but proper recognition can set the stage for ameliorating some of the problems.

The way the information is presented makes it easy for readers to understand the development of social work and social welfare in Nigeria. Each chapter provides the context for the following one. Moreover, the book is unique in that it offers a detailed and particularized analysis of social work and social welfare in one country—which allows for an in-depth analysis compared to books that focus on the whole of Africa or a certain region of the continent. This helps to develop meaningful and effective interventions to improve the recognition of social work in a given country, and this knowledge can provide insights for other countries as well. In addition to the comprehensive analysis of social work and social welfare in Nigeria, the book also provides a platform for social workers in other countries to conduct similar analyses, while contributing to the body of African literature on social work, social welfare, decolonisation, and social development.

What is also unique about *Social Work, Social Welfare, and Social Development in Nigeria: A Postcolonial Perspective* is its focus on human trafficking as an arena for social work practice in Nigeria. Human trafficking has grown to become a major problem on the African continent. There have not been many texts linking human trafficking to social work, and the authors managed to explicate the 5Ps approach to human trafficking, and how social workers can intervene at micro, messo and macro levels. Insights were also provided on how social work education can be decolonised and transformed to cultivate social workers who are ready to deal with human trafficking in Nigeria. Since this problem is not exclusive to Nigeria, but to almost

all African countries, this book provides key insights into how social workers throughout Africa can respond to human trafficking by observing the situation in Nigeria.

Overall, the book effectively describes the state of social work and social welfare in Nigeria from a decolonial perspective. It will satisfy those seeking insight into these fields in Nigeria but may disappoint readers expecting a comparative analysis with other countries. The authors' call for the Nigerian government to prioritise the recognition of social work would have been stronger if they had included comparative analyses to demonstrate progress in legitimising the social work profession in other countries. This book will, however, benefit a wide range of professionals in and outside Nigeria who are interested in social development, decolonisation, social work, social welfare, and the developmental challenges facing Nigeria and the rest of Africa. It broadens our perspective and invites us to examine the application of social work in an African context, providing a basis for comparisons with other countries.

REFERENCES

Ragab, I. 1982. *Authentization of social work in developing countries*. Tanta, Egypt: The Integrated Social Services Project (Arabic/English).

Shawky, A. 1972. Social work education in Africa. *International Social Work*, 15(1): 3–16.