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A PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

PART I

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This is the first part of a two-part article which documents the conclusions of a group of experienced social work practitioners regarding the theory of social development and its applicability to social work practice in South Africa. Part 1 examines the theoretical underpinnings of social development which is advanced as primarily a normative macro-policy perspective within which to situate a changed focus for social work practice. It is believed that social development does not present anything new for social workers and could even be described as the ecosystems perspective in a new guise. Like the ecosystems perspective, social development attempts too much. (Part 2 will be published in the October 1997 edition.)

The paper is based on the first Developmental Social Work (DSW) Coursework Master's Programme taught at the University of Natal in Durban (UND). This two-year, part-time programme was designed specifically for social work practitioners who had graduated at least two years prior to resuming study but preferably who had been in practice for more than five years. Ten students enrolled for the programme, between them they had nearly one hundred and fifty years of practice experience (Table 1). All were in positions in their work situation where they were able to influence their organisations or the social workers whom they were supervising towards the introduction of developmental social work. In addition to the developmental social work course, students also studied advanced social work theory, research and social policy, and were required to conduct a research project.

The first half of the DSW course involved a theoretical study of social development using Midgley (1995) as a foundation text. Students were provided with a detailed course outline and a substantial reading list. In addition, the Social Development Issues Journal was made available to them, with students borrowing and circulating the various issues among themselves. These were the minimum reading requirements which students supplemented with their own literature studies. The second half of the programme involved in-class presentations where students were required to critically evaluate social development theory and to examine its applicability to their particular practice context, suggesting ways in which DSW has in the past, or might in the future, be applied in their organisations. An essay on this topic constituted their course assignment. It is on the content of these essays and class discussions that this paper is based.

Table 1*
1995/96 Coursework Master's students at UND

Name of student	Practice context	Years in practice
Deonarain	Mental Health	16
Fakir	Defense Force	15
Khanyile	Spoornet	6
Mandizvidza	Child Welfare	6
Mbambo	National Council for Child Welfare	11
Neilson	Child Welfare	20
Ntshingila	State Hospital	27
Shongwe	State Hospital	19
Vilakazi	Rural Provincial State Welfare Department	8
Watson	Children's Home	13
TOTAL		141

*Table 1 constitutes a reference list for students' work cited or quoted in this paper as follows.

INTRODUCTION

Almost thirty years ago, Helen Harris Perlman (1967:52), writing in a different context and before the evolution of the social development perspective, clearly understood what are now known as social development concepts:

What is needed ... is social planning on a significant scale, basic preventive intervention with macrosystems system-change, not simply symptom-change.

According to Neilson (1996), she went on to identify specific needs that still sound familiar today, namely, the need for:

- accelerated slum clearance and decent, affordable housing
- economic security
- child nurturance (emotional, social and physical) including provision of day care and parent guidance, using indigenous personnel
- free and accessible health care including pregnancy prevention and protection
- intersectoral community service centres staffed by nonprofessional helpers trained and guided by collaborating teams of doctors, social workers, school representatives and clergymen who would co-ordinate services and guide people to established resources and potential opportunities.

Social work has this history and, as will be shown in this paper, social development is not new to social work. What it needs is a change in focus and application rather than a change in theory or methodology.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Defining social development

Before embarking on a definition of social development, it is important to mention that there are conditions in South African society which warrant a different approach to service delivery. The drastic economic decline, high unemployment and poverty levels, and large numbers of disenfranchised individuals and groups who were marginalised by past policies have been left with very little opportunity for growth and development (Mbambo 1996). Social development is a strategy to promote human welfare which is:

Designed to combat poverty: Poverty is identified in social development terms as a socio-economic phenomenon and, in order to alleviate it, social policy priorities must be invested in people, that is, they must help develop human capacity and human resources, and they must be linked directly with economic development measures (Neilson 1996).

- **Interventionist/statist:** It does not happen spontaneously but is an organised effort to bring about social improvement which requires state involvement (Midgley 1995).
- **Multisectoral:** It requires all sectors of society to work together towards social upliftment (Gray 1996a; Midgley 1995).
- **Universal and inclusive:** It is concerned with the population as a whole and with promoting the social welfare of all (Midgley 1995).
- **People-centred:** It recognises the participatory role of human beings in change which results in improving the overall quality of people's lives in ecologically sound ways. It is rights-based and emphasises people-powered resources.

Social development is distinguished from other approaches by its goals, outcomes and targets. Patel (1992) integrated Rothman's typology within a developmental social welfare paradigm. She suggested the following goals of social development:

- Improving people's material conditions of life through job creation and poverty reduction policies and programmes.
- Maximising the development of human capacity to create productive members of society.
- Promoting individual and collective self-reliance in an enabling social, economic and political environment.
- Assisting individuals and groups at various stages of their development and in different circumstances and helping those in need of protection, care, support and material assistance to achieve their optimal development.
- Infrastructural development and the establishment of organisations by the people themselves to drive and manage social development processes.
- Equitable resource distribution.
- Maximising human capacity.
- Building grassroots democracy through the empowerment of people to press for policies and programmes to meet their needs and to contribute to social and economic progress.

In addition to the goals of social development, it is important to highlight the target of social development efforts. Social development targets the population as a whole, with priority being given to the most needy, the least powerful, the disenfranchised and the most vulnerable (Midgley 1995; Osci-Hwedie 1990; Patel 1992). One can conclude that the unemployed masses, women,

youth, children and people living in rural areas are among the priority target groups for social development activities (Mbambo 1996).

Figure 1

A conceptualisation of social development

Social development	It is an approach to social welfare and a philosophical framework for welfare services. It consists of planned efforts and processes for social change which are designed to promote the wellbeing of the population as a whole, in conjunction with a dynamic process of economic development.
Guiding principles	Equity; accessibility; equality; people-centredness; respect for human rights; respect for cultural diversity; non-discrimination; social transformation; interdependence; appropriateness; humanism; <i>ubuntu</i> and sustainability.
Priority issues	Mass poverty; economic deprivation; marginalisation; rural under-development; the empowerment of women.
Central concepts	People-driven; multifaceted; empowerment; self-reliance; progressive inclusiveness; political commitment; integration of social and economic efforts; capacity building; conscientisation and multisectoral integration.
Strategies and mechanisms	Community development; income generation; rural social work; primary health care; literacy; women's development and public works.
Locality	Micro-level - individual and small group; mezzo level - village and community; macro level - national; global level.
Outcomes	Income; human capital development; economic growth for individuals, communities and the nation; improved material conditions of people; infra-structural development; participation of people in production; maximised human capacity; democratic society and equitable resource distribution.

(Mbambo 1996)

Definition

Social development draws on descriptive, explanatory and normative theories. It has an interdisciplinary focus and requires planned intersectoral co-operation, yet emphasises grassroots participation. It is universal and inclusive, but is specifically targeted at the poorest and most disadvantaged. It is consensus-based, uniting liberal, democratic and socialist ideologies. In short, social development attempts to be all things to all people (Neilson 1996).

Social development is a macro-policy perspective which offers a broad eclectic and pragmatic set of prescriptions to translate reconstruction and development principles into tangible development programmes.

Social development theory attempts to synthesise statist, communitarian and individualistic notions into an inclusive pragmatic approach (Figure 2). Midgley's (1993:5) 'individualist strategies' fall within a liberal capitalist economic model and are characterised by 'programmes that focus on small-scale activities and involve local people in the design, implementation and management of social development projects (Midgley 1991:90). Social workers draw extensively on what Midgley (1991:90) conceptualises as 'populist ideology which focuses on 'the people' in

development, stressing their empowerment and participation'. He believes that programmes which extol self-reliance and which urge people to function autonomously to meet their own needs through their own efforts as they strive constantly for self-improvement, are infused with individualist ideology. By contrast a statist approach (state-sponsored social development) holds that governments should provide for the basic needs of people, including health, education, housing, employment and nutrition (Midgley 1991).

Midgley (1995:25) defines social development as a 'process of planned social change designed to promote the well-being of the population as a whole in conjunction with a dynamic process of economic development'. However, social development also involves political development (Burkey 1993).

Social development might best be described as a normative concept which creates a vision of how society ought to be and how people ought to behave towards one another. It is based on the values of respect for people, participation, humanism, non-discrimination, equality, and global awareness. In this sense, social development is akin to an equalitarian or fairness conception of social justice (Gray 1993).

Social development is a macro-policy perspective which claims to have solutions for dealing with poverty in society. It is aimed specifically at the eradication or, at least, the reduction of poverty in society (Gray 1996a). It has also been referred to as an approach to poverty which has certain distinctive characteristics in that it is, *inter alia*, multisectoral, interdisciplinary, inclusive, universal, integrative, empowering, people-centred, and interventionist. What this actually means is that for it to work properly, national (and even global) planning is required so as to bring all the sectors in society together in an integrated, holistic, inclusive attempt to combat poverty. South Africa embodied these ideals in its policy of Reconstruction and Development.

Figure 2

Ideologies of social development

The **individualist** approach concentrates on individual social upliftment through improvements in the quality of life. Proponents of this ideology believe that the general quality of people's lives in society can be enhanced if individuals are given opportunities to improve their economic and social circumstances.

Proponents of **populist or communitarian** ideology believe that the power to change is in the hands of the people in the community and that social development is achieved through motivating people to develop their communities at a local level.

The **statist** approach points to the responsibility of the state in planning programmes that will lead to the development and upliftment of the quality of life of the country's people. The state should provide funds so that the goals of social development can be met.

(Vilakazi 1996)

Indicators of social development

Broadly, social development is needed most in those communities where high rates of poverty exist, where there is a low quality of life, a denigration of the environment, a need for resource generation and distribution, and a decline in income (Lusk 1992). More specific indicators of social development include the following:

- high mortality rates
- overcrowding and housing shortages
- high rate of unemployment
- no electrification
- no physical or infrastructural development, such as roads or other communication links to the outside world
- no public transportation
- water and sanitation
- high rates of violence, including political and social violence, such as gang activity
- high rates of family violence including child and spousal abuse
- high incidence of alcoholism and drug addiction

Travis (1996) found that perceptions of development between academics, community developers and members of grassroots development committees differed widely. The former saw development as a people-centred, empowering process to build self-reliance and community independence while development committee members equated it with infrastructural development programmes. Hence, with this insight, one might translate the list of social development indicators above into development goals as follows in Table 2.

Table 2
Differing perceptions of development goals

CD teachers & practitioners	Community members
Early child care to reduce mortality rates	Feeding schemes
Block-making & building projects	Housing provision
Income-generating projects	Job creation
Candle-making projects	Electrification
Community-based self-help 'services'	Provision of roads and public transportation
Building of pit latrines	Water and sanitation installation
Peace education programmes	Political organisation
Distance education	Telephone installation

Travis' (1996) research shows the extent to which community members believe that the government has an obligation to provide infrastructural development. A culture of entitlement has arisen in South Africa's new political climate, more so in urban than in rural areas, sidelining community empowerment approaches as shown in Moller's (1996) study. Table 3 shows the priority rating given to expert-defined goals for KwaZulu-Natal by ordinary people.

Table 3

Expert-defined goals in order of importance for ordinary people

Highest priority	Intermediate priority	Lesser priority
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and training • Security from crime & violence • Clean water • Basic health care • Healthy environment • Affordable housing • Less teenage pregnancy • Culture of learning • Social security • Road safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment for future generations • Nutrition • Less corruption & graft • Sanitation • Efficient government departments • Quality housing • Electricity • Literacy • Balance between population and resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender/racial equality at work • Security of tenure (residential) • Security of tenure (arable land) • Provincial transport system • Community roads • Community empowerment • All weather main roads • Land redistribution & restitution • Reduce welfare dependency

(Moller 1996)

In the same study, Moller (1996) showed the difference in development goals for urban dwellers, rural dwellers and rural black women as shown in Table 4. Most of these goals relate to infrastructural development or some form of government provision. Education is given high priority while community empowerment and the reduction of welfare dependency are very low development priorities. Interestingly for social workers, social security is fairly highly rated along with a high degree of concern with teenage pregnancy, which provides scope for preventive sex education programmes.

Table 4

Top ten priority development goals

Urban dwellers	Rural dwellers	Rural black women
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less crime & violence • Education & training • Basic health care • Less teenage pregnancy • Affordable housing • Clean water • Healthy environment • Social security • Culture of learning • Efficient government departments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean water • Education & training • Healthy environment • Basic health care • Less crime & violence • Culture of learning • Environment for future • Road safety • Affordable housing • Security of tenure (arable/grazing land) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean water • Education & training • Healthy environment • Culture of learning • Less crime & violence • Basic health care • Social security • Road safety • Nutrition • Environment for future generations

(Moller 1996)

Approaches to social provision

According to Midgley (1995), social development transcends residual and institutional approaches. By residual approaches he means philanthropy and charity or 'safety-net' approaches and by institutional approaches he means social administration and social planning, often termed the 'welfare state' approach. The Draft White Paper on Welfare (1996) would have us believe that residual and institutional approaches are no longer relevant and that developmental social work is the approach of the future (Vilakazi 1996).

In the past, the social administration or social services approach (Gray 1996b) formed the major model for service provision within both the residual and institutional perspectives. It was merely the extent of service coverage which differed. Alternatives to these Western approaches were to be found in Third World development models where basic needs formed the basis for development initiatives. A critical examination of the changes envisaged in the Draft White Paper on Welfare (1996) reveals that, in switching from one paradigm to another, service cuts and a lack of government clarity and commitment on its role in social development, leaves the government wide open to criticism regarding abdication of its responsibility in relation to social provision.

1. **Social administration approach:** Here the government provides social services. This approach has also been referred to as the 'social services approach' (Gray 1996b). It results in a constant struggle for adequate and continuous resource allocation, together with the search for a strategy to ensure the survival of human and social services (Hopkins 1985). Services either grow incrementally or decrease decrementally. Decrementalism is cut-back social planning such as that which is being pursued by the Department of Welfare (1996):

With the current economic reality in perspective, one needs to realise that the communities hardest hit by welfare cutbacks are communities like Wentworth. It is estimated that one in ten people in the Western Cape receives some form of social assistance (Lund 1996) ... Wentworth cannot be far off the mark (Watson 1996).

In practice, it may be questioned whether the Government is showing the required commitment to address the economic needs of the poor. They have reduced state funding for private welfare organisations and refuse to accept new applications for state maintenance grants (SMGs) as the budget allowance was spent in the first six months of the financial year. The Report of the Lund Committee on Child and Family Support (Department of Welfare 1996) proposes that the monthly child allowance be reduced from its present level and the parent allowance phased out completely. If this recommendation is accepted, it might indicate that poverty relief is not a government priority. Or, as the Editor of the Sunday Tribune has argued (Davis 1996), is it that government's priority must be to concentrate first on the income side of the equation (and by inference, forget about the poor for the moment)? (Neilson 1996).

There is a great deal of talk about 'self-help', 'self-reliance' and 'community initiative' leaving one with the impression that government is abandoning the less privileged in society. In the process of disengagement, the government scapegoats the old order, the previous system, inadequate social work training and the like, to obfuscate its own responsibilities. While self-help and local initiative should be encouraged, they are too one-dimensional for the complex

problems facing welfare planners. If they are being seen as the primary solutions in this decremental era, then the government's underlying assumptions are naive. Even in the social development approach, some form of government provision is needed. Government claims to be aiming at a welfare system based on equality, equity and social justice. They must, therefore, share the responsibility for development and find creative ways to support private and non-governmental development initiatives. Failure to find internal solutions will almost certainly lead to external intervention. Since the poor are not involved in the International Monetary Fund or World Bank negotiations, this will move development planning even further from the communities it concerns (Watson 1996).

2. **Basic needs approach:** This is the approach advocated by the International Labour Organisation and the World Bank. Conyers (in Hopkins 1985), in reviewing this approach, placed basic needs in three categories:

- Basic consumption needs include fundamental items such as food and clothes.
- Basic survival needs include essential services such as education, health and clean water.
- Participation needs include economic activities through gainful employment.

According to Midgley (1995), the basic needs approach urges government to use existing social planning and human service programmes to address the pressing unmet needs of poor people. To this extent, the basic needs approach is remedial in nature. Gray (1992) argued for rights over needs as the foundation for developmental programmes. Likewise Hopkins (1985) believed that participation ought to be based on people's rights to be involved in making and implementing decisions affecting their development.

3. **The social development approach:** Social development emerged in the Third World and, according to Midgley (1994:11), 'established a direct link between social welfare and economic development ... It appeared to have little relevance for the industrialised countries where economic development was not regarded as a distinct responsibility of government, and where the promotion of welfare through the human services was not explicitly linked to economic activities'. Social development is NOT service-delivery with development tagged on. It is a fundamentally different approach which recognises the relationship between social, economic and political development (Midgley 1995). While the Draft White Paper on Welfare (1996) sets the policy framework for developmental social welfare, it has yet to find ways to implement this new paradigm of social provision (Lombard 1996).

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economic development is the second dimension of a developmental approach. Burkey (1993) defined economic development as a process by which people boost production for direct consumption and have a surplus to sell for cash. It requires that people organise themselves and manage their own economic activities.

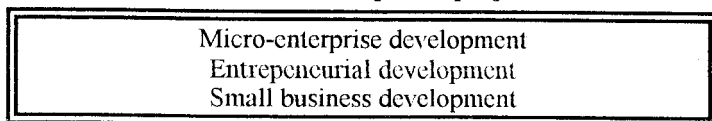
According to Midgley (1995:1-2), 'social development cannot take place without economic development and economic development is meaningless unless it is accompanied by improvements in social welfare for the whole population'. What type of economic development is Midgley (1995) referring to and how can it be promoted by developmental social welfare?

Principles of economic development

1. **Economic development is tied to work, productivity and earning capacity:** If the goal of development is the empowerment of people, then true economic empowerment can only be achieved once people are contributing actively to the economy and, in return, earning an income to make them self-supporting. The economy is unable to generate enough jobs in the formal sector giving rise to the need for income-generating programmes as shown in Figure 3. There are those who believe that there are factors mitigating against the success of economic development, for example, the capital-intensive rather than the labour-intensive nature of business where equipment and modern technology are replacing labour and the inability of micro-enterprises to make 'real' money because of global competition and mass production.

Figure 3

Economic development projects



2. **Economic development requires a sound understanding of business:** Many of those involved in development do not have 'business know-how' which works counter-productively to the goals of social-cum-economic development.
3. **Economic development and social development should be in harmony with one another:** For example, economic developments, such as casino resorts, which make a great deal of money, should be accompanied by social interventions to improve the quality of life of those who live within close proximity of these resorts, not only by providing employment to surrounding communities but also by ploughing profits back into these communities through social upliftment programmes. The development of tourism should be linked to social development, e.g. in areas bordering on game reserves.
4. **Economic development must keep money circulating in the same region:** Micro-enterprises which meet the unmet economic needs of communities help to keep money circulating in these communities. Such enterprises need not necessarily be tied to material production; they can also be service-oriented.
5. **Economic development is dependent on strategic government intervention:** All attempts at economic development will come to nought without some form of government intervention. It is the government's responsibility to ensure that there is a market for flourishing micro-enterprises. However, what sort of government intervention is needed?

The principles of economic development are summarised in Figure 4.

Figure 4
Characteristics of sound economic project development

- People-driven, participation important, focus is on human development
 - Sustainability
 - Income-generation
 - Recycling - keeping money in the community
 - Use existing/available resources, e.g. home-grown produce, cash crops
 - Taps local expertise and resources
 - Tailored to local, social/cultural system*
 - Ecologically sound
- Improvements in basic needs/quality of life do not automatically lead to social development. They must be context-specific and reflect local values, culture and ideology.

Economic development does not always result in social development. Midgley (1995) referred to this as distorted development. Figure 5 provides examples of this.

Figure 5
Examples of distorted development

- Engen in Wentworth:** The location or construction of factories which do not absorb people from the surrounding community and which neglect environmental issues.
- Ulundi:** There is no development around Ulundi despite the fact that it is the seat of provincial government. People employed in Ulundi itself come from other areas.
- The Sugar Estates:** Poverty in the midst of plenty - provision is made for their own workers NOT for the general development of the community. Surrounding communities have no water or electricity, no roads and no schools.

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

The third dimension of social development is political development. Burkey (1993:37) defined political development as a process of gradual change over time in which people increased their awareness of their capabilities, their rights and their responsibilities. They used this knowledge to acquire political power in order to:

- Participate in decision-making at local level.
- Plan and share power democratically.
- Create and allocate resources equitable among individual groups.

The concept of political development is compatible with the political roles of social work of promoting social justice and equity (Gray 1996c). Interventionists argue that growth and change is not inevitable. For social development to take place, governments must display the political will and commitment to eradicate poverty through its policies and developmental programmes (Vilakazi 1996). As stated by Khanyile (1996), it is the government's role to 'create a politically enabling environment conducive to development'.

The process of adopting a social development approach is in itself a political process. It is easy to adopt social development in principle, however, to implement social development is difficult (Mbambo 1996).

CONCLUSION

In this paper an attempt was made to provide a theoretical perspective on social development. Social development is presented as a multi-dimensional macro-policy perspective which has been recommended as an alternative approach to social welfare in South Africa to enable social workers to transcend their traditional roles (Draft White Paper on Welfare 1996). It is an approach which, it is said, can assist social workers in making an impact on the problems of mass poverty, unemployment and social deprivation which affects large sections of our population. For social workers to implement the social development approach, a change in focus is required. This change in focus necessitates wider use of the diverse change strategies familiar to social workers and the assumption of change management roles relating to advocacy, community education and empowerment, consultation, networking, and policy analysis. These themes are developed in Part 2 of this paper, which examines social development from a practical social work perspective.

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