



Social Welfare Services for the Vulnerable: A Sine qua non for the Formulation of a Comprehensive Social Welfare Policy for Healthy Living in Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined Social Welfare Services for the Vulnerable: a Sine qua non for the Formulation of a Comprehensive Social Welfare Policy for Healthy Living in Nigeria. In doing so, it x-rayed the meaning of social welfare services as well as gave in-depth explanations on social welfare services for a few select vulnerable people in Nigeria. Apart from these facts, the study further gave a situational analysis of social welfare policy and its challenges in Nigeria. In the circumstances of the foregoing, the study among others; also delineated the need for the formulation of a comprehensive social welfare policy, which includes to have a qualitative and equal (nondiscriminatory) education, and a comprehensive healthcare for the healthy living of the vulnerable people in Nigeria.

Keywords: Social Welfare Services, the Vulnerable, Sin qua non, Formulation, Comprehensive Social Welfare Policy, Healthy Living, Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

The historical trajectory of social welfare services in traditional Nigerian societies was more of assistance or help by individuals in families, communities and kingdoms to the vulnerable people. During this period, social welfare policy was not a challenge in Nigeria; hence provision

of social welfare services was based on communal rules and love for the care of the vulnerable people. But as the society evolved into a more scientifically-based one, with attendant increase in population, taking care of the vulnerable people became extremely challenging to people and government at all levels in Nigeria. However, to come out of the “maze” of the foregoing challenges attempts were made by the Federal Government (FG) to formulate a comprehensive social welfare policy; unfortunately, these were hampered by insufficient political will and corruption among the elites in Nigeria.

In the circumstances of the above facts, there is no comprehensive social welfare policy for now, rather what Nigerians have today are pockets of policy programmes for the care of the elderly, indigent children, prisoners, ex-convicts and others in Nigeria. Sadly, it is this lacuna in the formulation of a comprehensive social welfare policy that has spurred the researcher to carry out this study on Social Welfare Services for the Vulnerable: a *Sine qua non* for the Formulation of a Comprehensive Social Welfare Policy for Healthy Living in Nigeria.

Meaning of Social Welfare Services

Dyrough (1995) sees social welfare services as the organized system of social services and institutions designed to aid individuals and groups to attain satisfying standards of life, health, personal and social relationships that permit them to develop their full capacities and to promote their well-being in harmony with the needs of their families and the community as a whole. For Woodsite and McClam (2002) social service as social care is assisting clients in meeting their social needs, with the focus on those who cannot care for themselves. In addition, *National Open University of Nigeria* (2004) defines social welfare services as alleviation of poverty in its many ramifications.

Apart from the definitive analysis of social welfare services, Krcatovich (2017) explains that social welfare services also include cash assistance for the elderly and disabled, free or reduced cost school lunches, help with a home loan, and provision of physical goods like groceries, medical devices, and health insurance. It is regrettable that social welfare services in Nigeria have not reached the foregoing standard, but have been in ‘passing’, without a comprehensive social welfare policy. In the absence of a comprehensive social welfare policy, there has only been a fragmented provision of healthcare, education, housing, food, clothing, water, recreational activities/facilities and other infrastructural facilities (road, electricity, decent transportation, etc.) to a few needy among the large number of the vulnerable groups in Nigeria.

Social Welfare Services for a Few Select Vulnerable People in Nigeria

Social Welfare Services for the Elderly People in Nigeria

Most elderly people are vulnerable to diseases such as arthritis, poor vision, insomnia, diabetes, stroke, and others. These health challenges of the elderly may worsen when they cannot pay for hospital care and/or even get social and financial support from government, government agencies, family members and others in Nigeria. Based on the above situation, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGoN) introduced the National Pension Scheme that also covered the elderly persons. However, this did not sufficiently address the healthcare, food, shelter, clothing and other social services for the elderly in Nigeria. In this regard, during the 2-day National Summit on Ageing and Older Persons organized by the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social

Development, in collaboration with the Dave Omokoro Foundation and other stakeholders, to mark the 2014 International Day of Older Persons in Abuja; Hajiya Zainab Maina explained that:

We value greatly our senior citizens as very important stakeholders in National Development. Consequently my ministry will commence updating the National Policy on Ageing and that of social welfare to provide a suitable national framework for care of older persons in Nigeria (The *Vanguard*, 2014:1).

Taking from the above commitment by the minister then, the *Vanguard* (2014:1) further argues that:

The elderly persons should have access to adequate food, water, shelter, clothing and healthcare and have the chance to work or have access to other income generating opportunities. They should be able to live in environments that are safe and adequate to personal references.

Social Welfare Services for Indigent Children in Nigeria

First and foremost what are child welfare services? Child welfare services encompass every effort made by a nation on behalf of its children, including its educational system, medical services, parks and recreational facilities, even its road and highways (Charles, Ikoh, Iyamba & Charles, 2005). In line with the above definition, social welfare services include all social services that are aforementioned, in addition to supportive services such as food, clothing and living aids that are provided to indigent children. Taking from these facts, the question now is who should provide social welfare services to the indigent children in Nigeria?

Indeed, to answer this question, those who should provide social welfare services to indigent children are mostly the government and donor agencies; while members of families and communities give them supportive social services in Nigeria. Furthermore, Iwarimie-Jaja (2002, p. 141) posits that:

Child welfare services (including services for the indigent children) are provided by the child welfare agencies. Such agencies include the child protection agency, remand home and approved school. Abuse or neglected children receive child protection services; delinquent children obtain remand and trade school services, while abandoned children receive home care treatment from foster and adoptive parents. On a general note, child welfare departments offer counselling services to both the handicapped and delinquent children to enable them think rationally and to counter irrational and negative attitudes. Children with drug behaviour problems are referred to the alcoholic anonymous centres.

Thus, the reasons of government and its agencies for providing social welfare services to the indigent children in families and in official homes such as orphanage home, foster home, remand home and others as well as those on the streets include caring and protecting them from abusive acts in today's 'risk society' full of uncertainty in Nigeria. Another question is, do government and its agencies provide adequate social welfare services to indigent children in Nigeria? The

answer is capital 'NO'; hence there are 'army of indigent children who cannot get social welfare services in Nigeria. This is so because most of them live in the market stalls, motor parks and some are found under bridges in Nigeria (Ubi & Bissong, 2004). Worse still is the fact that majority of the street children have no access to school and medical facilities as a result of parents' inability to provide education and medical services (Ubi & Bissong, 2004).

Social Welfare Services for the Physically Challenged (impaired) Persons in Nigeria

Most physically challenged persons in Nigeria are discriminated against and/or avoided based on the circumstances or causes of their physical conditions. This is true, especially when such physical conditions or challenges are traced to leprosy as a causative disease. Despite this, FGoN provides some palliative social welfare services to the physically challenged people with the support of donor agencies in Nigeria. Some of the social welfare services for the physically challenged persons include access to education, healthcare, employment (through skill-acquisition schemes), housing, sporting activities and other life opportunities. Thus, in order to ensure that these social welfare services get to the physically challenged persons, Lang and Upah (2008:23) explain that:

The Rehabilitation Department at the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development does provide prosthetics and orthotics through its regional offices. However, such appliances are prohibitably expensive for the vast majority of disabled people to ever really benefit from the provision. Also, demand far outstrips supply for such appliances which means that, even if they were affordable, only a very tiny proportion of disabled people would be able to benefit.

Again, even though the aforementioned appliances were expensive, the Ministry of Women Affairs and, Social Development (Rehabilitation Department), provides some basic rehabilitation services... and through the Ministry of Health, provides some funding for the provision of medical rehabilitation for the disabled persons in Nigeria (Lang & Upah, 2008). Thus, to solidify these efforts, the physically challenged should be considered when planning and implementing infrastructural establishments in Nigeria. For instance, in the construction of high-rise buildings, the physically challenged persons' pathway lift machines should be considered for easy access to top floors. In the same vein, governments should, as their social welfare services, also consider the physically challenged persons' conditions during planning and implementation of road and park constructions to ensure their easy access in Nigeria.

Social Welfare Services for the Mentally Ill and the Ex-mentally Ill Persons (Recuperated Mentally ill Persons) in Nigeria

The mentally ill persons are those with emotional imbalances, who require help from government and others to cope with their mental challenges. Towards this end, government shall aim to (1) integrate neurological and substance abuse into primary care services; (2) make provision for acute in-patient care for persons with mental and neurological disorders at every federal medical centre, while discouraging unnecessary long-term institutionalization; (3) provide for out-patient care in all of these settings; and (4) provide for rehabilitation services, including occupational service, social service and clinical psychological service at every facility

where persons with neurological and substance abuse problems are treated (Federal Ministry of Health [FMoH], 2015). For quick recuperation of the mentally ill persons, FG in addition, provides social welfare services such as healthcare (medicines and behaviour therapy techniques [through the use of counselling and mental therapy conditioning and others] and good nutrition), and social care (provision of clothes and other materials needs as well as encouraging positive interactions) to them.

Additionally, the social welfare services for the ex-mentally ill persons are more of rehabilitation services that will make them lead positive health behaviours in Nigeria. In consonance with the above view, Social Welfare Development (SWD) (2016) explains that social rehabilitation services for ex-mentally ill persons aim at developing their physical, mental and social capabilities to the fullest possible extent that their disabilities permit. More importantly, mental health rehabilitation services are provided in a recovery-oriented rehabilitation in mental healthcare (Green, 1996). The aim of the FGoN on this is to rehabilitate the ex-mentally ill persons for educational programmes (formal and informal education) and positive behaviours, in order to cope well in their immediate communities. Apart from this, members of the communities also provide clothes, houses, food, etc. to ex-mentally ill persons for the possible reintegration and readjustment of their mindsets harmlessly, but positively, to mankind.

Social Welfare Services for Prisoners and Ex-convicts in Nigeria

Prisoners are usually left in the hands of Welfare Services Department of the prison for their correction and rehabilitation. In order to achieve this feat, government and non-governmental agencies (NGAs) are required to provide social welfare services such as healthcare, food, recreational activities, skills, clothing and others to prisoners for healthy living before their reintegration into the society.

Apart from these social welfare services, certain reform and rehabilitation objectives should be realized for the benefit of the out-going prisoners alongside members of the society. With regard to this stance, *The Nigerian Prison Service (NPS)* (2011) explains that the realization of one of the major objectives of the prison service is that the reform and rehabilitation of convicts should be done through a complicated set of mechanisms consisting among others: conscientization, group work, case work session, recreational activities, religious services, adult and remedial education programmes, educational development project, skills acquisition programme, mid-range industrial education production, agricultural service and after-care service programme. Thus, to ensure the workability of the above objectives, the rehabilitation services in Nigerian prisons therefore, should be aimed at increasing the educational and vocational skills of inmates, and their chances of success upon release (*NPS*, 2011).

Thus, when the ex-convicts are with members of their families in communities, social welfare services are usually continued for their further reformation and acceptance by other members of the society. In this regard, the social workers provide after-care-duty to the ex-convicts in their homes. Indeed, they advise the ex-convicts on the need for furthering their education, and/or improving on the trade acquired when in prisons. In fact, some social workers go as far as providing fund for the ex-convicts to buy tools and rent shops for the practice of the skills they acquired while in prisons. In addition to the efforts of the social workers, the significant and generalized other persons assist the ex-convicts with clothes, foods, houses, and

in some cases provide them with land to farm and/or give them paid employment to fend for themselves in the society. Gainfully, the main aim of these efforts is to properly reform and rehabilitate the ex-convicts for positive behaviours that will be devoid of negative behaviours (crimes and vices) in the Nigerian State.

Social Welfare Policy in Nigeria: A Situational Analysis

Social welfare policy in Nigeria is not comprehensive yet. But there are pockets of social welfare programmes that are provided by National Pension, National Health Insurance and Universal Basic Education laws as well as got through the youth development schemes to cater for the elderly, indigent children, physically challenged, mentally ill and prisoners, in addition to other vulnerable people in Nigeria. In the circumstance, efforts are made by FG to have a comprehensive social welfare policy that will be devoid of fragmented social welfare programmes for the vulnerable people in Nigeria. Indeed, when this is achieved, it will be an all-inclusive National Social Welfare Policy, which will contain packages to take care of the developmental needs of persons with disability (PWDs), orphans and vulnerable children, as well as the elderly within the society (Okafor, 2012); and this is on the verge of being developed for the country. In addition, Okafor (2012:1) also emphasizes that:

The new policy is expected to provide a comprehensive social welfare package to check the growing menace of street begging in and around Nigerian cities by impoverished citizens in form of the locally known *Almajiri*. It is equally geared towards arresting the alarming rate of street hawking by children, social excesses of street urchins as well as taking into consideration the plight of the ageing sector of the country's population and other vulnerable.

In consonance with this laudable vision, the Federal Government of Nigeria planned to spend 500 billion naira (\$2.5 billion) in 2016 on welfare programmes over 3 years in Nigeria (*The News*, 2017). However, these intervention social welfare programmes did not cover the needs of all vulnerable people in Nigeria, and to close the above lacuna, the FG should today, put in well thought out measures for the formation of a comprehensive social welfare policy in the country.

Some Challenges of Social Welfare Policy in Nigeria

Given the background of social welfare services in Nigeria, evidence abounds that colonialism left behind a legacy of social welfare systems irrelevant to the social needs of the colonies, but those of the colonial masters (Okennotifa, 1978). Learning from this sad situation, most Nigerian elites found it difficult to formulate a comprehensive social welfare policy to address the challenges associated with inadequate health, housing, education, food and social infrastructure for the vulnerable people in Nigeria. Rather they explored and exploited the attitude of self-satisfaction or aggrandizement of their colonial masters to the detriment of the citizenry, specifically the vulnerable people who then were at a 'sorry state'. What is also challenging at the onset of the formulation of a comprehensive social welfare policy in Nigeria is the fact that the country compounded the problem by integrating the United States of America (USA) social welfare system, even when the USA system is not nationally controlled like Nigeria's (Jarret, 1991). Currently, there are other challenges bedeviling the formulation of a comprehensive social

welfare policy in Nigeria, and they include unfocussed political will by successive governments at the centre, inadequate accurate data, inadequate allocation of funds, inadequate trained personnel and corruption.

Unfocused political will by successive governments at the centre

Right from 1960 when Nigeria had her independence, no successive government has deemed it necessary to formulate a comprehensive social welfare policy that will help take care of the vulnerable people in the country. These were the situations because no leader since then had also shown sound commitment or prowess in political leadership towards the formulation of a comprehensive social welfare policy for the care of the vulnerable people, or even present a bill alongside lobby the members of the National Assembly for its successful passage into law. Today, nonetheless, efforts are made by the federal government to support social welfare programmes in the 2016 budget for the care of the poor of the poor and other vulnerable people in Nigeria. However, this is not enough; hence Nigerians need “all embracing” social welfare policy that is driven by strong and sound political will for the care and development of the elderly, indigent children, physically challenged, mentally challenged, prisoners, ex-convicts, the unemployed, beggars and other vulnerable people in Nigeria.

Inadequate accurate data

Planning in Nigeria is usually bedeviled by inadequate accurate data. Sadly, the above scenario cuts across every sector of Nigerian economy. With regard to this ugly situation, making policies by political leaders to address unemployment, fall in education standard, fall in health status, decline in infrastructural establishments and others has witnessed the “darksides of underdevelopment (decline in economic growth, inflation, poor social welfare services, etc.), due to ‘dislocated’ record and inadequate data in Nigeria.

This is undoubtedly true; hence those who suffer more from the foregoing circumstances are the vulnerable people in Nigeria, who by right deserve adequate social welfare services through a well-planned comprehensive social welfare policy that should be derived from accurate data in the country. Inversely, the latter is difficult to achieve since there is no accurate data today to formulate a comprehensive social welfare policy for the vulnerable people in Nigeria. In line with these views, the *Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics (NNBS)* (2010, p. 1) confirms that:

It has failed to meet its mandate of producing adequate accurate and timely data needed for decision making... among the reasons for this appalling state were the poor attention from government, bad management, a bloated and low quality workforce, preponderance of non-professional staff (particularly administrative and accounting personnel), archaic data production and management technologies, and low morale and productivity of works. All these manifested in non-production of relevant statistics for planning and evidence-based policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, or, at best, the production of data that were untimely and often without any iota of integrity. This situation necessitated the current process of reforms in the body.

Inadequate Allocation of Funds

One of the major challenges of the formulation of a comprehensive social welfare policy in Nigeria is inadequate allocation of funds. This is worrisome because all successive governments since 1960 did not deem it necessary to allocate adequate funds for the formulation and development of a comprehensive social welfare policy in Nigeria; instead they fragmented social programmes to care for a few of them. Consequently, the import of this attitude could either be that the FG ignored the downtrodden or is ignorant of the need for social welfare policy development for all vulnerable people and others in Nigeria. Surprisingly, this negative attitude has spilled over to today's ugly trend of governance to the extent that some budget planners, in collaboration with some ministries, allocate funds to satisfy ministers or heads of agencies of government who will do their bidding after the budget is passed into law.

Also affecting adequate allocation of funds for the formulation of a comprehensive social welfare policy is the adjustment of allocation of funds by members of the National Assembly for constituency projects without much regard to improving funds for social welfare and its policy formulation and subsequent improvement in Nigeria. Regrettably today, the foregoing actions by both the FG and the National Assembly appear to outstrip the adequate allocation of funds for the formulation of a comprehensive social welfare policy in Nigeria.

Inadequate Trained Personnel

The FGoN ignored the formulation of a comprehensive social welfare policy because it claimed that professionals in social welfare services were inadequate to manage or enforce the policy in Nigeria. In view of this, the FG was loath to assemble stakeholders who would have helped for the foregoing policy formulation to meet the dire need of social welfare services for the vulnerable people in Nigeria. Thus, in order to overcome the low level of trained professionals for the formulation of a comprehensive social welfare policy, the federal government should encourage the establishment of Departments of Social Work in all Nigerian Universities, alongside trained personnel in the concerned ministries to fastrack same in Nigeria. Unfortunately, when this is not done by the FG, the resultant effect on the vulnerable people will be enormous; hence inadequate social welfare services in Nigeria.

Corruption

Trading Economics (2017) observes that corruption index in Nigeria averaged 20.17 points from 1996 until 2016, reaching an all-time high of 28 points in 2016. This statistical evidence shows that the Nigerian corruption index is still high and can truncate any attempt of a policy formulation, and the achievement of the existing policy frameworks of every sector in Nigeria.

Taking from the above facts, corruption seems to have affected the formulation of a comprehensive social welfare policy in Nigeria, in that there is 'slim rationalisation' among elites in government to achieve the policy for better social welfare service for the vulnerable people in Nigeria. Worse still, their focus is on power struggle and distribution of appointments instead of the care of the vulnerable people in Nigeria. This fact is supported by Crowe (2011) who in a master's thesis, entitled '*The Impact of Political Corruption on Social Welfare in the Federal Republic of Nigeria*', found that political corruption is a significant factor contributing to poor social welfare in Nigeria, resulting in nothing short of a protracted human tragedy. In spite

of the deep nature of corruption and the ‘devil’s ingredients’ associated with it, time has come to sack the menace for the formulation of a comprehensive social welfare policy that will open a new chapter of healthy living among the vulnerable people as well as others in Nigeria.

The Need for the Formulation of a Comprehensive Social Welfare Policy for Healthy Living of the Vulnerable People in Nigeria

In order to have an in-depth understanding of a comprehensive social welfare policy for healthy living of all, especially the vulnerable people, it is pertinent to define healthy living. Healthy living is the practice of health-enhancing behaviours or, put simply, living healthy ways (*Public Health Agency of Canada [PHAC]*, 2013). Drawing from this definition, it means therefore, that ‘healthy living can be used interchangeably with living healthy’. In this regard, what then constitutes living healthy in any society? In answering this question, Bamidele (2015, p. 1) explains that living healthy involves:

Eating a balanced diet, snacking appropriately and exercising regularly. When you choose to make a health choice every day, not only are you improving your physical appearance, you are also boosting your immune system and protecting your mental health. You do not have to be overweight before you start to live healthy as living is very essential regardless of your physical appearance.

In addition to the above explanation, what then is the need for the formulation of a comprehensive social welfare policy for the vulnerable people in Nigeria? To answer to this question, the need includes that:

There will be quality and equality in the education of the vulnerable people

This should cover the formal and non-formal education for the vulnerable people in Nigeria. The formal education should be comprehensive in the policy; such that it will include special education for the blind, deaf, mentally challenged and others. In fact, in this type of education, all teaching aids and gadgets as well as facilities should be provided for the education of the vulnerable people in Nigeria. For those who are not interested in formal education, they should be engaged in non-formal education where they can learn skills that will help them in life; and this should be explicitly enshrined in the policy, in order to achieve the foregoing feat.

There will be a comprehensive healthcare for the vulnerable people

In this regard, the policy should cover all health services that will help address the health challenges of the vulnerable people (i.e. the elderly, indigent children, physically challenge, mentally challenged, prisoners and others) in Nigeria. The formulation of a comprehensive policy will also help to address the challenges of health services, facilities and personnel for the care of the vulnerable people in hospitals, old people’s homes, orphanage homes, inmates in prisons and the vulnerable people in special centres in Nigeria. In addition, it will ensure better outreach programmes for the needy in the homes in Nigeria.

There will be food security for the vulnerable people

Today, the FG has started school feeding of children as a social welfare service for the vulnerable children in Nigeria. Thus, to expound this laudable feat, there should be a comprehensive social welfare policy to spur agricultural revolution for food sufficiency alongside its sustainability for healthy food security among the vulnerable people and indeed others in Nigeria.

There will be economic empowerment for the vulnerable people

This will only be achieved, where there is a comprehensive social welfare policy for the vulnerable people, which supports them financially to do businesses of their choice with low interest rate loans while for those who cannot access loans, grants be given them to fend for themselves and to buy personal working equipment and/or tools.

There will be a comprehensive infrastructural development for the vulnerable people

In this regard, the policy will create avenues for massive projects on housing, road infrastructure, electricity upgrading, safe water processing and others to improve on the social welfare services of the vulnerable people in Nigeria. More importantly, when the foregoing policy is effectively and efficiently implemented, crimes, ill-health, destitution and others will be reduced for healthy living among Nigerians, regardless of their social and health vulnerabilities.

There will be recreation activities for the vulnerable people

In consonance with this fact, the formulation of a comprehensive social welfare policy will expound equality in recreation activities among Nigerians, regardless of their socio-medical conditions. Meaning that the vulnerable people will be considered in all sporting activities, besides providing recreation equipment and facilities for them in schools, sport centres and community resource centres in Nigeria. Thus, to ensure that this social welfare service is encouraged in all parts of Nigeria, the FG should make “hay while the sun shines” for the formulation of a comprehensive social welfare policy and its domestication in all the states, in order to achieve comprehensive social welfare services for the healthy living of the vulnerable people in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

It is crystal clear that the ‘piece meal’ delivery of social welfare services for the vulnerable people was due to negligence of the formulation of a comprehensive welfare policy in Nigeria. These cannot be confuted; hence there is no clear-cut social welfare policy to address the decline in qualitative education, inadequate healthcare, food insecurity, inadequate economic empowerment, poor infrastructural development, as well as inadequate recreation activities for the vulnerable people in Nigeria. In these circumstances, however, the social welfare services for healthy living were found between the “devil and the deep blue sea” in all successive governments in Nigeria along with associated contradictions therein for the formulation of a comprehensive social welfare policy since 1960 to date.

Thus, all these challenges were addressed in the study, with specific reference to the need for the formulation of a comprehensive social policy that will be effective and efficient in the delivery of social welfare services to the vulnerable people in Nigeria. In addition to these facts, the study adumbrates that, the formulation of a comprehensive social welfare policy will be achieved to its fullest if further researches are done on the relationship between political leadership and sustainable social welfare policy development, as well as on the relationship between manpower development and social welfare policy implementation in Nigeria.

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