



African Journal of Social Work
 Afri. j. soc. work
 © National Association of Social Workers-Zimbabwe/Author(s)
 ISSN Print 1563-3934
 ISSN Online 2409-5605

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Indexed & Accredited with: African Journals Online (AJOL) | University of Zimbabwe Accredited Journals (UZAJ) | SCOPUS (Elsevier's abstract and citation database) | Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) | Society of African Journal Editors (SAJE) | Asian Digital Library (ADL) | African Social Work Network (ASWNet) | Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) - South Africa | SJR | CNKI - China | Journal Publishing Practices and Standards (JPPS) | EBSCO

Social sector planning and sustainable social services delivery, and management practices in developing countries

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the role of social planning in the delivery and management of social services. Social planning is a contemporary social sector development strategy which development agencies ought to adopt in order to deliver quality social services. Contrary to the conventional strategies, through social planning, appropriate social welfare programs may be initiated and good program management practices promoted. However, although this strategy is associated with numerous advantages, many development agencies continue to use conventional approaches to deliver social services. This has resulted into failure to initiate appropriate social programs to address critical societal challenges. This paper assesses the effect of community involvement in identifying their needs and in setting social development goals on social services delivery. The paper adopted a systematic literature review approach and based on the findings of the review, we conclude that social planning helps to initiate appropriate and efficient social development programs. This improves social services delivery and promotes good program management practices. Thus, we recommend that development agencies should adopt prescribed principles of social planning so as to be able to initiate appropriate social development programs which can address social challenges in society.

KEY TERMS: *developing countries, management practices, social sector planning, sustainable social services delivery*

KEY DATES

Received: September 2022
 Revised: October 2022
 Accepted: November 2022
 Published: December 2022

Funding: None
 Conflict of Interest: None
 Permission: None
 Ethics approval: Not applicable

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Current and previous volumes are available at:

<https://africasocialwork.net/current-and-past-issues/>



How to reference using ASWNet style:

Kakaire, A., Ssekamatte, D. and Kaweesi M. (2022). Social sector planning and sustainable social services delivery, and management practices in developing countries. *African Journal of Social Work*, 12(6), 286-294.

INTRODUCTION

Earlier studies show that there is a positive correlation between social planning, particularly between one of its key principles called community participation, which emphasizes the importance of community involvement in identifying social needs and in setting social development goals, and effective social services delivery. However, although social planning helps to generate appropriate social development interventions, there is still lack of clarity and understanding of these social planning principles by development practitioners. This is seen when a number of development agencies continue to use conventional strategies, which are less effective in promoting good program management practices, to deliver social services in the community and this negatively affects social services delivery in developing countries. This review paper therefore goes a long way in addressing this gap by assembling literature from different studies which explain the role of social sector planning, particularly the principle of involving communities in identifying societal problems and in setting social development goals, in delivering effective social services and promoting good program management practices in developing countries. Findings of this paper therefore help development practitioners to know the correlation between social planning and effective social services delivery.

BACKGROUND

There is no doubt that positive social change takes place when appropriate and effective social development interventions are initiated, and in ensuring that the interventions rolled out build resilient, cohesive and empowered communities (Karuga, et al, 2022). However, such change cannot happen by only investing massively in capital developments and application of modern technology, but also through adopting strategies which enhance the beneficiaries' abilities to take charge of their own affairs (Kinyata., & Abiodun, 2020; Siambombe, 2015; Osborne & Strokosch, 2021). Indeed, Khisa (2015) opines that the requisite for transforming society and causing social change lies in dealing with the social problems that have tragic implications on peoples' lives, and the needs they face through an integrated approach. Moreover, social planning is one of those strategies which may be used to transform society because by its nature, it is community based, which presents an opportunity to development stakeholders, to initiate people-oriented social development programs (Akondeng, Njamnshi., & Mandi, et al, 2022).

Historically, social planning was conceived way back after world war one but it gained prominence in the 1940s after world war two. Between the 1940s and 1950s, there was no clear social sector planning strategy which could be used to analyze social situations thus world governments and humanitarian agencies adopted social engineering strategies, mathematical models, to analyze social situations and to plan development programs to address social problems created by the war (Kadurenge, Nyonje, Tujifunzeni & Ndunge, 2016; Osborne & Strokosch, 2021). Failure to use social engineering strategies to address the social effects of the war demonstrated that the above models had gaps and were not comprehensive enough to answer the social questions of the day (Bromley, 2003). As a result, these development models were put aside and social planning techniques adopted in Great Britain and by other European countries to analyze the complex social challenges created by the war, and to plan for post-world war reconstruction (Chivasa, 2019). By the time of the outbreak of world war two, social planning was being used to analyze, assess and address complex social situations in Europe. Moreover, by the 1960s, a number of colonial territories had also regained their independence and national development efforts were also in high gear, which heightened the need for clear development plans.

Conceptually, social planning, also referred to as neighborhood planning, is a concept with no single definition. Thus, it attracts different interpretations and definitions from different scholars. Moreover, it is also a field characterized by a mix of specialists with varying education backgrounds and specializations (Einstern & Msilu, 2020). According to Hardina (2017), social planning is defined as the process of planning social services, programs and policies involving government agencies, communities, social planners, policy makers, legislators, philanthropic organizations, local authorities and donors. It is also defined to describe the planning of social services or efforts to improve the quality of life of communities (Meenaghan, et al, 2004; Solomon, 2000). Social planning is one of the three primary models of community organization besides social action and community development (Chivasa, 2019). Indeed, social planners use applied research techniques including needs assessment and program evaluation, among others, to get data which guides them while planning social services (Khisa, 2015). Social planners obtain facts about social problems through research and analyzing data to inform their decisions in regard to the most appropriate and effective interventions needed to adopt to be able to address societal problems (Hassan, et al, 2017).

Theoretically, varying opinions have been advanced about why development practitioners ought to embrace social planning, a strategy adopted after Europe and its colonies failed to address social problems created by world war I using conventional development strategies. Valeska (2017) report that earlier development planning models put emphasis on engineering principles and techniques, and less attention onto the basic theories, which could have been used to address the said social challenges. Meanwhile, Hickel (2012) also observe that the models

planners were using after world wars one and two were economic and based on quantitative analysis and these could only make sense in social terms, and policy conclusions made basing on them only after being transformed into general social models (Ntirandekura & Christopher, 2022). The existence of gaps in the existing development models compelled world governments and social practitioners into a search for new strategies to address social problems heightened by world wars hence the emergence and institutionalization of social planning in social development efforts.

In light of the above, social planners, who are by nature versatile, through a participatory approach plan society's non-economic activities which support the wellbeing of people including health, education and housing, among others. As noted by Hardina (2017), any support efforts meant to improve service delivery and to upgrade the peoples' standards of living are more effective when change agents embrace a people-focused strategy. However, although it is reported that social planning helps to generate appropriate social development programs, many development agents, especially in the developing countries have ignored it and they continue to use conventional strategies to deliver social services, which has resulted into failure to generate appropriate social development programs to address community challenges (Ntirandekura & Christopher, 2022; Karuga et al, 2022).

RATIONALE FOR THE REVIEW

Social planning is a people-centered social development strategy which brings professionals and non-professionals together to address critical societal problems (Kinyata & Abiodun, 2020). These implement joint programs aimed at improving societal conditions and fostering sustainable development. Planning social services, which is informed by scientific research, enables stakeholders to take joint actions to address community problems, contrary to the conventional development methods in which beneficiaries were seen as objects for development (Ntirandekura & Christopher, 2022). However, whereas research confirms the existence of a positive correlation between social planning and efficient social services delivery, which ideally would induce all change agents to embrace it, many have completely ignored it, while others have partially embraced it. These continue to use the less participatory conventional development approaches to deliver social services (Akondeng, Njamnshi, Mandi et al, 2022). This denies them the opportunity to diagnose the real societal needs and to initiate programs which can empower their beneficiaries. This paper assembled data which highlights the role of social sector planning in ensuring efficient social services delivery and good program management practices in developing countries. Thus, this can help development agents to understand the relevance of social planning in their community development efforts. This was done under the following objectives:

- a) To establish the effect of the participation of communities in identifying their needs on social services delivery and good program management practices
- b) To analyze the effect of joint identification and setting of social development goals on social services delivery and good program management practices

The justification of this review is that its findings have practical implications, which help to inform the decisions of stakeholders including communities, government agencies, social development professionals and social planners, among others, to address societal problems. Secondly, results further help stakeholders to appreciate the relevance of social planning, particularly community participation, in generating appropriate social services delivery interventions, and in promoting good program management practices, leading to better and faster social services delivery.

METHOD

A systematic literature review approach was adopted and three main steps were taken namely; (1) planning the review process, which involved coming up with a review protocol, followed by identifying specific key search terms used to search for relevant literature which was reviewed, (2) evaluation and extraction of relevant literature in line with the objectives of the review, synthesizing the findings and lastly (3), reporting the findings (Aromataris & Pearson, 2014). Google Scholar, ResearchGate and AJOL were the search engines used to identify relevant literature.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria adopted by the study involved identifying and selecting only relevant articles which measured the effect of community participation in problem identification and goal setting on social services delivery. Both peer reviewed and non-peer reviewed but relevant and recent articles, books and conference presentations were included in the review. However, seminal articles which were old but provided background information about social planning were also included.

Systematic data analysis method was used to analyze data and this involved identifying, organizing and extracting findings in line with the aims of the review from each study, summarizing it and lastly grouping the findings into themes related to the aims of the paper.

Several ethical standards were observed during the review process in order to protect the findings from being undermined. The authors read literature representing a good spread of views and opinions, and not only that which we agreed with, we took time to understand the arguments presented and the basis for such arguments to avoid the risk of misunderstanding the authors' arguments and reasoning. We also avoided superficial reading which affects the way researchers assess some other peoples' works, which would affect our ability to know how much weight to give such work in this study. Table 1 contains a list of seminal articles included in this paper.

Table 1: List of articles included

#	Article	Source
1.	Akondeng, C Njamnshi, W.Y., Mandi, H. E, et al (2022). Community Engagement in Research in Sub-Saharan Africa: Approaches, Barriers, Facilitators, Ethical Considerations and the Role of Gender	African Journals Online (AJOL)
2.	Aura, C. et al (2015) A Comprehensive Public-Private Partnership Concept for Resources Sustainability from a Mega-Project Management Multi-Level Perspective	Google Scholar
3.	Austin, M. J., & Jeffery R. S. (2000). Managing the Planning Process. In the Handbook of Social Welfare Management.	Google Scholar
7.	Butoracova Sindleryova, I., Garaj, M., and Dancisinova, L. (2019). Community Planning Perspective and Its Role within the Social Policy of the Municipalities	Google Scholar
10.	Chivasa, N. (2019). Action Research by Ordinary People: How Communities Are Creating Peace Committees in Seke District, Zimbabwe,	AJOL
14.	Einstern, A. M., and Msilu, S. S. (2020). Community Participation and Service Delivery: An Assessment of Legal Safeguards in The Context of Local Governance in Tanzania,	AJOL
15.	Esteves, A.M. et al, (2020). Sustainable Entrepreneurship and the Sustainable Development Goals:	Google scholar
16.	Folorunso, A.E. (2005). Community Development and Youth Integration Policy in Africa	AJOL
17.	Hassan, F.A., Ongayo, H. A., Osore, M.K., Morara, G. N., and Aura, C. M. (2017). Effect of Community Participation in Access to Social Services:	Google Scholar
18.	Kadurenge, B.M., Nyonje, R.O., Tujifunzeni, B.B.O., & Ndunge, D.K. (2016). The Evolving Nature of Community Participation in Public Development Projects in Kenya	AJOL
19.	Karuga, R, et al, (2022) Participation in Primary Health Care Through Community-Level Health Committees in Sub-Saharan Africa	Google Scholar
21.	Khisa, M. (2015). Political Uncertainty and its Impact on Social Service Delivery in Uganda.	Research Gate
22.	Kinyata, G.S., & Abiodun, N.L (2020). The Impact of Community Participation on Projects' Success in Africa	Google Scholar
25.	Marijani, R (2017). Community Participation in the Decentralized Health and Water Services Delivery in Tanzania.	AJOL
30.	Ntirandekura, M., & Christopher, F. (2022). Community Participation and Budget Allocation in Local Governments in Uganda: A Case Study of Rubanda District Local Government, Western Uganda	AJOL
31.	Ogbeiwi, O. (2019). General Concepts of Goals and Goal-Setting in Healthcare: A Narrative Review,	AJOL
32.	Olaleye, Y. L. (2019). Social Mobilization and Community Participation in Development Programs,	AJOL
34.	Pilát, M. (2015). Community Planning of Social Services in Current Theory and Practice.	Google Scholar
37.	Shigute, Z. (2022). Community Participation and the Quality of Rural Infrastructure in Ethiopia	AJOL
38.	Siambombe, A. (2015). Rural Communities and Policy Participation: The Case of Economic Policies in Zimbabwe.	AJOL
39.	Sindleryova, I. B., Garaj, M., and Dancisinova, L. (2019). Community Planning Perspective and Its Role within the Social Policy of the Municipalities,	AJOL

RESULTS

Literature reviewed in this section is specifically related to the study objectives namely; the effect of community participation in problem identification and in the identification and setting of social development goals on social services delivery and good program management practices.

Participatory problem mapping

Involving the beneficiaries in activities which directly affect them is one of the ideas emphasized by social planners during the process of planning social services and this is anchored on the assumption that community participation improves social services delivery (Chivasa, 2019; Hardina, 2017). Studies by earlier researchers indicate that one of the key activities which the beneficiaries have to actively engage in is problem identification. Indeed, it is reported that any social planning process begins with recognizing that there is a problematic social situation which requires attention (Bromsley, 2003), followed by involving communities at all levels of a project cycle including identifying a problem, and this is said to be the driver of development (Olaleye, 2019; Weil, 2005). Similarly, Sindleryova, Garaj and Dancisinova (2019) also hold a similar argument when they opine that “a participatory model of community planning policy as a main tool of community planning improves service delivery”. Esteves et al (2020) also support the above arguments when they also observe that “community-led initiatives help stakeholders to learn experiences from local levels and strengthen the implementation of programs”. It is further reported that communities get empowered when they are involved in identifying their needs and this is attributed to the sense of ownership and responsibility created among them due to their participation. Participation of the beneficiaries enhances their connection with the programs which helps them to plan, manage, control and assess their joint actions (Kadurenge, Nyenje, Tujifunzeni & Ndunge, 2016; Folorunsho, 2005).

Management of societal needs identification process

Contemporary social development scholars argue that the success and sustainability of community development programs largely depend on the ability of the beneficiaries to manage their own affairs (Austin & Jeffery, 2000). This of course involves their ability to manage the process in which community needs are identified. Indeed, Ejiogu (2001) contends that grass root problem identification and management enhances the sense of community responsibility, which leads to more benefits which governments with all their resources may not quickly provide to people. Moreover, findings in a study by Hassan et al (2017) also concur with earlier studies when they observe that “social services' affordability is enhanced when a participatory approach is used to manage the process of identifying community needs”. Meanwhile, Aura, Hassan, Osore, Musa, Morara and Uku (2015) also emphasized that engaging the community in managing the entire process including problem identification, development and implementation leads to better project management. Therefore, although the above arguments imply that the success of social welfare programs is premised on putting the beneficiaries at the center of managing the process, the situation on ground in many developing countries is different.

Social development agenda

Social planners emphasize that beneficiaries of any program are key stakeholders who must be involved at every stage of the development program initiated in their communities, which include setting social development goals. When beneficiaries participate in the identification and setting of social development goals, they influence its direction and execution, which enhances the effectiveness and efficiency of such programs, and improves their well-being (Ntirandekura & Christopher, 2022; Ken, Korth & Richter, 2016). Indeed, the 2016 UNDP report on integrated planning and sustainable development also shows that stakeholder engagement and coordination during the setting of the programs' goals and objectives helps to realize sustainable social development. Moreover, Bardal, Reinart, Lundberg and Bjorkan (2021) also observed that joint identification and implementation of goals ensures sustainability of development projects and enables society to contribute to the goal. This implies that involving beneficiaries in setting development goals does not only ensure the attainment of society's development agenda but also helps to translate the goals and targets into the beneficiaries' respective contexts. Similarly, Ogbeiwi (2021) also supports earlier arguments that goal-setting is a key activity, which is problem-based, change-oriented and can effectively facilitate the attainment of community goal statement if it is formulated with a specific framework, while Pilat (2015) also maintained that social planning promotes the principles of consensus, equality and joint decision-making, a guide to participatory models, which helps to identify development goals agreeable to all. The above arguments mean that involving communities in setting development goals by the development agencies leads to effective and efficient community social services delivery.

Management of social development agenda

Earlier studies show that beneficiary involvement in determining the social development agenda enhances good project management practices (Akondeng, Njamnshi, Mandi et al, 2022). Indeed, Einstern and Msilu (2020) opine that “putting communities at the center helps to align the community’s development agenda with their needs”, Bromley (2003) observes that social planning is people-centered and it involves planning for people and by the people, while Makanyeza, Kwandayi and Ikobe (2013) argue that community development can easily take place when developers work on the social development agenda with the community. Chivasa, (2019) contends that “establishing friendship with the community while offering minimum direction helps to steer them towards a community development agenda” which meets their needs, improves their conditions of living and ensures sustainable community development. Moreover, adopting an all-inclusive approach by stakeholders is reported to be the “mother” of generating appropriate social development agenda and it enhances the sense of project ownership (Kadurenge, Nyonje, Tujifunzeni & Ndunge, 2016; Osborne & Strokosch, 2021). Also, through joint research, societal problems are diagnosed and people-centered social development agendas acceptable to all are generated, which enhances the beneficiaries’ identification with the program (Schuttee, 2016). Therefore, this implies that the generation of an appropriate social development agenda and the promotion of good program management practices largely depend on stakeholders playing a guiding role as they work with beneficiaries to address society’s critical social problems.

DISCUSSION

The first specific objective of this paper investigated the effect of community participation in the identification of needs on social services delivery. Our review findings affirm that community-led initiatives strengthen program implementation, deliver better services (Esteves et al, 2020) and improves social services delivery (Chivasa, 2019). Moreover, the review confirms that grass-root problem identification delivers faster benefits compared to governments with better resources and structures (Olaleye, 2019; Sindleryova, Garaj & Dancisinova, 2019). This however has been affected by failure by change agents to embrace social planning. Relatedly, from the review, it is further noted that communities are empowered and their sense of ownership of the development interventions enhanced when they are involved in identifying their problems (Kadurenge et al, 2016). Indeed, community participation is also reported to be a basis for sustainable social development after change agents terminate their working relationships with beneficiaries, and helps them to identify with the program (Korth & Richter, 2016). The review also confirms that when communities participate in defining interventions to their problems, their attachment to them is enhanced, which promotes a good program management practices (Aura et al, 2015) and ensures the sustainability of such programs. Moreover, the second objective of this review was to assess the effect of community involvement in identifying social development goals on social services delivery. Participatory goal-setting is reported to be problem-based, change-oriented and steers the community towards their development agenda, which helps to meet community goals (Ogbeiwi, 2021). Indeed, involving communities in identifying development goals ensures sustainable social development, helps to attain society’s social development agenda and to align societal goals with interventions. However, although social planning principles emphasize participatory problem identification and development goal setting to enhance sustainable social services delivery and promote good program management practices, change agents have harnessed them, which has affected social services delivery.

Through a systematic review of literature related to the study constructs above, we conclude that:

1. Involving communities in identifying their needs by social development practitioners as emphasized by social planning enables change agencies to initiate appropriate, efficient and effective social development programs, and it also promotes good program management practices.
2. Involving community members in setting of social development agenda is an ingredient needed in any social development strategy to foster social change and if it is fully embraced by change agents, it can help them to initiate appropriate and effective social development programs leading to improved social services delivery, and the promotion of good program management practices.

We recommend that:

1. Social development practitioners and change agencies should at all times involve communities in identifying their needs because this helps to address the real problems of the people and to build resilient, cohesive and empowered communities.
2. Social development practitioners should always involve beneficiaries in identifying and setting of social development goals because this will enable them to initiate appropriate, effective and efficient social

development programs which are not detached from the social realities on ground, and which are capable of delivering quality social services, and promoting good program management practices.

3. Since social planning is a recent concept just gaining dominance in the social development sector and it also stands on a number of principles, further reviews can be done focusing on the relationship between social planning and other social variables which influence social change in society including coordinated action, linkage across sectors and local government leadership, among others.

CONCLUSION

In line with the findings of the review and the ensuing discussion, we conclude that social planning, particularly the principle of community participation, which emphasizes the idea of community involvement in the identification of needs and in setting of development goals, are effective ways of initiating appropriate and efficient social development interventions, and promoting good social program management practices, other factors remaining constant. We also conclude that beneficiary-led initiatives, which among others, include needs identification and goal setting, strengthen the implementation of development programs, and deliver better and faster services compared to governments with better resources and structures. They also enhance the beneficiaries' sense of ownership of the interventions and promote good program management practices. Thus, change agents ought to take advantage of social planning in order to initiate appropriate social development programs.

Declaration

We the authors declare that this review paper was conducted in the absence of any financial relationship that could be perceived as a potential conflict of interest.

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