

SOCIAL WELFARE: A TOOL FOR IMPROVING WELL-BEING OF THE AGEING POPULATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract: *Social welfare policies are documents designed for the improvement of the life of all categories of people be it children, youth, adult and aged. Based on United Nations declaration for welfare policy of the Aged which Nigeria is a signatories. Presently, there is no welfare policy for the aged in Nigeria. Aged people are facing numerous challenges ranging from security, shelter, family rejection, nutrition, health among others. Aged populations are the senior citizens of any nation who had spent all their time and energy on national unity and development. This paper recommended among others that the Nigerian government should provide welfare policy document for the aged and also citizens should encourage grassroot support for the aged starting from the family to improve love and care among families.*

Keywords: Social welfare, well-being, Ageing Population, Sustainable Development

Introduction

Ageing is the process of growing old in one's life time. Ageing has become a global phenomenon and a policy issue that received attention by governments globally. Ageing according to the David (2009) Learners in Nigeria, people are experiencing demographic and epidemiological changes which pose a unique policy changes and information needs. Ageing has posed a serious challenge to governments in Nigeria due to the inability to cope with regular care and payment of pensions to retired workforce who served their father land meritoriously, both civilian and military men and inability to provide social services and health facilities to cater for the needs of the teaming ageing population.

There is no universally accepted standard to numerically define who an aged person is but it was stipulated as the age of sixty by the United Nations (2006). The Aged in Nigeria Nation can be categorized as people who fell within the age bracket of sixty or sixty-five and above. In most of the developing countries, the age of retirement is always put at sixty or sixty five and it is therefore assumed that old age start at this age. It is believed that at

the age of sixty or a little above, a person is Less productive and can only contribute a little to the economy, hence the need for such person to retire and rest.

It is undisputable that Nigeria is the most populous black nation in the world and there is a very high potential rapid growth rate of the older population.

The bitter reality is that the aged people have invested in their children in hay days with the belief that they will have succor when they get old are rudely dashed as most of these children find it difficult to secure a good job after schooling. Some of these children even depend on the old parent for livelihood or to engage in further studies after graduating from tertiary institutions. Moreover, those that have enough money to spend on their parents, due to the nature of jobs and family arrangement, do not really have the time to render the full care and attention needed.

Older people are identified as a distinct group, deserving special care and attention under human rights law. In Nigeria nation the old aged are always suffering with many problems such as inability to get monthly pension, poor family support and government intervention. The

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plight of the aged leads to loss hope for support from either government or non government agencies. This calls for the establishment of a social welfare services to render help to these old people within our society.

Social welfare can be described simply as the general well-being of a society. The wellbeing of a society can be considered to be acceptable when the well-being of the majority of its citizens is acceptable. What does it mean to be “well” and what is an acceptable level of well-being? The answer to such question lie in the contemporary international agreed upon norms that nearly all countries have agreed to as members of international organization by signing the international treaty laws, such as human rights. The welfare of a society can be measured by the extent of its political and economic rights.

Political rights deals with the spread of democracy, economic rights have not always ensured. A society can be considered to have ample social welfare when the majority of its citizens consider themselves to have a decent quality of life, meaning that their basic rights are met to live conducive life, grow the economy and achieve sustainable development agenda.

Sustainable development is said to be the development that meets the needs of current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development has been portrayed as a crucial development process that needs to be adopted by the world due to the accelerating decrease of natural resources which leads to the deterioration of human environment and the negative impact it causes on the economic and social development (Drexhage and Murphy, 2010).

Sustainable development advocates for a link between three pillars: economic development, which ensures that economic growth maintains a healthy balance with the ecosystem; social equity which tackles human inequality, social injustice and poverty and environmental protection which tackles limited natural resources (Kates, Paris and

Leiserowitz, 2011). This study highlights the concept of social welfare, sustainable development, policy of social welfare among others. It is based on the above background that this paper tries to examine social welfare direction for the Aged in Enugu State inorder to improve their well-being.

Concept of Social Welfare

Social welfare are organized centres or homes incharge of caring for social problems associated with suffering, deprivation, hunger, want, deviance and death among people especially the older ones. It is an organized means of providing natural support for people within the society especially the elderly, care of the sick and the handicapped. It is an organized structure that provide services to the people. Social welfare services provides both material needs and most importantly the psychological security for the people in need within our society. Social welfare services helps the families to tender to meet the welfare needs of the masses within the society (David, 2009).

Social Welfare and the Roles of Families:

As in all traditional societies, problems that could not be explained or solved by available technical competence tend to inspire a fatalistic attitude. There was little understanding of social problems as known today and there were no organized agencies to deal with the problems of suffering, deprivation, hunger, want, deviance and death. When these problems occurred it will be handled by the family or the lineage (Gerald, 2012).

Thus, the services termed as social welfare, traditionally fell exclusively into the domain of the extended family. The family in Ibo land had for centuries arrogated to its self social, economic, political and cultural functions. Each man was truly a “brother’s keeper” (United Nations 2006). Religion, be it Islamic, African tradition and Christianity were the principle behind the assumption of such functions by the family as it have the basis of all family life and activity. It did not only provide

explanation for the unexplained or little understood, but also provided the impetus for action.

The extended family, thus, provided natural support for members, the care of the elderly, care of the sick and handicapped, the orphans and the destitute. Thus, the family has the structure that provided services that are nowadays offered by organized social agencies. Moreover, the family did not only provide the materials needs but most importantly it provided psychological security for its members. This is a very significance factor when discussing social welfare. Organized welfare services were pioneered by missionaries in Enugu State, mostly with medical services, education and care for mothers. Colonial administration assumed responsibility for welfare activities either because of considerations for industrial efficiency or because of the fact that the needs of the under privileged were becoming increasingly recognized. However, the limited social services within Africa during the colonial times were distributed in a domination and exploitation pattern (David, 2009).

The administrative structure for social welfare services is a direct imitation of those in the home countries. Thus, the services reflected the structural traditions, intellectual values and concepts of the colonizing countries and not of the indigenous African societies. In the formal British colonies, many of the welfare services were those that were found in Britain; and many other activities undertaken in the colonies, were intended primarily for the maintenance of the colonial administration. Social welfare services were available to the colonial settlers and a few selected Nigerians engaged in the productive activities. Since the rural areas and smaller urban centers did not figure in the priority of the colonial masters, they did not receive these services. Consequently, the effect of the introduction of Western concept of social welfare services limited to those areas and people actively engaged in the machinery of colonial administration and production. Nevertheless, the natural helping systems family, lineage which had tended to meet the welfare

needs of the masses was seriously weakened by the impact of the colonizing forces. In Enugu State today, most social welfare services are provided by church, non-governmental organization and rich individuals within and outside the state.

Sustainable Development

It must be understood that there is no single definition for sustainable development, but the key idea common to all definitions concerns resource exploitation at a rate that would prove detrimental to future generation. According to Ugwu and Ijah (2011), sustainable development is described as a construct, which envision development as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the needs of the future generations. Environment should be seen as an asset, a stock of available wealth but if the present generation spends this wealth without investment for the future then the world will run out of resources. If however, we use capital to research and develop new resources for the future, we can build machines that will substitute for the environmental resources (resource substitution). A good example is the construction of solar panels to replace oil and coal. Sustainable development means a better quality of life now and for generation to come (Ugwu and Ijah, 2011). It means not using up resources faster than the planet and human can replenish.

Sustainable development contains within it two key concepts:

- The concept of needs and
- Idea of limitation (Ugwu and Ijah, 2011).

The concept of needs in particular is the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given and the idea of limitation imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs. The economic policies we endorsed today will have an impact on urban poverty when our children are adults. Sustainable development concerns a wide range of interrelated issues which may be approached through raising the level of

literacy and numeracy in any society to maintain ecological integrity (Asodike, 2008). This implies a developmental issues that depends on the initiative, resourcefulness and discipline of human beings who are the managers of developmental programmes to sustain welfare packages for both the youth and aged.

The present social welfare services in Enugu State

One has to distinguish between articulated social welfare policies and actual social welfare provisions. As already noted, social welfare, before the advent of missionaries and colonialists, was provided by the extended family system. Organized welfare began to take shape with the pioneering efforts of missionaries. At present, social welfare services are provided by the family system. Voluntary agencies and government individually or collectively, these two bodies provide social welfare services to citizens of Enugu State (State Ministry of Planning, 2017).

Enugu State Social Welfare

Organizational structure has gone through four stages. First of all, as administered by the colonial government, the provision of services was the responsibility of the administrative officers. In stage two, the provision of services became the responsibility of government department. The third stage was the integration of services within various ministries. Finally, the state government established the state ministry of social development, youth and sports to ensure continuous improvement and transformation in the quality of life of the citizens, to coordinate the activities of the various service sectors. This indicates that state government has created a whole ministry to provide welfare for the populace, especially the youth but nothing for the older people who have served the state government for years as workforce among others.

Enugu State social welfare policy

A social policy can be defined as a deliberate decision or package or decisions, by a state government which is concerned with the provision of a range of services,

facilities, infrastructure among others which are perceived as essential and relevant to the social welfare and well-being of individual members of the society (Jega, 2008). Thus, a social welfare policy entails aggregate decisions which generally concern the provision and distribution of services, relating to education, health care, shelter, physical and emotional disabilities, crime and delinquency, child-care, the elderly, environmental hazards among others in a society. Social welfare policies are invariably informed by, and are therefore a reflection of the prevailing values, beliefs and world-view or orientation of those that are at the helm of affairs of the state.

Social Welfare Need Of the Aged

This is another area in which the government of Enugu State has not yet adopted the western structure of social service practice. Traditionally, this care has been assumed by the family. As noted before, children had recognized the responsibility to take care of aged parents and grandparents. It appears that this is still the practice. However, this practice is weakened by the overall impact of change. Change in the degree of respect for the elderly, change in composition, function and role of the family, change in terms & urbanization, western styled education have made care of the elderly more difficult for the family than it was when the kinship system was strong. In addition, the fact that more and more women are becoming educated and taking up different roles such as civil service, business, farming among others, renders the care of the elderly more difficult (Mildred, 2010).

This area (welfare of the aged) deserves more consideration by the government of Enugu State. It is better to maintain the care of the elderly by the family than to put the elderly in special homes and institutions as there is no caring centre yet in the study area (Enugu State), this would only further alienate them from the family. It would help to weaken even further the family ties and family roles as “welfare agent”. Thus, the government of Enugu State should devise a means of

encouraging the family to maintain this care by subsidizing it, for instance: Enugu State Government should institute a home for caring of old Aged people but the care and management is questionable in accordance without traditions, norms and values. All this effort was made by the state government in order to provide welfare for the aged.

The issue of protecting the rights of the aged in Enugu State does not have constitutional backing, which is regarded as the first fundamental document for protecting rights, which are essential to human existence (Adebo, 2011). There are certain provision of the 1999 constitution of Nigeria (as amended) that seem to ascribe some rights to the aged in Nigeria, state inclusive, within its social milieu. For example, as part of the economic objective of the state, it is provided that the state shall direct its policy towards ensuring that suitable and adequate shelter, food, old age care and pension, sick benefits and welfare of the disabled are provided for all citizens.

The aim of the above provision is to protect the vulnerable in the society from hardship that may occur due to weak or disadvantaged nature. The vulnerable in the society, needs the protection of the government and the society at large. Therefore, there is need for the government of Enugu State to direct its policies to ensure that such category of people is not exposed to danger by virtue of the weaknesses. The 1999 constitution of Nigeria (as amended), further provides that in furtherance of social order of the state, which is built on ideas of freedom, equality and justice, the sanctity of human person shall be recognized and human dignity shall be maintained and enhance. It is also stipulated that every citizen shall have equality of rights, obligations and opportunities before the law (Sanda, 2005). This implies that the aged should not be deprived of the provisions of the social order as enshrined in the 1999 constitution.

Social Welfare policy and Improvement of Wellbeing of Ageing Population for Sustainable Development

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The elderly people in Enugu State fall into a lot of problems and difficulties of living in many areas like adequate health care facilities, food, shelter, economy, security and skill acquisition among others. The challenges facing the aged after serving their mothers land when they need rest to enjoy comfort and security are many in the state. Thus, it becomes imperative for the state Government to provide free medical care for the aged as obtained in other places (Adrian, 2013). The State Government needs to provide Day Care Centers for the elderly to solve the problem of abandonment by family members.

That Senior citizen's wealth of experience should be tapped for solving national issues and problems which may lead to achievement of peace, national security where development will thrive and also can be sustained. This in a nutshell will lead to achieving sustainable national development on the long run. This will serve as a welfare provision for the elderly even though there is no documented and accepted policy that is being implemented in the state now, that can help in assisting the aged with those aspect of welfare provision.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident that the aged in Enugu State are seriously suffering from various challenges ranging from scarcity of food, shelter, income generation, pension income, security among others. As an important category of individuals, who served the state and now facing serious challenges as senior citizens of the state, there is need for a rethink on social welfare policy directions for the aged in order to improve their wellbeing.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

1. Enugu State Government should provide a policy document on welfare policy for the aged to care for the elderly.
2. The wealth of experience of the aged persons should be tapped and utilized in solving state issues and problems which can contribute to the

attainment of peace, security and development for the economic and social growth of the citizens.

3. The proposed policy document should encourage the support for the aged to start from the family in order to improve love and care among the family.
4. The State government should set up welfare service centres in all wards of the seventeen (17) Local Government Areas of the State.
5. Non-Governmental Organization should be encouraged to fund welfare services to our ageing population.
6. The Government of Enugu State in order to achieve Sustainable development for her citizens should start a mild stone move for the improvement of wellbeing of the aged population within our society now.

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