Original Article

IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS SKILLS FOR IMPROVED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES IN ENUGU NORTH SENATORIAL ZONE.

Dr. U.T. Eze and Ayogu, Michael Emeka

Department of continuing education and development studies, faculty of education, Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Agbani, Enugu State, Nigeria.

E-mail: Ukamaka.Eze@Esut.Edu.Ng, mchlayogu@gmail.com,

Phone Number: 09051444443, 07039490385

Abstract

This study determined how implementation of social workers skills can improve community development programmes in Enugu North senatorial zone. The study was carried out in Enugu State using a descriptive survey research design. One research question and one null hypotheses guided the study. The population for the study was 1457 community development officers and executive members of Town Union in the six local government areas of the zone. The sample size of the study was 460 respondents which comprised 212 community development officers and 248 executive members of town unions in the six local government areas of the zone. The instrument used for data collection was a 9 itemed structured questionnaire which was face validated by three research experts. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha method and the reliability coefficient of the instrument yielded alpha value of 0.79. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation and t-test statistics was used to test the null hypotheses at .05 level of significance. The result of the study revealed that implementation of social workers skills to a great extent were provided for community development programmes in Enugu North senatorial zone. The null hypotheses tested showed no significant difference in the mean ratings of community development officers and executive members of town union (respondents) on how implementation of social workers skills improve community development programmes in Enugu North senatorial zone. Based on these findings, it was recommended among others that social workers should ensure direct engagement of community members in implementation of programmes or projects in their various communities as it will help to facilitate the programmes or projects. Also, the government should encourage and support social workers to embark on more social works for the development of communities.

Keywords: Social Workers' Skills, Community Development, Enugu North Senatorial Zone, Programme Implementation, Descriptive Survey Research

Introduction.

Human beings have various needs and these needs range from fundamental, physiological to aesthetic and esteem needs (Nyerere in Ayogu 2022). These needs also vary depending on the age bracket, gender and socio-economic placement of the individuals. The needs of a child are different from that of the adolescent, and the needs of adolescent differ from that of adults or older adults. Males have different needs compared with that of females and the concern of the poor may not be the concern of the rich. Besides, the needs of citizens can hardly be met by the citizen alone. Some persons come to the world with congenital abnormalities and require specialized services while others are born without such disabilities. There are individuals who are separated from their spouses for one reason or the other and some children require fostering and adoption when their natural parents are not available. In addition, there are socio- economic stratifications that place individuals in different social strata. There is therefore need for inclusion of the support of others, governmental, non-governmental organizations and social workers.

Social workers are professionals who aim to enhance overall well-being and help meet basic and complex needs of communities and people (Dhavaleshwar, 2016). Social workers work with many different populations and types of people, particularly focusing on those who are vulnerable, oppressed and living in poverty.

Social work is a practice-based profession that promotes social change, development, cohesion and the empowerment of people and communities (Indeed Editorial Team, 2021). Social work practice involves the understanding of human development, behavior and the social, economic and cultural institutions and interactions. Social work professionals working with families and institutions have helped to provide and advance the following social impacts:

- Civil Rights
- Unemployment Insurance
- Disability Pay
- Workers' Compensation
- Reduced Mental Health Stigma
- Medicaid and Medicare
- Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention (Indeed Editorial Team, 2021).

In general, there are three levels of social work practice. They are: micro, mezzo and macro social work. At each level, social work professionals provide slightly different services to target populations (Dhavaleshwar, 2016).

- Micro Social Work: At the micro level, social workers provide one-on-one, family and small-group services to individuals addressing a wide range of social issues. These may include housing support, substance abuse counseling and mental health therapy.

- Mezzo Social Work: Social workers who operate at the mezzo level work with groups of people, such as in a school, prison, hospital or neighborhoods. They may help students struggling academically, address substance abuse recovery with prison inmates or help coordinate care for patients who are admitted to hospitals for long-term care.

- Macro Social Work: At this level, social work encompasses policy making, research and community based initiatives. Social workers at this level of practice are more likely to focus on and help to address larger societal issues like homelessness, substance abuse, housing and more.

Social work could be seen from the above, as the process of efficiently providing resources and services necessary to meet the needs of individuals, families, groups and communities to ensure effective social functioning. Thus, Friedlander in Bharadwaj (2017) is of the view that administration of social agencies translates the provisions of social legislation of social agencies and the aims of private philanthropy and religious charities into the dynamics of services and benefits for humanity.

This indicates that the activities of social workers are for the good and services of humanity.

Today, the Greeks, the Indians, the Chinese and the Europeans have very rich literature of how ancient people administered help and assistance to their people. Many historical accounts of ancient people maintained that mutual aid was conceived in many societies as the collective responsibility of every member of the society. The welfare of the individual was intricately linked to the welfare of the community. Cash and food were often donated to the poor, and shelter could be provided for migrants. Voluntary exchange of help was a dominant cultural practice in many parts of the world including Nigeria. However, the extent of social welfare permissible by culture was largely determined by the amount of resources that the community could afford as at the time the request was made (Sachdeva, Sonya, Jordan, & Mazar 2019).

In Britain, Catholicism came to be the major religious philosophy upon which the church and the state assisted the poor (Okide, 2015). It was also the main philosophy of most Western nations including Australia. In pre-Elizabethan era in Britain, social work services were the responsibility of the church. Church monasteries helped in providing food and shelter for the poor. Through designated parishes, the church usually collected alms for the poor or vulnerable on specific Sundays, Christmas or other festive periods and such alms were given to the poor through church officers. Some others even donate to the Church for the poor in times of difficulty. A typical example is during the peak of Covid-19, individuals and government donated for the good of the people in order to bring succor to them. This practice is on-going around the globe till date.

Social workers function in a variety of settings, including the private, public and government sectors, and are instrumental in providing legislators and nonprofit organizations with the information needed in order to successfully roll out any programme designed for the benefit of the community. They develop policies and programmes that help others. They work in the social services department of an organization, and they set policies to help people cope with problems such as unemployment, substance abuse, inadequate housing, spousal and child abuse, et cetera. They also design programmes that help people combat these social issues.

The roles/functions of social workers include the following as described by Popple, FSU and Leighninger (2020):

1.   Engagement — the social worker must first engage the client in early meetings to promote a collaborative relationship.

2.   Crisis management

3.   Advocacy

4.   Empowerment

5.   Educator

6.   Assessment — data must be gathered that will guide and direct a plan of action to help the client

7.   Planning — negotiate and formulate an action plan

8.   Implementation — promote resource acquisition and enhance role performance.

9.   Community organization

10.   Monitoring/Evaluation — on-going documentation through short-term goal attainment of the extent to which client is following through

11.   Supportive Counseling — affirming, challenging, encouraging, informing, and exploring options.

This study focused on the implementation of social workers skills for improved community development programmes.

Programme implementation is an important role of social workers in community development programmes. It is essential to the progress of any group or organization. Implementation could be defined as a specified set of activities designed to

put into practice an activity or programme of known dimensions (Chomutare, T., Tejedor, M., Svenning,T.O., Marco-Ruiz, L., Tayefi, M., Lind, K., Godtliebsen, F., Moen, A., Ismail, L., Makhlysheva, A., Ngo, P.D, 2022). According to this definition, one can see that implementation processes are purposeful and are described in sufficient details such that independent observers can detect the presence and strength of the "specific set of activities" related to implementation. The study therefore aims at determining whether enhanced implementation of social workers skills improved community development programmes in Enugu North senatorial zone.

Community development covers all forms of developmental activities in a community. It is an unbounded domain. Community development is therefore, understood as a professional discipline, and is defined by the international Association for Community Development as a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes participative democracy, sustainable development, rights, economic opportunity, equality and social justice, through the organization, education and empowerment of people within their communities, whether these be of locality, identity or interest, in urban and rural settings (Alison & Marilyn in Ayogu, 2022). From the above, community development is therefore seen as a process which seeks to empower individuals and groups of people by providing these groups with the skills needed to effect change in their own communities. These skills are often concentrated around building political power through the formation of large social groups working for a common goal.

Community development is a planned and organized effort to assist individuals to acquire attitudes, skills and concepts required for their democratic participation in the effective solution of as wide as possible, a range of community problems in an order of priority determined by their increasing levels of competence (Indabawa &

Mpofu in Ayogu, 2022). The programmes of community development usually grow out of calculated tireless efforts to bring about social change in communities. Community development could also be regarded as the process whereby members of communities are encouraged to think about their predicaments and then formulate action programmes that will help to solve them.

However, the approach to delivering community development and social welfare services has been changing from time to time. Presently, a bottom-top service delivery approach is in vogue. This approach implies that the beneficiaries of a social welfare service are helped to understand their problems and then, participate in suggesting and providing possible interventions towards resolving them. On the other hand, bottom-top service delivery approach is a demand-driven approach showing that communities are helped to identify a problem affecting them and hence, the need to solve it (Twebaze in Ezima, 2021).

The bottom-top approach contrasts with the top-bottom approach whereby the bureaucrats thought over problems affecting the communities and provided interventions on their behalf. The top-bottom approach presupposes that communities have no capacity to understand their problems, nor do they have any capacity to suggest any meaningful intervention to solve their problems (Chigbu, U.E, 2015). This top-bottom approach of solving community problems had short-comings since their services did not match the communities' needs. As a result, the communities considered the interventions not only as foreign but as imposition and intimidation on them. The institutions and facilities were looked at by the communities as 'government things' and never in favour of the communities.

Institutions and facilities provided broke down when government funding and responsibility dwindled. Hence, the top-bottom approach failed to yield the expected results. This development,

according to Johnston, K.A., Lane, A.B., Devin, B., & Beatson, A. (2018), led to the adoption of bottom-top approach since last two decades. UNICEF further asserted that in Nigeria, the bottom-top approach has been adopted since the early 1990s as community development projects cannot be undertaken successfully without the bottom-top approach. The bottom-top approach involves mobilizing the communities, getting them involved, educating them to focus and prioritize their pressing community development needs. Once they identify their needs, they are further helped to identify interventions to solve such needs. The bottom-top approach is also referred to as a demand-driven approach because it translates into equity possession of properties resulting from a consultative approach process. The community therefore cares for the institutions and facilities effectively and efficiently as they are aware that the institutions and facilities not only belong to them but are for their own benefit. As a result, the communities become part and parcel of their own problem-solving tools.

This constitutes what Nyerere, Freire and others described as "transformation or change in consciousness" (Indabawa and Mpofu in Ayogu, 2022). Here, one can see that development placed more emphasis on the person as the ultimate beneficiary of all developmental efforts. It helps individuals to realize their inherent potentials and effectively cope with the change in circumstances of their lives. It also involves the total mobilization of a society towards a self-reliant position with regard to not only the processes of decision-making but also, in production and consumption patterns. Community mobilization is indispensible to the effective execution of development programmes and as such, community development officers are at the fore-front in the community mobilization process. This is because they are experts in the area. Therefore, there is the need for the community development officers to mobilize community members for effective involvement in the social, economic and political advancement of their communities. It is therefore obvious that in mobilizing communities for development process, none of these two facets of communities (urban and rural) in Enugu North senatorial zone should be neglected.

In Enugu State for instance, there are instances where communities have been mobilized by community development officers for the purpose of developing their communities. The employment of the mobilization strategies such as: capacity building, coalition formation, direct engagement of community members and partnership creation with organizations has resulted in the completion of agricultural extensions at Akpa-Edem, Ozzi-Edem and Uzo-Uwani respectively. Others are provision of health education at Uzo-Uwani, Igbo-Etiti, Nsukka and other local governments in Enugu North senatorial zone. More to the point, since the year 2020 that the whole world witnessed Covid-19 pandemic, there has been sensitization programmes by social workers on Covid-19 around the globe to educate people on how to control and prevent its spread. Sequel to that, the government introduced face mask, regular washing of hands with soap, avoidance of crowded areas, et cetera.

In all the instances given, one can see that community development programmes are best implemented and improved by social welfare officers through community mobilization / active involvement of community members in the programmes. However, there are still cases of abandoned and/or uncompleted community development programmes in many communities within Enugu North senatorial zone. Therefore, the strengthening of communities' capacities and active involvement of community members by the social workers in solving their problems make the members of the community to embrace the programme and then, help to ensure implementation of such community development programmes.

Since implementation of social workers skills is very important to ensure improved community development programmes, training of town union executives and involving community members for community development progrmmes in the various communities by community development officers becomes inevitable. This is because; there are still cases of abandoned and/or uncompleted community development programmes in many communities within Enugu North senatorial zone. There is therefore the need to determine the extent to which proper implementation of the skills of social workers can improve community development programmes in Enugu North senatorial zone. It is against this background that the researcher carried out this study.

Statement of the Problem

Social workers are noted for encouraging communities to embark on different community development programmes in the form of agricultural extension, housing, health, home economics, cooperatives, rural industries, recreation and use of leisure, et cetera. As part of their profession, social workers often generate community improvement programmes as well as development projects that also allow the local citizens to contribute to their community's development through social actions. Social actions get people moving, making them feel strong and responsible for their own lives and actions. It therefore means that social workers are relevant in community development and need varied competencies to function effectively as they act as catalysts/ encouragers, educators, connectors, innovators and even change agents. Being competent requires life-long learning which entails enhanced/better performance in their roles in planning, organization, implementing and evaluating which the study intends to determine. Over the last two decades, different community development programmes have been implemented in various communities. As a result, lots of funds

were employed into the programmes. Even though, some successes have been recorded, the social workers seem to have no detailed assessments of the effectiveness of these programmes in ameliorating the sufferings of the community members. Records available in the various local government areas showed that there are many completed and commissioned community development programmes. However, there are also cases of uncompleted and/or jumbled community development programmes within the area that the communities are not interested in. From records available too, it seems that the social workers are kind of sidelined in most of the community development programmes mostly because they are not well exposed in terms of what they should do in most cases and how to carry the community along for effectiveness. More still, it seems that lots of investments put into these community development programmes are not commensurate with their outcome while some are outside the immediate needs of the community.

The level of community involvement in the planning, financing, execution, operation and management of community development programmes is still in doubt in some communities. It then becomes necessary to enhance the implementation skills of social workers to improve community development programmes in Enugu North senatorial zone so that community development programmes/projects could be implemented better hopefully with all stakeholders involved. Therefore, the problem of the study posed as a question is: How can implementation of social workers skills improve community development programmes in Enugu North senatorial zone?

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this research is to determine how implementation of social workers skills can improve community development programmes in Enugu North senatorial zone. Specifically, the study will determine:

1. how implementation of social workers skills in welfare activities can improve community development programmes in Enugu North senatorial zone.

Research question.

1. How can implementation of social workers skills improve community development programmes in Enugu North senatorial zone?

Hypothesis: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of community development officers and executive members of town union on how implementation of social workers skills can improve community development programmes in Enugu North senatorial zone.

Methodology

Research design: Descriptive Survey Design was used for the study.

Sample and sampling Technique: the study's sample size was 460 respondents (212 community development officers and 248 town union executive members).

Instrument for data collection: a structured questionnaire was used to elicit information from the respondents.

Method of Data Analysis: Data was analysed using mean and standard deviation while hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance and appropriate degree of freedom with t-test statistics.

Result

Research question 1: How can implementation of social workers skills improve community development programmes in Enugu North senatorial zone?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation Rating Scores of Community Development Officers (CDO) and Executive Members of Town Union (EMTU) on how Implementation of social workers Skills Improve Community Development programmes in Enugu North Senatorial Zone.

S/N	Item Statement	CDO (N=212)			EMTU (N=248)		
		$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
1.	Allowing one programme to be handled at a time.	2.35	0.96	Rejected	2.69	1.12	Accepted
2.	Involving the community members in assessing the utilization of the programme.	2.57	0.97	Accepted	2.75	1.02	Accepted
3.	Involving the community in prioritizing (selecting) their needs.	2.70	1.03	Accepted	3.11	1.17	Accepted
4.	Various groups in community should work together.	2.45	1.00	Rejected	3.16	1.09	Accepted
5.	Accepting constructive criticisms from community members.	2.67	1.03	Accepted	2.95	1.12	Accepted
6.	Providing relevant information to convince the community members on needs to acquire skills for community development.	2.67	1.03	Accepted	3.06	1.13	Accepted
7.	Making use of resources in	2.49	1.05	Rejected	2.74	1.17	Accepted

the community.

8.	Make use of expert advice	2.70	1.03	Accepted	2.96	0.98	Accepted
9.	Active participation of community members during programme implementation.	2.53	1.05	Accepted	2.79	1.14	Accepted
	Cluster Mean	**2.57**	**1.02**	**Accepted**	**2.91**	**1.10**	**Accepted**

Table 1, shows the mean and standard deviation ratings of community development officers (CDO) and executive members of the town unions (EMTU) on how implementation skills of social workers can enhance community development in Enugu North Senatorial Zone. The mean ratings for community development officers on how implementation skills of social workers can enhance community development programme ranged from 2.35 to 2.70 with standard deviation ratings values that ranged from 0.96 to 1.05. On the other hand, the mean ratings of executive members of town unions ranged from 2.33 to 2.82 with standard deviation ratings values that ranged from 10.98 to 1.17. Six out of the nine items were rated above the benchmark (Mean=2.50) stated for acceptance of item statement by the CDOs. However, the mean ratings of the executive members of town union on all the items were above the benchmark (Mean=2.50) stated for the acceptance of item statements. It can therefore be said that community development officers and executive members of town union agreed that involving the community members in assessing the utilization of the programme, involving the community in prioritizing

(selecting) their needs, accepting constructive criticisms from the community members, providing relevant information to convince the community members on the need to acquire skills for community development, make use of expert advice and ensuring active participation of community members during programme implementation are some of the ways implementation skills of social workers can improve community development programmes. The cluster mean ratings for the CDO and EMTU were 2.57 and 2.91 with standard deviation ratings of 1.02 and 1.10 respectively. Both the mean ratings are above the 2.50 benchmark, therefore it appears that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of the CDOs and EMTUs on how implementation skills of social workers enhance community development programmes.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of community development officers and executive members of the town union on how implementation skills of social workers improved community development programmes in Enugu North Senatorial Zone.

Table 2: A t-test for Significant Difference between the Mean Ratings of Community Development Officers (CDOs) and Executive Members of the Town Union (EMTUs) on how Implementation of Social Workers Skills Improved Community Development Programmes.

	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig	Dec.
CDO	212	2.570	1.020	3.417	458 000	.001	NS
EMTU	248	2.910	1.100	3.437	454 000	.001	

Table 2 shows a t-test analysis of significant difference between the mean ratings of community development officers (CDOs) and Executive

Members of the Town Union (EMTUs) on how implementation of social workers skills improve community development programmes. The absolute

t-values for the nine items ranged from 1.97 to 7.17. Except for only item 2 with associated probability value of 0.050, the associated probability levels for the remaining eight items, including the cluster mean are below the level of significance (0.05) stated for testing the null hypothesis. Therefore, there exists significant difference in mean rating of CDOs and EMTUs in the eight items. From the observed significant difference in the cluster mean, it implies that CDOs and EMTUs differed in their perception of how implementation of social workers skills improve community development programmes in favour of EMTUs with greater mean rating. Hence, the null hypothesis which state that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of community development officers and executive members of the town union on how implementation of social workers skills improved community development programmes in Enugu North Senatorial Zone was rejected.

Discussion of Findings.

The findings of the study revealed that implementation of social workers skills enhance community development programmes in Enugu North senatorial zone. The findings of the study showed that involving the community members in assessing the utilization of the programme, involving the community in prioritizing (selecting) their needs, accepting constructive criticisms from the community members, providing relevant information to convince the community members on the need to acquire skills for community development, make use of expert advice and ensuring active participation of community members during programme implementation are some of the ways social workers skills enhances community development programmes in Enugu North senatorial zone. The findings of the study were in agreement with the view of Valbrun (2018) that to enhance implementation of social workers skills for improved community development programmes, it is important to make sure that the

goals are specific, measurable, result-driven and time bound. This will attract the members of the community to be part of the programmes hence, facilitates the implementation of community development programmes in such communities.

The findings of the study according to the null hypotheses showed that there was no significant difference between the mean ratings of community development officers and executive members of town union on how implementation of social workers skills improved community development programmes in Enugu North senatorial zone. This implies that both community development officers and executive members of town union shared the same view on how implementation of social workers skills improves community development programmes in Enugu North senatorial zone.

Conclusion

Implementation of social workers skills improves community development programmes in Enugu North senatorial zone. As a result, government should continue to promote the activities of social workers in various communities for effectiveness, to ensure that the investments put into the community development programmes are commensurate with their outcome and are not outside the immediate needs of the community.

Recommendations

1. The social workers should ensure that the communities as the beneficiaries of their programmes should be properly informed and are having the direct impact of the programmes.

2. The social workers should ensure direct engagement of community members in implementation of programmes or projects in their various communities as it will help to facilitate the programmes or projects.

3. Government should encourage and support social workers into embarking on more social works for the development of communities.

4. Community members should utilize the opportunities provided by the social workers

through development programmes in their communities to improve their standard of living.

5.   Social workers should ensure that the needs of the targeted communities are taken into

consideration in the programmes to ensure that the community will benefit from the programmes.

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