11. Social work in South Africa: context, concepts and some critical reflections

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Key words
South Africa, social development, social welfare, developmental social work

Introduction

Two decades have elapsed since South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, which heralded the advent of a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights (Republic of South Africa, 1996)[2]. Social work, as an established profession in the South African society, played a significant role in the democratization of the country (Patel, 2005). However, the active voice and impact of social work on the prevailing social development para-

digm of the country is questionable and this concern gave rise to this article with the purpose to open constructive dialogue and debate on the matter. Hence, this article aims to present some critical reflections regarding social work practices in South Africa. To this end, an overview of the South African socio-economic situation, a synopsis of the development of social welfare and an exposition of concepts relevant to the current status of social work are presented as context. Essential concepts instrumental to an understanding of the context are outlined throughout the article.

1. An overview of the South African socio-economic situation

Diversity is a key feature of the South African population, with 11 official languages and historically, racially and culturally divided societies. For 2013, Statistics South Africa (2013) estimated the mid-year population as 52,98 million, comprising 79.8% black people, 9% coloured, 8.7% white and 8.7% Indian. The African national congress (Anc) has been the ruling political party since 1994, aiming to redress the National party's apartheid legacy of a deliberate and sustained exclusion of the majority of the citizens from political decision-making processes.

Although South Africa has one of the continent's largest economies, the country is challenged with one of the most uneven income distributions in the world with a Gini-coefficient of 0,69 (National planning commission, 2012), and an average unemployment rate of 25% (this unemployment rate measures the number of people actively looking for a job as a percentage of the labour force). This contributes hugely to the poverty rate, which is estimated at 41.4% of South Africans living under the poverty line. Coupled with one in seven hiv infections of its citizens (Statistics South Africa, 2013), South Africa as a developing country, has as a consequence numerous socio-economic challenges in all spheres of civil life and specifically in terms of crime and policing, infrastructure, education, health and social welfare.

The country has a well-established social welfare system and a large proportion of social spending is allocated for social grants. Social welfare spending accounts for approximately 60% of total government ex-

penditure and the social security in South Africa may be regarded as one of the largest non-contributory systems in the world. Currently the number of beneficiaries of government grants exceeds the number of personal taxpayers by a wide margin, with roughly three people on social grants for every person who pays income tax, and almost two social grant beneficiaries for every employed individual in the country. An estimated 17% of the population depend on state welfare, whilst 74% of beneficiaries are children younger than 18 years and are therefore not liable to taxation. However, the adult (voting) population numbers approximately four voters to each taxpayer. Consequently a disturbing ramification might be that an estimated 48% of youths between the ages of 15 and 24 and nearly a third of those between 25 and 34 years may in fact be regarded as structurally unemployed. The implication is that they are potential recipients of social grants in future rather than potential income taxpayers. This should be seen against the estimate that only 0.8% of South Africans who were regarded as poor were able to migrate to higher income groups in 2009 (Engelbrecht, 2011).

Be that as it may, six types of social grants are currently administered by the South African social security agency (Sassa) to improve the standards of living, to redistribute wealth and to create a more equitable society in the country. These grants are the following: a grant for older persons; a disability grant; a war veteran grant; a care dependency grant; a foster child grant; and a child support grant. Each grant has to meet a different set of requirements and provisions (Saunders, 2013). Many grant beneficiaries rely on grants as their only income; and in many households, incomes are augmented by more than one grant (Engelbrecht, 2008).

The current socio-economic situation of the country can also not just be blamed on the current global financial crisis, which is regarded as the worst economic slowdown the past 60 years. The harsh socio-economic conditions in the country have persisted over a period of time, during which the majority of households suffered a lack of opportunity to improve their circumstances, in spite of a relatively sophisticated social welfare system (Engelbrecht, 2011). A synopsis of the development of social welfare as presented in the next section, will provide further elaboration.

2. Synopsis of the development of social welfare

Various narratives exist around the development of social welfare in South Africa, as the country's history was shaped by successive eras of colonialism, apartheid and democratization, resulting in irreconcilable perceptions based on differences in experiences. Therefore, the account of the development of social welfare is demarcated with the country's early history and post-apartheid as two definite time periods, based mainly on the work of Potgieter (1998).

2.1. Early history of structured social welfare

Between 1864 and 1899 the Dutch reformed church in particular was first to create structured care meeting the welfare needs of people in South Africa by founding various institutions in the Cape Colony. Poverty among a large section of the population was aggravated by a war with Britain in the beginning of the twentieth century. More than 26,000 white women and children, and 14,000 black people died in concentration camps, resulting in many children being orphaned. In response, women's charitable associations were founded in 1904 for white people, followed by Child welfare societies for all population groups.

A Land Act of 1913 deprived black people of the right to own land outside certain demarcated areas and forced them to maintain links with the rural subsistence economy through a system of temporary migrant labour. Structured social welfare efforts focused almost exclusively on the white population and culminated in an investigation by the Carnegie commission of enquiry into the poor white problem in 1934. This resulted in the establishment of training institutions in social work in the 1930s and the first Department of social welfare in 1937.

World war II was followed by droughts in 1945, disease and poverty, forcing people who were ill-equipped to life in a modern industrial society to migrate to cities. In 1948 the Nationalist government came to power, which ruled the country for 46 years and introduced a system of separate development (apartheid) through institutionalised racial discrimination. This resulted in social welfare services with 18 govern-

ment bureaucracies at national and provincial levels responsible for the administration and delivery of welfare services. Despite these fragmented welfare services, a sophisticated social service delivery system developed. With the banning of political movements such as the Anc in 1960, ordinary people also became involved in social service initiatives, which resulted in widespread protests against apartheid-initiated programmes.

Even with the majority of South Africans not able to receive equal welfare benefits, three acts were introduced in 1978, which changed the future welfare scene in South Africa. The National welfare Act (100 of 1978) made provision for the registration of welfare organisations; a Fund-raising Act (107 of 1978) aimed to control fund-raising by the general public and a Social and associated workers Act (110 of 1978) made provision for a statutory council to regulate the conduct, training and registration of social and associated workers. These acts resulted in certain discrete principles in the social welfare system in the 1980s, based on the segregation of races, a state-private welfare partnership, the rejection of socialism and the idea of a welfare state, and a movement away from a residual and therapeutic focus to a community-based preventative orientation. During this area a second Carnegie inquiry into poverty and development was also launched and focused on the whole of South Africa. However, the separation of population groups was confirmed with a new constitution in 1983, making provision for a tricameral parliament with separate chambers for whites, coloureds and Asians, with the exclusion of blacks. National government programmes such as a Population development programme did not succeed in mobilising community participation and the country furthermore experienced growing effects of economic sanctions and a recession, resulting in decreased funding for social welfare services.

2.2. Post-apartheid

In 1990 all political organisations were unbanned en Nelson Mandela was released after 27 years' imprisonment. The first democratic election of the country was held in 1994 when the Anc government of national unity came to power. In 1997 a unified Department of welfare

started to operate. Part of the transformation process required the Department of social welfare to change its name to the Department of social development. The new government had the opportunity to challenge the political processes of the past, which also included handling of social welfare (Lombard, 2003). Several government-led policies were introduced, such as the Reconstruction and development programme (Reconstruction and development plan, 1994), the (Gear) Growth, employment and redistribution strategy (1996) and the White paper for social welfare (Republic of South Africa, 1997), which had a vital impact on the shaping of social work in the new political dispensation.

While welfare reform in many Western countries meant reducing government commitment to welfare, the new South African government embarked in 1994 on an inclusive transformational welfare system based on the principles of social development. The Reconstruction and development programme (Reconstruction and development plan, 1994) was initiated and was an integrated socio-economic policy framework with the aim of joining the South African communities and resources in the final dismantling of apartheid. The Reconstruction and development plan (Rdp) paved the way for an alternative way of thinking on the mobilisation of human resources potential and endeavoured to be an integrated and sustainable programme; a people-driven process, providing peace and security for all; focused on nation building, linking reconstruction and development; and aimed for the democratization of South Africa.

In 1996 the South African department of finance adopted the macroeconomic Growth, employment and redistribution strategy (1996). This neo-liberal shift recommended financial discipline, strategies to increase public and private investment, commitment to the free forces of capitalism and the logic of the market. However, this policy was opposed by many sectors in the country, such as trade unions, and was soon to be replaced inter alia by a Broad-based black economic empowerment Act (2003), resulting in political intervention in the business environment. Gear's stringent limits on expenditure did not meet the social development goals of the Rdp, and failed to deliver the envisaged economic, job growth and redistribution of socio-economic opportunities for the benefit of all the people in South Africa.

Within the same time frame of the adoption of socio-economic and macro-economic policies and strategies such as the Rdp and Gear, a White paper for social development was adopted in 1997 as part of transforming the welfare system of the country. This was an attempt to move towards a developmental approach in social welfare, supporting a people-centred approach to social and economic development. The adoption of social development as an approach towards social welfare was a deliberate rejection by the government of a neoliberal approach of market reliance and minimal government. The social development approach implies a commitment to invest in human capabilities and purposely redistribute resources on more equitable terms in order to achieve social justice. The approach focuses on poverty eradication through building people's capabilities to achieve self-sufficiency (Patel, 2005); and is largely based on Midgley's (1995: 25) definition as «…a process of planned social change designed to promote the well-being of the population as a whole in conjunction with a dynamic process of economic development».

The developmental approach has been the official guide to social welfare in the country since 1997 and is inherently a movement away from a residual and institutional welfare approach, characterised by the emergence of social welfare in South Africa. More specifically, the developmental approach to social welfare recognises the need for integrated, strengths-based and rights-based approaches to social service delivery; ensures and promotes the sustainability of intervention efforts; emphasises appropriate services to all, particularly the poor, vulnerable and those with special needs; and recognises that social work, among other social service professionals, plays a major role in addressing the developmental needs of the South African society (Department of social development, 2006).

Against this backdrop of the development of social welfare in South Africa, the current status of social work will subsequently be expounded.

3. Current status of social work

The distinctive type of social work that has evolved from the social development approach has become known as developmental social

work (Midgley, Conley, 2010: XIII), which constitutes the profession's specific contribution to the developmental approach (Patel, 2005). Developmental social work can be defined as an integrated, holistic approach to social work that recognises and responds to the interconnections between the person and the environment, links micro and macro practice, and utilises strengths-based and non-discriminatory models, approaches and interventions, and partnerships to promote social and economic inclusion and well-being (Mayadas, Elliott, 2001; Gray, 2006; Patel, Hochfeld, 2008). An integration of case work, group work and community work is regarded as the primary methods of social work service delivery.

A range of acts are currently guiding social work practices, with the Constitution of the republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) (Republic of South Africa, 1996[a]), primarily providing the right of access to appropriate social assistance to those unable to support themselves and their dependants. Apart from acts such as those for the aged, prevention and treatment of drug dependency, and social assistance, a Children's Act (Act 38 of 2005) (Republic of South Africa, 2006) is directing social work. The Social service professions Act (110/1978) (Republic of South Africa, 1978) provides the regulations for a statutory, autonomous South African council for social service professions (Sacssp) and sets out inter alia an ethical code, and standards for education and training in social work (South African council for social service professions, 2012[a]). All social workers and student social workers have to register annually with the Sacssp and are bound by the ethical code. Social service professions other than social work are in various stages of development in terms of establishing professional boards and developing qualifications.

The total number of social workers registered with the Sacssp in March 2012 was 16,740 (Moloi, 2012). Of these social workers 40% are employed by the government and the rest are employed at Non-profit organisations (Npos), in private practice capacities or are not active practitioners. It is estimated that only 9,000 social workers are servicing the current population of more than 50 million people in South Africa across all sectors (Statistics South Africa, 2013). In spite of a recommended ratio of 1 social worker to 60 cases by the Department of

social development (2006), social workers report caseloads sometimes exceeding 300 and more (Engelbrecht, 2006).

Furthermore, a gross discrepancy between the remuneration of social workers working for the government and those in the private sector, together with overall low salaries of social workers and unfavourable working conditions, were some of the reasons of an incontestable brain drain of social workers after South Africa's first democratic elections (Engelbrecht, 2006). This staffing crisis has led to the Minister of social development declaring social work a scarce skill (Skweyiya, 2005) and approving a recruitment and retention strategy for social workers. However, South Africa is currently experiencing a 77% shortfall of social workers, affecting the implementation of crucial social welfare legislation. For instance, 66,329 social workers are required to implement the Children's Act; 743 social workers are essential for the implementation of the Older persons Act; and 1426 social workers for the implementation of the act dealing with prevention of and treatment for substance abuse. Notwithstanding these tremendous shortfalls, the social work profession is still regarded as significant in communities and to fulfil government's efforts to provide social welfare services in South Africa (Waters, 2013).

Pivotal to an understanding of the current context of social work in South Africa, is an examination of the typology of social work service providers in the country, service recipients, service delivery, management and supervision of social workers, social work education and relevant associations.

4. Typology of social work service providers

Various service providers are involved in the provision of developmental social work services, with the government, non-governmental organisations and the private sector as the main role players. Figure 1 is a graphical illustration of the typology of social service organisations in South Africa.
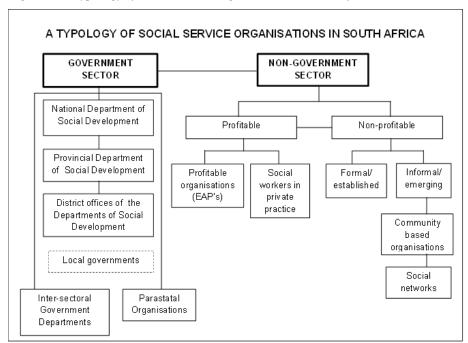
Figure 1 - A typology of social service organisations in South Africa

A TYPOLOGY OF SOCIAL SERVICE ORGANISATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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GOVERNMENT                          NON-GOVERNMENT
  SECTOR                                SECTOR

National Department of          Profitable          Non-profitable
Social Development

Provincial Department     Profitable      Social      Formal/      Informal/
of Social Development      organisations   workers in   established   emerging
                           (EAP's)        private
District offices of the                   practice              Community
Departments of Social                                            based
Development                                                      organisations

Local governments                                                Social
                                                                 networks
Inter-sectoral      Parastatal
Government           Organisations
Departments
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Source: Adapted from Boshoff (2006).

The range of service providers can be divided broadly into the government (public) sector and the non-government (private) sector.

The government sector consists of the National department, which provides inter alia strategic direction for social service delivery. The roles and responsibilities of the provincial departments of social development can briefly be described as to formulate, coordinate, maintain and review provincial policy and planning in consultation with stakeholders, and to plan, implement, coordinate and monitor the delivery of social services in accordance with national norms and standards. These roles and responsibilities coincide with those at the district and local levels (Department of social development, 2006).

The non-government sector can be distinguished as profitable as well as non-profitable. Social workers in profitable private practice offer a wide range of direct services with some also rendering employee assistance programmes at private companies. They are fulfilling an essential role in social service delivery, additional to government and

non-governmental social services. The latter services are traditionally divided into formal established Non-governmental organisations (Ngos), which are registered with the government in order to receive subsidies, and those organisations which are in an emerging phase of organisational development, based in the community or which are merely social networks. The Ngo sector is estimated to make up more than 100,000 organisations, of which 72,000 are registered with the Department of social development. Some of these registered Ngos are accredited to do statutory work, although they are subsidised by the government for just a percentage of their running costs, provided they render social work services to the primary target groups identified by the Department of social development (2005).

5. Continuum of social service delivery

The primary target groups identified by the Department of social development as social work service recipients are the poor and the vulnerable people in society. Specifically, these target groups are delineated as children and the youth, families, women and older people. People infected and affected by hiv and aids, people with disabilities and those who have other special needs prevail across all target groups on the continuum of social service delivery (Department of social development, 2006).

In its efforts to achieve the desired outcomes for social service recipients, the Department of social development established a continuum of social service delivery as contained in an integrated service delivery model for social services (Department of social development, 2006). The main features of this model suggest certain levels of intervention, namely prevention (aimed at strengthening and building capacity and self-reliance); early intervention (assistance before statutory services and intensive intervention are required); statutory intervention/residential/alternative care (supporting the recipient of services who is no longer functioning adequately in the community); and reconstruction and aftercare (to enable the recipient of services to return and reintegrate with the family or community as quickly as possible). The core services rendered by social service providers have been grouped

into five broad categories of services, namely promotion and prevention (these services intersect with community development services); protection services (provided within the context of legislative and/or a policy framework and including statutory services); rehabilitation services (aimed at those whose functioning is impaired); continuing care services (with the goal to improve independence and quality of life); and mental health and addiction services (assisting people to live balanced lives by protecting and restoring their mental well-being).

6. Management and supervision of social workers

In order to maintain a high level of service delivery, several statutory requirements of social work practices in South Africa, such as the Social service professions Act (Republic of South Africa, 1978), Code of ethics (South African council for social service professions, 2012[a]), and the Children's Act (38 of 2005) Republic of South Africa, 2006), mandate the supervision of social workers. The Social service professions Act (Republic of South Africa, 1978) stipulates that a social worker may only be supervised on social work matters by another competent and registered social worker. However, in reality the management of social workers by non-social workers often has a detrimental impact on the practice of the profession. This gave momentum to the development of a national supervision framework for the social work profession in South Africa (Department of social development, South African council for social service professions, 2012), which not only addresses supervision of qualified social workers, but also of student social workers.

7. Social work education

Training of social workers is offered at all universities in South Africa. The South African qualifications authority Act (Republic of South Africa, 1995) legislated a National qualification framework (Nqf), which embarked on a process of developing qualifications and standards for social work, including a four-year Bachelor of social work

(Bsw), structured and research master of social work and doctor of social work. The Bsw contains an integrated theoretical and field practice component in terms of credits, exit levels, outcomes and associate assessment criteria. These minimum standards provide sufficient space for the unique focus of a university's teaching programmes, and reflect a shift from the previous political dispensation's rehabilitative focus to a social development approach. The purpose of this professional four-year qualification as stipulated by South African qualifications authority (South African qualifications authority, 2012) is to equip learners with: skills to challenge structural sources of poverty, inequality, oppression, discrimination and exclusion; knowledge and understanding of human behaviour and social systems and the skills to intervene at the points where people interact with their environments in order to promote social well-being; the ability and competence to assist and empower individuals, families, groups, organisations and communities to enhance their social functioning and their problem-solving capacities; the ability to promote, restore, maintain and enhance the functioning of individuals, families, groups and communities by enabling them to accomplish tasks, prevent and alleviate distress and use resources effectively; an understanding of and the ability to demonstrate social work values and the principles of human rights and social justice while interacting with and assisting the range of human diversity; the understanding and ability to provide social work services towards protecting people who are vulnerable, at-risk and unable to protect themselves; knowledge and understanding of both the South African and the global welfare context and the ability to implement the social development approach in social work services; understanding of the major social needs, issues, policies and legislation in the South African social welfare context and the social worker`s role and contribution; the skills to work effectively within teams, including social work teams, multi- and inter-disciplinary teams as well as multi-sectoral teams.

Statutory parameters of the social work education require that students should be registered with the Sacssp as student social workers, and uphold the council's ethical code. The successful completion of the qualification enables students to be registered with the Sacssp as a professional social worker (South African council for social service professions, 2012[a]). As part of the government's recruitment and retention

strategy, scholarships are available for deserving social work students, resulting in an increase from 4,200 to 5,574 social work graduates in the 2010/11 financial year (Waters, 2013).

The social work training institutions are organised in an Association of South African social work education institutions (Association of South African social work education institutions, 2014), in order to maintain and support a community of social work educators who are committed to the continuing development of social work education, training, research and practice in South Africa. Association of South African social work education institutions (Asaswei) is affiliated to the International association of schools of social work (Iassw).

A statutory process regulated by the South African council for social service professions (2012[b]) requires all social workers in the country to obtain a required number of Continuing professional development (Cpd) points annually in order to remain registered with the Sacssp. The purpose of this system is to ensure that social workers retain and continuously develop their knowledge and skills to maintain professional standards.

8. Professional social work associations

For many years, professional social work associations were fragmented in South Africa, owing to the country's history of cultural divides. In 2007 the National association of social workers (Nasw-Sa) was established, affiliated to the International federation of social workers (Ifsw). This affiliation grants social workers the opportunity to participate meaningfully in the Global agenda for social work and social development (National association of social workers South Africa, 2012).

9. Some critical reflections

Considering South Africa's history of colonialism and apartheid, for most South Africans the country is now a better place than before. However, some critical reflections on social work in the country raise serious concerns.

The success of the Rdp as one of the new democratic government's first projects, which had a significant impact on social welfare and social work, was soon to be overshadowed by the instalment of Gear. As in the British experience, the discourse of neo-liberalism, had «colonized the public sector as business thinking and practices crossed the public-private sector divide and were transplanted into activities such as social work» (Harris, 2002: 5). The contradictory principles of Gear and the guiding principles of the White paper for social welfare, which supported a people-centred approach to social and economic development through a social development approach towards social welfare, did not however restrain the government from gaining political leverage by increasing gargantuan spending on social security, which has become the major poverty alleviation measure in the country.

Consequently, the place, role and function of developmental social work within the country's social development welfare system became diffused, as social transfers offer a much quicker and more comprehensive way to redistribute money to the poor than traditional social work interventions. Although the crucial need for an extensive social security system as safety net for the country's vulnerable people is by no means disregarded, how this accords with the principles of social development and the role and function of developmental social work within this context, is still not clarified (Engelbrecht, 2011).

Exacerbated by the fact that the shortage of social workers in the country will be hard to address even in the next decade, coupled with the government's evident inability to adequately fund and resource the Ngo sector as partners in their social development endeavours, the future of developmental social work, notwithstanding the government's praiseworthy policies, is facing various challenges. For instance, the Minister for social development recently revealed that her department has not conducted sufficient costing to determine the number of social workers required to implement current welfare legislation (such as the Children's Act), a state of affairs quite detrimental to the successful implementation of well-intended and sophisticated acts (Waters, 2013). The practice reality is thus that although the need for prevention and early intervention in social work is emphasised by government policies and embraced by social workers, the continuing great demand for child protection in practice makes this continuum of care merely aspirational.

As a consequence, the irony is that the demand for case work services (especially in foster care) is exceeding group and community work methodologies in practice, which still bear the features of the previous political dispensation's remedial approach to social work.

This increasing demand for direct social work services is not just out of pace with the government's intended continuum of service delivery and developmental social work, but is also inconsistent with the exit level outcomes of the Bsw degree. The social work education institutions deliberately transformed their teaching programmes during the past two decades to be in line with the current regulations of government policies and legislation, relevant to social work (Spolander, Pullen-Sansfaçon, Brown, Engelbrecht, 2011). However, it is now evident that the integration of theory and practice is more paradoxical for beginner social workers than they ever envisaged. In this context, based on empirical reflections by social work practitioners, Engelbrecht (2008: 172) asked: «Is this the most that can be expected from social workers? Are small gains worthwhile, and do they collectively add up to social improvement? Social workers offer social support and access to social resources where available and, in this way, fight the war on poverty and contribute to uplifting the country's poor. Is this enough?»

Moreover, one of the main concerns in the social work profession of the country is that the social work role is largely defined by government rather than the profession itself (Lombard, 2008), despite positive indicators such as the unification of the profession in one national association and an association for social work education institutions. This means that the political aims and agenda of the government, as in South Africa's past, could potentially jeopardise the independence and professional credibility of the social work profession in the country. It has already turned Ngos (wittingly or even unwittingly) into agents of the state, owing to their dependence on government subsidies, and causing them to deviate from their traditional community interests. As a result, critical voices of many social service organisations in the country (and by implication social workers), whose funding is largely dependent on performance-based contracts with the government, are potentially silenced by managerial control and a neoliberal discourse disguised as accountability.

However, as is evident in the development of social work as a fully-fledged profession in South Africa, the resilience and strength of social workers as professionals should not be underestimated and submerged by political processes of the day. The regulation of the social work profession by the Social work Act (1978) has been a determining factor in maintaining standards of social work practices for nearly four decades, notwithstanding political ramifications impacting on social workers' working conditions and their service delivery. The statutory registration of social workers and student social workers, code of ethics and Cpd system are furthermore indicators of the depth of a well-established profession. Also, the well-established Ngo sector, longstanding advocating tradition of Asaswei, and the blossoming of the unified Nasw-Sa as professional association, together with their internationally affiliated support networks, add to the capacity inherent in the profession. Moreover, supervision of social workers is mandatory in South Africa and conveys a professional social work heritage to practitioners through practices such as a national framework for supervision encompassing national standards. Ultimately, the social work education institutions are a formidable force, manifestly by their acclaimed scholarly academic programmes and outputs on undergraduate, postgraduate and research levels, and leadership role in global academic affairs (Joint world conference on social work, education and social development, 2014). These strengths, embedded in the social work profession throughout the history of South Africa are shielding social workers from despair and disillusionment that may erode their pride and professionalism.

The context and concepts of social work in South Africa, as expounded in this essay, show that social work was intended to transform from a residual and institutional approach to a rights-based social development approach, focusing on the poorest and most vulnerable people in the country. However, in spite of this intended transformation, many questions evolve in practice, and one of the questions going begging, is: what is the impact of developmental social work on poverty eradication, or are social workers just helping vulnerable people to live with it? Based on the critical reflections presented in this article, it may be concluded that it is questionable whether social development (and by implication also developmental social work) remain the *de facto* ap-

proach to social welfare in South Africa. It appears that social development as envisaged in government policies differs drastically from practice realities, and rather reflects features of a welfare state as in some other parts of the world. As was the case with South Africa's previous political dispensation, the need for depoliticizing the social work profession in the country is vital in order to open constructive dialogue and debate on social work's future core role and functions, and to capitalise on the profession's inherent strengths. Grounded, independent empirical research is recommended to shed more light on this contentious topic.

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