TWENTY REASONS FOR RESTRUCTURING
THE SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIAL SERVICES

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South Africa is going through a period of change. A new constitution, a new form of parliament. Reform is in the air. Myth or reality? Only time will tell.

What about our social service structure? Can it be improved? Should it be improved? This article argues that all is not well in welfare. That reform is needed. That the problems we find in our welfare services will not go away by asking for "more" social workers, "more" institutions, "more" ancillary services. We need a re-ordering of the structure.

What is required is a different system of service delivery. Before that can be dealt with let us look at what is wrong with our existing system at the welfare organisation level.

1. **NOT ENOUGH INFORMATION**

   The present system produces no comprehensive statistical data. This is a staggering weakness in our social services. Apart from census data on numbers of children, unemployment, numbers of old people etc. etc., no national information for all race groups exists on social pathologies. Without it, it is impossible to discover how far short or how close the existing social services come to meeting the needs of the community.

2. **DIVISION BETWEEN WELFARE AGENCIES**

   Many senior social work agencies are divided along the lines of social pathology. One agency deals with the alcoholic, another the ex-offender etc., etc.

   Several other social work agencies have as their mandate "the family" cutting right across the various specialist agencies.

   Several other social work agencies deal only with members of one race on a family basis and others again might decide to deal only with members of one religion. These divisions are both false and counter productive to the delivery of an efficient social service. They overlap and are heavily clustered in urban areas.
3. **DUPICATION**

Following on from point number two. The problem arises of clients legitimately using the services of more than one welfare agency, and the government subsidising this duplication.

The classic example is of the ex-offender who also happens to be an alcoholic and can legitimately request the help of both NICRO and SANCA. His wife and children might be receiving help from Child Welfare while using his crippled child as an excuse to get further help from the Association for the Disabled. If the family can manage to never mention the help of other agencies the duplication goes on indefinitely. Even in a climate of affluence this would be a serious offence. It is however an extremely reckless practice in a period of scarce social service resources.

4. **SUBSIDIZATION**

This point is also related to points 2 and 3 above. Government Welfare subsidy takes place mainly by counting clients. In its crudest form the formula for casework posts works on the basis that "the more clients you have the stronger your argument is for more posts." It might be that one client is counted several times by different agencies. No system exists to eliminate overlap between agencies. The management of caseloads becomes inefficient and encourages a form of game playing.

5. **UNEVEN SPREAD OF SERVICES OR THE URBAN/RURAL DICHOTOMY**

The pattern in three parts is as follows:

a) The further from the urban area, the more inadequate the social service. Add to that

b) the richer the community, the better its resources to help itself. And

c) "the more recently constructed the community the less likely it is to have a decent welfare infrastructure." How many social workers serve the needs of Atlantis 40 kms from Cape Town? How many work in Ocean View near Fish Hoek in the Cape? Who cares? Whose responsibility is it anyway? Social planners appear to be absent at the birth of new housing schemes. Seldom do urban planners ask for the opinion of social
workers and new communities suffer the consequences. Welfare agencies have been known to work in scarce residential housing because no one planned for them in the new scheme.

If central government cannot persuade a private welfare organisation to go into a new area then no welfare service is provided.

6. CURATIVE VS PREVENTATIVE

Cape Town abounds in curative welfare services. Imagine a medical service which consisted in the main only of specialist hospitals. e.g. an eye hospital, a hospital for the deaf, a small general hospital with few public health services. Absurd? Yet that is what we have in the world of social pathology. Why is it not equally as absurd? Failure to give strong priority to preventative programmes affects the long term amelioration of social problems. This state of affairs has grown up in part due to the subsisitation system and in part due to agencies being required to fulfil statutory obligations. It is understandable but regrettable.

7. REGIONAL WELFARE BOARDS

These Welfare Boards were set up to regulate, develop and encourage the welfare services in a particular area. They were set up along ethnic lines which creates false divisions. It also places an additional unfair burden on the less organised, poorer communities. There is a persuasive case to be made that the poorer the community, the more vulnerable to social problems it becomes and the less likely it will be to organise itself and protect itself against further debilitation. The opposite is also true that the wealthier a community, the more resourceful it will be in developing its own caring infrastructure. What is required is a process of cross-fertilisation where the strong and resourceful help the weak and inadequate. Regional Welfare Boards operating along ethnic lines retard this procedure and make social planning on a geographical basis for the whole community almost impossible.

8. COMMUNITY CHEST

This extremely important fundraising organisation deserves a study all of its
own. Suffice it to say here that it does not experiment, it does not initiate and it does not reward on the basis of efficiency. It hands out money on an incrementally increasing basis each year with no concern for quality of life debates. This simply is not good enough. The chest is a pivot point, the fulcrum on which so many welfare services depend. The handing over of large sums of money without any quid pro quo should cease.

Agencies should be asked to submit goal orientated applications which, if successful, are rewarded by further funding. This would place the agency on a competitive footing, with regular evaluations and achievement-directed aims. It would also encourage a more accountable and businesslike approach from welfare organisations. The Chest needs to set itself a list of priorities which emphasise preventative services. There is a need in this regard for further study of American methods of project evaluation.

9. THE FUNDRAISING ACT AND QUALITY CONTROL

If an energetic, well-organised group puts forward a welfare programme for a certain area for a certain pathology it is unlikely that anyone else will be given the same area for the same pathology at a later date. This has the praiseworthy effect of avoiding to some extent duplication, (but does not affect points 2, 3, and 4 above). On the other hand it allows monopolistic tendencies and most importantly there is no mechanism to query quality. Where in fact is there quality control in the welfare services? Is there any measuring of the delivery of social services and if so where?

10. THE FUNDRAISING ACT AND THE LIMITS ON SPECIALISATION

What are the limits to specialisation? Who can effectively stop the proliferation of specialist agencies? It is possible to apply for and get a fundraising certificate for example to help injured rugby players (why can't they use the Association for the Disabled fundraising number?) The list of examples could be extended. The trend to specialise - in an already over specialised social service - will become more apparent in time. Will we ever see new generalist welfare agencies? How can we ensure that the social services continue to deal with primary needs and not the more sophisticated needs?
11. THE DESERVING POOR VS THE UNDESERVING POOR

This debate goes unresolved. It reflects badly on social workers. There are a growing number of people who fall through the net of existing social services. This is only too apparent at the two Cape Town night shelters. Practically all the residents are veterans of welfare agency waiting rooms.

There is a natural tendency for casework agencies to drift slowly "up market". How frequently is it heard that "intensive counselling only works with those intelligent enough to develop insight" or that agencies want to deal only with the "well motivated client" the ones who "want to help themselves".

What about those who are too inadequate, too damaged, too unmotivated, too stupid to benefit from counselling? Are they not by definition more needy and therefore relatively more in need of social work intervention?

12. EMOTIONAL APPEAL

Related to the above point. The "deserving poor" eg. the vulnerable elderly person, the abandoned child, the blind young woman evoke strong emotional responses in all of us. They require our help and get it. The undeserving poor on the other hand conjure up no such appeal. The alcoholic, the criminal, are objects of distaste. However we ignore the needs of the undeserving poor at grave costs to ourselves and the quality of life in our community. There are strong arguments to be made that the social costs of crime and alcoholism in society are higher than many other pathologies.

Any welfare service which is allowed to develop in accordance with its ability to raise money is surely unlikely to meet the broad spectrum of needs of the community no matter how praiseworthy its aims.

13. MODEL INSTITUTIONS

Are our institutions assuming the role of being 'model' institutions - over regulated, too costly, over subsidised and seldom designed to meet the needs of all those who need that facility? It is of limited value to have a show piece institution whether it's a school for the blind, cerebral palsied etc. which caters for 200 or 300
children, when they have a waiting list of 2000 or 3000 children. It can be argued that South Africa's welfare planning tends towards the model type of planning and not a "needs" orientated solution.

14. **ACTUAL NEED VS PERCEIVED NEED**

The evolution of welfare services generally comes about in response to perceived rather than actual needs. In fact it is even more narrow than that; it is usually only the needs which articulate and energetic members of the community perceive to be important that receive attention. Again lack of information makes it difficult to argue about priorities, but it is a dubious precedent to work from a basis of perception. Under the present system there is no other way of working.

15. **THE MOST NEEDY**

Our present system places no safety net under the whole community. No agency can claim that it is reaching and servicing the needs of all those who fall within the definition of their pathology. In fact the most "needy" may be quite incapable (too disorganised, too apathetic or too weak) of responding to the existing welfare services.

To expect them to develop their own welfare services when most of their energies are exhausted on survival, is quite unreasonable. Nothing short of a systematic evenly spread geographical social service will pick up the most needy.

16. **LACK OF CO-ORDINATION IN TIMES OF CRISIS**

The welfare agencies are to a large extent incapable of mounting an effective response to large scale crisis. They have no large scale command over resources. Some would suggest that this is the job of civil defense yet oddly enough, because of the political situation, this does not always appear to happen. The Nyanga squatter crisis of 1981 met with little help from the Cape Town Civil Defence Services, and to this day no local authorities will involve themselves comprehensively in the ongoing squatter crisis in the Cape. The welfare agencies lack any co-ordinating body, they are also too ill-prepared, ill-equipped, understaffed and inadequately financed to respond to emergencies.
17. **Dynamic Leadership**

The demand for social workers greatly outstrips the supply. In the appointment of directors of welfare agencies three things happen.

a) Directors for large welfare agencies are recruited outside of the profession (which can be either a good or a bad thing) or

b) strong leadership inside the profession is found or

c) indifferent leadership inside the profession is used.

Most welfare agencies are fortunate in the level of dedicated leadership they get. However occasionally agencies go through a lean time due to lack of leadership. It seems wrong that so much depends on charismatic leadership. Social work agencies will always need good, efficient dedicated leaders, however, it is unfortunate that the clients fortunes vary with the quality of leadership. Social services should be developed on a less personalised, more factual level, on grounds of need rather than on the presence of strong management.

Good leadership can do much to build up one agency but this must not be at the expense of others with less effective leaders. This may take place without any reference to the real needs of the community.

18. **The Psychology of Dependence**

Every social worker is trained to be alert to the problems of dependency in their clients. It is well known that reliance on endless social work intervention will weaken the client's ability to cope with life.

In a similar way the whole procedure of subsidisation of the social services has brought about a psychology of dependency. Most social work agencies are wholly dependent on central government for funds. The relationship between the two is unequal. It is a parent-child relationship. It is unlikely that apart from asking endlessly for more money the welfare agencies will extensively criticise the social policy of central government. This is wrong. For example the Group Areas Act has wreaked havoc in the Cape Town community. What response are social workers making to the Government's plan to shift the people of Langa, Guguletu and Nyanga to Khayalitsha? Social workers are to a large extent privy to this information yet seem powerless to act on it. What is required is a system of funding which does not directly require agencies applying to central government.
19. MANAGEMENT OF WELFARE ORGANISATIONS

It is a strange paradox that the South African social work profession puts so much emphasis on the professionalisation of social work, insisting on university qualifications, on all social workers being registered with strict deregistration for not paying fees, while at the same time devising a system whereby all welfare organisations are run by management committees which are made up extensively of amateurs drawn from the ranks of that organisation's members. An amateur may not practice social work in South Africa, but may control a social work agency.

Does any other profession in South Africa have to submit to the advice of people outside their profession? How would teachers, architects, nurses, chartered accountants or engineers react if social workers told them how to go about their business? Do social workers really need this form of parenting? Are they so irresponsible, reckless or inadequate that they cannot run their own affairs? Are management committees possibly retarding the growth of welfare organisations?

20. THE SILENT MAJORITY

South African social workers by and large are dedicated and extremely hard working but appear not to participate in dialogue on broad welfare issues. Is it because they are too overworked and exhausted just in maintaining the service that they have little energy for the broader issues? Are they too polite to complain? Are they just plain satisfied or maybe they perceive the discussions as irrelevant?

The recent Presidents Council report on Demographic Trends in South Africa\(^1\) should give most people an uneasy sense of urgency about social planning and policy in this country. Apparently not one social worker served on this committee. That in itself is a serious indictment. Who will be dealing with the crisis of this enormous population increase? The social workers. Yet not one of the 43 recommendations makes a commitment to a more developed welfare structure. No mention is made for example of the benefits of a National Pension Plan to alleviate the need for poor people to have more children to support them in their old age. Social workers need to participate more fully in the debates on social policy which are taking place.

It is not the intention of this paper to level endless criticisms of the existing welfare structure at welfare organisation level. No human organisation is perfect
and it is not the purpose here to be gratuitously critical.

The intention of this paper is to point to the more glaring inconsistencies in the welfare structure and then to try and answer the criticisms which arise taking into account the constraints of our present stage of welfare service development.
A NEW SOCIAL SERVICE STRUCTURE

The first section of this paper listed twenty criticisms of welfare organisations as they are presently constructed. This section will propose a plan of reform and then match this plan against criticisms.

The plan simply is this:

Let us take one clearly defined region and experiment to see if we can improve on our present structure.

1. Let us take the Ol economic region plus Kuils River consisting of several Local Authorities. In the poor communities let us utilise existing, or build into existing area housing offices, social work offices and establish a family welfare service based on geographical lines and controlled at a Local Authority level.

2. Area social work offices would be made responsible for all family welfare services and statutory work i.e. rehabilitation centre applications, legal aid investigations, children's court enquiries etc. These area offices would be made responsible for the administration of all grants for those who need this service and who live in the area.

3. These area social work offices would be made responsible for the collection of information on social pathology in this area.

4. The generally accepted concept of social work in these area offices would be enlarged to include Citizens Advice Bureau Services, Legal Advice work etc.

5. The existing welfare organisations could continue to offer specialist services which would not easily be available in a generic office i.e. assessment of child abuse, mental health assessments, counselling the dying, support groups for special pathology. They will not however administer grants or do statutory work.

6. The existing specialist welfare organisations would employ community
workers who by specialising in a particular social pathology would make a valuable contribution to the prevention of those problems. For example SANCA can put all its energies into education of the public with regard to alcoholism, the casework of the alcoholic being done at an area office level instead of SANCA trying to do both.

7. Welfare Organisations would continue to run all their specialist institutions e.g. old age homes, workshops etc. etc.

The plan, in effect, calls for a generic welfare service for the whole community, based on geographical lines at Local Authority level. This service would be the major, dominating welfare service in the region. The specialist welfare agencies would be, in comparison, much smaller but more able to concentrate on specialisation and would not have to deal with the plethora of administrative details and peripheral pathologies which they are having to cope with at present.

The role of the Welfare Organisations would also be to research needs and try out new ideas. They would draw funds from the private sector until services were proved successful and then be subsidized by the state. How would this plan answer the criticisms of the first section?

i) INFORMATION:

Information would be immediately and constantly available. Possibly the greatest benefit of a geographical based welfare structure is the availability of information. This plus the manoeuverability of the services will allow for manpower to be shifted to the most needy areas as indicated by the flow of information.

ii) DIVISION BETWEEN WELFARE AGENCIES

The system of welfare will now have a linear perspective rather than the present circular pattern. Referrals will take place from a generalist office to a specialist office (be they specialists either on a pathology or a religious denomination basis).
iii) **DUPPLICATION**

This system will diminish the possibilities of duplication. A central case register would easily be set up for all races in the Ol economic region.

iv) **UNEVEN SPREAD OF SERVICES**

This problem is effectively taken care of with all housing schemes including area welfare offices. This will iron out all uneveness. The responsibility for the general welfare services will be with the local authority.

v) **CURATIVE VS PREVENTATIVE**

The presence of information, the pressure being taken off the specialist welfare organisation to some extent and the ability to focus more precisely on particular pathologies must in time lead to a better system of prevention.

vi) **REGIONAL WELFARE BOARDS**

These Boards would also benefit from the presence of information. They will for the first time have some idea of the 'width and breadth' of the social needs of the Cape Peninsula and can act accordingly. This might persuade the racially segregated Welfare Boards to come together.

vii) **THE COMMUNITY CHEST**

The Chest would continue to fund the specialist agencies and their institutions. It would now be possible instead of funding 'finger in the dyke' social work, for the Chest to reassess its priorities and attempt a few experiments in the direction of goal orientated project funding and if necessary change its constitution to do this.

viii) **THE FUNDRAISING ACT AND QUALITY CONTROL**

This act would continue to protect the smaller specialist welfare organisations but the local authority service would have direct contact with central government. Quality control could be exercised over a period of years based
on the information gathered regarding the level of social pathology in the area.

ix) **THE FUNDRAISING ACT AND THE LIMITS ON SPECIALISTS DEBATE**

This would cease to be a problem to some extent because the senior agency would be a generalist agency and consequently would be too big to be seriously threatened by a gradual proliferation of specialist groups.

x) **THE DESERVING VS THE UNDESERVING POOR**

This particular problem will also be affected by the change. All the inhabitants of a certain area will be the responsibility of that area office, irrespective of their problems. There is no way that the social workers could avoid helping some of the poor.

xi) **EMOTIONAL APPEAL**

This too will cease to be a problem. The size of the service will not be in direct relation to the amount of money that the agency can raise. Rather, development would take place in relation to size and extent of need.

xii) **ACTUAL VS PERCEIVED NEEDS**

As with so many other criticisms, this particular problem will be taken care of by the availability of better information.

xiii) **MODEL INSTITUTIONS**

Hopefully the private agencies can give this matter more attention by building simple, less expensive institutions, and attempting to absorb all those who need the facility and not just the privileged few.

xiv) **THE MOST NEEDY**

The most 'needy' will be seen and dealt with. The area office should be within easy reach of everybody, particularly in the high 'problem areas'. The one
advantage of being near housing offices is that someone from each household visits these offices at least once a month. To have area social work offices in close proximity is a great advantage in terms of accessibility.

xv) IN TIMES OF CRISIS

The relationship between Local Authority social services and Local Authority civil defence should be so close that the one service could act on the suggestions of the other. However the crisis might also not be resolved if it is of a political nature. Obviously the response to "non political crisis" could be very effective because of organisational resources and leadership proximity.

xvi) DYNAMIC LEADERSHIP

High quality leadership will never cease to be important. However, poor leadership will not dramatically effect a welfare system which is geographically based. Many of the jobs done by directors of agencies would fall away on the new system, (e.g. fundraising, sponsorship, motivation for extra funds from the chest, untangling the enormous subsisisation knot, supervision of social workers etc. etc.) thereby ensuring the new system is not vulnerable to indifferent leadership.

xvii) THE PSYCHOLOGY OF DEPENDENCE

This particular problem, will to some extent be alleviated. Agency heads will not deal directly with central government. Estimates for expenditure will be included in the much larger Local Authority budget. Subsidisation would be more free of central government decision making and the ability to have a "partnership" relationship with central government would develop if it were at all necessary.

xviii) MANAGEMENT OF WELFARE ORGANISATIONS

Management and development of Local Authority social services will be in the hands of professionals where it rightly belongs. It would obviously be subject to city council control yet once again the presence of persuasive information will make the management of welfare services at this level much more effective.
POSSIBLE PROBLEMS

What are the problems attached to this method of delivery of welfare service. The two main ones are:

a. Who will man this service in a climate of extremely scarce social work resources?

b. Who will pay for it?

A. MANPOWER PROBLEMS

Obviously some, if not all agencies would have to relinquish casework posts - including, in fact, all posts directly connected to statutory work. Some agencies might be greatly reduced in size or even incorporated entirely into the Local Authority structure with their buildings, where appropriate, being used as area offices.

The number of senior jobs becoming available, from the Director of Social Services through deputy directors down to area heads and local office heads, will hopefully make it possible to absorb all social service staff.

B. FINANCE

As envisaged in this proposal central government would continue to pay for existing posts and as the Local Authority service develops there would seem to be no reason why the Local Authority could not apply for more subsidised posts. Legislation which exists forbidding this should be amended.

In time however a certain amount of development will have to come from the local rates.
IN CONCLUSION

In a recent edition of the Harvard Business Review, Lodge and Glass suggest three prerequisites to help the poor gain full membership in American society.

(a) "There must be a co-operative, holistic approach - that is multiple reinforcing links from several directions have to be established for improvement to take place.

(b) There must be competence - that is a collection of the skills, resources, capabilities and understanding for penetrating the circle of problems effectively.

(c) There must be authority - that is a decision making process acceptable to all participants for setting the goals of community change, for determining the course and speed to be followed and for making the trade-off inherent in any change effort."

It is suggested that our plan not only fulfils these requirements, but in fact goes further. Our plan is a plan for the future. The present social services are boxed into a corner. Nothing short of our proposed two tier social service system will break the impasse.

Any plan which caters only for the problems of today will be inadequate for tomorrow. The problems of rapid population growth and rapid industrialisation with all the attendant urbanisation problems needs to be examined now.

Social workers of this generation cannot afford to ignore or refuse to participate in the debate on the social needs of the community. South Africa is a society on the move it is in transition from rural to urban, from agricultural to industrial, from primitive to modern. The permutations and intricacies are endless and finely woven. The tempo of industrialisation must increase as the population develops at an alarming rate. The upheaval caused by these factors alone pushing against one another will create social problems
as yet unthought of. Now is the time to debate these macro level problems and as part of that debate forge a new system of delivery more equitable and geared to the needs of the total community. Let the Ol economic region be an experiment from which the rest of the country can draw conclusions. Let the parameters be changed to suit the needs not the ideology.

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