

BOOK REVIEW

The Handbook of Social Work and Social Development in Africa, by Mel Gray (Ed.), NY: Routledge, 2017, 413 pp., \$240.00 (hardcover), \$192.00 (e-book), ISBN 9-781472-468512

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Over my more than seventeen years of work in social work education and social development in Ethiopia, I saw the profession re-emerge and develop across the country. During that time I met or came into virtual contact with social development leaders from South Africa, Tanzania, Rwanda, Ghana, Botswana, Zambia, Liberia and Kenya. Although I watched these countries from afar, it became clear to me that social work with a developmental perspective was advancing at a fast pace across the continent. My contacts convinced me that the use of, and innovation in applying, the developmental approach was occurring, even though there was not a central, convenient site to locate such information. *The Handbook of Social Work and Social Development in Africa*, edited by Mel Gray, confirms my view on innovation and development and, for the first time, offers a storehouse of information on social work and social development in Africa.

The book comprises three parts: Setting the Scene; Established Areas of Practice; and Developmental Social Work in Emerging Areas of Practice. Part I sets the stage by discussing the historical forces shaping the development of social work and social development in Africa. Foreign aid and poverty reduction are key policies impacting social work. The question posed is whether social work is an authentic African enterprise.

Part 2 consists of sixteen chapters that highlight practice-based work in several African countries, with some chapters focusing on regional development. These chapters outline work with specific populations or on specific issues. Four chapters outline social work in Ghana in areas of social protection, child and family welfare, mental health, and human trafficking. Chapters on social work practice in Zimbabwe include the protection of vulnerable children, and decolonising childcare practice. Work in Uganda features community-based rehabilitation and work with teenage mothers and education. Two chapters present social work practice with children and same-sex relationships among women in Botswana. Authors from Namibia outline community-based care with older people, and this is supplemented with a general chapter on social work practice with older people in East Africa. Single chapters focus on civil society organisations and people living with HIV/AIDS in Ethiopia, social work in Lesotho through the Ministry of Social Development, social protection in Zambia, and a general chapter on the social management of epilepsy in Africa.

The dozen chapters in Part 3 look more specifically at emerging practice in developmental social work. Of these, four chapters look at work in Uganda in social protection, post-conflict humanitarian assistance, war-related refugees, and practice in the NGO section, which includes work in Kenya. In this Part, the reader learns of social development work in several countries not represented in Part 2 of the book. The chapter from West Africa, with a focus on Senegal, looks at poverty alleviation through a development lens. Other chapters that describe macro-level social development include collective action for social change in South Africa, and a strengths-based Afrocentric model for community development in Kenya. The chapter on Nigeria addresses the challenge of decolonising social work, and the chapter on Rwanda discusses adapting Western models to local contexts. The remaining three chapters in Part 3 look at developmental work with vulnerable children and families, including violence against children in Malawi, paraprofessional support services in Tanzania, and gender inequality in Zambia.

It is astonishing to find this wealth of information from scholars and practitioners on the ground in Africa in one book. The *Handbook* should be used by African scholars to educate themselves not only on the progress and strengths of social work and social development on the continent, but also on its setbacks and challenges. Students should be exposed to the historical dilemmas and critical questions posed in the first two chapters. They should understand the many different types of problems facing African countries, and the way in which innovative practice, based in social work and social development, can be designed and implemented to address them.

The book also has an audience outside of Africa. It is essential reading for academics in Western countries who are involved in research or service programmes, including university-to-university partnerships that engage faculty members in institutions of higher education in partnership with African universities. The book is also relevant reading for those seeking local, indigenous and culturally informed approaches to global issues such as trafficking, poverty reduction, work with vulnerable children, and broad-based social protection policies and practices – all within a developmental perspective.

If there is a second edition in the future, I would like to see an introductory chapter that traces the development of social development from its African roots, which I understand to be in South Africa. Notable in the diffusion of social development and social work, first in Africa and more recently in the West, should be the work of Dr Leila Patel and her colleagues at the University of Johannesburg, and its Centre for Social Development in Africa.

The *Handbook* is a foundational knowledge base from which social work and social development in Africa can proceed further. It heralds the valuable work being done by academics, scholars and practitioners throughout the continent. It should be used worldwide by anyone interested in, or working in, social work and social development in Africa.