Social work research within the context of the new social welfare policy of South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this article is on the paradigm shifts that govern the new social welfare policy as proclaimed in the South African White Paper for Social Welfare, as well as the Financing Policy: Developmental Social Welfare Services document. These new policies changed the face of social welfare in South Africa. They emphasise the (cost) effective, outcome-based service delivery to the benefit of all South Africans, particularly the previously marginalised population. This requires social work to readdress its research focus and methodology in order to maintain its pivotal role in social welfare.

1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Given the new development-based social welfare policy and the many changes on the terrain of welfare, social work must seriously reconsider the role of research, in order to play an essential role in the welfare framework of South African society.

Two research-focused statements by Midgley (1998:90–98) concerning the social welfare policy of South Africa are fundamental to this problem statement:

- “The decision to transform the nation’s social services from a remedial and maintenance-focused approach to a developmental one is, therefore, of considerable international significance. It presents a challenge to South
African scholars in the fields of social policy and social work to document and analyse the changes that are taking place. There is an urgent need for international information on how a developmental approach can be implemented and how effective it is likely to be. South Africans are uniquely placed to inform and even lead international discussions on the viability of the social development approach.”

- “Although still in its early stages, there is a pressing need for a comprehensive account of the South African experiment. It is hoped that South African social policy and social work writers will respond to the challenge.”

In line with Midgley’s, as well as Strydom’s (1998:109) and McKendrick’s (1998:109) appeal to social work to do research relating to the new welfare dispensation, the social worker/researcher must be well informed of the critical variables that will play a role when research within the new social welfare policy is reflected upon. Without a thorough reconsideration of the demands that the new welfare policy and dispensation make on the social worker who has an established interest in social welfare services, no research can be done that can provide a reliable indication of the measure in which success has been achieved within the goals of the welfare policy, as well as the role and contribution of social work and other role players.

Four variables that may have a fundamental influence on the nature and quality of social work research, and by implication social welfare services, can be singled out. These are:

- the social welfare policy or social welfare-/funding policy and associated paradigm shifts
- the developmental quality assurance process
- characteristics of welfare organisations’ business plans
- professional social workers’ skills and frames of reference.

These variables will be explained briefly, followed by an in-depth reflection upon the role of social work research.

2 THE SOCIAL WELFARE-/FUNDING POLICY AND PARADIGM SHIFTS

The new social welfare policy of the Republic of South Africa, as proclaimed in the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997), as well as the policy on the financing
of welfare services as proclaimed in the *Financing Policy: Developmental Social Welfare Services* (1999), clearly states that the new welfare dispensation in South Africa is characterised by the paradigm shift from the apartheid era-based welfare service to one which will give stature to social welfare. This is defined in the *White Paper for Social Welfare* (1997) as “an integrated and comprehensive system of social services, facilities, programmes and social security to promote social development, social justice and the social functioning of people.”

The paradigm shifts that form the basis of the so-called new deal in development-based social welfare are stated in the following documentation:

The guidelines for compiling business plans for consideration for state subsidies, based on the principles and values inherent to the welfare policy as proclaimed in the *White Paper for Social Welfare*, and in the *Financing Policy document*.

**2.1 Paradigm shifts concerning the delivery of welfare services**

The paradigm shifts must be read in conjunction with the three focus areas for welfare, namely, (1) children, juveniles and families; (2) women; and (3) the aged, who will be treated in accordance with four service levels. The four service levels are:

(1) prevention; (2) early intervention; (3) statutory process; and (4) continuity of care and development, for example caring for children in children’s homes.

According to the *Financing Policy: Developmental Social Welfare Services* (1999:14), the present distribution of welfare services reflects an emphasis on levels 4 and 3 and an under-emphasis on levels 1 and 2. In accordance with the development model of the welfare policy, this distribution is unacceptable, though for the immediate future it will have to be utilised. The aim is to alter the emphasis in such a manner that services on level 1 will enjoy priority as the main focus of service delivery, and services on level 4 will be considerably reduced with services on levels 2 and 3 in between. This change in emphasis must show significant progress by the year 2004.

The dominance and extent of services on levels 2, 3 and 4 will hopefully decrease. Social work is thus striving to form a resilient society which will handle challenges and stumbling blocks along the way more effectively, rather than
being forced to a standstill and ineffective behaviour by the demands and obstacles of life, after which a remedial/therapeutic programme has to be implemented. Achieving the development of a resilient society demands a considerable amount of life skills and empowerment on different terrains of life, as well as the availability of structures and resources in society (George & Wilding 1994:46–73).

The practical realisation of the repositioning of service levels requires the following paradigm shifts (*Financing Policy* 1999:11–12).

- The acceptance of the development model and development-friendly service methodology *in contrast with* the focus on pathology and specialisation services.
- The emphasis on prevention services and early intervention *in contrast with* a low provision and financing of prevention services and early intervention.
- The scaling down of services on level 4 to the ideal of *supplying the minimum services on level 4*, but with the reservation that the scaled-down services on level 4 will still be properly funded, with a thorough and effective infrastructure.
- The integration of specialist services which focus on the development areas, such as HIV/AIDS, disabilities and drug or alcohol abuse with services which address the three focus areas *in contrast with* the fragmentation of specialisation services distributed over the broad welfare sector, which are often inaccessible to the broader community.
- The integration of social security provision (such as pensions) with other services that are development focused *in contrast with* separation between social and security provision on the one hand and the delivery of development focused and relevant security services on the other hand. The viewpoint is held that the receivers of social security provision will also benefit by service delivery. People’s capacities will develop and thus ensure a better quality of life and increased general welfare.
- The purposeful dismantling of inequalities in society with special attention being paid to poverty relief *in contrast with* the present inequalities in society, especially concerning accessibility of welfare services.
- The redefining of residential care as “one-stop service centres” in the community *in contrast with* the concept of institutions far removed from other services and isolated from the community. A children’s home could also become a service centre for other children in the community by providing, for example, social skills training.
The focus on delivery of services to all people (children, juveniles, families, women and the aged) in contrast with services that are based upon the assumption that identifying and addressing pathology are the criteria for receiving services.

2.2 Paradigm shifts concerning the financing of welfare services

The statement in the Financing Policy document (1999:15) that “[b]udgeting for service delivery will be output- and outcomes-based, and will enable the analysis and allocation of resources according to stated purpose and results”, is in my opinion the central value that will guide the financing of welfare services. This central value also implies a critical disposition towards the appropriation of funds. Systems must be established, such as the Developmental Quality Assurance (DQA) programme (Financing Policy 1999:35–44), which will ensure that the ineffective services are delivered more effectively or are no longer subsidised.

The funding strategy of the state implies that service delivery will be handled differently from the system to which welfare organisations are used and with which they are familiar. In order for welfare organisations to obtain funding from the state, they must understand and maintain the different paradigm(s) of the state.

The paradigms of the state are spelt out in accordance with the following 12 focus shifts that will have to be made (Financing Policy 1999:16–19):

- **From** quantity of services (the number of cases on the case load) as a reason for the existence of a service to one of quality and quantity, but with the emphasis on capacity development and the general welfare of children, juveniles, families, women and the aged.
- **From** per capita funding to funding of comprehensive programmes that correspond with the focus areas and service levels of welfare. In other words, more emphasis is placed on prevention than on remedial services, without remedial services being regarded as irrelevant and unnecessary. Remedial services should be grouped together with other more generic services rather than being kept separate from other services.
- **From** the funding of isolated specialisation services to integrated and extensive (holistic) services with specialist components that are accessible to all people. This shift of focus corresponds with the above-mentioned focus shifts.
From race-based services and structures to multi-racial services with the purpose of social integration.

From the principle of entitlement to one of deserving, necessary and effective services.

From one-sided and skewed allocation of resources in different areas and provinces to priority financing of services in a manner which will ensure that there is a balanced provision of services in the country.

From services that possibly neglect the indigenous and cultural rights and practices or customs to services that are sensitive and accommodating to cultural diversity.

From “sucked-out-of-the-thumb” arbitrary criteria for the existence of a service to financing of services with criteria based on principles and values, as well as the minimum standards with which these services must comply and which are in the interest of the consumers of the services. This means that services that are the personal hobby of one or more peoples and do not address the broader needs of the community will not be financed. (For example, the rehabilitation of drug addicts by means of the exclusive and therapeutic convictions of a few individuals who run the project according to their personal beliefs.)

From individual organisations demanding to be a realm on its own to collective delivery of services and development of networks and the mutual merging of knowledge, skills and sources.

From fragmented, isolated specialisation services to “one-stop” integrated services.

To involve the receivers of social support in development programmes and in capacity building, rather than isolating these people from the services.

To promote a participating attitude to service delivery as far as the consumers of welfare services are concerned. This means that there must be a continuous aspiration to make the users of services active partners in the service delivery process, by giving them co-responsibility in solving their problems on the grounds of the trust that has been put in them.

This paradigm shift must not only be seen as so-called broad guidelines that must be aspired to. On the contrary, the Service Level Agreements (SLAs) as indicated in the Financing Policy document (1999:33) – which was drawn up between the state and welfare organisations – spell out explicit expectations as far as the following are concerned:

- the type of service delivered
the community on which the focus or the levels of services (1, 2, 3, 4 and/or combinations thereof) is. Are the services only aimed at addressing certain pathological behaviour, or do they address the needs of the broader community of which these pathological “cases” form a part?

- acceptable standard for delivery of services
- time frames
- mechanisms for reporting
- developmental quality assurance
- an undertaking by both the state and the welfare organisation to ensure that the mutual requirements are complied with, including statutory requirements where necessary.

3 DEVELOPMENTAL QUALITY ASSURANCE (DQA)

Briefly, the DQA programme postulates that business plans which are submitted by welfare organisations for subsidy purposes must, firstly, reflect the welfare purposes of the state as spelt out in the welfare policy. Secondly, the effectiveness and affordability must be continually evaluated on the basis of the guidelines for the DQA process. The core business of the DQA, according to the Financing Policy document (1999:35–6), can be summarised as follows: “The DQA process is essentially one of assessing the developmental needs of the organisation plus the monitoring of minimum standards and of human rights. The process and procedure result in an organisational developmental plan (ODP) which is then facilitated and monitored between DQA assessment or reviews by a competent mentor from either the department of welfare or an appointed NGO.”

The DQA process will be continuous until the services provided by an organisation are deemed unnecessary or are terminated for other reasons. According to the Financing Policy document (1999:39–40), DQA assessments will be done every six to twelve months and financial sanctions will be put in place when the organisation commits the following transgressions:

- when the principles of the welfare policy are not reflected in service delivery
- when the organisation does not comply with the DQA specified minimum standards for the service, or when minimum standards are not maintained
- when no growth can be demonstrated around transformation shifts, or no growth is indicated in the principles of the welfare policy in all the programmes, and if the maintenance of minimum standards is not realised
within six months after drawing up a so-called organisational development plan

- when the organisation does not comply with the South African constitution as well as with all other relevant legislation and regulations not solely applicable to welfare services
- when the organisation neglects to report any violation of the rights of children or child abuse or abuse of women or the aged as well as when it neglects to deal effectively with social services personnel who fail to report the violation of human rights or are guilty of such violations themselves
- when services are not delivered in accordance with the service contract between the organisation and the state
- when organisations knowingly allow, support or encourage acts of physical, emotional or sexual abuse of consumers of welfare services (clients) or staff, or acts which violate the rights of people in terms of the South African constitution

In conjunction with the DQA process, there are plans on national and provincial levels to implement the so-called Transformation Management Teams (TMTs) “to manage the transformation of social welfare services” (Financing Policy 1999:42). The TMTs will ensure that welfare services are in line with the policy, as expressed in the paradigm shifts, will get off the ground and will function. Welfare organisations can also consult with the TMTs for advice and help to deliver relevant services.

The TMTs will, in turn, be supported by so-called intersectorial task groups with the following specified aims (Financing Policy 1999:43):

- to build an extensive databank of all welfare services and facilities, and their costing
- to provide organisations/provinces with guidelines on achieving equitable and cost-effective standards specifically in respect of staffing and service rendering; and the effective utilisation of facilities to reassess all relevant legislation to initiate research in accordance with identified needs, to advise government on proposed new policy initiatives, to ensure effective dissemination of information to all stakeholders in order to build a comprehensive cross-departmental directory of available financial resources for financing social welfare and developmental programmes

There need not be any doubt that the state is serious about welfare policy and
that welfare organisations’ financial dependence in order to do their job will be used as leverage to change attitudes and service delivery in welfare organisations. Only research can prove whether this form of financial leverage is applied or not.

4 SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF WELFARE ORGANISATIONS’ BUSINESS PLANS

To gain a better understanding of the welfare services that welfare organisations plan to offer, in accordance with the guidelines for financing and focus shifts in welfare services, 50 business plans in the service field (focus group) of child, juvenile and family care in South Africa’s Gauteng Province were studied during March/April 1999. The study of these business plans was done in the offices of the welfare organisations and proper permission was obtained from the directors of these organisations.

The studied business plans demonstrate, among other things, the following characteristics that are important when contemplating research:

Focus on welfare priorities as spelt out in the welfare policy: Welfare organisations’ success in incorporating into their business plans the critical paradigm shifts in the nature, focus and financing of welfare services.

Focus on time dimension and quantification of services: In the majority of organisations, business plans are written for a period of three years. Within this time, it is planned that X number of communities, persons and/or groups (children as well as adults), especially from undeveloped communities, will be targeted to receive some kind of service, for example sex education (including HIV/AIDS information), training in social skills and other forms of personal and economic self-empowerment. The focus is clearly to inform and enable as many people as possible to create a better life for themselves through self-empowerment. Poverty, woman and child abuse, and the elderly are specifically being targeted to receive these services.

Didactic modus operandi: The majority of programmes implies that goals should be formulated beforehand by the service provider, based on knowledge of the needs and characteristics of the target group or community, and that these should be presented by means of lectures and discussions. Therefore, strong emphasis is placed on information and providing education in some aspect or another. For example, teenagers would be informed on how to say no
to drugs or sex, and women on what they could do to stop or avoid abuse. The impression is that experts will be utilised to give advice to participants in these programmes. The focus on reasonably large groups of people will make personal attention difficult, especially when seen in the light of the sensitive nature of some of the programmes.

**Group and community focus:** The nature of countless programmes is to emphasise groups and communities, especially because quantified goals need to be achieved in terms of the number of people who will receive these services. Groups and communities need to be informed on a grand scale of the information and empowerment actions of the programmes. It is assumed that the presenters of these programmes understand the group dynamics of the communities on which the programmes are focused.

**Volunteers:** Most of the empowerment programmes for children, the youth and adults will depend on large numbers of carefully selected, dedicated and well-schooled volunteers to realise the quantified and time-specified programme goals. These volunteers, who will probably in many cases be experts in specialised fields, will work in accordance with the business plans under supervision of a programme manager. Volunteers are also involved in community intervention work which fulfils a strong remedial/therapeutic role (for example, integration into family preservation projects). These volunteers will be thoroughly trained and accompanied by a social worker.

**Focus on family preservation:** There is a prominent focus on family preservation which is aimed at keeping high-risk families intact rather than breaking them up and organising alternative care, (eg foster care) for the children. The practical implementation of family preservation in the midst of countless risks to which children are exposed, is very complex, and professionally seen, of the most challenging and exhausting work that social workers can do. If the government does not have exceptionally well-thought-out and effective support guidelines (financial as well as statutory) to put at the disposal of social workers when a moratorium is placed on the removal of children from their biological families, child removal will decline statistically, but family neglect will increase. It is heartening to see that quantification is being done conservatively as regards the aims of family preservation programmes. These programmes will also need many skilled volunteers if success is to be achieved even within conservative quantified aims.
5 SKILLS AND FRAMES OF REFERENCE

It is significant to note how many skills social workers need to realise the diversity of welfare programmes. The emphasis away from specialist organisations implies that social workers will, once again, have to lend high priority to generic social work. This includes the handling of groups, communities, training and monitoring of volunteers, initiating job creation programmes, teamwork within multi-professional teams, empowerment and protection of women and children, presentation of business plans to prospective or potential donors, not to mention the stream of statutory-related social work in the supervision and control of minors, child abuse and counselling on diverse terrains.

Welfare organisations also plan to incorporate specialist knowledge and specialists on an ad hoc basis to help with the presentation and monitoring of services, as well as supplying limited specialist services to clients.

Attention should be paid to Voysey, Pelser and Taback’s (1998) very relevant and informative article concerning the demands that are being made on human resources in the transformation to the development-based welfare service. These writers (1998:125) come to the conclusion, inter alia, that “[d]evelopment is about transforming lives and transforming societies through a facilitated process. In order for development practitioners to successfully facilitate this process, they themselves need to have been through a personal process which challenges their world view and behaviour” (1998:125). A strong plea is delivered in favour of person-centred training of social workers and other welfare practitioners as a fundamental requirement for the shift to a development model for social welfare.

The business plans of welfare organisations do not necessarily spell out which approach will be followed, and whether all social workers agree with the person-centred approach. The term can also be widely interpreted. The nature of some business plans is to focus on empowerment of people by means of information and specifying goals that have to be achieved. How the aims of business plans are to be formulated in line with the dynamics of the person-centred approach is not clear.

The focus on the empowerment of people as a fundamental component of the development model for social welfare will naturally benefit from the person-centred approach, but it is not yet clear what the restrictions of this approach are. The fact of the matter is that it is unlikely that all social workers are trained in the person-centred approach. Educational institutions will, therefore, have to
confirm what welfare organisations mean by ‘person-centred’. In order to train students of social work within the framework of the new welfare dispensation, the approach to welfare and what organisations and academics view as relevant should urgently be re-examined. Educational institutions will then be involved in realising the development model for social welfare.

6 IS SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH (STILL) NECESSARY?

In conjunction with the preceding discussion on the four variables – especially the DQA process, the establishment of TMTs and the intersectoral task group – the questions should be asked whether research of welfare services can, must, or should be undertaken within any guidelines and requirements other than those which the state specifies, and whether any other values and norms are still applicable. In other words, is social work research still necessary and relevant or should all research rather focus only on the cost-effectiveness of subsidised welfare services? Should an audit only be done to determine whether the requirements of the DQA have been met? Are the TMTs and the intersectoral task group not the instruments that will have the final say about what is acceptable or unacceptable on the terrain of welfare?

The question must therefore be asked: to what extent does the autonomy of social work in welfare still play a role, since it may appear that social work will in practice be accredited by the DQA process and not in terms of social work’s own standards and approach.

Whereas until recently the social work profession, for all practical purposes has steered and managed the welfare component in South Africa according to the broad aims and professional convictions of social work(ers), including academics, the government now has a much more direct interest in the type and quality of service. In fact, the field of welfare is no longer the sole mandate of social workers.

By making the welfare terrain more democratic in the sense that other role players have equal access to welfare, the government is, in reality, setting the table for an extremely diverse but captivating and hopefully constructive assessment of the new welfare policy. The pronouncement in the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997:17) that “[g]overnment will facilitate the development of an inclusive and effective partnership between all the role players in civil society ... The resources, and the unique characteristics of each of the partners will be harnessed for maximum impact”, could imply that the state would also welcome
the critical evaluation of the welfare services by sources other than the structures (DQA and TMTs) the government has installed. Specifically because of the increasing involvement of other role players in the welfare terrain, it is vital that the government should spell out clearly that research output from the diverse welfare ranks, among others social work, is vital and indeed desired in order to develop and run an effective welfare service.

Social work is an independent profession with its own ethos, which can reach its full potential within the new democratic system, but critical research must still be done to find better ways of empowering people to live meaningful lives and experience their communities as being significant. Therefore social work research, together with other disciplines and role players, is essential to keep the welfare debate alive within the parameters of reflective and constructive thought, even though many values and principles of the welfare policy are similar to those of social work.

If research, and social welfare policy for that matter, is stripped of all career ethical direction indicators and only the guidelines laid down by the government (e.g., cost-effectiveness) and the results used as criteria for the evaluation and interpretation of data and results, it would mean that the role of theory, values, etiquette and principles, as well as specialist knowledge unique to the different welfare professions, would be lost.

The consequences of this loss will be that the debate about welfare in its many and complex facets will cease and be replaced by an assumed consensus in welfare thinking because of the absence of serious reflective thought and stagnation of the innovations to which Midgley refers. Strydom (1998:44–58) comes to the conclusion that all social work activities need to be assessed continuously and critically: “Everything that every individual social worker does as part of his or her daily professional practice should have meaning and deductions should be made from it.”

Strydom (1998:55) continues by emphasising that every social worker should not only be a consumer of knowledge but should also contribute to increasing and expanding knowledge. The advantage of each social worker attaching high priority to research will then: “help social work to take its rightful place amongst the other human services and in this way social work can ensure its indispensability” Strydom (1998).

Strydom’s statements must not be incorrectly interpreted as implying that social
work’s right of existence depends on effective service delivery only. Effectiveness is most certainly important but, at the same time, it is essential that the *modus operandi* that will be followed in service delivery, and the influence of the government’s welfare policy on the community’s social functioning and the functioning of welfare organisations, be reflected upon in depth.

Social work cannot only operate reactively, but should also operate preventatively (Strydom 1998:52). This implies that research must examine and report on the essential and critical factors that guide social functioning in communities. Research in social work can accordingly contribute to social welfare but, at the same time, other professions can also contribute, even though the focus of their research may be approached from a different ethical and value base. Economists, for example, could do research on welfare issues, including the contribution of social work as seen from an economic viewpoint.

A concrete example of the potentially diverse character of social welfare research based on divergent and even conflicting viewpoints can be found in current welfare ideologies, which include the New Right, The Middle of the Road, Democratic Socialism, Marxism, Feminism and Greenism (George & Wilding 1994).

### 6.1 Business plans as first line of research

In order to convert the principles, policies and programmes of the *White Paper for Social Welfare* into practice, the Social Welfare Action Plan (SWAP) (1998) was developed. The SWAP “is a three-year action framework which will guide implementation of the White Paper, the design of successive Medium-term Expenditure Framework cycles and annual operational plans. The SWAP can also be used to evaluate the performance of the national and provincial departments” (SWAP 1998:foreword).

The evaluation of the performance of provincial departments reflects indirectly upon the welfare organisations that are financed by different departments. The better welfare organisations perform, the better the achievement of the provincial welfare department. In practice, this boils down to the fact that it is the responsibility of the provincial departments of welfare to lead and empower welfare organisations in their areas so that the SWAP document can be put into practice.

The SWAP (1998:i) document: “is informed by the White Paper and provides
information on the ‘What?’ and ‘How?’ of social welfare policy. The commitment of the government to implement the White Paper is reflected by the SWAP.” With the detailed realisation of goals; the identification of the aspects that must be measured to provide the National Information System (NIS) with data; the factors which will serve as Social Welfare Indicators of Policy Effectiveness; the prioritising of welfare actions and services; as well as the strategies which are used to realise the broad objectives of the White Paper for Social Welfare, it appears that welfare organisations and especially social work will be relied on to ‘make welfare work’.

Obviously, the success of the welfare policy cannot only be measured according to the input of welfare organisations and social workers. Such an approach would imply that social work, once again, has the sole mandate to run the country’s welfare and must bear the responsibility for welfare services. As Voysey, Pelser and Taback (1989) indicated, the success of welfare is a matter that is influenced by countless factors. It is, however, logical to expect that a substantial amount of social work research will focus on the feasibility and effectiveness of business plans. It will specifically be these results, which are obtained at ground level, or in the first line of welfare services, that could give an indication of the direction of the new welfare services, as well as the adjustments that should be made in welfare services. The role social work plays in welfare will then also be spelt out clearly.

6.2 What is the potential of business plans to serve as a “ground-level” source for research?

Business plans can be researched with four reasonably achievable goals in mind:

Firstly, business plans are researched to determine the intentions of the welfare organisation to deliver services that fall within the parameters of the welfare policy and the SWAP. The result of the research basically involves a “yes” or “no” answer. This to determine whether or not the intentions of the services are in line with the policy. The DQA process, the TMTs and the intersectoral task groups will probably play a leading role here to transform organisations as far as their goals and strategies are concerned. This research is relatively simple and can, at its best, only give an indication of whether welfare organisations are trying to accommodate policy.

Secondly, business plans are researched with a view to determining whether
certain programmes get off the ground at all, and how many programmes were, in fact, implemented. This research examines, among other things, quantifiable data. Data are required on aspects such as the amount of groups involved or the number of community projects that is presented. Furthermore, data must be supplied on the number of people who are reached, and there must be an indication of whether the quantified target groups have been reached.

This research is also relatively simple to conduct as it deals with statistics that can easily be supplied by social workers. This type of research has in reality been part of social work practice for many years. It can give an indication of whether funds have been applied to approved programmes. Quantified data are also the source for the SWAP specified NIS databank, as well as serving as social welfare indicators of policy effectiveness (SWAP 1998).

Thirdly, business plans are researched with a view to determining whether the qualitative goals of the programme have been realised. For example, research can be done to determine to what extent juveniles’ knowledge of sexually transmitted diseases has increased, or the extent to which juveniles are capable of comprehending their own rights. Furthermore, the results of the empowerment of people to become economically more independent can be examined. On the terrain of family work, it can be determined if parents have benefited from the specialised service delivery which enables them to be re-united with their children.

The primary focus of this research will not be to determine if every single participant in a programme has achieved the qualitative goal, but rather to what extent the qualitative goals have been realised. Explanations for why more people are of the opinion that they did not benefit from the programme are not necessarily an indication that the goals are unachievable. It is merely possible that the presentation of a programme of assistance was not meaningful or acceptable to everybody. This research can also determine which programmes are regarded as significant and valuable, and would therefore be supported and which programmes are not as relevant and would therefore not be supported that well. It would primarily be supported by the feedback of social workers and volunteers, as well as evaluations by consumers of services (clients), which will be facilitated by social workers.

Fourthly, business plans can be researched to determine how the community can be reached to introduce services, and what the response of the community
is. Research can be done on meaningful role players’ and community leaders’ perceptions of what is presented in their communities in the field of welfare.

6.3 The feasibility of research in relation to business plans by welfare organisations

Welfare organisations must deliver welfare services in the midst of a dynamic and fast-changing social context where crisis intervention often features prominently. Business plans of the organisations can be viewed as clear guidelines, but it cannot be expected that a programme will run exactly as planned. Such an expectation also undermines the nature of the development model underlying the welfare policy, and is definitely not person-centred, which should be a basic point of departure for social work.

Business plans of welfare organisations are first-line services to the community and should not be tasked to deliver the proof that the welfare policy is successful and effective. Welfare services could indeed fail because the welfare policy is not appropriate, and not necessarily because the social workers or the welfare organisations have erred. Welfare services are most definitely an important link in the process of transforming welfare in South Africa, but appropriate and relevant service delivery should be the first priority.

In order to promote research around business plans and to simplify the quantification of data as far as collection and storage are concerned, Moore (1999) developed a computer program (Welfare Information System) as part of the NIS, which collects and releases welfare-related data. This program makes it possible to collect and store data continuously, that is relevant to almost all aspects of social work. The data, which are required by managers of welfare services, can be collected, saved and processed with the help of the computer program. This quantified data will obviously be assessed qualitatively.

The computer program is simple to use and can be implemented throughout the country to store and retrieve data for statistical processing and planning of services on provincial and national levels. However, the implications of internal evaluation or research for welfare organisations must not be underestimated. Even the simplest internal evaluations require human resources, time and technical infrastructure, such as computers and computer program support, and this all translates into capital input.

Research on aspects of social welfare which are addressed within the frame-
work of business plans, aimed at regional and national welfare assessment and strategic planning according to SWAP specifications, can be executed if:

- welfare organisations continuously negotiate with the Departments of Social Work and other relevant departments at universities and colleges. These departments are obviously involved in research and, together, a culture of research should be established within welfare organisations by actively involving social workers, students of social work and lecturers, as well as students and lecturers from related disciplines, especially in follow-up or longitudinal and contract research.
- those who manage the DQA process initiate a thorough impact study concerning the implications of internal research done by welfare organisations. On these grounds, the government will then make funding available to finance the research process.
- key personnel of welfare organisations, as well as lecturers of social work and other disciplines at educational institutions, will be orientated thoroughly and trained in the nature of the data which must be collected, as well as the modus operandi for internal evaluation that can serve as data source for the NIS, which forms part of the SWAP document.
- the government clearly spells out the criteria to obtain research funding for research within Category C services, as stated in the Financing Policy (1999:22). The type of research, as far as focus and extent are concerned, must also be stipulated.

7 CONCLUSION

The hope Midgley nurtures that South Africa’s welfare policy should serve as a direction indicator for the world, on the grounds of thorough study and analysis which have been done, is definitely challenging.

Midgley’s (1998:90) statement that “South Africans are uniquely placed to inform and even lead international discussions on the viability of the social development approach”, will only be realised by the provision of reliable research results. Reliable results can be delivered if the state and welfare-related professions make it their business to develop suitable research strategies according to which welfare programmes could be measured and evaluated.

Primarily, however, the focus of welfare services must be on the needs of South Africans, and must not merely be an attempt to show the world the success of their welfare programmes.
If the considerable changes in the field of welfare are taken into account, as spelt out in the four variables, as well as the social distress of a great portion of the South African population, it is essential that welfare services are delivered efficiently and cost effectively, especially within the context of the limited financial capabilities of the state and community to “support” welfare. Research and evaluation are necessary components of the new welfare dispensation in South Africa; without these aspects the country will lose direction.

McKendrick’s (1998:110) commentary is extremely appropriate in the present welfare transformation process and should be concretely embarked upon: “Throughout the history of social work and social work education in South Africa, major policy shifts have been facilitated by sharing and debate at national conferences, and perhaps the time has arrived for another landmark national conference ...” Even though McKendrick is specifically referring to a conference which focused on the training of social workers, this statement is just as appropriate to justify the convention of a national conference, where research and evaluation as strategic components for the continued relevance of social work as a profession are addressed, as well as social workers’ task of effective service delivery.

Social work, in close co-operation with other disciplines, is now still in the position to reconfirm its leading role within the new welfare dispensation by, among other things, practice-related research. It must, however, be taken into account that the research task is much too vast for social work alone, and would lead to academic and practice attenuation when only one discipline holds the sole mandate over welfare-directed research. The hope is expressed that academic input and practice will enter a new era of co-operation consequently to empower the profession of social work and other relevant developing social welfare role players, as well as delivering the best possible service to the consumer of social work and welfare services.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


