

Social welfare in Nigeria and the UK: reformation through international education, collaboration and research

The ACU Titular Fellowships promote mobility amongst Commonwealth university staff and enable collaboration on research projects. **Raymond Ogunade** is currently on a University of Wales Swansea Fulton Fellowship. Here, he and his research partner **Paul Rees** explain the importance of their work on state care for children and young people.

Across the Commonwealth, the positive impact of advances in scientific knowledge, education, health-care and technology are clearly visible and highly encouraging. Yet these advances do not negate the truth of the ancient proverb 'man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward'. Due to difficulties that stem from a host of environmental, economic, spiritual, physical and emotional sources, most individuals will require a degree of formal 'state'-sponsored social support at some point during their lives. In every country, there are large numbers of highly vulnerable individuals with very complex needs. Meeting the needs of these vulnerable citizens, especially children and young people, is presenting countries with extraordinary dilemmas and challenges. In fact, the scale of the challenge, even for economically advanced countries, is immense. In the United Kingdom, for example, official state documents estimate that, of the nation's

11 million children, as many as 4 million are 'vulnerable'. Around 90,000 children are officially resident in 'state' care. In some developing countries within the Commonwealth, the scale of the challenge is nothing short of disturbing. Of the 100 million children in Nigeria, only 30 million have access to education, health, shelter and adequate parental care. Recent guidance issued by the United Nations is very welcome and helps to reinforce the fact that, whilst local level multidisciplinary interventions are vital, there is also a need for international collaboration and an international vision.

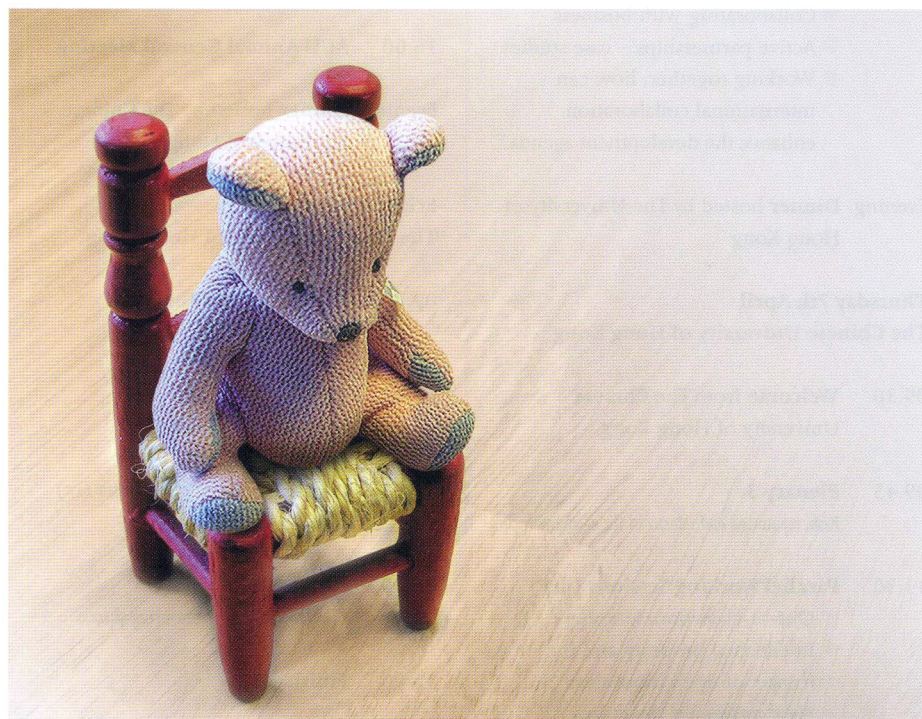
The evident and pressing need to address the social care needs of citizens in Nigeria and the UK provided the impetus for a wide-ranging collaborative research project between the University of Ilorin (Nigeria) and Swansea University (Wales, UK). This project, which is supported by the ACU through its Titular Fellowships programme, harnesses the comb-

ined insight, expertise and resources of both universities. The project commenced in September 2010 with the arrival in the UK of Dr Raymond Ogunade, Visiting Researcher at the University of Ilorin. Greeting Dr Ogunade, Professor Melanie Jasper, Head of the School of Human and Health Sciences at Swansea University, said 'This project provides an excellent opportunity for the experience and expertise from both Swansea and Nigeria to contribute to policy development in a much-needed area of social care. Collaborative working through partnerships of this sort will contribute to solutions to shared and global problems, as well as forging solid networks for the future'.

Following a brief induction period with his fellow researcher Dr Paul Rees, Dr Ogunade began to review existing literature and undertook some exploratory fieldwork visits. The project was subsequently refined and now has several distinct components. Firstly, the project is exploring the contribution that graduates of theology and religious studies can make alongside professionals from other disciplines to assist in social rehabilitation. Anecdotal accounts of the role and value of religion in rehabilitation are common, but research literature on the formal involvement of applied theologians in multidisciplinary social care is only just beginning to emerge.

Secondly, the project aims to contrast data and information on the social care needs of children and young people in Nigeria and Wales. Producing a clear and accessible picture of the situation of need is considered to be the first step in facilitating mutual support and assistance. Interestingly, as Dr Ogunade has met with staff and given guest lectures to social work students at Swansea University, many have responded with a voluntary commitment to visit Nigeria and assist with social work practice.

Thirdly, the project intends to explore the psychological coping mechanisms of children in different settings. It is well recognised that,



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when coping with difficult situations, children and young people draw strength from a range of sources – for example, social and family contact, rehearsing beliefs, use of mental imagery, and engaging in emotionally-charged behaviour – but what is not known is how the relative dependency on these factors differs across cultures and countries.

Fourthly, it is hoped that the project will provide appropriate material for a new textbook on religion and social rehabilitation. All aspects of the project will feed into existing teaching materials in both universities.

Fifthly, the research aims to provide a guide for the National Universities Commission and the Ministry of Education in Nigeria, with the hope that the Nigerian government will promote the creation of social work departments in Nigerian universities. Amongst the 200 federal, state, and private universities in Nigeria, very few have a department that is social work-related.

Finally, plans are now in place for both universities to sign a declaration of intent and understanding. Professor Is-haq O Oloyede, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ilorin and also President of the Association of African Universities, is to be invited to Swansea University to sign the declaration. It is hoped that this declaration will pave the way for the establishment of a formal social care work programme within the University of Ilorin, and enable further collaboration between the two institutions across other disciplines. Such collaboration would not have been possible without the support of the ACU. ■

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Dr Raymond Ogunade is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Religions at the University of Ilorin, Nigeria.

Dr Paul Rees is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Human and Health Sciences at Swansea University, UK.

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