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## TRANSFORMING SOCIAL WORK IN ZIMBABWE FROM SOCIAL CONTROL TO SOCIAL CHANGE

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The quest for relevance of social work in Third world countries in the context of mounting socio-economic challenges has necessitated the need to consider transforming social work from social control to social change. Prominent social work academics and practitioners have argued in support of the need for such transformation. This article analyses this transition in the context of the new global definition of social work and how its various aspects can be applied in transforming social work education and practice in Zimbabwe. Key conclusions are that, social work curriculum be re-oriented toward the developmental social work thrust, advocacy and indigenous knowledge be integrated into social work practice.*

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**Key words:** social control, social change, social work, social work education, social work practice, developmental social work

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## INTRODUCTION

Social work in the developing world was promoted by missionaries and the colonial administrators, not solely as a mechanism of promoting human well-being, but also as a mechanism of social control (Kaseke, 2014). In the post-colonial era this has placed social work at a rather awkward position because it is now supposed to be used as an instrument of re-distributing resources to the previously marginalised black majority and at the same time it is seen as an instrument of protecting the welfare benefits of the previously dominant minority. Social work in many African countries has struggled to shake off the colonial links. According to Gray, Kreitzer and Mupedziswa (2014) and Green (2008), Western social work models continue to guide social work practice because social workers are mostly pre-occupied with providing short term services due to the survival needs of the clients and acute poverty issues.

Hugman (1998) pointed out that social work is positioned at the intersection of three distinct territories, those of social care, social control and social change. Hugman (1998) argues that social care is concerned with the provision of support and services to people who are vulnerable while social control revolves around safeguarding people from themselves or others. On the other hand, social change entails challenging the sources of injustice and contributing to the empowerment of individuals and groups who have suffered injustices. This has left social workers in a dilemma as to which practice domain to focus on. Due to the socio-economic challenges in many Third world countries there is need to promote social change. The new global definition of social work can be used as a reference point in the quest for social change.

According to Kaseke (1991), social work in Zimbabwe was developed as a response to urban social ills such as crime, prostitution and destitution. He further added, the philosophy of the colonial policymakers was that such social ills, if left unattended, would undermine social order and stability. In this context social work was, therefore, used as a mechanism of social control, and never focused on addressing the root causes of these social ills. After independence as alluded by Mukaro (2013), social work adopted an unambiguous commitment to the policies of social justice and equity in personal social services intended to be free of racial and discriminatory practices. Mupedziswa (1995) identified some of the personal social services as services provided to people living with disabilities, the older people, youth and children by government, local authorities, companies and non-governmental organisations. Forms of social control in personal social work

services in Zimbabwe include the means tested public assistance, probation work and counselling offered in situations of marital conflict, deviance and drug addiction.

These services are being provided to maintain social order. However, they still mimic the colonial welfare system, as supported by Gray, et al. (2014) the colonial welfare institutions and systems have remained intact in most post colonial African countries. Kaseke (1995) alluded to the idea that due to lack of economic resources developing countries can only provide highly selective and rudimentary services. In Zimbabwe, the social change trajectory in the form of developmental social work has been undermined by factors such as lack of resources and is yet to take root in both social work education and practice. The social change thrust of social work education was disrupted by economic challenges which the country encountered from 2000-2008 and this has limited social workers capacity to promote social change (Kaseke, 2014). Social workers in government are largely still providing social services within the social control domain. This is despite a shift at policy level; the major change being the renaming of the then Department of Social Welfare to Department of Social Service in tandem with the developmental social work approach adopted by the government (Wyatt, Mupedziswa and Rayment, 2010).

The purpose of this article is to analyse how the new global definition of social work will affect social work education and practice in Zimbabwe. It focuses on how social work education and practice can promote social change and development through embracing human rights and indigenous knowledge which are aspects of the new global definition of social work. This is being done within the context of attempting to transform social work from promoting social control to social change (development). The article provides an introduction, conceptual framework, research methodology, a discussion on the implications of the definition on social work education and practice in Zimbabwe focusing on social change and development, human rights as well as indigenous knowledge. Finally, conclusions were reached based on the discussion. These include the need to re-orient the social work curriculum, adopting advocacy and integrating indigenous knowledge into social work practice.

## **THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

According to Kaseke (2014), social work in developing countries has been used to maintain the status quo (social control) and has thus failed to address the problem of social exclusion. During the colonial era, the social policies

and subsequent social services which were developed in Zimbabwe were meant to safeguard and promote white supremacy within the context of naked capitalism (Kaseke, 1995). Over the years the profession has failed to extricate itself from this unenviable position. Social work in most African countries has embraced the curative or remedial approach to solving problems (Chitereka, 2009). In Zimbabwe and South Africa there has been continuity with past patterns of service delivery significantly influenced by the British social work system (Patel and Hochfeld, 2012; Chogugudza, 2009). Hence the profession has often been criticised for its failure to effectively tackle the problem of poverty because of its orientation. This has been further compounded by the approaches to social work used in most of the developing countries which to a larger extent have proved ineffective.

According to Kaseke (2014), in Zimbabwe despite deepening poverty and unemployment, there has been no noticeable shift in the roles or approaches to social work. Casework has continued to dominate social work practice despite being questioned by prominent social work academics such as Midgley, Dominelli, Mwansa and Osei-Hwedie and practitioners who are now advocating for alternative approaches such as developmental social work (Gray, 2010; Patel, 2005). In Zimbabwe at practice level, for example, social work services such as the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) and public assistance are individualistic and short-term in nature. 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 strength-based and non-discriminatory models, approaches and interventions, and partnerships to promote social and economic inclusion and well-being (Patel and Hochfeld, 2012; Lombard, 2007; Patel, 2005; Mayadas and Elliot, 2001; Gray, 2002; Midgley, 1995).

It can also be viewed as a type of social work which diverges from the residual, service-oriented approach directed at special categories of people in need for strengths-based and people-centred approaches (Gray, 2002). Developmental social work is a paradigm of social work practice that is broad-based, change-oriented and deals with some of the severe social problems faced on the African continent (Hall, 1990). This developmental approach tends to integrate casework with group and community work. Therefore, the approach spans the three domains of social care, social control and social change. The new global definition which was jointly agreed by the two international professional representative bodies, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) in 2014 provides an opportunity to

seriously reflect about how social work in the Third world countries such as Zimbabwe can promote the transformation of social work from social control toward social change (social development) as enunciated by the various aspects of the definition as argued in this article.

Many attempts have been made at the international level to define social work reflecting the specific focus of the profession at every juncture of its history. The focus has gradually been changing from social control to the current emphasis on social development. In 2000, the two professional representative bodies, the IFSW and IASSW adopted the following as probably an internationally accepted definition of social work, “the social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work” (IFSW, 2000 para.1).

Due to the changing circumstances, the IFSW and IASSW in 2014 re-defined social work “as a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing”. This new definition of social work is reflecting the changing focus of social work by adding emerging issues such as social change and indigenous knowledge.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This article employed the qualitative method of documents analysis which involved a desk review of policy and general literature focusing on the transformation of social work in Zimbabwe from social control to social change. The literature was sourced from research reports, academic textbooks and journal articles. The data obtained assisted in the discussion, analysis and conclusions arrived at in this article based on purposively identified three aspects of the new global definition of social work which are social change and development, human rights and indigenous knowledge.

## **The role of social work education in promoting social change and development**

The new global definition of social work is putting emphasis on the need for social work to focus on promoting social change and development. Social work education in Zimbabwe has a role in promoting social change and development. According to Patel and Hochfeld (2012), social work education could be a key driver of change. In a bid to transform social work from social control to social development in Zimbabwe, the education system should help in this regard. Social change and development can be realised through developmental social work. Midgley (1995:25) alluded to the idea that, “the social development approach promotes a developmental perspective in social welfare”. The subject of social development has come back on the fore due to a number of initiatives such as the global agreements in the mould of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as enunciated in the United Nations Economic and Social Council (UNESCO) (2015) Statement on social protection floors: an essential element of the right to social security and of the sustainable development.

According to Gray (1997), the social work philosophy is consistent with that of social development. Therefore, social work education can play a pivotal role in promoting the development perspective in social welfare provision. Kaseke (2014) noted that the discourse on developmental social work points to the centrality of institutions training social workers in producing social workers with competencies to practice in a manner that gives expression to developmental social work. He further added that developmental social work is oriented towards promoting social change.

Mupedziswa (1995) noted that in Zimbabwe after independence, the School of Social Work adopted a social development thrust in order to produce a particular cadre of social workers who were able to use the approach in both rural and urban areas with a view of redressing the colonial injustices and promote social change. But this was disrupted by the economic challenges which were encountered in the country from 2000-2008 (Kaseke, 2014). He further stated that currently the social work curriculum in Zimbabwe has a limited developmental social work thrust. And this tends to limit the capacity of the social work graduates to promote social change. This might be because of the significant knowledge gap which exists about the theory and practice of developmental social work which is hampering its translation into practice (Patel and Hochfeld, 2012). Therefore, in Zimbabwe this knowledge gap could be partly addressed by a social work curriculum which is

development-oriented. In order to promote social change, the social work education must be a process of discovery rather than only the digestion of existing knowledge (Papell and Skolnik, 1992). There is also need to include economic development in social work training (Patel and Hochfeld, 2012).

Therefore, the social work curriculum in Zimbabwe can move in this direction through a number of ways; such as having courses on economic development, social development, social change, social policy and also involving students in micro developmental social work projects in the communities near the institutions as part of the curriculum. These projects can go a long way in ensuring that the students develop the key competencies for promoting social change and development at both micro and macro levels. Also students should be trained in advocacy in order for them to be in a position to promote social change. Kaseke (2014) stated that advocacy and lobbying are essential in promoting social change. In its current form social work education in Zimbabwe is largely paying piecemeal attention to advocacy as a viable approach or method of intervention in social work.

### **The role of social work education in promoting human rights**

Social work education has an important role in the area of promoting human rights. Reichert (2011) observed that in the social work profession, human rights have only recently begun to have significance. This is also reflected in the new global definition of social work. In Zimbabwe the mission of social work includes promoting human rights as articulated in the *Social Workers (Code of Ethics) By Laws 2012 Statutory Instrument 146 of 2012* (Council of Social Workers, 2012). According to the United Nations (1987), human rights allow people to fully develop and satisfy their various needs. The study of human rights broadens the perspectives of social workers when carrying out policies and practices (Reichert, 2011). Therefore, it is imperative for the social work curriculum in Zimbabwe to also incorporate issues of human rights with a view of broadening social work students' understanding of social policies as well as social work practice.

The incorporation of human rights in social work education can be done through various ways. A number of potentially useful ways can be borrowed from Patel (2005) which she suggested in the context of how social development can be taught in social work. Firstly, it can be through mainstreaming human rights throughout the social work programme so that they become the main thrust of the social work training institution or degree. Secondly, human rights can be taught as a separate subject or specialisation. Thirdly, they can be taught on a more ad hoc basis and conveyed within the content of other

courses in the social work programmes. Therefore, in Zimbabwe it has to be the duty of every social work training institution to determine the extent to which they are embracing issues of human rights in their curriculum. This can be enforced through incorporating human rights in the social work minimum body of knowledge. Social work cannot claim to address social injustices if it ignores human rights. The teaching of human rights can be viewed as part of efforts towards promoting social change.

### **The role of social work education in promoting indigenous knowledge**

The Western orientation of social work education and practice has often been a subject of criticism for the profession as it has failed to be located within the realities of the clients of social work in Third world countries. Right from its inception, and for many years, social work practice in Africa inherited the Western bias because of its colonial legacy. Theories have tended to be adopted wholesale from Western theorists and practitioners, reflecting Western academic analysis and the culture of individualism (Mupedziswa, 1992). Despite a lapse of many years, currently the dominance of Western social work literature has re-ignited the debate on the need to embrace indigenous knowledge in both social work education and practice as an alternative to the social work's current theories and practice orientation. According to Warren, Slikkerveer and Brokensha (1995), indigenous knowledge is the local knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society. Gray, Coates and Yellow Bird (2008) noted that at the international level the movements calling for incorporation of indigenous knowledge in social work can be seen to be located within the impetus to ensure that social work is firmly rooted in the relational, social and interpersonal realities of diverse clients groups and grounded in local knowledge and experience. The new global definition of social work supports the idea of incorporating indigenous knowledge in social work education and practice. IFSW and IASSW (2014) stated that among many theories, social work is supposed to be underpinned by the theory of indigenous knowledge.

The implication of this on social work education in Zimbabwe is on the need to include theories on indigenous knowledge in the social work curriculum. This is because the education system has a profound influence on the nature of social work practice and as a consequence the nature of practice is informed by the curriculum. Social work educators in Zimbabwe need to focus on researching about indigenous knowledge systems and social work because research informs practice. Institutions of higher learning are supposed to be producers of knowledge through research. It is also suggested that the nexus between social anthropology and social work need to be spelt



out clearly in the curriculum. Hopefully this trajectory can assist in ensuring that social work education focuses on social change.

### **The role of social work practice in promoting social change and development**

According to Gray (2002), social work has Western, liberal roots and traditions and while in some countries it has, from time to time, taken a radical turn, however this has not happened in Africa. Social work has relied heavily on the residual model of social welfare and practice with a focus on micro social work interventions while in Africa, there is need to look for more lasting solutions, such as economic viability, and focus on macro social work in the mould of approaches such as the developmental approach which goes beyond emergency relief (Patel and Hochfeld, 2012; Mupedziswa, 1993). According to Richie (2008:57) “it is important for social workers to move beyond an individual analysis of social problems in order for real social change to occur”. Social workers are in a unique position because they are able to advocate and challenge the systems from within during their day-to-day practice (Dalrymple and Boylan, 2013). In practice, social change can be embedded within social care and social control functions of social work (Humphrey, 2011). In Zimbabwe, an encouraging example is the cash transfer programme which is providing a monthly allowance of US\$ 20 to families with vulnerable children. Although the programme is part of the Zimbabwe social protection scheme of public assistance, it has potential of being used as a springboard to promote the social change agenda provided adequate financial support is availed for the allowances to be increased which can stimulate a meaningful take-off result in an improvement in the income levels of the families and the families using the allowances can be in a position to start income generating projects or strengthen their existing livelihood activities. Thus a mainly social care service being used as a springboard for social development.

Also within the context of social work practice, advocacy can be used to promote social change. Advocacy ensures that service users and carers, who are often denied their basic rights and opportunities, are empowered; therefore, social work advocacy aims to promote social change (Dalrymple and Boylan, 2013). Humphrey (2011) identified two types of advocacy which social workers can make use of in a bid to promote social change. The first type is when a social worker plays the advocacy role on behalf of service users. The second type is advocacy by service users themselves with the social worker indirectly supporting them. This calls for social workers in Zimbabwe to seriously consider advocacy as an alternative approach in their

interventions not just paying lip service. An exception is in the area of child welfare in which advocacy has been used to bring to the fore the plight of orphaned and vulnerable children (OVC). This culminated in the National Orphan Care Policy and the subsequent programmes being implemented offering services which promotes the well-being of the OVC.

However, challenges abound in ensuring that social work practice promotes social change and development. Gray (2002:8) cited "...the major stumbling block is whether or not social workers consider development as a valid form of practice". According to Singh and Cowden (2013:84), "social work ...suffers not just a lack of public recognition, but also a lack of belief in itself". A study in Gauteng, South Africa found out that social workers did not have an understanding of economic development concepts (Patel and Hochfeld, 2012). This suggested that social workers had not yet begun promoting social change. A similar scenario can also be stated as obtaining in Zimbabwe.

Mupedziswa (1993) suggested that social work profession has to become more aggressive and perhaps even more adventurous, if it is to be taken seriously. Patel and Hochfeld (2012) advanced the idea that social workers need to engage more actively with other professionals who have the expertise in the field of development in order to develop knowledge about how social workers might collaborate more effectively in local economic development initiatives. Therefore, in practice social workers in Zimbabwe need to work with other professionals such as economists and development experts in order to promote social change and development in line with the new global definition of social work. The coalition theory commonly known as the "Advocacy Coalition Framework", which was developed by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993), can guide the nature of the collaborations social workers and other professionals need to put in place to advocate for social change. The theory is premised on the idea that policy change happens through coordinated activities among individuals with the same policy beliefs (Stachowiak, undated). For instance, in Zimbabwe, the National Association of Social Workers could foster collaboration with organisations such as the Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development (ZIMCODD) in advocating and lobbying for debt relief as the national debt to bilateral and multilateral financial institutions has shown to be an albatross on the social development of the country.

### **Social work practice and the promotion of human rights in Zimbabwe**

The new global definition of social work explicitly mentions the aspect of human rights. This aspect can be more pronounced in social work practice.

An increasing emphasis has been placed on the rights-based approaches to development (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF] and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2007). They further stated that, this shift has been as a result of growing recognition that needs-based delivery approaches have failed to meaningfully reduce poverty. More importantly it is also felt that combining human rights, development and activism can be more effective than any single approach. Therefore, social workers in their various practice settings need to ask themselves the question about what particular human right(s) are they upholding and promoting in whatever service they are providing to their clients. Social workers in practice ought to embrace the rights-based approaches to development as well as social welfare services provision in a bid to move away from the needs-based approaches. Promoting human rights through social work practice can be a vehicle of ensuring that social change takes place. This is because when previously oppressed people begin to enjoy their rights after the intervention of social workers, change would have taken place.

### **Integrating social work practice and indigenous knowledge in Zimbabwe**

According to Munford and Sanders (2008), indigenous voices and visions are increasingly shaping the way that practice develops. It is, therefore, imperative for social workers in Zimbabwe to explore the ways that they can use to incorporate indigenous cultural views into their work. This is because indigenous knowledge can provide a strong foundation upon which social work interventions can be built. Warren et al. (1995) observed that ignorance of local knowledge often results in failure of development projects. The need to make use of indigenous knowledge in social work practice cannot be overemphasised.

In Zimbabwe as suggested by Munford and Sanders (2008), there is need for social workers to embrace new ways of working and to be challenged by alternative frameworks such as embracing indigenous knowledge in social work interventions. This can result in culturally sensitive, effective, appropriate and indigenised social work practice. Such type of social work probably stands a better chance of being accepted by the public because in its current form social work is suffering from lack of public recognition (Singh and Cowden, 2013). In the area of child welfare, Zimbabwe has embraced indigenous knowledge in response to the social problem of mass orphan hood in the form of the National Orphan Care Policy's six-tier safety net system. According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Services (MoLSS) (2011), the six-tier safety system states that an orphan should be

taken care of by following the six systems of care which are the nuclear family, extended family, community care, foster care, adoption and institutionalisation as a last resort. This safety net system is partly based on the cultural norms which support the idea that as much as is possible orphaned and vulnerable children should be taken care of in their communities as is highlighted by the first three systems of care. These have been integrated with the formalised systems of child welfare such as adoption and institutionalisation. Such a blend needs to be considered in other areas of social work practice such as working with people living with disabilities and in youth development.

In New Zealand, the Maori people's world views, knowledge and language have been incorporated into social work practice (Munford and Sanders, 2008). And of particular importance for the Maori wellbeing, is the connection with one's ancestry and foregrounding of cultural meaning systems, including spirituality (Ruwhiu in Munford and Sanders, 2008). Social workers in New Zealand working with the Maori have managed to take on board such indigenous knowledge and this has resulted in transformed and vibrant social work practice.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

It is critical for social work educators in Zimbabwe to lead the crusade towards promoting social change through embracing developmental social work as an alternative approach to Western-oriented social work education which focuses much on remedial social work. Issues such as human rights and indigenous knowledge can fit in developmental social work. Such a paradigm shift augurs well with the quest for relevance being sought by social work in Zimbabwe. The philosophy of the social work curriculum needs to change and focus on developmental social work. This will go a long way towards transforming social work from social control to social change and development. The teaching methods should also reflect this thrust by putting more emphasis on discovery learning. This will make it possible to question the status quo of social work in Zimbabwe with the idea of bringing forth the transformation process of both the social work education and practice. Also research is a critical area which needs the attention of social work educators in order to generate the necessary knowledge for social change in Zimbabwe. All these initiatives can go a long way in making social work education change oriented which is different from the current focus on social control.

Social work practitioners need to make use of advocacy in promoting social change and development. Such practice resonates with the human rights agenda and the indigenisation of practice through integrating indigenous knowledge in their interventions. The integration of indigenous knowledge into social work practice is vital for ensuring the appropriateness of the social work services provided to the various categories of clients in Zimbabwe. Social work has for a long time suffered from lack of public recognition as a consequence of not being in sync with local knowledge systems. Therefore, a shift in the nature of social work being practiced in Zimbabwe can go a long way in realising the goals of the various aspects of the new global definition of social work in the context of transforming social work from promoting mainly social control by focusing more on social change and development. Social control in social work practice can be seen in personal social services such as the means-tested public assistance. The shift towards social change is yet to be seen at practice level regardless of the adoption of a developmental approach by the government.

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