

**Social Development
and
Urban Poverty**

**Proceedings of a Workshop
Held at the Kentucky Hotel,
Harare, Zimbabwe**

22 – 26 February, 1993

**School of Social Work,
Zimbabwe**

Social Development and Urban Poverty

**Paper presentations and edited proceedings of a
Workshop held in Harare, Zimbabwe
22nd – 26th February, 1993**

edited by Nigel Hall

Urban Poverty and Fieldwork

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Aims and Focus of Workshop

Workshop on Social Development and Urban Poverty

Dates: February 22 – 26, 1993

Venue: Kentucky Airport Hotel, Harare, Zimbabwe

Contact: Editor, Journal of Social Development in Africa, School of Social Work, P Bag 66022, Kopje, Zimbabwe, Tel: 750815.

Sponsors: Overseas Development Administration (British Development Division Central Africa)

Organisers: Journal of Social Development in Africa, School of Social Work

Participants: To be drawn from Southern African countries: Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Also participants from University College, Swansea.

Aims of the Workshop:

- a) To discuss issues of social development with specific reference to urban poverty.
- b) To facilitate an exchange of experiences on problems of poverty in southern Africa.
- c) To examine the social consequences of structural adjustment programmes, especially as they relate to urban poverty.
- d) To discuss the implications of urban poverty for social work education and practice, in particular, fieldwork.

Focus of the Workshop:

- The Workshop will focus on the problem of urban poverty, looking at issues such as definition of problems, intervention strategies, social policy, the way forward, analysis of students' experiences while on fieldwork, etc.
- Country structural adjustment and economic reform programmes will be reviewed.
- The Workshop will also address the issue of popular participation and accountability, with the objective of making central and local governments more accountable than they are.
- Specific services such as housing, health, community services, personal social services, social security, research, etc, will be evaluated in their relation to urban poverty.
- Fieldwork, with its implications for social work education and practice, will be examined.

Papers will be two-pronged:

- a) Focus on country with discussion of urban poverty, extent of problem, intervention strategies, etc.
- b) Focus on fieldwork regarding its role in training social workers and urban development; and social development training with special reference to fieldwork.

“Rethinking Fieldwork Education and Practice in Southern African: Lessons from Botswana”

Barbara N Ngwenya and Tracey Mudede *

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is not so much to critique *what is* currently the practice of fieldwork in southern Africa in general, and in Botswana in particular. Major discussions regarding the role of fieldwork education in the context of a developing country have been debated at length by several authors (Kaseke, 1986; Muzaale, 1988; Ankrah, 1986; Hall, 1990, Njau, 1986). The main focus of this paper, therefore, is to consider, from a developmental and organisational perspective, *ideally what ought to become of field education* with particular reference to Botswana. This approach to field education, obviously, does not suggest a blueprint, but rather a working framework for contextualised fieldwork education in Botswana. The approach is therefore tentative and exploratory.

An attempt will be made to map out a plausible alternative to fieldwork education for Botswana. Logically, the practice of fieldwork cannot be divorced from the dominant social work education *methodology* and issues pertaining to the Department of Social Work’s “organisational competence”. The bottom line, however, is that social work education *in Botswana* lacks structural cohesiveness as a necessary condition to spearhead a unity of purpose and a sense of community among all those with a stake in it (that is, practitioners, educators, students and client constituencies). The practice of fieldwork, therefore, is conceptualised as positing plausible opportunities for organised and purposeful social involvement based on the principle of: *social work for development with equality and justice*. The focus of fieldwork, we argue, should be woven around the production and the delivery of services to communities by those who have a major stake in the process, specifically, social work students and educators.

The thrust of our argument is that if social work education is to survive major structural shifts in the micro (the university) and the macro (the national) socio-economic environment, there is dire need for the formulation of a “forward looking” planning strategy, and organisational perceptiveness. In other words, social work education in Botswana should establish appropriate structures to facilitate cost-effective productive activities, initiate strategic alliances with community-based organisations, and embark on efficient and sustainable provision of services.

However, one cannot talk about “productivity awareness” in fieldwork without reference to the social work educators’ and students’ ability to undertake a social and critical analysis of public issues in the broader political environment. In order to be issues-oriented, we argue, the fieldwork approach should problematise practice settings, which are seemingly politically neutral institutions. Once a “practice setting” is conceptualised from the point of view of issues in a specific field of practice in relation to a specific constituency, isolated individual concerns in the immediate environment are qualitatively transformed to public issues, connected to the very functions of dominant societal institutions. An issues-oriented practice of fieldwork, we argue, is a critical dimension in the overall political strategy for social work educators and students. The alliance between practitioners and educators with specific constituencies, will, in the long term, invoke a sense of commonality of interest by opening up issues for public debate and action for social transformation.

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(This paper is a condensed version of the original)

Rationale for The Reorientation of Fieldwork Practice

• “Reworking Critical Approach”

Fieldwork is an educational event as well as a work site. Fieldwork is a process of social, cultural, political and educational activity, and, therefore, the crucible within which educators and students synthesise and integrate their values into organised action (for example, through concrete projects/ programme development, applied and participatory research undertakings). Attending to both process and product is thus a major shift from the traditional practice of fieldwork, which is primarily a consumer of resources, without commensurate output in the production of tangible services to communities, and qualitative production of social knowledge.

Fieldwork education has been narrowly defined as a “course” within the social work curriculum, where the student is the locus of attention, Hamilton and Else, as quoted by Kaseke (1986:55), define fieldwork as:

“... a consciously planned set of experiences occurring in a practice setting, designed to move a student from their initial level of understanding, skills, attitude to levels associated with autonomous social work practice”.

Bogo & Vayda (1986) conceptualise fieldwork as the blending of knowledge, skills and values which can be articulated and learned. On the other hand Wilson (1981) and Grossman (1991) regard fieldwork as an opportunity for the student to engage in a conflict-ridden reality, to take independent action, to be resourceful and adaptable.

The problem is, it is illusionary to assume that coursework can provide the knowledge base suitable to meet the student’s learning needs and agency expectations. There is no congruence between course content and work content thus limited (if any) direct skill transfer to practice. It is therefore conceptually erroneous and practically incorrect to assume that once in the field, a process of “osmosis” would somewhat transpire to precipitate “conversion” of theoretical knowledge to practice skills.

As Freire (1985) succinctly points out: “...there is no theoretical context if it is not in a dialectical unity with the concrete context”. The relationship between classroom instruction and fieldwork practice, therefore, should be dialectical and reflective. This condition would enable students to engage in a dialectical process of reconstructing new knowledge and skills, be it in the formal (classroom) or informal (agency/community) learning site. In the words of Shor and Freire (1987:11), students need competency in ‘reading to rewrite’ what they are reading; in so doing, discover the connections between the text and the context. The activity of learning, they argue, is characterised by action, debate, critical reflection, and shared social and political values. As Shor and Freire further explain, if students are removed from the cycle of producing new knowledge and from the cycle in which knowledge is perceived, the act of knowing is reduced to transference of existing knowledge by educators, which students memorise for passing the exams.

Agency structures facilitate a particular process in relation to specific task and maintenance functions. We cannot expect, as educators, that structures which have not been established for the purpose of achieving fieldwork education goals to be an appropriate site for social work students to cultivate and advance their professional skills. Students are in a collision course amidst conflicting hidden agendas (the agency and the department of social work). The crux of the matter evolves around: who has ownership and control over what structures, and the extent to which they exert influence to facilitate a particular process.

• ***Internal Discord within “Received Models “ of Fieldwork***

Social work educators in Botswana, and elsewhere in southern Africa, have been overly concerned with making the “received models” (block and concurrent) of fieldwork “fit” into our local environment without necessarily thinking about the developmental objectives of fieldwork education. Concurrent placement model is a case in point. It has been deemed impractical in Botswana because of the limited welfare agencies in Gaborone, the capital city and location of the University of Botswana. The only option practical therefore is countrywide block placements. The opportunity-cost of countrywide placements is tremendous. To date, fieldwork costs have been rising each year as the intake of students increase to meet National Development Plan targets. Cost-effective strategies therefore have to be sought without necessarily watering down the quality and relevance of fieldwork education as a result of budget cuts.

The conceptualisation of fieldwork as a process and strategy go beyond administrative tasks and other logistic considerations (which appear to preoccupy fieldwork coordinators). The dominant concept of “agency placement” and the notion of tripartite alliance (student, placement agency and the university department), (see Hall, 1990) therefore does not provide us with tools to develop fieldwork as a process and strategy in social development.

We propose the *concept of letsema* – “workteam/camp” for fieldwork on the basis of Tswana ethical and philosophical values based on mutual obligation and reciprocity, accountability to community, individual and collective responsibility, human worth and value. Our values as educators have to echo what we do on the ground and who we are in relation to our historical experience with processes of social change. We are by no means nostalgic and espouse uncritical romanticisation of the past, but rather, attempt to infuse a sense of historical meaning in the relationship between work and learning.

From a philosophical point of view, the concept of *letsema* (workteam), underscores a unifying force and purposeful engagement by tapping in individual and collective potentials, and provision of differentiated rewards on the basis of the value of labour input. The concept of *letsema* denotes elements of the temporary and permanent, a self-sustaining network of support which offer direct, timeous and situation-specific services to members of the network. In this regard, the benefits outweigh the cost. The concept of workteams, therefore, is appropriate as a development tool for field practice.

I will briefly discuss, in relation to Botswana, the following pertinent issues in the socio-economic context. These relate to issues of spatial incongruence and cost-effectiveness, and what we refer to as “tourist supervision” of fieldwork.

• ***Spatial Incongruence, Effectiveness and Cost-Benefit***

The major reorientation of fieldwork in Botswana need to take cognisance of several factors. First, spatial considerations. Botswana is a vast country, twice the size of France, a population of 1,3 million and the birth rate of 3,4 %. Twenty per cent of the land contains about 80% of the population along the eastern corridor. The nature of Botswana’s population distribution and settlement patterns is characterised by densely populated village-towns. Other villages in the north-west and south-west across the Kgalagadi Desert are connected to the main east road through a network of bituminized feeder road system. The major village-towns such as Kanye, Serowe, Molepolole, Maun and Mochudi have a population of over 30,000 to 60,000 inhabitants, and have well-developed social service infrastructure. The southern and western part of the country is sparsely populated, the population ranges from 250 to 500 inhabitants.

The village-town settlement patterns provide an appropriate opportunity for community-based field placement, that is, students' "workteams", or workcamps. These could be organised on a district or single village basis, on fixed or rotational basis, the choice will depend on identified needs and cost-effectiveness of each strategy. The priority will be to make the fieldwork programmes sustainable and cost-effective.

From the foregone discussion, the practice of fieldwork education in a developing country needs to go beyond the question of placement weeks in quantitative terms, towards quality of placement in terms of student learning, community service and professional accessibility. The number of placement weeks may serve to qualify us for accreditation, but this does not mean we *know* what we are all about. The workteam/camp approach envisages several implementation options, namely:

- a) selected village(s) act as learning site(s), and would be matched with the particular issues to be addressed and students' stated learning goals. Students work out the content of learning and take the responsibility of organising the work process. The maximum size of a workcamp should not exceed fifteen students
- b) teams of lecturers (two or more) who develop the learning programme in collaboration with the community, and practitioners in welfare agencies in that locality. This would involve decisions regarding the workable size of each workteam
- c) specified duration of lecturer involvement in the implementation of the learning programme, for example two or three weeks on the work site after which students continue on their own
- d) evaluation and re-planning. We envisage several layers of evaluation – ie horizontal, that is student to student, followed by horizontal sharing of experiences through student-run seminars and/or use of a fieldwork newsletter; and vertical evaluation by educators and collaborating practitioners. This will include not only the evaluation of the student performance during the placement period, but also the totality of the process in view of future planning.

* ***"Tourist Supervision" and Marginalisation***

The current practice of fieldwork supervision can best be described as impromptu, with limited degrees of "spot-check" training and visit" (T-V). As already mentioned elsewhere in the paper, the tripartite fieldwork arrangement lacks cohesive structural support. Consequently, artificial conditions of collaboration are created, and a fertile breeding ground for what we call "tourist supervision". Educators spend more time on the road or hotel in rooms, with brief moments of 'zooming' in and out of "placement agencies".

The use and quality value of "contact time" in this regard is questionable since these "one hour brisk visits" are invariably marginal to the needs of the students and practitioners grappling with complex issues on the ground. Under these circumstances, the educators' specialised skills and knowledge is inaccessible to the agency and the community.

• ***Lack of Community***

As a dynamic social movement, social work educators, necessarily have to be involved with concrete development projects especially at grassroots level. Fieldwork offers that opportunity for dialogue and structural linkages. These linkages invariably contribute to the building of a sense of community. A community in the context of this paper, refers to a body of members with a normative structure, assigned roles and a set of expectations (Poplin, 1979).

Fieldwork has a role to play in community-building through both students' and educators' increased levels of involvement – with regard to students, through community placements as workteams or camps, while educators on the other hand would be better organised to provide situation-specific skill training sessions according to specified need and participants in a given learning site. This would be a goal-directed, skill-transfer training geared towards raising the level of the educators' accessibility to the community.

In other words, community-oriented student workteams would be organised in collaboration with, but not focused on, individual agencies. Target groups have to be identified, and goals of intervention operationalised in the context of immediate objectives. The workteams, therefore, should be seen as building blocks for social knowledge and community education and a foundation for future continuing education programmes for practitioners. It is in this context that we propose that the Department of Social Work establish a Fieldwork Education Unit (as will be discussed later in detail). The Unit will provide a structural framework and give the fieldwork education programme a community orientation.

- **“The Crisis of Cohabitation”**

Social work education is faced with what we refer to as “the crisis of co-habitation in the context of the political economy of the University environment. The University of Botswana is currently undergoing major institutional restructuring in relation to the government's intent to revise its policies on subsidising higher education.

The Social Work Department is situated in social sciences, and thus is subjected to conflicting demands and role identity. On a daily practical level, the legitimacy of social work is derived from the “discipline” orientation, and is valued and judged as such by policy makers, be it within the university or the government establishment. This has two foreseeable implications.

Firstly, as a “discipline” social work is pegged against a basket of other disciplines to determine its value in the development process, and in accordance with the law of supply and demand. Social work thus competes with, for example, economics and statistics as a discipline in terms of scarcity or competitiveness in the open market. In this context, skill is a commodity and its value is determined by the market. Thus this status adversely affects the bargaining power of social work within the university structure, and the government establishment.

Secondly, the unfortunate location of social work as a department in the faculty of social science has both direct and indirect effects. These could be observed, for example in the training methodology, where there is, an over-emphasis in the delivery of factual information and subsequent regurgitation during examinations. The learning environment is biased against development of practice skills. Lack of appropriate facilities such as a micro-learning laboratory exacerbates the situation. At the end of the day, social work students are neither well-grounded in an appropriate knowledge base, nor do they possess a package of skills which will enable them to redress these structural imbalances as future practitioners. Hypothetically, fieldwork education is expected to play a synthesising role, but falls short of these expectations due to situational discrepancies in the political economy of the university environment.

Thirdly, sooner than later, social work educators at the University have to grapple with the reality of spending cuts in academic programmes. The issue of cost-effectiveness is central not only for the survival of fieldwork *per se*, but also for the very continued existence of the social work programme within the framework of the University. Government prioritisation is dependent upon whether social work is defined as a priority and a scarce discipline/profession, and to what extent the government has to compete with the private sector to retain skilled workers from particular disciplines/professions.

Fourthly, for political and strategic reasons, fieldwork for social development would go a long way in playing an ambassadorial role by promoting closer links between the Department and government ministries, in particular those which hold coordination and distribution powers (eg, Ministry of Finance and Development Planning and the Ministry of Local Government, Lands and Housing). This could, in the long run, directly or indirectly induce “official’ redefinition of the functions, purpose and roles of social work profession in the context of national development.

Fifthly, the Botswana economy is undergoing major structural shifts, and more recently, this phenomenon was highlighted by the Minister of Finance and Development Planning 1993/94 Budget Speech. From the Minister’s Speech, a 567 million pula budget deficit is foretold for the financial year as a result of a combination of factors ranging from recurrent drought to reduced mineral (diamond) revenues. The theme in his Speech put emphasis on “mutual social responsibility”, a strong suggestion for “self-reliance’ to take precedence over appeals to government for assistance. As a parastatal, the University will be required to curtail costs, and boost its level of productivity and efficiency.

In practical terms, this implies that social work educators can no longer afford to sit on their laurels, but rather embark on a comprehensive forward-looking strategic planning whose focus is not only the development of relevant academic programmes and research methodologies, but also community-oriented programmes.

We are living in a consumer culture. The main thrust for social work education should be to make fieldwork productive, in term of goods and services to clients, and thus balancing the current orientation of fieldwork in particular, and social work education in general, from being a major consumer of resources. The mainstay of social work for social education and development would be concretised on the basis of immediate, medium-and long-term objectives with verifiable *developmental indicators*.

On the basis of our comprehensive understanding of macro issues in the economy, educators can then operationalise fieldwork intervention strategy in terms of:

- student productivity in community projects
- professional community service provision in terms of leadership development
- establishment of practitioners’ continuing education programme
- on-going constituency-focused in-service training workshops/seminars, and partnership projects
- Departmental (individual or collective) competence in applied research projects, policy evaluation etc.

Fieldwork Education : A Proposed Framework

The conceptualisation of the Fieldwork Education Unit is within the framework of the University’s development policy and the Department of Social Work’s overall education and training of professional social workers. The educational context of the FEU, is that it is a structure through which to educate professional social workers, while simultaneously providing services to both participating Community-based Rural Development Outreach Programmes (CBOs) and relevant government departments, that is, strengthening their professional capacity and making professional services accessible to them.

During the 1992 National Fieldwork Supervisors Workshop, several issues were discussed which pointed to the need to broaden the role and scope of fieldwork. These included, but were not limited to:

- Coordination of pre- and post-placement orientation of students in relation to addressing their specific educational needs.

- Appointment of a full-time Fieldwork Director from the Department of Social Work to coordinate all fieldwork activities throughout the academic year.
- The need to establish flexible structures through which to facilitate programme development for continuing education for practitioners already in the field.
- Inservice training workshops to upgrade practice skills for specific collaborating agencies in response to identified area of need.
- Inter-professional collaboration between social workers to identify areas of commonality and to enhance the efficiency of service delivery to specific constituencies.
- On-going training of fieldwork supervisors to improve the quality of fieldwork education.
- Research and documentation of fieldwork experiences (from students reports, experiences of fieldwork supervisors, and practitioners).
- Resource centre accessible to the Department and practitioners in the field.
- Accessibility of expertise from the Department through community service provision, establishment of concrete relations between the Department and rural development structures at grassroots level such as the Remote Area Dwellers Development Programmes (RAD).

The rationale for the establishment of the Fieldwork Education Unit (FEU) could be summarised as follows:

- a) Provision of an administrative backup and educational resources base for the Department's Field Education Programme.
- b) A structure for strengthening and improving the quality of contact and partnership between the Department of Social Work and CBOs. FEU will be the bridge between mutually supportive partners in training and exposing social work students to the length and breadth of social issues which characterises social work practice in Botswana.
- c) Provision of a formal structure for the Department's community engagement within which continuous education, community outreach programmes and in-service training programmes for social workers in the field and other associated professions in the human service sector could be designed and implemented to address gaps in the system of welfare service provision. The collaborative engagement will in the long run help strengthen the professional capacity of agencies, in particular grassroots. These outreach programmes link the University to the community and the community to the University.
- d) A mechanism of partnership and collaboration with CBOs through which the academic staff are grounded in concrete realities in the field and to develop relevant practice theory. The Unit will serve as a tool through which needs and service gaps can be identified, defined and hence appropriate programmes designed to address needs in social work practice. Community Outreach programmes and public education are important not only for the purpose of informing the public about the nature and role of social work in Botswana, but also to keep the Department abreast of changing needs of different client populations.
- e) The Unit will also serve as an Applied Research Unit for the Department and to promote the production of local teaching material.

- f) Fieldwork education is an integral part of social work training; this implies that it is essential that links with other schools of social work for purposes of field education need to be established through student and staff exchange programmes.

Future Implications

The development and establishment of the Fieldwork Education Unit has implications for:

- The National Development Plan Mid-Term Review in relation to the development of the Social Work Department within the University policy and framework.
- Community-based Rural Development Outreach Programmes.
- Continuing Education for Social Work Practitioners.
- Community Education Programmes, eg, AIDS.
- Focused research topics in specific areas of interest, eg, Gender Issues in Social Work Practice.

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