

SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE IN ZIMBABWE AND
THE FACTORS INSTRUMENTAL IN ITS
DEVELOPMENT.

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Paper presented during an Exchange Visit to
the University of Zambia. Lusaka, Zambia.

June 6 - , 1988

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Introduction

In many countries - both developed and developing alike - the concept of Social Work is understood as a composite term embracing three methods of practice, namely Social Case Work, Social Group Work and Community Work. This definition of the term, notes Cormack (1983), "is receiving increasing recognition in Zimbabwe as the profession develops, but many people still describe any work of a welfare, recreational and humanitarian nature as Social Work and those concerned with such work as Social Workers". This analysis by Cormack just about paints the most vivid caricature of social work in Zimbabwe.

The welfare system in Zimbabwe, like other sectors, is a product of the dual economy which is a legacy of the colonial past. The system has a relatively long history. In 1948, a duly constituted Department of Social Welfare was established for the first time in the then Rhodesia. This Department's activities in those early days included investigation of juvenile delinquency among all races. In 1964 the Department of Social Welfare increased its scope of operation and it began to run a public assistance programme. However, very few Africans at the time were eligible for any assistance. The assistance was basically in the form of food rations, cash or rentals.

With increased urbanisation and industrialisation, more and more people were flocking to the towns in search of employment, and consequently this meant that the demand for social welfare services increased. This pattern has been maintained over the years with the situation getting even worse after independence. At independence in 1980, the new government inherited this urban based, dualistic system which was basically residual in nature. Although the new government is fully aware of the inadequacy of the residual strategy being used, deficiencies in financial and other resources has meant that very few changes have been effected in this area. Hampson and Kaseke (1987) among others are in total concordance with this assessment and hence they argue, "The government welfare provisions are still basically residual and urban based". It might be worth adding rather sadly that there is no indication so far as to when or how this enormous situation could be rectified.

ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

Quite a number of organisations, both government and non-governmental, are involved in social welfare services provision in Zimbabwe, and some of these are identified below.

The Department of Social Welfare

The Department of Social Welfare in the Ministry of Labour, Manpower Planning and Social Welfare is charged with the responsibility of administering personal social services in Zimbabwe. It is headed by a Director who is assisted by two deputies. At provincial level is a Provincial Social Welfare Officer with District Social Welfare Officers below him. Social Welfare Officers (ie field officers) operate at the District level. There are 4 levels of officers at the district level and these are graded DSSO 1, 2, 3 and 4 with 4 being the lowest officer grade. The lowest level officer usually holds a minimum qualification of a 3-year Diploma in Social Work or its equivalent. Below the DSSO 4 level are Assistant Welfare Officers who are not qualified social workers.

The Department of Social Welfare, as mentioned elsewhere, is basically concerned with personal social services. Its functions include family Case Work, registration of Non-governmental Organisations, disposal of juvenile delinquency cases, work with the aged, rehabilitation of the physically handicapped, child welfare, registration of creches etc. The department obtains an annual vote from treasury for its functions. The vote is based on estimates of expenditure. The Department also administers a number of Social Security Schemes. The Old Age Pension Scheme is a non-contributory scheme which was created strictly for non-Africans. It was established in 1936 but was discontinued at independence in 1980 for obvious reasons. However, due to the provisions of the Lancaster House Constitutional Agreement which gave Zimbabwe independence, those who were getting this pension prior to independence continue to get it even today. Many of these pensioners have actually moved to South Africa - a country not so friendly to Zimbabwe - but still, each year millions of Zimbabwean dollars are repatriated to South Africa and distributed among these non-African pensioners. The other type of scheme is Public Assistance. This is also a non-contributory scheme and provides financial assistance to destitute members of society. This scheme is open to all. However, because of financial constraints, those in this scheme receive a meagre \$15 if they are adults and \$5 if they are minors, (per month) There is a limit to the number of minors who can claim assistance. This scheme is based on a means test and certain political

economic and moral conditions have to be met before one qualifies for assistance on this scheme (Kaseke, 1988). The third scheme is the War Victims Compensation Pension. It is based on an Act of Parliament passed in 1980; and it was enacted "to provide for the payment of compensation in respect of injuries to or the death caused by the war". In other words the scheme provides disability pensions for those injured as a result of the war or the families of those who died in the war.

Other Government Ministries

A number of other government ministries are involved in projects of a developmental nature which might pass for social work (eg community development projects). These include the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs and Cooperatives, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Resettlement, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture. Hall (1987) explains that various "developmental activities have often been promoted through other ministries - such as Community Development and Women's Affairs or Health and Agriculture and Rural Resettlement". The Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture for one has established Youth Centres all over the country and some of these centres are manned by qualified social workers. On the same token the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs and Cooperatives has many community development projects and social workers are employed often in very high decision-making posts.

Local Authorities

Some Local Authorities including the Harare and Bulawayo City Councils provide welfare services to their residents. Some of these, like the Bulawayo City Council, provide public recreation, Social Case Work, Social Group Work and Community Development. Local Authorities engage various methods of raising money to finance the welfare services they provide. For instance Gargett (1977) explained that social welfare services provided by the Bulawayo Municipality are financed largely through the municipal monopoly on production of opaque beer. Some local authorities also run Youth Programmes basically to provide income generating skills among youth. Certain parastatals (eg the National Railways) and private organisation (eg Triangle Sugar Estate) provide welfare services for their employees, as well as the employees' families. Very often, such organisations employ qualified social workers to run their projects.

Non-Government Organisations

Any voluntary organisation involved in social welfare has to be registered with the Department of Social Welfare in terms of the Welfare Organisations Act. Once registered an organisation becomes eligible for per capita grants from the Department of Social Welfare to meet its administrative and other running costs. Some voluntary organisations including church related ones, provide personal social services. The most conspicuous non-governmental organisations include the Jairos Jiri Association and St Giles (for rehabilitation of physically handicapped), Zimcare and Island Hospice (for counselling services for work with the dying, relief of distress among the bereaved etc) and Christian Care and CADEC (for developmental projects such as cooperatives etc). Others include Shearley Cripps and Matthew Rusike Children's Homes, Bumhudzo and Ida Wekwako Old People's Homes and Melfort Farm Project - a cooperative for the destitute elderly. "Voluntary Organisations are of significance in Zimbabwe in that they fill in the gaps left by the state in the provision of welfare services". (Hampson & Kaseke, 1986)

TARGET GROUPS

The major target groups in social work practice are discussed below:

The Disabled and the Handicapped

A National Disability Survey carried out in 1982 showed that there are over 276300 disabled people in Zimbabwe, and of these only 2% had access to rehabilitation services. There are a few centres which cater for these people and they include the Jairos Jiri Centre (for the physically handicapped), Cheshire Home, Red Cross, Copota School for the Blind, Emerald Hill centre etc. There have been moves to introduce Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) as a strategy of rehabilitation, and as a study by Mupedziswa and Jackson (1988) found, a Red Cross CBR Scheme launched in 1985 has been fairly successful. The Ministry of Health so far has over 90 rehabilitation assistants under its employ and more such cadres are undergoing training at Parirenyatwa Hospital. Lecturers from the School have been involved in the training of these rehabilitation assistants. The disabled and the handicapped can be awarded public assistance if they are seen to be destitute.

Children and the Youth

The welfare of children is promoted through the Children's Protection and Adoption Act (Chapter 33) which provides for inter alia, protection, welfare and supervision of children and juveniles. Children alleged to be in need of care are brought before a juvenile court for an inquiry. A probation officer is required to prepare a social inquiry report in respect of juveniles brought before the court. The Department of Social Welfare is responsible for the adoption and fostering of minor children. Besides, local authorities (eg municipalities) also run various youth programmes in the residential areas. Furthermore, day care and pre-school centres are also provided and these have to register with the Department of Social Welfare.

The Aged

The major problems with both rural and urban elderly in this country is income security. While both rural and urban elderly are entitled to public assistance, the rural elderly hardly utilise the services both for historical and cultural reasons. In any event personal services of the elderly are mainly to be found in urban areas. The services available include old peoples homes etc. The Department of Social Welfare provides per capita grants to the institutions. The majority of the Africans in old people's homes tend to be mainly aliens from Malawi, Zambia and Mozambique who had been engaged as farm labourers, mine workers or domestic workers.

Destitute Individuals

Individuals whose destitution has been a consequence of unemployment, retirement, old age, death or desertion of the breadwinner or sickness can apply for financial assistance with the Department of Social Welfare. As stated elsewhere, there is a means test based on a set of conditions that have to be satisfied before an individual qualified for assistance. Recipients of public assistance also receive free medical treatment and are assisted with the payment of tuition fees of their children attending secondary school. Those children attending primary schools receive free tuition. Other services provided for the destitute include old peoples home (eg Bumbudzo), counselling services (eg the Department of Social Welfare) referral services (eg Citizens Advice Bureau), child support (through government income tax abatements) and pauper burials for the destitute (through the Dept of Social Welfare).

Injured and Sick

Those injured in the formal sector are covered by the Workmen's Compensation Insurance Fund. The fund pays for certain medical expenses for certain categories of employee for specified lengths of time. Health services in general are however free for those earning less than \$150, but mission and municipal health centres charge a small fee. Private medical aid is available to those who can afford it through such insurance schemes as CIMAS etc. Usually there is a matching contribution from both the employer and employee. Employees are normally granted sick leave on full pay for up to 6 months and half pay thereafter. Those injured during the war can be accommodated through the War Victims Compensation Fund. The injured also have access to personal social services designed to rehabilitate them.

Refugees

Acts of destabilisation by the South African regime coupled with drought in the sub-region have resulted in Zimbabwe having to host over 65000 refugees mainly from Mozambique and a small number from South Africa. Most of these refugees are housed in camps in the eastern border of the country. The government and the UNHCR together with various Non-Governmental Organisations are providing assistance to the refugees. The NGOs involved include Christian Care, CADEC, Oxfam, Save the Children USA etc. Assistance provided is in the form of educational and skills training projects, agricultural projects, health services and income generating projects.

TRAINING OF SOCIAL PRACTITIONERS

There are basically two sources of manpower as far as the social work field in Zimbabwe is concerned. First, is the overseas pool. Before the School of Social Work was established, social workers were trained abroad. Today we still get a few social workers with qualifications from such countries as the USA, the UK and other West European countries. The second category and perhaps the more significant, is the pool of locally trained personnel. There is only one social work training institution in Zimbabwe, the School of Social Work situated in Harare. The School^{which} is an associate college of the University of Zimbabwe, was founded in 1964 and the first group of students started on a course in Group Work. In 1966 the School of Social Service was launched. In 1969 the School of Social Service changes its name to the School of Social Work when it became the first associate college of the then University of Rhodesia and it began to award a three year Diploma in Social Work of the University of Rhodesia. In 1975 a Bachelor of Social Work degree was launched and in 1978, a one year Certificate in Social Work programme (for para-professionals) was also started.

In association with the University of Zimbabwe, a course leading to the Bachelor of Social Work (Honours) in Clinical Social Work was started in 1983 and this was followed a year later with the launching of a Master of Social Work degree and a Bachelor of Science (Social Rehabilitation) degree in 1984. The School is fast becoming a regional training centre for the SADCC countries, attracting students from such countries as Botswana, Swaziland, Lesotho, South Africa, Malawi, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Kenya.

Training at the School of Social Work is now focusing on social development in rural Zimbabwe. Social development is seen as a response that encourages institutional change and social work practitioners thus become involved in human development, in improvements in social conditions in health, housing, education, employment, agriculture etc (SSW Handbook, 1988). The syllabi cover not only method courses of Case Work, Group Work and Community Work but also courses with a developmental bias including Social Research Methods, Socio-Economic Development, Social Policy & Planning and Community Health - to name but a few. The School of Social Work believes that the training of cadres who are agents of social change will help policy-makers rely on the most valuable resource that the country has - its people - as a means of socio-economic development. To this end, the School is involved in the establishment of new field placements in rural areas as well as arranging seminars and publication of material on social development. Things have been moving rather fast within the School of Social Work. At the end of 1985, with assistance from Konrad Adenauer Foundation of West Germany, the School launched the Journal of Social Development in Africa.

With regard to the practical side of the social work training, the School's Director of Fieldwork arranges placements for students, in all sorts of agencies. Every student gives an undertaking, before they start their course, to do at least one placement in a rural setting. The Director of Fieldwork also organises seminars in various parts of the country to bring social work agency supervisors together. The School has also got a Rural Fieldwork as well as a Research Unit, the latter of which has only just been launched, and is headed by a Director of Research.

Employment Patterns of Social Work Graduates

A 1983 follow-up study of the Harare School of Social Work graduates by V. Brand revealed that former students were employed (among other agencies such as NGOs and parastatals) in as many as ten different government ministries and in a

number of innovative capacities in addition to the more traditional types of social work jobs within the Department of Social Welfare. There was still a clear urban bias with slightly more than half of the respondents working in Harare. However, of these, quite a number operate out of urban offices but cover specified peri-urban and rural areas throughout the country. According to V. Brand (1986), "The same follow-up study revealed that although few graduates cited research as their major task, one third of all those respondents said that they had been responsible for carrying out at least one research project".

The fact that social workers in government employ as (revealed by the follow-up study) opted to work in government ministries other than that responsible for social welfare, is significant. It is basically because those employed by this particular ministry are generally poorly paid. It is also for this reason that a good number of graduates leave the public for the private sector. Many will, for instance, find work in the personnel field. It is^a gain for this same reason that nowadays, "graduating students do not seek work in the Department of Social Welfare and if they do they use the jobs merely as a stepping stone to better paid jobs" (Hall, 1987). Hence social workers in Zimbabwe today tend to be employed in a variety of agencies ranging from NGOs, church organisations, residential institutions, parastatal bodies, various other ministries and private companies. This is the position as of now, in spite of the fact that the government foots the bill for the training of professional social workers, with the hope that they will work under the Department of Social Welfare.

THE ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS OF ZIMBABWE

The National Association of Social Workers of Zimbabwe has been in existence since the mid 1970s. This association has had a mixed history, at times becoming relatively successful, mobilising a committed membership, while at others failing to attract any interest. "Partly this has had to do with the particular composition of the National Executive Committee and partly the degree to which it has engaged in activities of interest to the membership" (Hall, 1987). As mentioned elsewhere, social workers employed by government are rather poorly paid and this has led many to seek greener pastures in the private sector, for instance in the personnel field. This means that they become reluctant to identify with the social work profession, thereafter. On several occasions, attempts have been made to identify problem areas and hence develop a viable social workers organisation. Seminars have been

organised, papers have been presented and generally there has been a sustained appeal aimed at revitalising the social workers' association. For instance Mupedziswa (1986) in a paper presented at a Workshop on Social Development in Harare in 1986, lamented that "The Association of Social Workers in Zimbabwe... has been going through lean times of late"...and he made an impassioned appeal for its revitalisation. Calls of a similar nature have also come from other quarters, but so far little progress has been made.

Besides these calls of appeal, certain social work practitioners have actually gone out ^{of} their way to do something tangible in the hope of reviving the association. About a year ago, the association linked up with the local Council of Social Welfare (VOICE) and they ran a series of lunch time meetings on social work and social development topics for practitioners. The exercise was reviewed only recently (May, 1988) and it was agreed that the response had generally been lukewarm and, sadly, it was hence resolved to terminate the series. Furthermore, contacts have also been made with various defunct branches in the various parts of the country such as Bulawayo and Mutare with a view to stimulating their revival. The result of these efforts seems quite positive with the Bulawayo and Mutare people working vigorously towards reconstituting themselves as branches of the National Association. Thus it should be pointed out, in sum, that although the Zimbabwe National Association of Social Workers is definitely in need of some improvement, there is certainly a very strong motivation on the part of many social workers to see this association succeed. Hall (1987) a committee member of the National Association of Social Workers in Zimbabwe perhaps summed it all up when he commented; "The real question for us is whether we can cope with the negative effects of past mismanagement and lack of clarity regarding the purpose and goals of our organisation and move forward to deal with the many issues needing urgent attention".

CONCLUSION

Social work practice in Zimbabwe for historical and other reasons is based on a residual conception of welfare provision. While this arrangement may have suited the colonial regime, it is evident that such an arrangement does not augur well for the new socio-political order. The government is aware of this and there have been concerted efforts at improving the situation. However, financial and other constraints have slowed ^{down} progress. At present, the government, as far as social work practice is concerned, is involved mainly in the provision of personal social services (such as public assistance).

It has been left, by and large to NGOs (with government blessing of course,) to effect a more developmental approach to social work practice. Many of the social workers practising in the country are products of the School of Social Work in Harare while a fair number obtained their training abroad. Many who graduate from the School of Social Work these days find their way into Non-governmental organisations and the private sector and the relatively few who accept offers of employment with the Department of Social Welfare only do so as a last resort. This is mainly because of the poor salaries offered by this government department. Practising social workers in Zimbabwe have an association but at present the association is not functioning as well as it should do. Some practitioners are working frantically to revitalise it.

In a nutshell, social work in Zimbabwe is alive and kicking and several factors - social, political and economic - have been instrumental in its development. Like in many other developing countries, social work in Zimbabwe is however still regarded as a somewhat inferior profession, in many circles. The onus is perhaps on the practitioners themselves to do enough groundwork that will enable their profession to take up its rightful place among other established professions and the practitioners to stand up and be counted among other professionals.

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