Social work decolonisation – forays into Zimbabwe experiences, challenges and prospects

Tatenda Goodman Nhapi, Graduate in Erasmus Mundus MA Advanced Development in Social Work and Social Worker, Zimbabwe

Abstract

This article examines social work education and training trends in Zimbabwe based on literature review using the lens of decolonisation of social work education. The article's objective is to consider Zimbabwean social work education and training decolonisation and implications of the concept for contemporary frontline social work practice. This will be achieved by exploring critical perspectives in current Zimbabwean social education trajectory, identifying gaps and opportunities. A social work education decolonisation agenda is also considered for creating a push towards transformational approaches in Zimbabwean social work practice decolonisation.

Keywords

Zimbabwe, Social work, Development, Decolonisation, Education, Values, Ethics, Field work

Introduction

This article reflects on the contestations regarding the ambitious project of African social work decolonisation. Decisively decolonising social work practice has been a dominant theme articulated by a number of African social work proponents, scholars and practitioners alike. Equally so, African social work's renaissance has been galvanised by policy constructs such as the African Union's ambitious Agenda 2063 and Sustainable Development Goals. Given this colonial legacy, the values, beliefs, and theoretical underpinnings of social work were informed by Western understandings, which were shot through with racial prejudice and ideologies of cultural superiority assumed to be eminently transferable to these new, non-Western contexts (Mupedziswa, Rankopo & Mwansa, 2019). The harmonisation of European missionaries' activities and African mutual aid societies alongside colonisation processes are noted by Chitereka (2009) as having contributed to social work development. Chitereka further makes an important assertion that each country's pre-colonial and post-colonial experience helps in understanding the development of social work practice and education.

On the same note, Tamburro (2013, p. 2) observes that to work effectively with people, previously colonised social workers need appreciation of current issues created by colonisation. Tamburro (2013) argues that in European global economic and governmental expansion and their attempt to control, colonisation was presented to the world as civilized development; yet it exploited, and subjugated Indigenous peoples. Achieving decoloniality in social work knowledge is an ongoing process that demands interrogation, experimentation and contestation (Harms-Smith, 2019). Using a literature review methodology in the form of debates, discussions and discourses, the article seeks to provide a critical analysis of social work education and training, particularly focused on Zimbabwe in the context of pre-colonialism and the current trajectory forty years after independence. The article begins by contextualizing social work training, then examines challenges faced by social work educators in mainstreaming decolonised social work education relevant to the needs of the local people.

How and why coloniality is carried on in the historical and contemporary Zimbabwean social work context

In this section, I pay particular attention to a number of enduring but important questions that seem crucial to understanding the prevalence of coloniality in the historical and contemporary Zimbabwean social work context. I firstly offer an overview of the current Zimbabwean socio-economic trajectory. This is to give horizon to the conundrum of pursuing decolonisation in a context of resource constraints and climatic shocks, and the impacts of this. Structural weaknesses have constrained the country's ability to generate high and sustainable growth that is necessary to mitigate the debt distress. Currently, the country is still to fully overcome effects of a cycle of natural climatic shocks which induce drought. In 2019, this was exacerbated by the cyclone Idai, which devastated the southeast of Zimbabwe. Amongst the other intractable challenges faced by Zimbabwe is the COVID-19 pandemic, whose effects are still to be fully felt.

Additionally, the Department of Social Services (DSS)—which employs the majority of Zimbabwean social workers—has a broad spectrum of statutory responsibilities for the

protection and care of children. Under the Children's Act, the DSS coordinates other enactments and public assistance programmes and also administers the National Action Plan for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (the NAP for OVC) on behalf of Government of Zimbabwe (Wyatt, Mupedziswa & Rayment, 2010). In Muridzo's (2014, p. 58) analysis a worrisome situation exists given that those employed in DSS bear the burden of an abnormal work load of 49,887 children per social worker. Currently, socio-economic turbulence has led to a critical mass of trained social work cadres who had been manning the DSS to leave, mostly migrating regionally and overseas. The departure of experienced social workers reverses gains by the government and by UNICEF, who has attempted to build DSS capacity by availing resources and training.

Additionally, this section also enumerates major social work profession milestones that over the years embedded the profession in Zimbabwe. It is important to note Harms-Smith's (2019) assertion that social work foundational ideologies reside in the same European project of expansion of colonial power, racist capitalism and coloniality, with its history grounded in social engineering and white supremism. Social work training was grounded in Western-oriented curricula because, as observed by Chogugudza (2009) in the 1950s and early 1960s, this was the only option for Africans wishing for social work training. Chogugudza (2009) however, asserts that over time, some local social work institutions have been established including the School of Social Work in Ghana (opened in 1946), the Jan Hofmeyer College in South Africa (which later closed), and the Oppenheimer College of Social Science in Zambia (later absorbed into the University of Zambia).

With regards to Zimbabwe's (then Southern Rhodesia) social work training, Jesuit Fathers of the Roman Catholic Church established the School of Social Services in 1964. The then-School of Social Services offered a one-year Certificate Course in Group Work. Chogugudza noted that Jesuit Fathers were mindful of unemployed native African youths and housewives in urban centres. On the same note, the 1936 inception of the Probation and School Attendance Officer programme inaugurated the provision of social welfare services. Lack of locally trained personnel resulted in recruiting the first probation officer from Britain, leading to the Department of Social Welfare, established in 1948 (Dziro, 2013).

As argued by Chogugudza (2009), post-independence in 1980 saw a new social order embedded in Zimbabwean social work. Like South American countries, this has become inspired by dependency theory, liberation theology, and social development. Mupedziswa, Rankopo and Mwanza (2019) are quick to point out that because of certain tenets of social work cutting across the entire continent, at present in Africa and Zimbabwe coloniality still carries on. Certainly, Mwansa (2010) asserts the existence of a misguided notion that Western knowledge is transferable and suitable for problem-solving in developing societies without adaptation to their own cultures and reality. Even little available, purportedly Indigenous literature, Mwansa (2010) further contends, is written by non-Africans unable to fully appreciate African culture intricacies, and critics contend that African social work continues to rely on foreign theories and interventions.

Additionally, Mmatli in Muchanyerei (2017, p. 63) states that due to lack of voice and power to influence the political space, the social work profession is not actively fighting against human rights violations and other social injustices in Africa. Also, Mugumbate & Chereni (2019) cite Mushunje as stating colonial welfare-based social work, in which the social worker

is central to the process, no longer suffices for the wellbeing of vulnerable children. Mugumbate & Chereni (2019) note the social worker has to use an unfamiliar model which contradicts his or her own values and family, and they therefore forcibly adopt values that they do not know, let alone believe in. The application of Western models in social work encounters diminish the ability of community members to contribute meaningfully to children's physical growth and social development (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2019). To give context to the African *ubuntu*, Mugmbate and Chereni observe that child adoption is done by relatives without the intervention of professionals, plus parents and communities reward and punish children without the need for professionals, courts and juvenile jails. However as will be shown later, resource constraints impede these enduring *ubuntu*-grounded methods of community solidarity. Uncles and aunts provide mentorship, counselling and support to children without professionals' involvement. Finally, another key driver of the continuation of coloniality is the micro-practice focus of 'assessment, treatment and prevention' that target behavioural, psychological, and emotional disturbances (Mupedziswa, et al, 2019). The method, Mupedziswa et al. further observe, locates problems not with the environment but with individuals and families; therefore, overlooking the life situations improvements that are required. The approach also posits that problems must be defined at the individual or family level and not the community level.

Ubuntu expectations conceive of community as the starting point in the problem-solving process. Also, Mupedziswa et. Al (2019) argue the social work profession was introduced to Africa as a found discipline and as an intact imported model. While many African social workers have been conferred degrees by schools of social work helping to maintain and spread the African profession it is disconcerting that Western European countries and the United States continue to dominant social work scholarship and research on practice (Thabede, 2005). Mwansa (2010) asserts as the continent enters a postmodern phase, the knowledge needs reworking to fit local needs as most educators depend on material to which they are accustomed. Thus, this spiral of dependence on foreign information for education and training continues unabated. Henceforth, social work transformation requires curricula reorientation and teaching methods that facilitate and support holistic and Indigenous interventions.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

In the following section, I give the conceptual framework upon which the article is framed. The failure of decolonisation as a process to rid postcolonial contexts of ongoing complexities and structural dynamics of coloniality has led to the emergence of a vibrant movement for epistemic decoloniality (Harms-Smith, 2019). Tolerating inherent contradictions of a mainstream social work education in postcolonial contexts, being grounded in Western Eurocentric hegemony, without serious contemplation of coloniality and contextually relevant knowledge paradigms, is in itself an oppressive act (Harms-Smith, 2019).

Firstly, Dittfield (2019) comments that application of postcolonial theory in social sciences addresses the Global South and North inequalities and power discrepancies. Prioritising the unique ontological, epistemological and axiological positioning of Indigenous peoples requires the transformation of dominant knowledge and power relationships (Rowe & Baldry, 2015).

Kreitzer (2012, p. 82) additionally contends that Western knowledge hegemony has created a number of critical issues in African social work, listed below:

- A lack of critical process to redefine African social work
- A lack of recognition of the Western dominance in in social work education and little being done to create a culturally appropriate African curriculum
- Lack of knowledge and understanding concerning social work history in Africa. This is partly due to the difficulties of accessing appropriate documents, many of which are in the Western world or published in Western journals.
- Fear of breaking away from the coloniser's educational knowledge and institutions because it may not be as good as the West. Who defines good social work education?

Social work's incentive to engage with the history and effects of colonisation is hereby positioned as rather functionalist, that is to say, as a way to understand the colonial roots of dysfunctional behaviour of Indigenous peoples and families to be able to work more effectively with them (Tamburro, 2013). Additionally, Chitereka (2009) highlights the vibrant homegrown arrangements prevalent in Africa before the institutionalisation of casework-grounded social work in Africa. In Chitereka's analysis, prior to the development of statutory welfare systems, different types of mutual aid societies existed in pre-colonial Africa, providing assistance to extended family members. Finally, Bhowasi (2014, p. 40) critiqued the Council of Social Workers Zimbabwe Code of Ethics for Social Workers. He noted:

> A Social Worker recognises and promotes *unhu/ubuntu*, she knows that inherent in each person is dignity and value, and that each person deserves respect and that a person exists within a cultural setting and a community and that the individual and community shape, influence and benefit from each other.

Dziro (2013) opined that the resultant recasting of Zimbabwean social work curriculum to incorporate elements of land reform and rural development have a flair for developmental theories. In Kang'ethe (2014)'s analysis, advocacy by developmental social work proponents such as Midgley, Mupedziswa, and Osei-Hwedie for developmental social work in Africa has heightened the need for social work's paradigm shift for shedding its Western-based ideologies. As articulated by Kang'ethe, embracing developmental social work enhances the harnessing of local, people-centred, people-friendly, user-friendly, culturally appropriate and easily understood Indigenous approaches. However Midgley and Conley (2010) also trace developmental social work to social work's pioneering stage. They note,

> The ideas on which developmental social work are based can be traced back to the profession's early years, when the founders of the settlements and the advocates of governmental social welfare intervention offered an alternative to the casework model. The settlements provided educational, recreational, and youth activities and sought to mobilize local people to improve their neighbourhoods (2010, p. 5)

Challenges of colonial social work in present day Zimbabwe

In the following, I articulate some of the challenges regarding the social work decolonisation agenda in Zimbabwe. I am of course acutely aware of the risks involved in being too deterministic and conclusive in attempts to forecast a totally decolonised Zimbabwean social work practice. I seek to articulate those aspects of social work strategies and policies that have been deployed in different frontline practice contexts.

Africa is characterised by a long history of traditional problem-solving systems and approaches that go back to the precolonial era. Outstanding examples of this are the family and kinship

system, mutual aid groups, and other forms of reciprocity, solidarity, and alliance. However, as a result of colonialism's introduction of formal services, these systems and approaches were widely ignored (Twikirize & Spitzer, 2019). Pertinently, enduring Indigenous systems and beliefs galvanise the enhanced social functioning of Zimbabwean natives who were practising other forms of worship before the advent of colonialism. In Zimbabwe, despite Christianity's dominance, many sacred shrines and groves where the gods and deities were revered are still preserved and rain making ceremonies are still conducted in many Zimbabwean rural communities. Global North social work values stem from a Judeo-Christian background and methods used arise mainly from a medical model. Those values and methods seemed to be inadequate and inappropriate for dealing with the consequences of colonialism, poverty, government corruption, religious practices, and other philosophical orientations (Kreitzer, 2012).

Accordingly, Kreitzer (2012, p. 71) highlights social workers in non-Western countries who learned theories and methodologies alien to their cultures and had the added burden of filtering the parts that worked from the parts that did not work in their own social work practice. In the same vein, Thabede (2005) bolsters these assertions by noting the problem is exacerbated by the fact that many practitioners continue to receive training in Western countries, which makes breaking from the Western orientation a formidable task.

A clarion call is made by Mabvurira & Nyarungu (2013) who challenge social workers to honour the spiritual issues woven into the concerns brought by service users. These spiritual issues can be very useful resources in the service user-worker relationship. Mabvurira & Nyarungu's assertions augur well, especially for those frontline Zimbabwean social workers involved in designing and implementing rural and community development interventions where they work hand-in-hand with traditional chiefs, custodians of the land and cultural vanguards. Consequently, several social assistance schemes (in cash and/or kind) enable individuals and families to execute *ubuntu*-imposed obligations like caring for the destitute (Olivier, Kaseke, & Mpedi, 2008).

Zimbabwe is a country rooted in spirituality and before colonialism's advent, beliefs in a God who manifested through spirit mediums was commonplace. In some parts, especially rural Zimbabwe, the spirit mediums still remain revered. Also, many social work university departments offer spirituality courses globally. These courses target resilience, spiritually sensitive practice, and roles of religious organisations in social work practice (Mabvurira & Nyarungu, 2013). In the Global North, Mabvurira and Nyarungu note many social work licensing boards are supporting spiritually sensitive approaches to continuing education and practice, but African boards are lagging behind.

Furthermore, related to issues of spirituality and social work decolonisation, traditional values such as *botho*, *ubuntu* and *harambee* have dominated African informal social security (Olivier, Kaseke, & Mpedi, 2008). The Social Workers in Zimbabwe Code of Ethics elaborates on the fact that *ubuntu* means humanness, based on such values as human solidarity, empathy, and human dignity. These values are also key in the profession of social work and Mupedziswa et al. (2019) highlight that African social work teachers and practitioners in Africa ought to recognise and adopt the concept of *ubuntu* as a guiding framework for training and application. It encapsulates ideals of human dignity, equality, and social justice, and hence directly aligns to the global SDG aspiration of leaving no one behind (Jones, 2020). To contextualise *ubuntu*

for instance, the enduring *ubuntu*-grounded Zimbabwean traditional practice of having *Zunde raMambo* (Chief's Granary) guaranteed that vulnerable groups—particularly older persons, orphans and widows—were fed in times of drought or famine or when experiencing food insecurity. Community members' contributions to the *Zunde ra Mambo* were under the traditional chief's general supervision (Olivier, Kaseke, & Mpedi, 2008). Up to the present time, due to erratic social assistance programmes as a result of Zimbabwean intractable socio-economic challenges, these *ubuntu*-grounded approaches remain to robustly support the vulnerable.

In contrast, individualistic, remedial approaches have dominated as effective forms of social policy and administration since, during and after colonialism. Remedial approaches expect that an indigent or vulnerable individual relies on state-administered social security interventions after undergoing robust means-testing by DSS social workers.

Due to funding cutbacks, structural adjustment programmes and ensuing socio-economic turbulence, the reliance on DSS-administered Public Assistance grants became a stigmatising safety net amongst Zimbabwean communities. This is because of the enduring communal way of living founded on community solidarity/*ubuntu:* one would have the extended or general community to fall back on in times of crisis. However, in order to disrupt the colonial legacies, critical perspectives on the State and the dynamics of enduring traditional practices must be embedded into current social work curricula. Framing issues of decolonising social work curriculum from knowledge bases procreated in the Global North is aided by interrogating African public and social spaces.

How to decolonise Zimbabwean Social Work

So far, the article has given a trajectory of social work evolution in Zimbabwe and some of the contestations and domains of decolonised social work in Zimbabwe. In this following section I outline themes which are integral for desired outcomes of a transformed and decolonised social work in Zimbabwe and beyond.

An important starting point is for social work students to undertake at least one rural setting placement, as Zimbabwean rural settings are where enduring customs and traditional belief still hold sway (Chogugudza, 2009). As noted by Chogugudza, one of the dilemmas impeding the deconstruction of the individualistic casework approach is lack of concrete developmental social work or social development conceptualisation by some social work agencies. Well-developed vibrant agencies focused on rural and developmental social work would enrich social work decolonisation. Midgely and Conley (2010) argue that the intervention strategies used in developmental social work include human capital investments, social capital mobilization, employment and self-employment (microenterprise), asset building strategies, and policies for removing barriers to effective economic participation amongst social work service users. These practice interventions support service users that the profession has traditionally served, while transcending social work's remedial and maintenance services and promoting community living and economic participation (Midgely & Conley, 2010).

Abundant natural resources in Zimbabwean rural settings have been harnessed for livelihood security and remain a key platform for operationalising developmental social work. This has been done through the application and design of social work approaches that empower communities to harness their natural resources with less reliance on continued government and NGO interventions. There is no ready availability of social work agencies with a developmental focus unless a given social worker is working in an NGO that specialises in rural and community development. DSS does not have a dedicated developmental social work portfolio. Given under-resourcing of the DSS, aspects such as cash transfers and Assisted Medical Treatment Orders for the vulnerable and sick remain domains of frontline social work. The following section identifies possible constraints to the Zimbabwean Social Work training decolonisation agenda.

Resources constraints

According to Wyatt, Mupedziswa & Rayment (2010), the DSS's front line delivery of services for OVC and other beneficiaries such as extremely poor households, people with disabilities and elderly people are provided by the district social services offices. These offices have a complement of only 164 professional officers and with high staff turnover rates and limited physical resources (office facilities, vehicles, telephones and computers) it becomes a challenge to execute duties effectively (Wyatt, Mupedziswa & Rayment, 2010). For Zimbabwean social workers to exhibit creativity and innovation, they must embrace modes of practice in sync with Zimbabwe's cultural aspirations. For this to happen, the deconstruction of colonial past-rooted approaches to local resources is crucial. As a result, the former colonising countries end up complementing DSS resources, and models of practice from these countries regain centre stage. For instance, matriarchs are supposed to be instrumental in a newborn child's care. One of the dominant cultural groups in Zimbabwe are the Shona. In Shona culture, this procedure is known as *masungiro*. However, if the matriarch or the mother of the newly born child live far

off in the village and cannot afford transport to get to the matriach's/maternal family household, nurses and village health workers become the main sources for child care information. Ideally, in such a scenario the DSS would obtain a travel warrant to be issued to the newborn's parent or the matriarch to travel, in order to fulfil this important cultural procedure. Again, despite community solidarity encapsulated by *ubuntu,* if the extended family itself lacks financial resources, this will not be possible.

Brain drain

The brain drain has seen experienced social workers migrating to regional countries and international destinations such as the UK. Social work education and training in Zimbabwe has been impacted by migration to Global North countries, coupled with slow economic growth (Chogugudza, 2009, p. 9). Brain drain impacts are lamented by Chogugudza (2009) who noted that in 2003, Zimbabwe had about 3,000 social workers and 1,500 have left for the UK since 2000. Chogugudza (2009) further reported that Birmingham, UK, at one point employed 47 Zimbabwean social workers. Of those social workers that remained in the country, many are 'unaccounted for' as they have joined the private sector or NGOs, or are doing work unrelated to the profession (Wyatt, Mupedziswa & Rayment, 2010, p. 30).

Undoing persistence of casework as a method of intervention

Most African social workers, Chitereka (2009) contends, utilise the casework method, but it is clearly inadequate to meet the continent's challenges and immense problems. Dittfeld (2019) argues that when postcolonial theory is applied in social work, it is often to challenge the 'ethnocentric monoculturalism' of social work curriculum, practice and pedagogy. However, I argue that it remains a viable method of intervention when targeting for Persons Living with HIV and AIDS. This is when counselling is required for overcoming aspects as denial and stigma associated with the status. There can be coexistence of both communal and individualistic values, though they may seem opposed.

Intersectionality and the decolonisation of social work in Zimbabwe

Intersectionality is a theoretical framework that posits that multiple social categories (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status) intersect at the micro level of individual experience to reflect multiple interlocking systems of privilege and oppression at the macro, social-structural level (e.g., racism, sexism) (Kabeer, 2014). In the decolinisation of social work education, the discussion of the impact of intersectionalities needs close attention. For instance, conservative Zimbabwean values on LGBTIs have discriminated against minority group promotion in social work training, leading to a challenge in promoting the rights of minority groups and protecting their interests. As argued by Dziro (2013), though Zimbabwean values seem to be conservative, social work education and training ought to be transformative towards these barriers, making life easier for the country's minority groups, including minority Indigenous groups. Social work education and training should embrace elements of multiculturalism and diversity (Dziro, 2013).

Decolonisation Theory and its application to Zimbabwean Social Work

Having illustrated the state of the ambitious decolonisation of social work projects in Zimbabwe and elsewhere, in the sections that follow I go on to suggest pathways through which this agenda can be attained.

Decolonisation in social work knowledge management

Firstly, Dhemba (2012) notes social work is a professional discipline anchored on a unified curriculum consisting of both theory and fieldwork components. The taking up of decolonization and reconciliation in the social work classroom ought to be understood as having implications for how students and graduates will take up this work in the field (Allan, Rhonda Hackett & Jeffery, 2019). To bolster the foregoing assertions, Mbigi (2014, p. 32) suggests, Africa needs suitable and relevant research paradigms through the creation of theories and not just preoccupation with outputs. An Afrocentric methodology principle that is pertinent to social work researchers is that not everything that matters is measurable. African beliefs, motifs and values are very critical in their everyday lives but may not be quantified in Global North science. Africans rely heavily on social capital that is difficult to measure in scientific terms; for instance, African communities that rely on informal social safety nets whose value may not seem important to a Western-trained social worker (Mabvurira & Makhubele, 2018). To reinforce Mabvuria and Makhubele's arguments, Harms-Smith cautions against critiquing social work foundational knowledges, as this may even perpetuate coloniality if the same Eurocentric perspectives are used. Advancing from a Eurocentric paradigm as universal relegates African knowledge to 'Indigenous knowledge', maintaining European/Western knowledge as the truth (Harms-Smith, 2019).

An analysis by Allan et al. (2019) highlights that an Indigenous emancipatory agenda requires transgressing dominant knowledge and power relationships. Theoretically, formulating emancipatory agendas in social work research with Indigenous peoples involves, *inter alia,* moving beyond modernist assumptions regarding emancipation (Allan, Rhonda Hackett & Jeffery, 2019). This requires resisting tendencies to *limit* theorisations to core concepts, such as patriarchy, class, and gender, as these concepts alone capture neither the full complexity nor multidimensionality of lived experience (Rowe & Baldry, 2015).

Dziro (2013) asserts that Zimbabwe's Council of Social Workers, through its education and training committee, should be seen to promote professional development courses for its members to be updated with current social work education and training trends in line with the global minimum standards for the education and training of the social work profession. The now-five Zimbabwean social work training institutions should endeavour to have a comprehensive provision for continuous professional development for staff (Dziro, 2013). It is through these platforms for continuous professional development for social workers that decolonisation of social work principles and practices can be embedded.

Research, particularly practice research, is another important element of knowledge building. In practice research traditional stages of research are followed, but are connected to the parallel stages or processes of practice (Uggerhoj, 2011). In adopting practice research towards advancing the decolonised social work agenda, various research themes can be explored by Zimbabwean social workers. For instance, DSS-employed social workers, under the auspices of National Association of Social Workers Zimbabwe, can be at the forefront of conducting practice research. Being administrators of conditional cash transfers and other key social

security pillars, the practise research themes can explore extended family strategies for upholding *ubuntu*-grounded obligations to overcome socio-economic turbulence-induced destitution amongst family members. In that domain, practice research can interrogate the impact of family breakdown due to younger and able-bodied family members' migration *vis-a-vis* operationalising *ubuntu*. Other practise research themes can explore Indigenous knowledge systems that can reduce deforestation and natural resources in rural development. Some sacred groves and forests have remained untainted due to reverence of spirit mediums and the God believed to reside in these places. Adopting practice research that employs techniques such as participatory rural appraisal can contribute to enhanced conservation milestones in rural development. In the same vein, most African social work educators continue to be trained at Global South universities and model their curricula accordingly.

The premier university in Zimbabwe, University of Zimbabwe, through its unit, Centre for Applied Social Sciences (CASS), offers a tailor-made master's program in Social Ecology, in which social workers may enrol. However, Social Ecology and Climate Change concepts should gain more traction in critical undergraduate modules such as Rural Development and Community Work. As Mbigi (2014, p. 24) notes, redundant research techniques include questionnaires, case studies, empiricism, philosophy and interviews. Participatory action research, on the other hand, is a contemporary research methodology that creates possibilities of decolonisation alongside other methods such as discourse analysis, phenomenology, cooperative enquiry, grounded theory and appreciative inquiry.

As noted by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), and the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW)'s Global Social Work Agenda (2012-2016), people's health and wellbeing suffer as a result of inequalities and unsustainable environments related to climate change, pollutants, war, natural disasters and violence. On the same note, Dziro (2013) cautioned that in the Global South, including Zimbabwe, the application of continued remedial strategy means the dire needs of the majority of impoverished populations are neglected. Additionally, to borrow from Dhemba (2012), social work departments can use the block fieldwork placement system—which occurs in second and third year for a period of three months and three weeks across Zimbabwean universities—to expose students to community action approaches.

Curriculum realignment

Social work decolonization is an undertaking that has global resonance but requires local specificity in understanding the Indigenous and colonial histories of the lands on which we live, learn, work, and grow (Allan, Rhonda Hackett, & Jeffery, 2019). Whilst the University of Zimbabwe and Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE) offer a Bachelor of Social Work Honours Degree, their modules lack adequate coverage of wider social development issues like environmental justice and sustainability. Responsiveness to social work decolonisation can be galvanised when social workers' training embeds environmental justice and sustainability issues. Sustainability embraces cultural diversity and harmony, so incorporating these modules in the curriculum is vital.

Mamphiswana and Noyoo (2000) assert that it cannot be just social work educators who promote a developmental approach in social welfare through approaches such as curriculum realignment. It requires engagement of the whole social work profession and persons outside

the profession such as politicians, civil servants, community leaders, NGO representatives and academics in related fields. Council of Social Workers Zimbabwe and National Association of Social Workers Zimbabwe can be instrumental in this regard by mobilising resources and ideally, for instance, being active during Zimbabwe's Culture Week (held annually in May). Participating in this activity is one way to show social work's harmony with Zimbabwean culture and beliefs, especially those which are progressive and not perceived as harmful within the human rights realm.

Service user involvement

Successful social work decolonisation is reliant on service user involvement. In writing about service user and social workers interactions, Uggerhøj problematises the situation of social workers not listening to service users and allowing democratic collaboration. Instead, service users are directed by social workers, ensuring the status quo is not disturbed (Uggerhøj, 2014). Decolonial futures require more than appreciation of colonial histories or territorial acknowledgements, but our relationships and accountabilities to the Indigenous peoples and traditional teachings of the spaces we occupy is crucial (Allan, Rhonda Hackett, & Jeffery, 2019).

Beresford (2013, p. 140) further notes excluding service users from discussion about their 'othering' reinforces negative views of their capacity and an uncritical social work tradition of professionals speaking for people rather than supporting them to speak for themselves. As a result, policy development models are based on evidence gathered by outside 'experts', granted credibility and legitimacy, seeking to educate 'the public'. Some Non-Governmental Organisations-employed social workers engage in developmental social work with specific rural areas bias, mobilising communities to take an active interest in problems affecting them and they assist communities to define their problems (Chogugudza, 2009).

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the decolonisation of social work training plays an important role in combating the churning out of pro-poor and pro-social development-oriented social workers. It has become imperative for Social Work training institutions, working collaboratively with partner organisations, to produce social workers capable of applying a repertoire of decolonised social work theories and approaches targeting local development. My perspective regarding drivers and pillars for decolonised social work in Zimbabwe finds common ground with Harms –Smith (2019), who points out that any interventions defined as transformative and liberatory, directed towards holism, well-being and social change in postcolonial contexts would do well to embrace such processes of decoloniality as their basis of knowledge and discourse. As Kam, (cited in Dittfeld, 2019) contends, turning the postcolonial lens on social work is not merely a way for social work to satisfy the doctrine of postcolonial theory but also for social work to honour its one unifying mandate internationally: social justice. The main message in this paper is that the conditions which make social work in Zimbabwe and elsewhere to be fully decolonised are the result of decisions by social work academics and frontline practice thought leaders who have the duty to respond to various local and international pressures for change.

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