Social work education and training in southern and east Africa: yesterday, today and tomorrow

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In Africa, social work is considered a young profession, as it was imported from the West at the beginning of the last century. Critics have expressed concern that African social work education, because of its Western roots, lacked appropriateness and relevance. Many institutions in southern and east Africa have heeded the call to strive for relevance. Studies, however, reveal that enormous challenges have been encountered in attempts to realise relevance, while at the same time ensuring adherence to IASSW Global Standards. The impediments have included problems in generating indigenous teaching materials, lack of resources, lack of appropriate field placements, etc. Using empirical data, this paper commences by chronicling the historical development of social work education and training in Southern and East Africa, before surveying its current state, and concluding with comments on prospects for the future.

Social work education in Africa: yesterday

Social work education in Africa has a colonial heritage having been imported from the Western world, especially Europe, in the last century (Mwansa 2011; Mupedziswa 2001). There has been disquietment around issues of relevance and appropriateness of social work in Africa. In the 1970s, African scholars (Midgley 1981; Ragab 1982; Safari 1986; Kaseke 1991; Hall 1990; Mupedziswa 1992; Osei-Hwedie 1993b) began to express discontent regarding the type of social work that was being ‘foisted’ on the people of the continent. The then umbrella body for social work education and training in Africa (Association of Social Work Education in Africa (ASWEA) 1982, 11) added its voice to these concerns by observing that:

African social work must proceed from remedial social work – foreign by nature and approach – to a more dynamic and more widespread preventive and rehabilitative action which identifies itself with African culture in particular and with the socioeconomic policies of Africa in general.
Commentators contended that to become relevant, the social work profession in Africa had to assume a developmental orientation, and this had to start at the level of education and training.

Social work education and training in Africa began in the 1930s in such countries as Egypt and South Africa. In the case of South Africa, the Jan Hofmeyer College was one of the early institutions established in 1924, while in Egypt the Higher Institute for Social Work in Cairo was among the first in 1946. In Ghana the School of Social Welfare Accra had its humble beginnings around 1946. Ten years later in 1956, the teaching of social work commenced at the University of Ghana. The 1960s saw more schools of social work being established in Africa, including the School of Social Work in Zimbabwe in 1964 and the Oppenheimer College of Social Science in Zambia which was absorbed into the University of Zambia in 1965.

The School of Social Work at the University of Khartoum in the Sudan was established in 1969. In Ethiopia, a fully fledged university department of social work was launched in 1966. The Department of Social Work, University of Botswana, was established in 1985. According to Midgley (1981, 61), by 1973 the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) had 25 schools of social work from Africa in its register. The numbers of social work education institutions have continued to increase; for example, Uganda currently boasts 21 institutions offering social work.

Programs offered
The various social work education and training institutions in Africa have offered a diversity of programs. Certainly not all of them have offered high quality qualifications in social work. Criteria used to determine quality of training have included admission requirements, length of training and affiliation to universities. On the basis of such criteria, the United Nations (1971) reported that in the 1970s there was a relatively small number of independent or university-based schools of social work in African countries, and that most of the personnel in the field were without advanced education or professional qualifications.

Some institutions could not be regarded as professional schools of social work because of the nature of their offerings. A number of African countries had community development training centres which did not train social workers per se. Thus, in Africa discrepancies were evident in terms of training standards of different institutions. There were also variations in the extent to which these different institutions conformed to international standards, guidelines and expectations. Even so, they all purported to train personnel who were expected to promote the general social welfare of the people. In Africa, the length of training and qualifications awarded by different schools of social work have clearly not been standardised (Mupedziswa 2001; Osei-Hwedie 1993b).

Overview of traditional curricula in use
In many countries in Africa, social work education and training programs were first established either by outsiders, mostly from the West who doubled as consultants, or at least with the assistance of local practitioners who had been trained in the West, hence who had a Western orientation. Consequently, the curricula that were adopted reflected the Western influence. Some of the Western countries had so much influence that they even offered
generous scholarships to train students from the developing countries (Midgley 1981). Some of the scholars that were offered these scholarships, upon returning from abroad, perpetuated the Western influence.

According to Midgley (1981, 72), studies of the curricula of schools of social work in developing countries (those in Africa included) carried out in the 1960s revealed that the content of social work training in these countries conformed with Western, particularly American, approaches. The curricula of these institutions thus had many features which were in tandem with those of the Western world (Mupedziswa 2005). For example, the teaching of social work methods emphasised Western techniques and themes of case work, group work and community organisation. This observation was corroborated by Ragab (1982) and Muzaale (1987), who expressed concern over the inappropriateness of the approaches. Such an orientation of social work education would not assist students to relate theory and practice in the classroom as they acquire principles, values and ethics (Mupedziswa 2001; Mupedziswa 2005; Mwansa 2010).

Research done in this regard also made some disturbing discoveries with respect to literature used in social work education and training in Africa. Most African schools of social work were found to be dependent on Western social work literature and, sadly, few efforts had gone into developing indigenous teaching materials. Referring to the situation in Asia, Nagpaul (1972) lamented that it was unfortunate the schools of social work in that part of the world were dependent on Western literature. He admonished that the Western textbooks used had been written with a Western audience in mind. The same could be said about the African situation. As long ago as 1964 a report of a Consultant Team for the Study of Schools of Social Work in Africa (Economic Commission for Africa 1973) had similarly noted with regret that social work educators in the continent were having to consult foreign textbooks which they and the students found difficult to use as a foundation for professional training and practice and whose content was not applicable to their situation. This problem appears to have continued unabated in some institutions. Indeed, the majority of the textbooks currently in use in Africa have neither taken cognizance of indigenous social, economic and political conditions nor the contribution of African social scientists (Mwansa 2010).

Apart from classroom instruction curricula, there is also the fieldwork element. In most schools of social work in Africa, students have been placed (for fieldwork attachment) with various agencies such as government departments, hospitals, psychiatric and rehabilitation units, parastatal organisations, private industry, mines, local authorities and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Preoccupation has been with urban placements at the expense of rural placements. Njau (1986, 93), for example, commenting on the situation at the University of Nairobi, Kenya, had this to say:

Out of 40 weeks of fieldwork in 3 years of (degree) training, the students have an option to work in the rural areas for only 8 weeks of their second year block (fieldwork) placement, if they chose to do so. The rest of the time is spent in fieldwork in and around Nairobi.

Institutions elsewhere in the continent have had similar experiences; and while some, like Makerere University in Uganda, have taken steps to do something about this anomaly (Ankrah 1987), many others have not.
Safari (1986) has identified a number of challenges associated with choice of placements in social work education and training institutions in Africa:

1. shortage of suitable staff in agencies (i.e. to supervise students)
2. competition for a limited number of places for fieldwork
3. limited opportunities to explore suitability of agencies which take students
4. lack of suitable accommodation for students and supervisors
5. To the four problems noted above could also be added lack of financial resources which limits the placement choices (Mupedziswa 2001).

These challenges have been confirmed by researchers who recently conducted a study of 25 social work institutions in southern and east Africa (Hochfeld et al. 2009). While these challenges might be experienced in both urban and rural areas, they are mostly prevalent and acute in rural rather than urban areas.

The problem of the shortage of suitable staff to supervise students in agencies, for example, is mostly a rural phenomenon. In many African countries the vast majority of trained personnel prefer to work in urban areas, partly because of the ‘urban biased’ nature of the education system they went through, but also because most employment opportunities are concentrated in urban areas, and so is infrastructure.

Lack of proper accommodation for students and supervisors may be both an urban and a rural problem, but it is more acute in the rural situations. Generally students going on urban placements can easily arrange to stay with relatives and/or friends. But such an arrangement is for obvious reasons only possible in very rare occasions in rural settings. The concern about competition for a limited number of field places is more of an urban than a rural problem because, due to urban bias, fieldwork in many African countries is concentrated in urban areas.

As education and training institutions in Africa have grown and expanded, it has become more and more difficult to find placements for students. The limited budgets for fieldwork training have also made it virtually impossible to send students to places that are too far away and scattered all over the countryside. Safari (1986) echoed this concern, and explained that it is the prohibitive costs involved that make it difficult for institutions in Africa to consider rural placements. Njau (1986, 93) also expressed reservations about using rural placements, especially due to the distances involved. She noted that,

The distance between some rural agencies and the social work training institutions (which are mainly urban based) makes it difficult for trainers to identify suitable rural fieldwork agencies and fieldwork supervisors, and they therefore prefer to place students in nearby agencies where communication and effective supervision can be carried out.

Yet as the number of social work education institutions increases, there will be a need to focus on rural placements as urban placements cannot absorb everyone. Also, as institutions move in the direction of a developmental social work approach, rural placements become an imperative.
Social work education in Africa today: debate over relevance and appropriateness

Issues around flaws of the traditional curricula spelt out above triggered the debate over relevance and appropriateness in the 1970s. Appropriateness refers to the most suitable method (of intervention in a given situation) based on an understanding of the context of the needs in the particular situation and an understanding of what would be the most effective method or combination of methods to achieve the goals of social work intervention in that situation (Willmore 1985, 24). In order to realise relevance, there is a need to employ appropriate strategies and methodologies. Without use of such appropriate strategies and methods, the goals of relevance and appropriateness would almost certainly remain a pipe dream. The two concepts (relevance and appropriateness) therefore go hand in glove.

Many commentators (e.g. Hampson 1987; Mupedziswa 1992) have argued that the concept of relevance is in itself a positive, progressive and pragmatic idea, and that it is not only a useful concept but central to the debate; hence it needs to be analysed at two related levels, namely at the level of theory and of practice. They do, however, concede that realising relevance remains a Herculean task, especially where it relates to social work in Africa in particular. The greatest concern relates to what constitutes relevant aspects and also how to realise that relevance.

As noted, the concept of relevance, as it relates to social work, can be analysed at two levels – i.e. at the theory and practice levels. The social work profession in Africa has for several decades now been embroiled in debate over how best to realise relevance. In 1971 the Fifth United Nations International Survey of Social Work Training (UN 1971) addressed the issue of relevance, acknowledging in the process the inappropriateness of American social work theories to programs of other societies. Some authors (e.g. Khinduka 1971; Lasan 1975) also addressed the issue of relevance in the context of social work theory and practice, reaching similar conclusions in as far as its central role in social work is concerned.

At the level of social work theory (i.e. education), the argument has been that efforts must be made (particularly in Africa) to come up with relevant theories that would hopefully better inform practice. Thus, relevance, when addressed in relation to theory, focuses more on the need for social work education to be appropriate to the needs of social work practice in a given situation.

When considering the concept of relevance in the context of social work practice, three basic schools of thought seem to predominate: these could be referred to as the conservative, the pragmatic, and the radical schools of thought. The conservative school would argue that there is no need to tamper with existing forms of practice which, by accident of history perhaps, happen to be Western in origin. What needs changing is the environment to enable it to suit these existing Western approaches, as basically the approaches are tested and tried, with universal appeal and application. The pragmatic approach, on the other hand, would argue, among other things, that social work scholars in the developing world should not expend energy and waste effort striving to reinvent the wheel as such but should simply work towards attempting to modify existing theories, irrespective of the fact that they originate from the West. Where a theory hails from is immaterial; what matters is its potential efficaciousness. Finally, the radical approach would dismiss the arguments presented above and urge practitioners to change strategies and models completely and
come up with new approaches that are more relevant to local situations. It calls for the development of new theories better suited to situations in the developing world.

The critics of the conservative view (Ragab 1982; Midgley 1981; Ankrah 1987, etc.) argue persuasively that the most critical constraint seems to be the Western theories and methods that the social work profession in Africa has lavishly employed, and which are neither appropriate nor effective. Because the theories and methods are inappropriate then, they cannot be expected to address meaningfully the question of relevance (Chitereka 2009). The critics further note that the Western models are narrow, remedial and curative in nature; that these models tend to ignore the issue of traditional forms of welfare and hence they come short as they are not rooted in local culture, that they focus on individual pathologies (e.g. crime, prostitution, delinquency etc.) at the expense of structural issues imbued in the rubric of poverty, i.e. issues like homelessness, unemployment, etc. (Chitereka 2009; Mupedziswa 2005; Midgley 1981).

The two approaches (conservative and pragmatic) differ slightly in the way they approach the pertinent question of realising relevance. While the pragmatic approach admonishes against throwing away Western theories, as all that is needed is modification of these theories to suit local conditions (Midgley 1981), the radical approach is more revolutionary, arguing as it does that there is indeed a need to discard Western theories and methods in favour of locally developed new theories rooted in local tradition and culture (Mwansa 1992; Osei-Hwedie 1993b; Ragab 1982).

Context is also an important factor when considering the concept of relevance. It should be noted that social work practice does not occur in a vacuum; it happens in sociocultural, economic and political contexts. In fact, in countries like Egypt for instance (Walton & El Nasr 1988), the religious element is considered just as important as other related factors. The concept of relevance therefore has to be tackled in relation to a host of related factors, including sociocultural and socioeconomic contexts. Very often there has been a tendency to ignore the political dimension, important though it may be. And yet relevance can only be realised if the political context is taken into cognisance (Ankrah 1987). It is the sum total of these various dimensions or contexts that will provide a conducive atmosphere for realisation of relevance.

**Social work education in Africa today: towards a social development approach**

The debate on relevance and appropriateness, meant to steer social work in Africa in the direction that will enable it to realise relevance, has culminated in calls to adopt a developmental approach. The social development package comes with a number of new concepts. The next few paragraphs consider the concept of social development, before an attempt is made to unpack some of the key related concepts.

**Social development concept**

Efforts to realise relevance in social work education and practice in Africa have, as noted above, culminated in calls for the adoption of a social development orientation. Social development is a relatively new and in some ways revolutionary perspective on addressing social problems. Social work educators and practitioners alike have not yet achieved con-
sensus as to its content and practice requirements (Muzaale 1987), although scholars like Patel (2007), Midgley (1997, 1996) and Gray (1996) have made serious attempts to unpack this concept. Sanders (1982) defined social development as a process of planned institutional change to bring about a better fit between human needs and social policies and programs. The concept describes a radical change of mission, knowledge base and practice skills in social work. Muzaale (1987) added that social development can be viewed as the proposed package of social work's contribution to the redefinition of the content, objectives, methods and social structures of development. Its core skills include policy analysis, planning, community organisation, program evaluation and social advocacy. Hollister (1982) observed that the knowledge base of social development includes a mastery of the ingredients of social structures, economic structures and political structures.

The concept of developmental social work emerged in the wake of calls by African scholars for social work in Africa to move away from the remedial, residual, social control thrust to focus more attention on an approach which emphasises social change. Commentators (e.g. Muzaale 1987; Osei-Hwedie 1993b) explained that in traditional social work the emphasis had been on relief type of welfare assistance. Muzaale (1987) observed that the recent failures of development programs to reduce poverty in developing countries in general and Africa in particular had led social workers to question their own practice paradigm and redefine the purpose of development.

Social development is seen as a holistic approach to development which encourages the maximum participation of people, particularly the marginalised, in collaboration with the various agencies. Hall (1990, 149) explained that, 'A social development orientation in social work means that social work as a profession can begin to address issues of structural inequality and social disadvantage.' This view is corroborated by Elliott (2012, 103) who states that 'Social development offers a progressive model of social work practice with goals of social justice, and empowerment of the oppressed, the marginalised, or excluded population.' The approach is preventive and proactive rather than remedial and reactive, aiming at long-term change for the benefit of the majority of a country's population. Social development advocates for self-reliance and participation, and stresses the need for enhancement of people's capacity to work for their own welfare and that of the society. Thus, empowerment and capacity building are considered important elements in this approach (Mupedziswa 1988, 2001).

Paira (1982) postulated that the broad mission of social development is to contribute to the emergence and maintenance of a society in which organisations and institutions are more sensitive and responsive to human needs. This contention is corroborated by de Graaf (1986) who emphasised the element of people's control over their resources. He argued that social development should involve the capacity of the people to control, utilise and increase their resources, adding that a community which does not control its infrastructural arrangements can be a victim of external factors.

**Selected concepts in social development perspective**

There are a number of concepts which are in tandem with a social development orientation to which social work education in Africa has been urged to pay particular focus; namely indigenisation, authentisation, radicalisation, reconceptualisation and recontextualisation. Commentators have argued that all these concepts ought to be viewed not as multifarious
strategies but merely as tools for achieving the same goal – that of realising relevance through promotion of the social development approach.

Indigenisation: this is a concept characterised by appropriateness, which means professional social work must be appropriate to the needs of different countries (Midgley 1983, 170). Shawkey (1972, 3) has referred to indigenisation as a process of adapting imported ideas to fit local needs. Indigenisation therefore emphasises modification of imported ideas to fit local needs. African scholars who subscribe to this view do not call for a reinvention of the wheel (Mupedziswa 1992), but rather, adaptation of existing methods and theories with a view to making them more relevant to the needs of Africa. Critics (e.g. Hall 1990) have argued that indigenisation simply entails modification of existing models of social work, to suit different cultural contexts, and this may not be sufficient. The critics would prefer to see much more than the apparently ‘cosmetic’ changes implied in indigenisation.

Authentisation: Ragab (1982, 21) defines authentisation as, ‘The identification of genuine and authentic roots in the local system, which would be used for guiding its (i.e. the community’s) future development in a mature, relevant and original fashion. It refers to the creation or building of a ‘domestic model of social work’ (Walton & El Nasr 1988, 136) in light of the social, political and economic characteristics of a particular country. The approach contends that each country should develop its own theory and practice, based on its own experience, for its own use. This new thinking admonishes social work training institutions and practitioners alike to be wary of applying social work principles from the West indiscriminately, without due regard for appropriateness. Critics, however, regret that the approach is too theoretical and hence unworkable. They argue that the building of a domestic social work implies reinvention of the wheel, which is a total waste of resources (Mupedziswa 1992). Proponents of this view have been accused by some scholars of being ‘fundamentalist’ in their approach to issues, as evidenced by some of the jargon they employ.

Reconceptualisation: this concept relates to the reformulating of concepts so that they fall in line with efforts to empower the marginalised groups in society. The term has its roots in Latin America where it was influenced by the work of Paulo Freire’s conscientisation approach and also liberation theology. It denotes building new ‘constructs’ on the basis of these observations. Osei-Hwedie (1993a) observed that reconceptualisation ‘makes room for adaptation and modification of old ideas, knowledge and process of practice as well as the emergence of new ones, all in the effort towards appropriateness of social work professional education and practice’. Reconceptualisation aims to raise the consciousness of individuals and society. Activities incorporated in the reconceptualisation concept include consciousness raising, training, organising and social mobilisation, with the basic aim of liberation of the human being. In the context of this approach, schools of social work would be expected to organise programs in such a way that they work critically with organisations and institutions that serve the masses (Molina 1992), achieving a dialectic interaction of theory and practice and developing a new image of social work in the social consciousness by society; a school which responds totally to the realities of the present.

Radicalisation: this refers to a disposition to make a marked departure from the usual or the tradition to effecting extreme changes in existing views, behaviours, conditions or institutions (Ankrah 1987). Radicalisation has to do with getting to the root of issues in social development. It thus refers to developing a practice paradigm with African roots. Ankrah (1987, 9) argues, ‘To radicalise roles is to prescribe behaviours that directly ad-
dress the conditions of Africa, not those pervading elsewhere. The calls for radicalisation have come in the wake of a realisation that the models currently operational in Africa are at best ineffective, and at worst weak and inappropriate. Mwansa (1992, 2) observed that for social work to be meaningful to the process of social development in Africa today, it must depart from its current liberal manner of practice to adopt a more pragmatic, radical approach. Ankrah (1987) opined that there is an imperative that African social work finds a way from the slavish replication of inherited forms. Critics have, however, dismissed it as a Marxist approach which by definition is violent and whose ultimate aim is the overthrow of the existing sociopolitical institutions. Others view it as being a method of confrontation and a violent way to bring about change.

Recontextualisation: this focuses attention on attempts to put social work in Africa into its proper perspective (Mupedziswa 2005). It attempts to achieve this by urging the social work profession to revisit the conditions and circumstances under which social work is taught and practiced in the continent, with a view to recasting its orientation (Mupedziswa 2001). The concept urges social workers to consider alternative forms of operation, based on an analysis of various factors in the local social system, including power and the constellation of forces at work in a given situation. It further urges the profession in Africa (as elsewhere) to select those alternatives that are likely to deal most effectively with a particular situation and circumstances (Molina 1992). Recontextualisation calls for vigilance on the part of the social work profession in Africa, to ensure the profession is not caught unprepared for this. The term also implies that practice is determined by theoretical considerations based on having put each problem in its proper context in terms of social, economic, cultural and political considerations. Critics, however, observe that there is very little if anything to distinguish this concept from the others discussed before it.

Challenges in promoting the developmental social work approach in Africa

Over the last few decades, many social work education and training institutions in Africa have heeded the call to move in the direction of developmental social work. A study by Hochfeld et al. (2009) entitled ‘Developmental social work education in Southern and East Africa’ found that all 25 institutions of social work education that responded to the study (including those from Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda, South Africa (Rwanda) had aligned their programs in the direction of a developmental social work approach. However, they all reported facing challenges of different types, and these are considered below.

One challenge related to the fact that there is a general lack of indigenous materials for use in schools of social work in Africa. Social work literature used in African institutions is Westernised material from Europe, America, Australia and other countries. Consequently, students and educators remain frustrated because the literature used is unable to appreciate African culture and its diversity (Mwansa 2011). Hence, the call to synthesise the Western theories and models based on African values and culture in an effort to have an appropriate social work education that is specific to the African population (Mwansa & Kreitzer 2012). Due to the nature of the curriculum that is heavily Westernised, there is a lack of fitness-for-purpose between social work education and the service needs of the communities (Hutton & Mwansa 1996; Mupedziswa 2005, 2001).

Curricula which lack relevance have been noted to be a major problem in most social work institutions in Africa. This problem is critical, particularly given that it is the curricu-
lum that will ultimately determine the type of graduate who will be churned out. Graduates who are trained using inappropriate curricula are likely to turn out to be a liability to the social work profession in the continent as they might perpetuate inappropriate forms of social work. Such graduates are also likely to show little commitment to change. It has been observed that Africa lacks curriculum experts who would normally assist in curriculum development efforts. Agouba (1976, 54) corroborated this by noting that there was limited expertise for curriculum design and also often different understandings of the concept of social work among African social work educators.

In most African countries the number of social workers that graduate each year is negligible. In addition, there has been the perennial problem of the ‘brain drain’ (Mupedziswa & Ushamba 2006). A few countries (e.g. in the Great Lakes Region) still do not have social work (professional) training programs of their own. Thus, limited output of trainees is a problem which often has a ripple effect in the African continent. The build-up of training resources in the field of social work in Africa thus ensures just a minimum supply of workers required in the existing social work field.

The problem of inadequate resources is not unique to the field of social work in Africa. However, in the social work education field, this problem has often severely impeded programs. In many African countries the classrooms are cramped and equipped with inadequate or inappropriate materials for meaningful learning. Agouba (1976, 54), writing a few decades ago, pointed out that lack of adequate funds to improve, promote and expand training, or to increase staff numbers, were common problems in many schools of social work in Africa. The situation has hardly changed over the years. The shortage of staff has sometimes resulted in part-time educators being recruited, but some of them may not have the correct orientation or commitment to the goals of appropriateness and relevance. Many schools of social work in Africa, because of shortage of resources, depend largely on donated books from the West, some of which are old editions, besides being inappropriate for the local situation (Mupedziswa 2001). A further problem is that although local materials are increasingly becoming available, many of these remain unpublished due to limited resources.

Similarly, there is limited research carried out locally that can be used as literature for the classroom (Mwansa 2010). Coupled with this are challenges regarding the class assignments given to the students. The Western literature provides case studies that are totally different from the actual scenarios in Africa, and this often poses a great challenge when students are faced with cases during practice, as some of the theories learned are not applicable there. There is a need for transformation of social work education with a view to reorienting the curricular and teaching methods to synthesise with indigenous information so that social work can be effective and relevant (Osei-Hwedie & Rankopo 2008).

Schools of social work in Africa have also often had to grope in the dark as a result of unclear national policies with regard to the position and role of the social work profession. Some governments, because they are not well acquainted with this relatively young human service profession, have tended to at worst ignore the profession completely, and at best do little to acknowledge this profession’s pertinent role in national development. In instances where governments support tertiary education through loans and grants, sometimes social work students have been discriminated against through either lack of support or inadequate support (Mupedziswa 2005).

The lack of well defined, stable social policies in various African countries has also caused problems in terms of designing training programs that will address national needs.
Ideally, it is on the basis of clear social policies that schools of social work can attempt to base or relate education and training of their professionals. Because of such constraints, however, social work education sometimes lags behind and inadequately responds to the pressing problems faced in the continent.

There are often two types of Western trained personnel teaching in social work institutions in Africa today. One category comprises the expatriates, born, bred and trained in the West, who make their way to Africa for a variety of motives. While some are motivated by a genuine desire for cross-fertilisation of ideas and experiences and a desire to help in the development and promotion of social work education in Africa, others may come for adventure and even personal aggrandisement. It is the latter category that has set the clock backwards where advancement of relevant social work education in the continent is concerned. However, even with those who are committed, who mean well, sometimes their Western bias and background has not helped matters where issues of appropriateness of models of education and training are concerned.

The second category relates to social work educators who are locally bred but who opt to go and train as social workers in the West. Many of these are wittingly or unwittingly influenced by their Western training, and have at times wrought havoc where attempts to promote appropriate local education programs are concerned. Again while some such persons genuinely believe their Western training is superior, and hence Western oriented social work programs should prevail in Africa, others will be committed to change but, unwittingly, their Western background will distort their good intentions. It must be stressed that not all African social work educators trained in the West suffer from this effect; there are some who have used their Western training to advantage by employing that knowledge to critically look at local conditions and proceeding to do something about these. However, this breed of Western trained local educators who have kept their heads above water is very rare in Africa.

Social work in Africa tomorrow: the way forward

Social work education and training in Africa has come a long way. The profession, however, suffers from lack of relevance and appropriateness in terms of practice knowledge, value base, philosophy and ideology. There have been concerted calls for these institutions to adopt a developmental social work approach in order to realise relevance. Many of the institutions have heeded this call and have proceeded to embrace the developmental approach. Naturally they have encountered challenges along the way. What is encouraging though is that many of the institutions have tried to do something in terms of addressing the challenges. Clearly, social work educators in Africa have to be proactive in the struggle for their profession to realise relevance. Only in that way can the tomorrow of social work in Africa be expected to be bright.

References

Global social work


