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## ZIMBABWEAN FOURTH SOCIAL WORKERS CONFERENCE AND WINTER SCHOOL

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*The Council of Social Workers (CSW or Council) was established under the Social Workers Act 27:21, which was enacted in 2001. Its mandate is to: (a) register and licence all practising social workers, (b) conduct examinations to qualify persons for registration as professional social workers, (c) define and enforce ethical practice and discipline among registered persons, and (d) take such steps as the Council considers necessary or desirable to enhance the status and effectiveness of the profession of social work and to promote the interests of social workers. Such steps include running the Annual Social Workers Conference & Winter School. This annual observance creates a platform to showcase the goals and accomplishments of diverse social work professionals in the country, give a report on progress and convening a social work winter school for exchanging professional ideas. The purpose of this article is to introduce the fourth edition of the Annual Social Workers Conference and Winter School held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> to the 24<sup>th</sup> of April 2015 in Mutare, Zimbabwe.*

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The Fourth Annual Social Workers Conference and Winter School was held in Mutare, Manicaland Province from the 23rd to the 24th of April 2015. As the fourth conference in the history of the Council of Social Workers the 2015 event was better-co-ordinated. It brought together more than a hundred registered social work professionals across Zimbabwe and beyond.

This conference – a product of the Social Workers Act (27:21) – showcased accomplishments of Zimbabwean social practice in a remarkable way. Chief among the accomplishments are social work policy reforms such as amendment of the Social Workers Act, review of social work curriculum, strengthened social work workforce and improved compliance by social practitioners. The theme itself, *“Fostering Regulation, Commitment, Innovation and Opportunities in the Fields of Social Work Practice in Zimbabwe”*, was an appropriate response to the dynamic and multiple conditions characterising the country’s social work scene. Some of the dynamics within the profession include the changing nature of social problems, multiplicity of social work intervention strategies and the rising need for entrepreneurial skills. In coining the theme for the conference, the Council considered annotations from the past conference themes to give the conference a forward-thinking and developmental perspective.

The major aim of the conference was to engage social work experts and stimulate debate on strategies that can be employed by the social work fraternity to embrace new opportunities, emerging technologies and innovations at the same time foster regulation and ethical practice in the midst of the wavering social, economic and political tide and the developmental shift characterising the profession.

What made this conference a success was the way contemporary issues of social work were raised and debated in the presentation and plenary sessions. Energetic presenters gave the participants a highly informative and educative moment, building on the conference themes. Further, the plenaries spurred productive discussions on contemporary social work issues in Zimbabwe. Participants from neighboring countries (South Africa and Namibia) shared their experiences as well. Participants from abroad shared country experiences regarding social work institutions were managing donor dependency. Social workers also deliberated on relevance of and social work role in, new fields of social work practice such green social work and social work in extreme situations. The challenges facing social work in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century were discussed and broader solutions proffered. It is Council’s hope that these will be developed into strategies that will be implemented and evaluated by all stakeholders involved. As we are witnessing continuous development in our profession, we need to work as one in embracing these advancements and paradigm shifts to ensure that when challenges come our way, we address them as a unit and move to greater heights in strengthening our profession and serving our communities to optimum levels.

The 2015 conference keynote address was delivered by Professor Vishanthie Sewpaul a Senior Professor in the School of Applied Human Sciences at the University of KwaZulu Natal, Durban, South Africa. She works with several organisations among them the South African Council of the Social Service Professions. She chaired the Global Standards for Social Work Education Committee on behalf of International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW). She also chaired the International Social Work Definition taskforce on behalf of IASSW. She served as vice-president on the board of IASSW, and president of Association for Schools of Social Work in Africa (ASSWA), and president of Association of South African Social Work Education Institutions (ASASWEI). Her presentation implored social workers to move away from a positivist view of professionalism which is detached, uninvolved, neutral, acts as observer, tends to be individualist and linear in nature. She encouraged participants to engage an alternative professional approach characterized by relationship between the personal & the political aspects of life and dialogical encounters. Her address also shared registration insights in South Africa and how this has helped the recognition and advancement of Social Work in that country. It is our hope that Zimbabwe will also learn a lot from South Africa for the strengthening of our profession.

Finally, the Council of Social Workers wishes to encourage readers to submit papers for future Annual Social Workers Conference & Winter School. Conferences are held once every year. Check out for our call for papers. Abstracts are usually not more than 250 words around selected thematic areas. Such areas may include: social development; research & evidence based practice; innovation in social work; human rights & advocacy; policy issues; fields of social work; social work regulation; private practice; and social work administration & many others

Papers will be considered for publication in this journal published by the National Association of Social Workers (Zimbabwe).