



Publisher

African Journal of Social Work  
Afri. j. soc. work  
© National Association of Social Workers-Zimbabwe/Autor(s)  
ISSN Print 1563-3934  
ISSN Online 2409-5605

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## UTILIZATION OF UBUNTU BOWL IN SOCIAL WORK PROCESSES: THE WAY TO GO TOWARDS ATTAINMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

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### ABSTRACT

*The practice of Social Work in Africa is making a turnaround towards finding relevant, contextual and sustainable theories, models, frameworks and strategies that are well positioned to meet needs of African people. Many African Social Work academics, researchers and practitioners are speaking in one accord towards the localization of Social Work education and practice through embracing the dictates of Ubuntu Theory. To that effect, this paper presents the Ubuntu Cycle in implementing the Ubuntu Theory and finding appropriate as well as sustainable Social Work interventions for socio-economic development of African economies. It has also been noted that the spirit of Ubuntu in Africa existed since time immemorial and is being followed up with a new face emanating in religious circles and regroupings done through migration and globalization trends. The Africanization of Social Development in Africa is taking centre stage and expected to bring positive Social Development through restoring collectivism, humanity, norm of reciprocity and value for traditional systems in solving problems presented by Social Work clientele. Thus, 'Ubuntuing' of Social Work in Africa is long overdue and should take its place during this critical moment of deepening poverty in many African countries.*

**KEY TERMS:** Ubuntuing, humaneness, Ubuntu Bowl, Social Work, Spirituality, Social Development, Africa

### KEY DATES

Received: 06 September 2019  
Revised: 02 January 2020  
Accepted: 01 October 2019  
Published: 20 February 2020

Funding: None  
Conflict of Interest: None  
Permission: Not applicable  
Ethics approval: Not applicable

This article appeared in a special issue of the African Journal of Social Work (AJSW) titled *Ubuntu Social Work*. The special issue focused on short articles that advanced the theory and practice of ubuntu in social work. In the special issue, these definitions were used:

- Ubuntu refers to a collection of values and practices that black people of Africa or of African origin view as making people authentic human beings. While the nuances of these values and practices vary across different ethnic groups, they all point to one thing – an authentic individual human being is part of a larger and more significant relational, communal, societal, environmental and spiritual world.
- Ubuntu social work refers to social work that is theoretically, pedagogically and practically grounded in ubuntu.
- The term ubuntu is expressed differently in several African communities and languages but all referring to the same thing. In Angola, it is known as *gimuntu*, Botswana (*muthu*), Burkina Faso (*maaya*), Burundi (*ubuntu*), Cameroon (*bato*), Congo (*bantu*), Congo Democratic Republic (*bomoto/bantu*), Cote d'Ivoire (*maaya*), Equatorial Guinea (*maaya*), Guinea (*maaya*), Gambia (*maaya*), Ghana (*biako ye*), Kenya (*utu/munto/mondo*), Liberia (*maaya*), Malawi (*umunthu*), Mali (*maaya/hadama de ya*), Mozambique (*vumuntu*), Namibia (*omundu*), Nigeria (*mutunchi/iwa/agwa*), Rwanda (*bantu*), Sierra Leone (*maaya*), South Africa (*ubuntu/botho*), Tanzania (*utu/obuntu/bumuntu*), Uganda (*obuntu*), Zambia (*umunthu/ubuntu*) and Zimbabwe (*hunhu/unhu/botho/ubuntu*). It is also found in other Bantu countries not mentioned here.

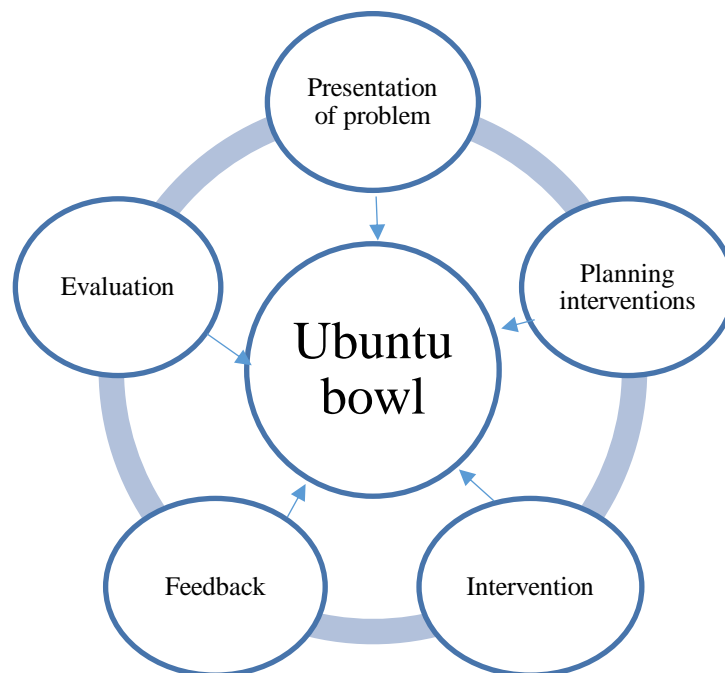
## INTRODUCTION

Ubuntu (also known as *hunhu* or *unhu* in Shona language) in Social Work is a concept that existed in Africa since time immemorial. It refers to the principle of humanity or dignity that is bestowed upon an individual regardless of sex, age, status or any other determinant (Patel, 2012). According to Chidzonga (2017), Ubuntu is the foundation of one's identity and a sense of self which are based on the ethical teachings passed from generation to generation through enculturation and socialization. The code further states that Ubuntu, places emphasis on values of human solidarity, empathy, human dignity, holding that a person is a person through others (Council of Social Workers, 2012). This is regarded as a guiding spirit for an individual within a community which control his/her conduct and relation with others. It is this conduct that westernised forms of theories devoid of rectitude, sharing and harmony which exist in Ubuntu find themselves unwelcome in the African context. There is evidence that Social Work has been relegated to become a cure for social ills and not an active player in prevention and amelioration of social problems (Zvomuya, 2017). Hence, this gap calls for use of relevant and contextually sustainable social theories, models and strategies for Social Development. Thus, a recurring call for dissecting and disassembling of the foreign theories which were adopted wholesale in Social Work training and education information is fast taking centre stage.

## 'UBUNTUING' OF SOCIAL WORK

'Ubuntuing' can be described as a process by which Ubuntuism becomes the pillar for rationalization and alignment of professional as well as operational activities in any given context. This becomes the reference point in the assessment of relevance that a program, intervention or strategy bears and variance from the expected standards can also be checked. According to Mugumbate and Nyanguru (2013), Ubuntu echoes the African thought of acceptable indigenized ideas and deeds. Indigenization is a process whereby a phenomenon, method or philosophy is contextualized to suit the needs of local people. In this case, "Ubuntuing" is a form of indigenizing Social Work so that the challenges faced by Africans and those of African descent are addressed.

### *The Ubuntu cycle*



As indicated above, the proposed Ubuntu Cycle is an ongoing process in the Social Work practice whereby problems are identified and addressed in a comprehensive and Afrocentric manner. This is an intertwined approach towards tackling African problems in a sustainable way. At every stage of Social Work, it is important to refer to the Ubuntu Bowl.

- i. **Presentation of problems** - the Ubuntu Cycle starts with presentation of problems by clients. It should be noted that these are diversified and sometimes complex which calls for extensive assessment process.
- ii. **Social work case care plans** - these are developed after an informed analysis of the presented problems and they should detail proposed plans for addressing the presented. A case record with registration, assessments,

- reviews and concerned stakeholders have to be put in place so that a comprehensive intervention strategy is chosen that is SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound).
- iii. **Consulting the ubuntu bowl** - It is critical for the Social Work practitioners to come up with intervention strategies that are informed by Ubuntuism. The Ubuntu Bowl consists of cultural diversity, African cultures value collectivity, reciprocity, spirituality and interconnectedness of all beings, beliefs, humanity and collectivism.
  - iv. **Social work intervention** - the Social Work Interventions that are planned and implemented get informed by the cultural and Afrocentric values. Social Work interventions to be used at this stage are not only those with Ubuntu orientations but may include other western theories that have been indigenized.
  - v. **Feedback** - the giving of feedback is a very important stage in addressing the challenge. This involves response or reaction from the intervention strategies. At this point, the client has the overall say as to what he/she found useful in addressing the presenting problems.
  - vi. **Evaluation and Review** - feedback on the effectiveness of Social Work interventions is very critical in managing problems presented. This is a stage whereby practitioners evaluate on the Ubuntu interventions used to see how they fared in addressing the presenting problems or need for another strategy.

### AFRICANIZATION OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN SOCIAL WORK

The call for Afrocentric paradigm in Social Work is founded on the existence of principles that are identical with Ubuntu values and ethics towards service to humanity. The practice of Social Work in Africa was guided by westernized theories that were far much removed from the traditional reality. Twikirize and Spitzer (2019) note that Ubuntu is an African philosophical framework in Social Work that is rooted in cooperation and working together. The problems that Africa face do not emanate from individualized circumstances as some come from families and others societies or within communities. This denotes use of theories and interventions that speak to the needs of the local African people. According to Mungai (2015), the Afrocentric approach in Social Work is based on African philosophies, history, culture, values and ethics. Use of these determinants informs the formulation and implementation of Ubuntu paradigm shift towards Social Work through which African cultures and values are taken into consideration. In African Social Work, there is need to value collectivity, reciprocity, spirituality and interconnectedness of individuals and families within their local structures something which was affected by modernity as well as market forces. (Mungai, 2015). According to Mtapuri and Mazengwa (2013), there is clear evidence from Zimbabwe that poverty alleviation strategies that are divorced from people's spiritual worldview are doomed to fail as was the case of dam building, irrigation schemes and HIV/AIDS Programmes in the country. Although, this interpretation may be seen as undoing the long-term benefits of Christianity, these long-held beliefs have stood the tests of times and are central to Social Development of the many rural people in African communities.

The wholesale importation of western theories, models and intervention strategies has led Social Work to become a borrowed profession that is fast losing relevance in the eyes of the generality of African populace (Dziro, 2013). Use of these imported material made life tough for Social Workers as their work is not normally considered under "critical sectors" for economic development. As such, very limited resources are committed for the same cause making interventions so difficult to implement that their failure is always at sight. To make matters worse, the interventions attempted are far-fetched and divorced from reality. In short, this makes it a hurdle to address modern challenges faced by the local people which emanate from their indigenous systems. It is against this background that Africanisation of Social Work should address such an anomaly for attainment of Social Development amongst the Social Work Clientele. According to Mungai (2015), the Concept of *Sankofa* (interpreted a bird in Ghana that is looking back but going forward) is a way to go in the Africanization of Social Work. This entails that it is crucial for African Social Workers to take into considerations history, cultures, values and available systems in order to come up with sustainable and prosperous interventions. It can also be argued that the Africanization of Social Work should not be an instrument for the restoration of the "old vices of oppression" and reversing the positive gains of globalization that brought a level ground on gender, human rights and respect for humanity. Hence, the call for Africanization of Social Work through design, planning, implementation and evaluation of locally developed models for sustainable Social Development is the way to go if the profession is to regain its place amongst other upcoming economically-oriented "professional giants".

According to Mungai (2015), the Afrocentric paradigm has identical principles with Ubuntu which in Africa exemplifies African values and ethics in the service of humanity. It has become a common trend that Social Work practice in Africa borrows much from the western theories and philosophical orientations and these are used as reference points. This widely shared belief has come with it shortfalls when addressing Social Work problems in Africa since it does not consider or seek strengths that people find in their indigenous systems. The African way of doing things value collectivism, norm of reciprocity, spirituality and connectedness of people in addressing presenting socio-economic and political problems. The same also goes to the traditional interventions when solving the psychological or mental health problems during which religious and traditional circles are consulted. In the African world view, community development is more culturally relevant than individual casework favoured

in western Social Work (Mungai, 2015). According to Ife (2010), Community Development includes Social Development, economic development, political development, culturally development, environmental development and spiritual development. According to Mbuki (2012), self-help group is a common practice in African context and important for sustainable development. In the mutual assistance, *mukando* is a self-help intervention in the African context and can be used to address poverty. This is supported by Mtapuro and Mazengwa (2013) who note that extended family spans in Africa creates a source of mutual support, social cohesion and promotes provision of safety nets that act as products of *Hunhu/Ubuntu*. Kitetu (2010), mutual aid also plays a big role in African American communities as is the case of Kenyan diaspora women groups in United Kingdom. All these products of *Ubuntuism* have seen Africans graduating from abject poverty and assisting each other to come up with sustainable life skills for development.

## NEW FACE OF UBUNTUISM FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

The practice of Ubuntuism has taken a new twist that has found relevance in addressing the Social Development in Africa. Respect for spirituality, collectivism, consultation and interconnectedness is now being practiced in different spheres of influence that range from religion, professional fields and traditionalism. In Social Work Practice, professionals respect individualization, self-determination, social justice, confidentiality and cultural diversity. However, these values and principles are not absolute when dealing with the mentally ill, children, involuntary clients (Wilson et al, 2008). There is need to take note of the new urbanized families that are replacing the traditional and rural systems in the form of churches, societies, cooperatives and clubs. In the Ministry of Health and Child Care (MoHCC) Zimbabwe, there is development of Community ART Review Groups (CARGs). In churches, Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) and Roman Catholic Church, there is use of concept “tete and sekuru” and “advisors” or “elders” who are revered as important leaders who act as arbiters of Ubuntuism in their religious circles. These advisors are found in all orthodox and mushrooming Pentecostal churches. The principle of having “*china chemadzimai*” in the Zimbabwean context and guilds in churches presents the new face of ‘Ubuntuing’ towards the preservation of humanity in the African context. This is a call for attention to be paid by Social Workers with regards to the importance of and contribution by these influential circles towards addressing social, psychological and economic problems faced by the African people. It should not be forgotten that African communities attach more authority to religious and social affiliations more than they get from professionals. In Zimbabwe, the power held by traditional healers is now being in the hands of pastors and prophets who can either convince or dissuade whole congregation to participate in national or community programmes. The ‘Spirit of Pentecostalism’ held by the followers of Zaoga Forward in Faith Mission led by Ezekiel Guti in Zimbabwe is a good example of the importance of preserving the principles of Ubuntu through collectivity.

The concept of Ubuntu should be contextualized and applied in many contexts and fields for Social Work practice. Departments of Social Welfare in Africa should embrace Ubuntuism in their practice since they are main domains for Social Work Clientele and cover issues related to child welfare, social welfare and welfare of the War Veterans. At this juncture, there is need to ensure application of *Ubuntuism* in orphanages or children’s homes. Orphanages and other children’s institutions have to ensure that all Orphanages are using the household/ family-based models. For example, Department of Social Welfare Zimbabwe should put in place strategies for community engagement on fostering of children to improve on their community integration and promoting Ubuntuism among them. In Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Services (ZPCS) are doing correction and rehabilitation. Factoring in room for spiritual interventions in the case management systems and case care plans, Family Therapy should always form part of the therapy in the view of wanting to preserve life over Confidentiality. To promote the utility of Ubuntu in Social Work practice and Social Development, there is need to consider introduction of courses on spirituality. According to Mugumbate and Nyanguru (2013), there is a strong link between spirituality and Social Work that has been forgotten in Social Work education and practice. This was supported by Mabvurira (2016) who noted that Social Work in Zimbabwe should embrace issues of religion in its practice. Issues of religiosity and denominational dogmas point to command and power that the spiritual world has in people’s lives and Social Work clients are no exception. It is to this background that National Association of Social Work Students, National Association of Social Workers and Council of Social Workers should oversee development of frameworks that promote Social Development through publications in African Journal of Social Work, workshops, lecture series and posting of related material on the websites or internet. However, financial constraints and takes time to re-orient practitioners into this new emerging developmental approach towards solving problems in Africa. Thus, it needs the courage by Social Workers in Africa themselves to raise their voices and use innovative methods to spread the gospel of Ubuntuism, Ubuntuing of Social Work or Afrocentric Social Work across Africa and beyond.

## CONCLUSION

The Ubuntuing of Social Work is an important step towards using locally contextual, relevant and sustainable interventions that are promising to Social Development in Africa. This presents a platform for development of Afrocentric models and strategies that are meant for poverty alleviation in Africa. Presentation of Ubuntu Cycle in this paper should provide an advanced stage of localizing Social Work and developing frameworks that have high chances of success when exported to other non-African countries and meeting the needs of African descents abroad. The Ubuntu Cycle presented put much focus on consulting of the Ubuntu Bowl and preservation of life as basic tenets for characterizing the Ubuntuing of Social Work Practice. In this period of economic, social and political uncertainties Ubuntu concept restores cooperation and empathetic feelings towards tackling global issues. It has been made clear in this paper that Ubuntuing is not only a concept that exists in African countries and Social Work profession alone as other non-African economies and religious circles have embraced and adopted the dictates of this emerging paradigm. The rate at which academics, researchers and practitioners are embracing the Ubuntu theory and concept points to promising future for its efficacy towards poverty alleviation within and without African borders.

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