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The value of ubuntu towards the fight against corruption in Zimbabwe: a social work perspective

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ABSTRACT

The place of Ubuntu in the fight against corruption in Zimbabwe is critical. If the battle against corruption in Zimbabwe is to be won, there is need for reestablishment of the spirit of Ubuntu in the citizens. This paper argues that corruption in Zimbabwe is mainly a result of abandonment of the Ubuntu in Zimbabwe. The erosion of the Ubuntu spirit in the citizenry has thus inculcated selfishness and greed in the citizenry, hence motivating the desire for corruption in many. Therefore, if corruption is to be curbed, there is need for a holistic approach by all stakeholders in ensuring that Ubuntu is inculcated in the citizenry in order to replace selfishness and greed with brotherly and sisterly concern, love and compassion. In all the efforts, social work as a profession with people at heart is indebted of playing a key role in facilitating reverberation of Ubuntu in the citizenry through academic and professional influence. Given the condition that social work succeeds in reverberating Ubuntu in Zimbabwe which is intended to fight corruption and the social rot it has caused, equity, social justice and empowerment of the people will be achieved.

KEY TERMS: ubuntu, corruption, social work, Zimbabwe

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INTRODUCTION

Corruption is defined as behaviour that deviates from formal duties because of private gains (Mishra, 2006: 349). Corruption in Zimbabwe's various sectors has risen to unfathomable proportions. The impact it has deposited on society in Zimbabwe is perpetual poverty, increased inequality and low citizenry confidence in the government. Corruption has thus permeated all classes in Zimbabwe which suffice to say even grassroots communities in the country have accepted and are perpetrating corruption as a normal way of conducting business. The situation has gone abyss. Anecdotal and scholastic evidence indicate that various sectors in Zimbabwe are now riddled with corruption. Such sectors include the delivery of social welfare services such as grain distribution, the mining sector and the education sector. In this paper, it is argued that the perforation of corruption in Zimbabwe's various sectors is an evident result of a causal societal rot. The societal rot in this case relates to erosion and decay of Ubuntu (being humane) and all its values in the citizenry. Therefore, it has thus become a norm that sticking to the values of Ubuntu which are love, the spirit of empathy and brotherhood does not pay. As such, citizens have abandoned the spirit of Ubuntu. There is therefore the need for social work in Zimbabwe to re-establish in its curricula and practice Ubuntu so as to help in the fight against corruption in sectors such as social welfare and social services. In this article I define corruption as the decay of integrity and humaneness in individuals that occupy institutions which results in the individuals misusing power and public resources for private benefits. Corruption is thus a form of faulty moral behaviour; an immorality that leads to sensuality and greed which in turn lead to individuals striving to benefit at the expense and suffering of the vulnerable.

BACKGROUND

Transparency International (2018) indicates that the 2018 Corruption Perceptions Index highlights Zimbabwe as among countries that are making little or no progress in ending corruption. Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index ranks 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption. The Index uses a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean. It is established by Transparency International (2018) that in 2017, across the world, New Zealand and Denmark rank highest with scores of 89 and 88 respectively. This implies that, corruption is very low in New Zealand and Denmark. Syria, South Sudan and Somalia rank lowest with scores of 14, 12 and 9 respectively and therefore, corruption is highest in these countries. Zimbabwe is ranked as one of the most corrupt countries in the world with level 20 as indicated by Transparency International (2018). It could be established that according to Transparency International (2018)'s report on the level of corruption, corruption thrives most in developing countries such as Syria, South Sudan, Somalia and Zimbabwe. In countries where socio-economic development has managed to take some positive strides, corruption is low. In developed countries with low levels of corruption, there is effective social welfare services delivery. In countries with high levels of corruption, there is poor social welfare services delivery coupled with abject poverty. A survey by Transparency International in 2016 also indicated that corruption in Zimbabwe has become endemic within political, private and civil sectors as in that year, Zimbabwe ranked 154th out of 176 countries in the 2016 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CORRUPTION AND LACK OF UBUNTU IN ZIMBABWE

Ubuntu can be described as the capacity in an African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, humanity and mutuality in the interests of building and maintaining communities with justice and mutual caring (Almond, 2005., 2006: 6; Metz, 2009: 103; Mandela, 2006; Tutu, 1999: 34-35). Ubuntu is based on the adage that "I am because we are, we are therefore I am". The Ubuntu philosophy which is integrated into all aspects of African day to day life, optimises the indigenous setting of African organisations and communities by believing in group solidarity which shapes individual behaviour (Russell, 1991). According to Ngowi (2005: 75), an African is not a rugged individual, but a person living within a community. Given a hostile environment characterised by high levels of corruption such as in Zimbabwe, lack of compassion, humanity, dignity and mutuality in maintaining a Zimbabwe with justice and mutual caring play a role by influencing corrupt behaviour in individuals as selfishness and individualism instil the desire to benefit through corruption in individuals who occupy various institutions. This means that, corruption in Zimbabwe is due to abandonment of Ubuntu spirit that has resulted in loss of community solidarity, care, cooperation and brotherly and sisterly concern. Since brotherly and sisterly concern has been abandoned by most Zimbabweans and replaced with greed, selfishness and primitive accumulation of wealth at the perpetual suffering of the majority, individuals at various levels in different sectors are engaging in self-seeking behaviour that has bred extreme levels of corruption.

Below is a typical example found in Mtetwa (2018: 8) which shows lack of care, respect for human life and love for others:

"On 10 March 2016, at Deve Business Centre, Ward 24, ZANU PF Councillor ordered the distribution of maize and openly declared that only those villagers who supported ZANU PF particularly during the previous by-elections would receive maize. The councillor then directed both welfare officers and traditional leaders present

that only ZANU PF supporters would receive maize. He threatened villagers that those who remain defiant by continuing to support other political parties would starve”.

The above example is typical lack of Ubuntu among Zimbabweans in that, human welfare is now being sacrificed for political interests. In a typical African society characterised by Ubuntu, such a distribution of maize would be conducted in a non-partisan way that would see everyone deserving to get the maize receiving it no matter what their political affiliations could be. Since the survival of a human being in Africa is dependent on other people, when a human being is deprived of benefiting from what they deserve, Ubuntu would have been set aside.

Lack of Ubuntu values at different levels in Zimbabwe could also be argued to have necessitated rational egoism in corrupt individuals. Sandstrom and Sandstrom (2005) define rational egoism as the primary concern by groups such as politicians and bureaucrats whose primary concern is benefitting their own interests. Resultantly, faulty character has been instilled in individuals. This faulty character based on greed has thus consumed morality of individuals who serve in various capacities such as the Zimbabwe Republic Police, some social welfare officers and the country's politicians. It could therefore be argued that abandonment of Ubuntu in the Zimbabwean society is to blame for the high levels of corruption in the country. This has further initiated indirect effects such as increased poverty and inequality since corruption has made people abandon the spirit of sharing and egalitarianism. As such, everyone now seeks to be on top of the other through corruption.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION

According to the International Federation of Social Workers (2014) social work promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. It is underpinned by principles of social justice, human rights and collective responsibility. From this definition, one can argue that there is an inextricable relationship between social work and the spirit of Ubuntu. This is because social work seeks to promote social cohesion and empowerment and liberation of people. The initial link between social work and Ubuntu is social work's bid to promote social cohesion. By its definition, social cohesion refers to the willingness of members to cooperate with each other in order to survive and prosper (Stanely, 2003). By willingness to cooperate, it means people freely choose to form partnerships. Through these partnerships, they have reasonable chance of realizing goals. Initially, it is arguable that social work in its bid to promote social cohesion in Zimbabwe should reverberate the spirit of Ubuntu so that citizens realise the need to cooperate. This would be helpful if social work facilitates citizenry partnerships in Zimbabwe that are aimed at acting against corruption in the country. To realize this goal, people have to be educated through social work that there power in citizens' cooperation and acting against corruption through means such as social action. By doing so, it could be argued that the spirit of Ubuntu would be restored.

Since social work is centred on principles of social justice, it could further be proposed that there can never be social justice when there is no consideration of Ubuntu. Therefore, allegiance to the spirit of Ubuntu in the social work profession in Zimbabwe will establish mutuality in the interests of building and maintaining a Zimbabwe with justice and mutual caring. Hence, such a Zimbabwe that has got mutual caring and justice will arguably be free from corruption.

The journey to restore the spirit of Ubuntu start sby establishing a curricula in social work academic studies that has studies on Ubuntu. This will orient social workers on training with Ubuntu values. Once equipped with these values, the trained social workers will thus be able to lead by example in shunning corruption. As they shun corruption, since they deal directly with the citizenry, social workers will have a direct and indirect effect on influencing Ubuntu values in communities.

Other activities that the social work profession in Zimbabwe may engage in involve participation in policy formulation and implementation in Zimbabwe (Dudzai, 2018). All policies that are formulation should be anchored on Ubuntu. With such policies that are based on Ubuntu, corruption will thus be regarded as a pure form of deviant behaviour whose perpetrators should not be accommodated or accepted in any part of Zimbabwean society.

Ubuntu is the missing ingredient in the fight against corruption in Zimbabwe. Corrupt individuals in the country do not possess the spirit of Ubuntu. Social work in Zimbabwe is therefore indebted of re-establishing the spirit of Ubuntu in academic studies and professional practice at all levels so as to help curb corruption in the country. Having achieved that, equity, social justice and empowerment of the majority will be established.

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