
Editorial

Journal of Social Development in Africa
School of Social Work (Midlands State University)
Corner Chinhoyi & Grant Street, Harare
editor@jsda.msu.ac.zw, managingeditor@jsda.msu.ac.zw

Editor-in-Chief
Victor N. Muzvidziwa

This special issue consists of eight articles focusing on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in sub Saharan Africa. The COVID-19 global pandemic has and is altering the lives of peoples in Africa and around the World. Apart from the massive loss of life, the disease is affecting individuals, families, communities and countries socially, economically, politically and psychologically. Furthermore, as illustrated by the papers in this volume, the legacy of the disease will be far reaching, affecting the social development prospects and arrangements of counties. The pandemic will no doubt greatly impact on the continent of Africa given its weak economies and poor social protection systems.

The COVID-19 pandemic has leap frogged many countries into uncharted waters and forced almost everyone to a life under the 'new normal'. In some circles Southern Africa has become the epicentre of the COVID-19 pandemic. The first article by Jotham Dhemba and Vuyo Gama entitled “The Socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 and the Social Work Response in Southern Africa”, examines the impact of COVID-19 on selected Southern African societies. This paper draws mostly from secondary sources of data that include the Internet, print and electronic media, published journal articles and research reports drawing mostly from three African countries namely, Eswatini, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Unfortunately the impact has been disproportionate and is having dire consequences on the poor, the marginalized and vulnerable households. The three countries have implemented a raft of measures such as curfews, lockdowns, maintenance of social distance, masking and sanitising all intended to limit and prevent the spread of COVID-19. It has been observed that COVID-19 responses in the three countries has seen a decline in economic performance, an increase in unemployment, poverty and hunger. The social work profession is critical in coming up with effective responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus of social workers should be on containment, taking care of the sick and vulnerable, observance of social justice and coming up with comprehensive social protection measures that seek to strengthen individuals, families and communities' resilience to COVID-19 shocks.

The second article by O. Mbeve, V. P. Nyambuya, A. Munyoro, N. Dube and K. Shumba is entitled “The Challenges faced and survival strategies adopted by Zimbabwean informal traders that live in Johannesburg inner-city, during the COVID-19 induced lockdown in South Africa”. This is a qualitative study based on a sample of 15 participants, 13 informal Zimbabwean migrant traders and two key informants (social workers) operating in the Johannesburg inner-city area. The study explored in detail the challenges faced and survival strategies of Zimbabwean informal migrant traders during the COVID-19 induced lockdown in South Africa. While the lockdown increased the vulnerability of the informal migrant traders it also demonstrated resilience and innovation in the face of increased adversity. Zimbabwean informal migrant traders were able to establish new and mutually beneficial relations with local law enforcement officers and the community. Despite the fact that being a Zimbabwean migrant as well as an informal trader carried with it a state of double jeopardy many were able to thrive under adversity. Informal Zimbabwean

migrant traders are a heterogeneous but vulnerable group whose strengths and resilience need support by the state and policy makers.

The third article by Casmir Chukwuka Mbaegbu and Chukwudi Christopher Nwokolo is entitled the “Political Economy of COVID-19 and Women in the Informal Sector in Africa: Survey Data Evidence from Nigeria”. The study is situated in Nsukka local government area Nigeria. The three selected markets were located in the urban, semi-urban and rural settings. The survey questionnaire elicited 357 valid responses. Just like in most parts of Africa COVID-19 induced lockdowns resulted in loss of income and increasing impoverishment of the poor and vulnerable mostly women informal traders. Social protection measures and safety nets are severely limited and generally non-existent in Africa. An analysis of the survey data shows that only two variables namely income and type of product sold by the women informal traders significantly predict whether the lockdown had an effect on women informal traders or not. Women selling foodstuffs fared fairly better than those selling non-food items mainly because the lockdown regulations only permitted those selling foodstuffs to do so. The material conditions of women in the informal sector in Nsukka worsened due to the socio-economic consequences of COVID-19. There is a lack of social security safety nets and COVID-19 is widening the inequality gap between men and women.

The fourth article by Samuel Lisenga Simbine, Noel Garikai Muridzo, Victor Chikadzi and Itai Mafa entitled “Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic in Zimbabwe: Lessons from 2018 Cholera Outbreak”, draws lessons from Zimbabwe's past experiences of managing the cholera outbreak. The paper used secondary analysis of qualitative data of an empirical study done

in 2019 in Budiriro suburb in Harare. The paper argues that it might be prudent for Zimbabwe to learn from its successful strategies in dealing with cholera. Strategies used to combat cholera could be useful in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper identifies five strategies that were useful in the fight against cholera. The five strategies are: awareness campaigns, family and contact tracing, coordination of response, setting up of isolation and treatment centres as well as distribution of food and non-food items. These strategies dovetail very well with COVID-19's care, prevention, screening, diagnosis, treatment, and prognosis. WHO recommended strategies to combat COVID-19 look quite similar to Zimbabwe's strategies to combat cholera. The WHO strategies entail the following quarantine, isolation, treatment, raising awareness of the community in order to curb the spread of the pandemic, tightening on contact tracing and adopting a coherent coordinated response to the challenge. Zimbabwe stand to benefit from its past experiences in dealing with cholera.

The fifth article by J. Makhubele, V. Mabvurira, F. Matlakala and P. Mafa is entitled “Traditional beliefs and practices versus public health approach to COVID-19: Perspectives of social work academics in Zimbabwe”. The study influenced by the health belief model explores perspectives of social work academics in Zimbabwe with regards to the interface between traditional African beliefs, practices, public health measures, African values and COVID-19. The study adopted a qualitative research approach that embraces a plurality of experiences and a diversity of understandings on COVID-19. The study adopted an exploratory case study research design to assess perspectives of social work academics. A total of 11 social work academics participated in the study. There are lessons, positives, practices and experiences within the traditional setting that can be mobilized in our efforts to fight the pandemic. It would appear

though that most of the 11 academics seem to see the traditional African beliefs as archaic thus old fashioned.

Sibonokuhle Ndlovu's article entitled “The impact of COVID-19 on students with disabilities' access to education in South Africa” seeks to unpack how COVID-19 is impacting learning outcomes of students with disability. The paper relies mostly on data drawn from existing literature in Google Scholar, ProQuest, journal articles and online sources. The paper concluded that COVID-19 has increased the exclusion of students with disability when it comes to learning outcomes. It is strongly argued that incorporating principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) into teaching practice and training of academics will lead to effective interventions that will increase the inclusion of students with disability. Dialogue and consultations with students with disability is a must as this will lead to improved learning outcomes. Student with disability are a source of information on how best to deal with COVID-19 and how this can positively shape learning outcomes. Dialogue and consultation will minimize exclusion of students with disability in terms of learning under lockdown conditions. A 'new learning normal' for students with disability demands a rethinking, re-imagining, recreating teaching and learning terrain and as well as unlearning of old ways of imparting knowledge and skills.

The seventh paper by Sauti Christian is entitled “A critical reflection of trade union representation during COVID-19 pandemic: A case of General Agriculture and Plantation Workers Union of Zimbabwe's members in Mutare”. This paper seeks to examine the impact of COVID-19 on employment in the agriculture sector as well as the actions taken by the General Agriculture and Plantation Workers Union of Zimbabwe (GAPWUZ) in trying to safeguard employee interests and rights.

The study adopted qualitative research methodology and an exploratory multiple case study approach. A total of 44 conveniently and purposively selected members of GAPWUZ, HR and management staff from the agricultural sector were interviewed. The paper observed that the advent of COVID-19 has created new workplace challenges as well as deepened existing challenges faced by agricultural workers. These challenges include long working hours, unsafe working conditions, non-payment of overtime and unfair termination of employment contracts. Trade Unions are called upon to do more to enhance and safeguard the rights and interests of workers in the agricultural sector. There is a need for GAPWUZ to rebuild trust between employers and employees. There is also a need to strengthen workers representatives through training and education. As a trade union GAPWUZ should create other revenue generating activities in order to support its constituency during crisis times.

The last paper by Ajwang Warriia entitled “The Human trafficking continuum and COVID-19: rights, risks and recommended protective actions”, examines the role of disasters in the human trafficking continuum. COVID-19 is threatening to exacerbate challenges faced by victims of trafficking and threatens to amplify existing inequalities and risks. A rights based approach should be embraced when it comes to dealing with groups such as trafficked persons. Inclusivity is guaranteed through a rights based approach which will ensure safety of at risk groups and victims of trafficking. COVID-19 while posing as a serious problem should enable social workers and other practitioners to identify gaps and see opportunities to make communities adopt fair, just and sustainable lasting solutions to challenges facing trafficked persons.