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Editorial: Celebrating 40 issues of the JSDA and Midlands State University's silver jubilee: Looking at some of the developmental problems in Southern Africa

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This 40th issue of the Journal of Social Development in Africa (JSDA) coincides with Midlands State University's (MSU) Silver Jubilee celebrations, marking twenty-five remarkable years of academic excellence and innovation in Zimbabwe's educational landscape. MSU warmly invites you to be part of these extraordinary celebrations that commemorate this momentous occasion and milestone (Midlands State University, 2025). The MSU's thrust over the years has been to provide innovative research which has the potential to contribute to the development of Zimbabwe, Southern Africa, and the rest of the world, and this issue is complementary as it touches on key developmental problems affecting the Southern African region.

This issue consists of six articles containing research and review articles from across Southern Africa. The focus of the issue is mostly on housing issues (South Africa), substance use treatment among women (South Africa), food insecurity in rural Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe), social media use among Gen Z adolescents (Zimbabwe), women empowerment in small-scale farming

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(Zimbabwe), and social protection programs (Botswana). These are some of the most prevalent socio-economic issues affecting social development across the Southern African region (Jauch, 2011), and the amelioration of these problems will indubitably help countries in this region gravitate towards meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Africa's Agenda 2063, and local development goals and targets particular to each country. We contend, in line with Jauch (2011) that it is now time to turn the tide and ensure that we come up with concrete solutions to the social problems in Southern Africa. Without spirited efforts, we will continue rolling within the vicious cycle of underdevelopment. This issue also comes in the background of war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (another developmental problem in Africa), and the recent aid freeze by the United States government to developing countries. Many African governments seem disturbed by the aid freeze because most social welfare programs across the continent depend on aid. However, taking from Dambisa Moyo's book, 'Dead Aid,' we contend that this must be a wake-up call for African governments to devise independent and sustainable solutions to all social problems across the continent.

In the past issues, the JSDA has published cutting-edge research, which has been instrumental in strengthening social development discourse across the African continent. Articles in all 40 issues have come from almost all African countries, and the journal has continued to be pivotal in instigating arguments and conversations on socio-economic development across the continent. The first article in this issue is a review article on the housing-education nexus in South Africa, and it proffers implications for social work and policy. In this article, Sobantu, Mwedzi and Noyoo, through a social development and social policy perspective, provide a compelling argument about the dividends that accrue from integrating housing and education planning in South Africa. They argue that the rights to housing and education are social investments that promote human, social and economic development and that COVID-19 had implications on both education and housing, making this moment, a perfect one for a turn-around. The authors then recommend research to help

embed and strengthen this nexus, not only from a theoretical level but also from collaborative implementation processes.

The second article in this issue by Sukulao, Kurevakwesu, Tshugulu, Matanga & Muridzo focuses on the perceived causes and consequences of food insecurity in rural Zimbabwe and the authors used a decolonised methodology. This comes at a time when calls for decolonisation are becoming strong across the world (Kurevakwesu, 2023). The study was conducted in Kotwa, Mudzi district, Zimbabwe as a response to the recent El Niño-induced drought, which worsened the poverty situation in rural agro-based communities. The authors found out that the perceived causes of food insecurity, in the study area include a lack of adequate rainfall, high temperatures, poor soils, laziness and dependence, as well as poverty and unemployment. The consequences that were identified include poor physical and mental health, domestic violence, child marriages, crime, and family disintegration. It was then recommended that there is a need to assist rural agro-based populations with resources and knowledge to produce food despite adverse climatic conditions, and the revival of traditional food insecurity practices like the *Zunde raMambo* to ensure that communities can rescue households that are food insecure, and not wait for external intervention, among other recommendations. African ways of knowing (*ruzivo rwevanhu*) such as *Zunde raMambo* should be encouraged if Sustainable Goals especially Goal 1: No poverty, Goal 2: Zero hunger, and Goal 3: Good health and well-being, are to be achieved in the face of climate change (Muyambo & Marashe, 2020).

The third article by Mafa and Chigwedere is a study on digital socialisation and self-identity among adolescent girls in Harare, Zimbabwe. The authors used the psychosocial theory of development and the social learning theory and focused on the psycho-social effects of social media use on Generation Z adolescent girls. The qualitative study established that many young girls suffer from body dysmorphic disorder as they feel that their bodies are not consistent with the ideal figures depicted on social media platforms. Others also acquired a 'borrowed identity' to 'fit' into ideal social categories, leading to a low concept of self. It was also reflected that most female adolescents are

addicted to social media platforms due to the fear of missing out on trending issues. Ultimately, this affects their worldview and how they interpret themselves and the world around them. The researchers then promote the introduction of school social work to strengthen the cognitive processing agency for young girls and educate guardians and teachers on interceptive child-protection practices that can assist them in monitoring children's online presence for improved digital well-being. Although school social work is a large and growing subspecialty in social work practice, this specialisation is not common in developing countries. Where they are found they exist in privileged schools. When introduced School social workers will support students' educational success, especially those marginalised by poverty, oppression, disability and other personal or social problems (Huxtable, 2022).

In article four, Baloyi and Khosa qualitatively investigated the voices of social workers on the barriers that women face in accessing substance use treatment services in Limpopo province, South Africa. They used a feminist lens and examined the perspectives of social workers coordinating substance use programmes in South Africa's Limpopo province on the barriers that women face in accessing substance use treatment services. Interviews which were conducted with 20 social workers within the Department of Social Development show that women encounter personal barriers like a lack of motivation to change and denial about the substance use problem, together with external obstacles such as the shortage of treatment facilities and limited government investment in substance use treatment. The authors then recommend the government of South Africa invest more financial resources in substance use treatment to address some of the barriers that women face when seeking treatment.

In a subsequent article, Nyamaka and Kurebwa conducted a study on the socio-economic benefits of women's empowerment in small-scale farming in Raffingora, Zimbabwe. The authors argue that when land was redistributed in Zimbabwe at the turn of the millennium, women were significant beneficiaries, despite the presence of a gender dimension in the process. Their examination focuses on the socio-economic advantages of women's empowerment within small-scale farming (A1 farming). Utilizing a

qualitative exploratory case study design, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with 24 participants and 5 key informants. The data, analysed through thematic analysis, revealed that participants experienced several benefits from women empowerment programs in farming, including asset accumulation, decision-making independence, improved nutrition, better housing conditions, and enhanced agricultural practices, despite facing numerous challenges. The researchers emphasize the necessity of including women in agricultural decision-making processes by dismantling gender barriers to ensure the full realization of sustainable agriculture and women's empowerment.

Article number six, which is the final article in this issue, was authored by Gunhidzirai and Rankopo and focuses on the governance of social protection programmes (SSPs) for poverty alleviation in Botswana. The review article, which resonates with another study by Kurevakwesu et al. (2021) from Zimbabwe, employs stakeholder theory as a framework and underscores that the governance of Social Protection Policies (SPPs) is a significantly under-researched area within Botswana's social policy landscape. Utilising an exploratory case study design alongside document analysis, the authors found that, while vulnerable groups do benefit from SPPs, wealth distribution remains inequitable, leading to the marginalisation of certain communities. Key governance strategies identified include stakeholder engagement, public awareness initiatives, and oversight from the Department of Social Development. The study points out several challenges, such as insufficient coordination among various government bodies and capacity limitations faced by social workers. It calls for enhanced government transparency in social protection measures to tackle structural inequalities and empower citizens, offering valuable insights for the advancement of SPPs in Botswana and similar emerging economies.

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