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ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF
PROFESSOR EDWELL KASEKE
AND DR MATHIAS NYENTI

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CHAPTER 3

Reviewing the Contribution of Professor Edwell Kaseke to Social Work in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This chapter is dedicated to a departed colleague and friend Prof Edwell Kaseke who passed away in August 2017 following a battle with cancer. It recalls the contribution and achievements of Prof Kaseke towards the development of social work in Zimbabwe. He was a renowned Social Work Expert who contributed immensely to the history and development of modern social work in Zimbabwe. In his research work Prof Kaseke focussed on a social development approach that placed greater significance on macro-interventions that reached the individual or local communities and recognised the needs for structures that were not responsive to human needs, such as land reform, rural development, employment creation, economic reform programmes, development theories, donor aid and globalisation.

Keywords: Education, social work, social development, training, Zimbabwe

3.1

Introduction

Prof Edwell Kaseke began his academic pursuits by obtaining his Diploma in Social Work in 1979 and a Bachelor of Social Work in 1980 from the University of Zimbabwe. He later obtained a Master of Science in Social Planning in 1982 from the London School of Economics and Political Science. In 1994, he obtained a Doctor of Philosophy, Social Studies from the University of Zimbabwe. At the time of his death, he was Chair of Social Work in the School of Human and Community Development at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in Johannesburg, South Africa. Apart from this core responsibility, he served as a member of the Editorial Board of the

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Journal of Social Development in Africa; a member of the International Advisory Board of the African Journal of Social Work, Overseas Corresponding Member for the Journal of Social Policy and Administration and as an Editorial Board member of internationally acclaimed International Social Work Journal.

He served as Africa region representative on the Executive Committee and sat on the Board of Directors of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW). He was also a member of the Southern African Social Protection Experts Network (SASPEN) Advisory Council. At one point, he served as President of the IASSW for Eastern and Southern Africa. It was during a meeting of the Core Group of Social Security Specialists in Southern Africa and later SASPEN that the author interacted with Prof Kaseke. This chapter highlights the major contribution of Prof Kaseke to the field of social work.

3.2

History and development of social work in Zimbabwe

The history and development of modern social work in Zimbabwe cannot be fully told without mention of Prof Kaseke whose name resonates with everything social work in Zimbabwe. He rose from being a social work graduate and social worker in the 1980s to becoming an educator and the most well-known social work academic and administrator in Zimbabwe.

One of his contemporaries, Prof Rodreck Mupedziswa¹ described Prof Kaseke as an “intelligent, transformative, and strategic thinker whose love and passion for social work in the greater scheme of things was second to none”. For most of his former social work students at the School of Social Work (SSW, University of Zimbabwe), he was an academic mentor par-excellence, who inspired many of them now to become proud academics and outstanding professionals in their own right. The SSW produced half a dozen or so students who proceeded to acquire PhDs outside the country, a huge achievement for a small obscure school that only begun offering degree programmes in 1975.

In his landmark article, “Social Work Practice in Zimbabwe”,² Prof Kaseke observed that the growth of social work in Zimbabwe was closely knitted to Zimbabwe’s colonial past and this was reflected in its orientation which followed British social work. He noted that social work was developed to respond to urban social ills such as delinquency, prostitution and destitution. The idea of the colonial policymakers was to solve those social ills because if left unattended to, they would challenge societal order and stability and hence affect their grip on the colonial people.

1 Mupedziswa, R. 2018. “Tribute to Professor Edwell Kaseke 9 October 1954 to 28 August 2017.” *African Journal of Social Work*, 8:1.

2 Kaseke, E. 1991. “Social work practice in Zimbabwe.” *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 6:33-45.

He pointed out that social work was largely seen as a form of social control which was not meant to address the causes of social problems, and it was developed to deal with the effects of the social problems. Since the attainment of independence in 1980, there had been a steady swing towards developmental social work which was aimed at stimulating social change since it tried to directly ameliorate social evils and not the effects.

He further stated that social work practice in Zimbabwe tended to be curative and remedial. This was not only true of Zimbabwe but many developing countries. Social work practice in Zimbabwe reflected the wholesale transfer of social work practice from developed countries, particularly Britain, and was a response to the social problems associated with urbanisation and industrialisation. The focus, therefore, on problems such as destitution (arising from unemployment), marital conflict, disability and deviance were often conceived to threaten order and stability in society, hence the need to provide remedial services.

He further noted that social work had not been able to differentiate between individual and social causation. Many of the social problems that social workers handled using the casework method were only symptoms of structural problems, for which casework was an inappropriate response, akin to providing first aid where major surgery was required. The challenge therefore for social work was to transform itself so that the focus is on the root cause of social problems. Many of these problems were attributed to poverty, resulting from the working of political, social and economic structures.

Prof Kaseke further questioned whether social workers should be developing intervention methods that sought to address structural change in society? He was of the view that this was a mammoth task that required a multidisciplinary approach in which social workers would play an advocacy role on behalf of those disadvantaged by societal structures, work towards articulating the problems of the poor and powerless, and drawing the attention of policymakers to the impact of social structures on the wellbeing of people. This included projects to enable people to cope with the crippling effects of unemployment, the recession, drought, structural adjustment and more. Such projects offered real opportunities for income generation.

3.3

Social work education and training in Zimbabwe

One of Prof Kaseke's major contributions to Social Work in Zimbabwe was the modernisation of social work education and training in Zimbabwe.³ This was achieved by placing social work in Zimbabwe on the global stage through linkages with organisations such as the International Federations of Social Workers⁴ (IFSW); Journal of Social Development in Africa; the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW); Association of Schools of Social Work for Eastern and Southern Africa; Wits University and other international associations where he was actively involved as a Zimbabwean academic and intellectual.

He transformed the SSW; the only social work training institution in Zimbabwe at the time, from an obscure Institution founded and run by the Jesuit fathers, to one of the most respected institutions of learning in Central and Southern Africa.⁵ During his stewardship at the helm of the School of Social Work in Zimbabwe, he spearheaded some major improvements in the academic curriculum and effectively engaged key stakeholders, which included the Department of Social Welfare (biggest employer of social workers in Zimbabwe), Local Authorities through their Community Services Departments, the Ministry of Health in Zimbabwe, Local and International Organisations to improve the image of the profession in the country.

Due to his efforts, social work has been recognised as one of the most competitive and popular degree programmes at the University of Zimbabwe that attracts no less than 10 'A' level points to gain entry. Due to his work, emphasis on social work education and training in Africa shifted to a social development approach with greater significance on macro intervention to reach the individual or groups in society. The social work curriculum recognised the need to focus intervention primarily on those structures that were not responsive to human needs. Examples included land reform, rural development, employment creation, economic reform programmes, development theories, donor aid and globalisation. In recognition of the fact that social work education in Zimbabwe was inextricably linked to rural development strategies, students were encouraged to undertake at least one placement in a rural setting.

3 Kaseke, E. 2001a. "Social work education in Zimbabwe: Strengths and weaknesses, issues and challenges." *Journal of Social Work Education*, 20:101.

4 The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) is the global body for the profession. The Federation and its national members strive for social justice, human rights and inclusive, sustainable social development through the promotion of social work best practice and engagement in international cooperation.

5 Masuku, T. 2018. "Transforming social work in Zimbabwe from social control to social Change." *The Social Work Practitioner*, 27:204.

3.4

Social work employment in Zimbabwe

Prof Kaseke argued that social work in the industry was a new development in social work practice whose main tasks was to promote worker productivity and industrial harmony for sustained productivity. This role involved industrial relations, occupational safety, training and personal welfare of employees.

The Department of Social Welfare served as the largest single employer of social workers in Zimbabwe. Following its establishment in 1948, the department dealt with the problem of juvenile delinquency within the white settler community. Because of the absence of trained personnel in the country, the colonial government secured the services of probation officers from the United Kingdom (UK) to deal with such issues. The services of the Department were further expanded in 1965 to cater for public assistance, which previously had been a responsibility of the Department of Native Affairs. The Department of Social Welfare was the largest provider of social work training placements for students under the Ministry of Public Services and Social Welfare, Zimbabwe.

Prof Kaseke observed that, in terms of work placements, most social workers in Zimbabwe were mainly employed in hospitals and psychiatric institutions where they were involved in counselling patients with psychosocial problems and their families. However, social work in these settings had not been able to shape its role, which was instead defined by the medical practice. Other social workers were employed in other government departments with a developmental approach, such as the Ministries of Women and Community Development.

According to Prof Kaseke,⁶ the majority of social workers employed by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) were involved in developmental social work, with a specific bias towards rural areas to handle issues related to poverty alleviation and community mobilisation. They further assisted communities in the definition of their problems. Social workers were also employed as advocacy officers for marginalised groups or communities. His research further revealed that social workers in Zimbabwe were involved in the protection of consumers, research on issues affecting consumers, as well as the dissemination of information through the media. Others were employed by the Citizens Advice Bureau, providing advisory, information and referral service linking clients to appropriate services.

He further noted that the shortage of social workers in the country led to Sociology and Psychology graduates being employed as social workers. The economic crisis faced by Zimbabwe in the 1990s and 2000s resulted in the emigration of most social

⁶ Kaseke, 2001a, pp. 101-109.

workers to the UK, Canada, Australia, South Africa, the United States of America and many other countries where social work was widely recognised and where social workers were well recompensed.

3.5

Social Development as a Model of Social Work Practice

Prof Kaseke's other major contribution was towards the formulation of a Social Development Model for Social Work Practice.⁷ In this 2001 paper, he provided the historical context for a Social Development Model in Zimbabwe. In assessing the model, he acknowledged that there had not been any systematic evaluation of the social development model, mainly because the implementation of structural adjustment had placed the government in a vulnerable and dependent position where it no longer had a free hand in determining its economic and social policies. Consequently, policies were being determined largely by external forces – firstly due to limited space for social workers and secondly, social workers themselves had been slow in shaking off their old mantle, particularly those employed by the government.

He concluded the discussion on the social development model by reiterating that Zimbabwe had a long way to go before the objectives of social development could be fully realised. He called for the formulation of social policies that were responsive to human and community needs.

3.6

Conclusion

Prof Kaseke's immense contribution towards the advancement of social work was not only highly acclaimed in his country of origin, Zimbabwe, but in Africa and globally. He raised African scholarship through his various academic papers, book chapters, books and research projects. He was deeply passionate about building theories and bodies of knowledge in social work, social policy, social security and social development that were Afrocentric and relevant to Africa's development. Prof Kaseke will be remembered vividly for being at the epicentre of everything social work in Zimbabwe, Africa and internationally.

⁷ Kaseke, E. 2001b. *Social development as a model of social work practice: The experience of Zimbabwe*. Harare: School of Social Work [SSW] Staff Papers: Harare School of Social Work.

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