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EDITORIAL NOTE

The special issue comprises of articles that were presented at the Annual Social Workers Conference (CSW) and Winter School held on the 23rd to the 24th of April 2015 in Mutare, Zimbabwe. The theme for the conference was 'Fostering Regulation, Commitment, Innovation and Opportunities in the Fields of Social Work Practice in Zimbabwe'. This gathering put together social workers from all walks of life and was the fourth to be held under the auspices of the CSW in Zimbabwe. Intriguing exchanges between social work educators, researchers and practitioners characterized the conference and winter school. Presenters represented various practice fields including statutory spheres and social work practice with special groups. As is often the case, not all presentations found space in this special issue. This issue features six of the numerous research articles presented at this event. The six articles provide a detailed collection of current issues in statutory social work in Zimbabwe; specialized social work practice fields; and reflections on innovative social work practice and social work responses to an increasingly changing context.

The Children's Act (Chapter 5: 06) defines the role of social workers as probation officers who protect children in the country. Bhaiseni observes that despite the significance of the Children's Act in child protection and statutory social work with children, it remains misaligned with other legal instruments which influence child protection issues at various levels. The three main legal instruments Bhaiseni identifies includes the Constitution of Zimbabwe (Amendment No. 20 of 2013) which the parliament approved in 2013, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child (UNCRC) and the African Charter for the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). In a very succinct way, Bhaiseni identifies the gaps that need to be closed in order to align the Children Act with other key pieces of legislation. Whereas the Children's Act defines a child as someone under the age of sixteen, the National Orphan Care Policy specifies that a child is a person below the age of 18 years. These discrepancies also exist when one compares the Children's Act with the UNCRC and the ACRWC. The definitional issues are just the tip of the iceberg. Bhaiseni argues that some institutions and procedures that are critical in child protection are largely absent from the Act. He claims that the Act is tight-lipped on the issue of Child Protection Committees which have proved critical for child protection on the international arena. In Bhaiseni's reading of the Children's Act, there are no sufficient provisions for pre-trial diversion which promotes restorative and rehabilitative justice to children in conflict with law. This omission is significant given that the trial diversion system ensures that children do not get a criminal record which can taint their prospects in adult life or putting up with the stigma associated with criminal justice procedures while they remain accountable for wrongdoing. Bhaiseni's paper does not only reveal key gaps in the Children Act. It ends with recommendations which exhorts actors to start walking the talk and amend the Children's Act.

Beaula Ruparanganda and Lina Ruparanganda set out to document the recent reforms in Zimbabwe's juvenile justice system. They observe that the introduction of new legislation and policies after 2000 has provided a strong impetus for juvenile justice in the country. The promulgation of Constitution of Zimbabwe (Amendment No. 20 of 2013) and the implementation of policies and strategies such as National Action Plan for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (I and II) placed the rights of children in conflict with the law on the spot light. The article provides a detailed background to the national and international legal frameworks relevant to juvenile justice. Importantly, the authors reflect on the roles social workers play at three levels in the delivery of the juvenile justice systems. At the primary level, social workers play preventive roles focused on nipping the root causes of crime in the bud, while creating a preventive environment. The focus of social work intervention at the secondary level is risk factors that expose children to crime. Social workers, then, address risk factors through, for example, training parenting skills. Community work approaches which utilize family clubs are also relevant in this regard. The thrust of the tertiary level is to prevent re-offending of the children already in conflict with the law through facilitating effective rehabilitation.

In our reading of the article, it seems that there is an increased awareness among duty bearers of the rights of children in conflict with the law. In addition, the free legal assistance that children in conflict with the law get through the National Legal Assistance Strategy for Children (2012-2015) constitute a key service. Beaula Ruparanganda and Lina Ruparanganda show that although the reforms are promising, there is still a lot to be done. The pre-diversion trial programme, for example, has diverted a very high percentage of children in conflict with law (77 per cent). However, the authors observe that the trial programme is being implemented in Harare and Bulawayo, the two major cities in country. More resources are needed to roll out the programme throughout the country. The authors suggest that it is worthwhile to think about the most effective ways of engaging players in the private sector in this regard.

Increasingly, military social work is becoming a critical field of social practice. Soldiers that have spent some time in combat situations suffer from mental health-related problems including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which may in turn, give rise to further individual malfunctioning including substance abuse and domestic and gender-based violence. Prior to deployment, soldiers might require pre-deployment counselling and services such as housing and recreational services.

As a field of practice, military social work has been and remains an indispensable aspect of any effective army. The relevance of military social work as a field of practice is succinctly described by Runesu (this issue) who argues that, it is “a sure path to its demise should any armed force chose to ignore the immutable fact that for a soldier to be effective in combat duties, he needs assurance that his welfare is of concern to his commanders”.

Drawing on many years of working in the Zimbabwe National Army, Runesu presents an informative overview of military social work in Zimbabwe. Runesu’s paper is informative in many ways. He contends that military social work is a specialized field of social work practice and underscores the need for social workers to gain an intimate knowledge of the problems that confront soldiers and their families as well as existing interventions. He discusses peace-time and war-time roles of social workers. During time of peace, social workers engage in restorative interventions such as assessing war veterans for vocational skills, discharging vocational guidance and placements. In addition, social workers engage in promotive and proactive interventions among others. Promotive social work comprises efforts to mobilize resources needed to solve specific problems. Proactive interventions are research-oriented efforts focused on generating knowledge of social problems bedeviling the army officers and their families.

Mhlanga and Zengeya take the reader through the field of refugees. Their article is a reflection on social work practice with refugees in Zimbabwe. Forced migrants in the country constitute a special population, the authors remind us, which requires specialized knowledge of the legal frameworks and how mainstream services and interventions can be adapted to this population. The article is highly informative. It provides social workers with rich information about the international normative frameworks governing country responses to refugees, Zimbabwe’s refugee regime as well as the history of refugee reception in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe follows a “Camp Model” which reduces the refugees’ chances for integration. A refugee camp is a microcosm of the community in a different sense. In a refugee camp, social workers attend to special categories including children, the elderly and women. There, social workers deal with poverty and physical as well as mental-health related problems which arise from the experiences of flight. The authors provide examples of how social workers use casework, group work and community-oriented methods in a refugee camp. Apart from interventions to address these problems, social workers also engage in statutory roles when they facilitate voluntary repatriation of refugees.

Rangarirai Frank and Zororo Muranda make a passionate plea and reasoned case for the adoption of social enterprise in human service organizations and social work approaches. Social enterprises integrate economic and social approaches to generate resources to meet social objectives. The authors argue that, in recent years, funding for social programmes has significantly diminished even as the demand for social services has escalated. Social enterprise can bridge the gap. They argue that “social enterprise is premised on a culture of innovation, openness and adaption, it represents [a] hands on approach to sustainable community economic development.” The article is detailed; it reviews definitions of and approaches to social enterprise, among other aspects. Perhaps the high point of the article is when the authors reflect on how social enterprise can be incorporated into social work. Social enterprise, we observe will likely find strong resonance with and build on, social development approaches which emphasize productivism and social investment.

Lastly, Mthethwa reflects on how social workers might make social work education, research and practice relevant to the changing nature of the problems confronting social work. In recent decades, stubborn diseases such as HIV and AIDS as well as extreme deprivation have bedeviled the Zimbabwean society. Mthethwa considers the efforts of the Council of Social Work (CSW) in developing the first social work minimum body of knowledge. He reviews literature on social work knowledge base and emphasizes the factual knowledge and practice wisdom that social workers ought to develop in order to understand and respond to poverty, extreme deprivation and disease that face various population group.

*Looking at the last two papers, the focus turns to social development. In order to deal with the magnitude of poverty in Zimbabwe, as is the case in most developed countries, it is important to take a more developmental approach. This approach is critical of curative, welfaristic or remedial approaches such as casework. Social development starts from the perspective that social problems and economic problems are one and the same, each affects the other. In developing economies, where economic problems are more pronounced, there are more social problems. We can only overcome these problems by integrating economic and socio-economic strategies. Having said this, we hope social workers in every field of social work—refugees, child welfare, military, education, research, judiciary, you name them, will begin to engage in developmental practice or strengthen such existing initiatives. Some strategies for developmental practice include lobbying government for better socio-economic policies and community development. Such policies must recognize the rights and needs of marginalised communities in the distribution of resources. This is social justice. We hope the theme of the Conference — *Fostering Regulation, Commitment, Innovation and Opportunities in the Fields of Social Work Practice in Zimbabwe* will inspire social workers in Zimbabwe to commit to developmental social work. Innovation and creativity are important social work attributes in this endeavour.*

The African Journal of Social Work is willing to publish special issues focusing on conferences and any other activities happening in Africa and the African diaspora. If readers have any ideas in relation to special issues, do not hesitate to get in touch with the editorial team.

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