

‘DO NOT WORRY YOUR HEAD’: THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF INDIGENIZING SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION AND PRACTICE IN AFRICA

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**‘RETHINKING SOCIAL WORK IN AFRICA: DECOLONIALITY AND INDIGENOUS
KNOWLEDGE IN EDUCATION AND PRACTICE’**

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OUTLINE

- Introduction
- Contextualizing the Problem
- The Case for Culturally Relevant Social Work Education and Practice
- The Challenges
- The University of Botswana's Attempts to make Social Work Culturally Relevant
- The Way Forward
- Conclusion

INTRODUCTION

- ‘Do not worry your head’
- Relevance & effectiveness of Social Work in the African context.
- Debate about the role of social work education & practice and how to prepare social workers for such role.

CONTEXTUALIZING THE PROBLEM

- The Nationalist socio-economic and development agenda after independence

To establish a society in which men and women will have no anxiety about work, food and shelter, where poverty and illiteracy no longer exist, and where disease is brought under control, (and) where our education facilities provide our children with the best possible opportunities for learning... (Nkrumah, 1967, pp. 52-53).

- Issue: Social work's role in promoting the development agenda.

CONTEXTUALIZING THE PROBLEM

CONT'D

- The development agenda has proved unsustainable due to enormous challenges:
Poverty / Unemployment / Lack of access to healthcare / Environmental degradation / Human trafficking / Terrorism / Lack of good governance and leadership / Religious and ethnic conflicts / Refugees and internally displaced persons / Human rights abuses, etc.
- Questions:
Why does the social work profession continue to be ineffective in fulfilling its developmental role?
Why, in spite of efforts, not much has been achieved in making the profession culturally relevant?
How can we make it more relevant?

THE CASE FOR CULTURALLY RELEVANT PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORK

- The search for appropriate, locally relevant indigenized social work calls for the cultural basis of social work.
- Differences between Africa and the West
- Social work and social development
 - Role of social work in social development
 - Socio-economic development and prevention rather than case work
- Social work as cultural imperialism
- Therefore, the need for social work that functions differently in an African context.

CHALLENGES

- A New Definition of Social Work for Africa
 - Distinguishing between African and Western social work
- Too much to chew
 - Developmental social work as a distortion of social work focus
 - Expansion of focus makes social work ineffective
 - Limited resources suggests a focus on socio-economic development & preventive not individualized case work intervention.
- Balancing Traditional and Western Norms
 - Balancing the formal social welfare provision and the indigenous informal traditional systems

THE EXAMPLE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BOTSWANA'S ATTEMPTS TO MAKE SOCIAL WORK CULTURALLY RELEVANT

- Procedural Impediments in Indigenizing Social Work
 - The context of the curriculum
 - Global emphasis on social development
 - South Africa's emphasis on developmental social work model
 - Pressures towards Western model from University authorities, academics and students.
 - University's goal of international competitiveness & recognition & Centre of Excellence.
- Students' influences
 - Focus on upgrading certificate and diploma programmes and not a 'new social work'

THE EXAMPLE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BOTSWANA'S ATTEMPTS TO MAKE SOCIAL WORK CULTURALLY RELEVANT CONT'D

- Institutional Processes and Stakeholder Influences
 - Consultation with stakeholders- government, NGOs, social work departmental advisory board.
 - Internal committee- Dean of Faculty of Social Sciences, Director of Career and Counselling Services, Representative from Departments of Sociology, Psychology, Population Studies, Health and Wellness Centre, Academic services and members of the Social Work Department.
- Curriculum Review Process
 - Departmental Board
 - Advisory Board
 - Faculty Executive
 - Faculty Board
 - Academic Policy Review and Planning Committee
 - University Senate &
 - University Council

THE EXAMPLE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BOTSWANA'S ATTEMPTS TO MAKE SOCIAL WORK CULTURALLY RELEVANT CONT'D

- **Differences at the Department on Indigenization**
 - Lack of consensus on indigenization
 - Different opinions on desirability of local emphasis and importance of African culture
 - Intellectual and power struggle
- **Faculty Influences**
 - Getting support for change of focus
 - Balancing international acceptability , local relevance and modifying Western models for local use
 - Social work as an international profession that may include local content

THE WAY FORWARD

- Rethinking Indigenization
 - Defining social work; and the scope of indigenization and related processes
 - Evaluating African cultural values, methods, knowledge etc. as basis for social work
 - Harmonizing African cultural influences and the inherited Western traditions of social work
- Building Consensus
 - Engaging all regions of sub-Saharan Africa in the indigenization process
 - Articulating a knowledge and practice experiences that must inform the profession

THE WAY FORWARD CONT'D

- Creating Basic Resources to Support the New Conception of Social Work
 - Human resource
 - Teaching and practice materials
 - Technology
- Examination of African Cultural Values and Resolving the Issue of Universal Principles
 - Creating a broad base profession that incorporates the best from different sources (Eclecticism)
- The Question of 'Africa'
 - Managing African cultural differences for a common social work profession
 - Avoiding distortions in the name of cultural relevance

CONCLUSION

- The idea of Social Work as a context based profession that draws on, responds to, needs based on the values and norms of society.
- Developing a culturally relevant social work is an elusive enterprise.
- Redefining African social work through compromises and accommodation.
- Recognizing the impossibility of a wholesale indigenization and heeding the saying 'Do not worry your head'.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION