

# **Social Work in Africa: The imperative for social justice, human rights and peace**

**Taolo Lucas<sup>1</sup>**

## **Abstract**

*Social Work in Africa is faced with problems that are a product of unjust social, economic and political relations. Poverty, discrimination and violence are some such problems that confront Social Work. These problems have structural dimensions that Social Work must deal with. This paper argues that to effectively discharge its mandate of safeguarding fundamental social aspirations, Social Work in Africa must embrace a transformative agenda anchored on the ideals of social justice, human rights and peace. Social Work should push for social reforms and social policies that conform to existing international human rights instruments, social justice ideals and peace compliant practices. It should also work with progressive social and political formations to create awareness and raise public consciousness on the need to embrace human rights, social justice and peace.*

**Keywords:** Social Work, Africa, social justice, human rights, peace

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<sup>1</sup> Lecturer in Social Work, University of Botswana. email: [lucastv@mopipi.ub.bw](mailto:lucastv@mopipi.ub.bw)

## **Introduction**

The scale of socio-economic challenges facing the African continent is huge. The continent is over represented in countries that have low human development index as calculated by the United Nations Development programme in the areas of health, education and the standard of living. HIV/AIDS and its impact are most severe in Africa. Conflict, violence, social dislocation discrimination and abuse of various forms are also rampant as indicated by Amnesty International reports. These problems directly or indirectly fall within the domain of Social Work. The enormity of the problems confronting Africa requires the Social Work profession to adopt transformative and activist approaches if it is to meaningfully discharge its mandate.

The structural nature of the challenges in Africa compels Social Work professionals to rethink the conventional approaches and anchor their practice and education within the framework of social justice, human rights and peace. By adopting this framework, Social Work practitioners would be in a position to challenge the causes of injustice, oppression, discrimination and disadvantage. It is the contention of this paper that the literature that connects Social Work, social justice, human rights and peace should be harnessed to transform Social Work practice and education. A conscious and robust programme of infusing social justice and human rights in the practice and education of Social Work should be evolved. The numerous human rights instruments at local, regional and international levels should be mobilized by Social Work to justify transformative and activist approaches. The design of the Social Work curricula and course offerings in Social Work in Africa should be skewed towards achieving justice and fairness in human relations and service provision. The practice of Social Work should emphasise the raising of the level of consciousness on social justice, human rights and peace. It should work towards drawing the support of its deprived constituency, progressive social movements and the public so that it can increase its bargaining power relative to existing oppressive and unjust structures.

The objective of this paper is to argue for an approach that requires Social Workers in Africa to reappraise their moral, philosophical and value foundations in line with the situation, circumstances and realities of the continent. The paper starts by defining the socio-economic and political context of the African continent. It then shows the interface between Africa's challenges and the Social Work profession. The paper also reviews literature that connects Social Work to social justice, human

rights and peace. It discusses international human rights instruments to make the connection between these instruments and Social Work, and makes an argument for the need for Social Work to anchor on such instruments. The last two sections of the paper propose a transformative approach to Social Work education and practice, which would, it is hoped, help Africa to realise justice, human rights, and peace

### **Africa: The context**

Africa is a vast continent. It has over fifty independent nation states with varying social, economic and political situations. Generalization on the African situation is thus difficult as it may not only conceal the true picture in individual countries, but also perpetuate negative stereotypes about the continent. However, one cannot shy away from the reality of certain conditions and situations that are common to some African countries. Conditions of social and economic deprivation, poverty, unemployment, inequities, corruption, illiteracy, violations of human rights, intolerance, conflict and violence continue to be a developmental challenge in many African countries. Successive United Nations Human Development Reports, which measure the performance of countries in the combined areas of educational attainment, life expectancy and GDP per capita, reveal that most African countries continue to underperform in the human development category. According to the 2010 United Nations Human Development Report, there is no African country in the Very High Human Development category. Four African countries, namely Libya, Mauritius, Tunisia and Algeria are in the High Human Development category. Nine countries that include Gabon, Botswana, Egypt, Namibia, South Africa, Morocco, Cape Verde, Swaziland and Congo are in the Medium Human Development category. Out of the 42 countries in the Low Income category, 35 are from Africa. The same report reveals that except for Afghanistan, the bottom 20 countries in the Low Human Development category are from Africa (see Table 1 below).

**Table 1: Bottom 20 Low Human Development Countries**

HDI rank	HDI value	Life expectancy	Mean years of schooling	Gross national income per capita	Inequality adjusted Value	HDI Rank
150. Zambia	0.395	47.3	6.5	7.2	0.270	115
151. Gambia	0.390	56.6	2.8	1,358	0.238	126
152. Rwanda	0.385	51.1	3.3	10.6	0.243	122
153. Malawi	0.385	54.6	4.3	8.9	0.261	118
154. Sudan	0.379	58.9	2.9	2,051	-	-
155. Afghanistan	0.349	44.6	3.3	1,419	-	-
156. Guinea	0.340	58.9	1.6	953	0.209	128
157. Ethiopia	0.328	56.1	1.5	992	0.216	127
158. Sierra Leone	0.317	48.2	2.9	809	0.193	130
159. Central African Republic	0.315	47.7	3.5	758	0.183	133
160. Mali	0.309	49.2	1.4	1,171	0.191	131
161. Burkina Faso	0.305	53.7	1.3	1,215	0.195	129
162. Liberia	0.300	59.1	3.9	320	0.188	132
163. Chad	0.295	49.2	1.5	1,067	0.179	134
164. Guinea-Bissau	0.289	48.6	2.3	538	0.166	137
165. Mozambique	0.284	48.4	1.2	854	0.155	138
166. Burundi	0.282	51.4	2.7	402	0.177	135
167. Niger	0.261	52.5	1.4	675	0.173	136
168. Congo, Democratic Republic of the	0.239	48.0	3.8	291	0.153	139
169. Zimbabwe	0.140	47.0	7.2	176	0.098	140

**Source:** UNDP Human Development Report 2010

The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), the concept used by the UNDP in its 2010 Report, further reveals the extent and intensity of poverty in Africa. MPI measures individual poverty according to the extent and intensity of multiple deprivations in the area of education, health and standard of living. These areas are broken into discrete parts to gain a deeper understanding of poverty as it affects individuals in each country. Education is broken down into years of schooling and child enrolment. Health is divided into child mortality and nutrition. Standard of living encompasses availability of electricity; access to proper sanitation and safe drinking water; floor type (mud, sand or dung), type of cooking fuel and ownership of assets. This measure (MPI) reveals that African countries fare badly. Out of 30 countries that are at the bottom of the MPI index, 27 of them are from Africa. This is an indication that Africa is afflicted not only by income deprivation but

by multiple deprivations that may require wholesale structural changes in their economic and social development processes.

Poverty, inequities and poor access to basic commodities in Africa are even more apparent when disaggregated figures for individual countries are used. The picture that emerges in the majority of African countries is that wide disparities exist between regional, sex, age and ethnic groupings. Women, children, the youth and ethnic minorities are the worst affected by socio-economic problems. The HIV/AIDS scourge has also exacerbated the situation. According to the UNAIDS Report (2010) Sub-Saharan Africa is the worst affected by HIV/AIDS. The Report indicates that there were 11.3 million people living with HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa by the end of 2009. Thirty one (31) per cent of new infections, 34 per cent of all AIDS related deaths and 40 per cent of all adult women living with HIV/AIDS are in Southern Africa (UNAIDS Report, 2010). The scourge has reversed gains made in areas such as health, education and poverty reduction in many African countries. The cost of caring for the affected and infected is enormous. The upsurge of neo-conservatism in the world's economic and political environment, the huge debt burden, unproductive investment, economic mismanagement, and natural disasters have also combined to pose a serious challenge to livelihoods in Africa. Structural Adjustment Policies and other economic recovery programmes instituted by the IMF and World Bank have increased suffering among the poor.

Similarly, lack of democracy, accountability, and tolerance which, in various ways, has led to violence, insecurity, instability, conflicts and abuse of human rights has also complicated the situation for Africans. With over 13.5 million internally displaced people in Africa and over 3.5 million refugees, Africa is home to insecurity, vulnerability and violence of grave proportions. Amnesty International (2010) reveals serious and widespread human rights abuses across the African continent. Conflicts, social and political unrests, ethnic and regional factionalism as well as regime illegitimacy still plague some parts of Africa. The Amnesty International Report reveals that members of armed opposition groups and security forces in countries such as the Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia and Sudan continue to perpetrate human rights abuses with impunity, with unarmed civilians, women and children bearing the brunt of the violence. Conflict and rapid urbanization have caused the displacement of many people in Africa. Discrimination of people based on their perceived or real sexual orientation is continuing. Lesbian,

gays, bisexual and transgender people are harassed and intimidated. People are also discriminated against on the basis of their gender, ethnic and religious identity. Domestic violence, mainly perpetrated against children and women, is commonplace in Africa (Amnesty International, 2010). Clearly, Africa is beset with massive socio-economic challenges that require intervention from Social Work professionals. The current interface between Social Work and the challenges faced by Africa is discussed below.

### **Social Work and the African crisis**

It is widely acknowledged that Social Work in Africa has failed to meaningfully respond to the myriad social problems that beset the continent. The profession has been assigned and accepted very narrow roles in the development agenda. In most African countries, Social Workers are found in the departments or ministries of social welfare or social services where they are charged with the responsibility of administering inadequate welfare programmes. They also coordinate and implement underfinanced Community Development and self-help projects in the government and non-government sector (see also Ntshwarang, Mwansa and Malinga-Musamba (this volume)). Though the profession deals with victims of socio-economic deprivation, political intolerance and injustices of various forms, it has very little input in the formulation, development and evaluation of programmes that affect its constituency. Social Workers remain virtually silent on issues of the distribution of resources and opportunities, protection of human rights as well as the promotion of non-violent means of addressing conflict in human relationships. As Rwomire and Raditlhokwa (1996:13) put it: “the consequence of this constricted perception of Social Work is that in many African countries Social Work does not proactively address structural sources of poverty, but only functions as a passive and unambitious distributor of meagre food handouts which effectively keep clients in the vicious cycle of poverty”.

Social Work education in Africa has also not clearly identified with the disadvantaged. In most schools of Social Work, there is no clear or firm commitment to confronting disadvantage, injustice and oppression. Issues of social justice, human rights and peace are not at the core of Social Work curriculum discourse. They are, in fact, peripheral in the majority of situations. On this point Rwomire and Raditlhokwa (1996: 15) argued that ‘although some academic Social Workers in Africa adopt a radical posture in their writing, we are

aware that none of the schools of Social Work offers a progressive or radical educational programme'. They further argue that "it is well-nigh impossible for Social Work practitioners to engage in radical practice if educational and training programmes in the schools of Social Work fail to infuse radical and liberating consciousness into students" (p. 15). The tendency among most institutions is to train students to fit into existing welfare institutions, with very little effort made to assist them to develop a transformative orientation and mindset (Lucas, 1994).

Social Work practice and Social Work education in Africa remain largely underdeveloped, and lack a clear framework for transforming the lives of the oppressed and disadvantaged in any meaningful way. There is an unfortunate lack of clarity on the guiding principles hence a 'muddling through approach' adopted in Social Work practice. The profession is fragmented and without cohesion. The National Associations of Social Workers in Africa (henceforth NASW) are generally weak and incompetent. The schools of Social Work are only now trying to forge a working relationship. The state of affairs in Social Work education and Social Work practice calls for the profession to reappraise its moral, philosophical and value foundation. The profession should anchor itself firmly on social justice, human rights and peace as I argue in the next section.

### **Social Work, social justice, human rights and peace: Mapping the literature**

Social Work, social justice, human rights and peace are inextricably linked. They are all premised on respect for the dignity and worth of human beings. Social Work, for instance, has a history of concern for the underclass. The profession's history is characterized by a commitment to the improvement of the quality of life of all persons. Social justice encompasses fairness and mutuality in human relationships, as well as an equitable distribution of resources, opportunities, and services within and across age, sex, ethnicity, religions, class and sexual orientation. The concept of human rights is used here to mean entitlements that offer protection from all forms of injustice, oppression and discrimination, and guarantee respect for human dignity and worth. Peace is used in this context to mean the absence of violence in human relationships at all levels of society, including the absence of poverty, oppression and discrimination- all of which may cause physical, mental, spiritual and psychological distress.

Literature that seeks to link Social Work, social justice, human

rights and peace abound. Such literature seeks to elevate Social Work beyond narrow professionalism and social control. Chamberlain (1988) edited a book in which Australian scholars sought to show the link between Social Work and social justice. The tone and content of the book saw the role of Social Work as confronting disadvantage through the framework of social justice. The Australian scholars noted that Social Work was a critical profession in the creation of a just society. Such a society, asserted Australian scholars, requires the safeguarding of human rights and liberties, a more equitable distribution of material resources and a greater public involvement in decision making. They collectively challenged Social Work to show a greater commitment to social justice through scholarship, debate and action. Gil (1998) also underlined the importance of Social Workers to understand oppression and injustice because people who seek assistance from social services are usually victims of oppressive and unjust social, economic and political structures. Reichert (2001:5) echoes the same sentiments when she argued that “historically the Social Work profession has challenged inequities among individuals and groups. Social Work originates from humanitarian and democratic ideals that prompted the profession to challenge discrimination and unequal distribution of resources.” She further contended that Social Workers have always considered the oppressed and the marginalized as their constituency.

The International Federation of Social Workers and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), in cooperation with the United Nations Centre for Human Rights, have over the years produced literature and material that link Social Work with human rights. They have produced manuals on the relationship between Social Work and human rights to be used by schools of Social Work. This is what they had to say:

It is imperative that those involved in the field of Social Work education and practice have a clear and unreserved commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights and to the satisfaction of fundamental social aspirations (IFSW, IASSW and UN Manual, 1992:3).

The International Federation of Social Work has further reiterated that:

Social Work has from its inception been a human rights profession having as its basic tenet the intrinsic value of every human being and as one of its aims the promotion of equitable social structures, which can offer people security



and development while upholding their dignity (International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) International Policy Papers: UN, 1994:1).

Lundy and Wormer (2007:735) contend that, “individuals alone may not always be capable of overcoming the inequalities and the discrimination they face. Adopting a human rights perspective can help Social Workers more readily identify structural difficulties in planning appropriate interventions.” They further asserted that, “united under the banner of a human rights framework, Social Workers, in collaboration with other allies, can be a vital force in advancing a social and economic justice agenda” (p.737).

Soest (1992: 32) linked Social Work, social justice, human rights and peace in a succinct manner by asserting that:

The central values of the Social Work profession emphasize self-determination, human rights and social equity. The profession stands for the creation of a society in which human beings, both individually and collectively, can live in dignity and have the opportunity to realize their potential free from interpersonal, institutional or international violence.

Solas (2008) argues that Social Work in Australia should move from a narrow minimalist view that emphasizes material equity to a radical egalitarian plane which embraces constitutionally entrenched equality at cultural, economic, political and social levels. The argument by Solas (2008:135) is that social justice of an egalitarian nature should be the “first of the profession’s cardinal values because injustice devalues all the others.” He further argues that “social justice is essential for human dignity and worth, service to humanity, integrity, and competence to flourish”. Hugman (2008) responds to Solas (2008) first by appreciating that the debate about egalitarianism helps Social Work to introspect and move forward. He, however, proffers a particular preference for equity as a principle of social justice as it is “capable of relating to the diversity between Social Workers as individuals and as members of different communities, as well as the range of practices and the issues to which Social Work responds” (p.144).

There is some unanimity on the connection between Social Work, social justice, human rights and peace. Debates continue to ensue on how such novel ideals and principles could be factored into Social Work practice and education. What is missing in the Social Work

literature is the extent to which this connection has influenced Social Work education and practice in Africa. It is the contention of this paper that despite the apparent relevance of social justice, human rights and peace issues to Social Work in Africa, there has been very little effort to transform the practice of Social Work in the continent to embrace these fundamental values. It is against this background and the continuing deterioration of Africa's socio-economic situation that this paper argues for a transformative and activist approach to Social Work in Africa. Such an approach would "address the structural inequalities and injustices while providing available resources." (Lundy and Wormer, 2007:735). The need for Social Work to identify relevant international instruments that have a special connection and appeal to Social Work and use them to enrich the profession is imperative. Some such instruments, and their collective significance, are listed and discussed in the next section.

### **Social Work: The need to anchor on international instruments**

Various international instruments that seek to protect humanity from exploitation, oppression, discrimination and marginalization of various forms exist. These instruments exist in the form of pronouncements, declarations, conventions, protocols and rules that have local or international sanction. They are seen as representing points of agreement and normative standards at the international level. The consensus that surrounds such instruments gives them legitimacy and appeal at regional and national levels. As far as the promotion and protection of human rights are concerned, such instruments are clearly articulated by the NASW on its International Policy on Human Rights (2000). Others are not contained in the policy but they are equally relevant to and appropriate for the practice of Social Work in Africa. They include:

- Charter of the United Nations (1945)
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights(1948)
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)
- International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965)
- Convention on all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979)
- Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984)
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

- Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and their Families (1990).
- Millennium Development Goals (2000).

Declarations of global significance include:

- The Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons (1971)
- The Protection of Women and Children in Armed Conflicts (1974)
- The Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007)
- Right to Development (1986).

Other important declarations of the United Nations are those that seek to protect people with disabilities; people affected and infected with HIV/AIDS; juvenile offenders; and other vulnerable groups.

Africa has numerous declarations and protocols at continental, sub-regional and country levels which could be mobilized to protect the rights and welfare of the disadvantaged. At the continental level the following could be:

- The Cairo Declaration Establishing the Mechanism of Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution (1993)
- New Partnership for Africa's Development - NEPAD (2001)
- African Charter on Human and People's Rights (1981).
- African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1999)
- Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2005)
- The Addis Ababa Document on Refugees and Forced Population Displacements in Africa (1994).

The significance of these instruments to Social Work is that: first, the principles they espouse connect and resonate very well with the principles of Social Work in that they place emphasis on and side with the weak; secondly, they enjoy wide acceptance and appeal, and their use by Social Work would increase the appeal of the profession; thirdly, they are elastic and Social Work could use them to test and challenge the efficacy of existing policies and practices from different perspectives; fourth and finally, the employment and mobilization of these instruments may increase Social Work's bargaining power both nationally and internationally as they are perceived as reflecting higher human ideals. Social Workers in Africa should advocate and lobby for the domestication of these instruments so that they are incorporated

into national legislative and policy agendas. Thus Social Work practice and Social Work education should be transformed in line with the principles of social justice, human rights and peace. Proposals for the transformation of Social Work education are enunciated in the discussion that follows.

### **Towards a transformative and activist Social Work education**

To assume a radical and activist posture, Social Work should first transform its education and training. Once this is done, the graduates of a transformed programme will hopefully adopt transformative, activist and radical approaches in practice. The schools of Social Work should clearly identify with the structural approaches to Social Work (Mullaly, 1993) and anchor its principles and practice on the various progressive global instruments. Transformation of Social Work education should emphasize a clear articulation of the mission and vision of schools of Social Work. Most schools of Social Work lack clarity of vision and mission. A transformative and activist approach should articulate its vision along the social justice, human rights and peace parameters. In doing so, Social Work should clearly show that interventions at micro, meso and macro levels can reflect structural dimensions. To achieve this, the interface between private troubles and public issues should be clearly defined. There should be a conscious and persistent effort to link the problems individuals face with the structural or systemic origins of the same problems. A victim-blaming approach, which attributes peoples problems to the deficiencies and weaknesses of such individuals, should be avoided.

### ***Infusing social justice, human rights and peace in the curriculum***

After clearly articulating the vision, mission and values underpinning Social Work education, the challenge will be situating such in the curriculum. One approach would be to have courses that address the issues of social justice, human rights and peace and their relationship to Social Work. The other method, and one that is relevant to Social Work education in Africa, is the infusion approach. The infusion approach would integrate these concepts in all the courses offered in the Social Work faculty. Infusion would occur at micro, meso and macro practice courses at all levels. The objective in this case would be to enrich the existing curriculum content by adding appropriate concepts and giving assignments that would demonstrate the interconnectedness of Social Work, social justice, human rights and peace. The infusion approach would mean that faculty members work towards finding appropriate

spaces where they can fit the different international instruments, conventions and declarations in the different course offerings. The infusion approach would show Social Work students how social justice, human rights and peace can be infused directly into micro and macro practice.

***Fieldwork: an arena of student empowerment and community consciousness raising***

Field work education is an integral part of the Social Work curriculum. It exposes students to the practical situation and affords them an opportunity to link theory with practice. The way field education is structured, the assignments given and modes of evaluation may differ from one university to another. In some universities, fieldwork emphasizes the mastery of agency goals and procedures while in other situations students are allowed to discover the world of Social Work practice in a flexible way. Whatever strategy of field education is pursued, it is important that it affords students an opportunity to critically appreciate how injustice, oppression, discrimination and violence are located within the different institutions that provide assistance to clients. They should be given an opportunity to discover, through assignments, the power dynamics that obtain in organizations and how such dynamics influence service provision. Field education should also offer students an opportunity to gather sufficient willpower, courage and capacity to confront disadvantage. This could be achieved by encouraging students to have at least a single assignment in fieldwork that requires risk taking in intervening on behalf of clients.

In an environment of limited resources and political hostility, as is the case in Africa, field education can be one way of reaching out to as many people as possible. Students at university have some measure of freedom to embark on projects of their choice and one such project that could be used in field education in Africa is consciousness raising. Students doing fieldwork could be assigned to run workshops on issues of social justice, human rights and peace for the community. They could pick any of the international instruments and relate it to conditions in their country for an audience in their community. This way, students learn the skills of organizing communities while at the same time increasing community awareness of existing instruments that can emancipate them.

***Teaching methods that overcome fear and powerlessness***

Teaching methods for transformative and activist Social Work practice

should be geared towards developing strong willed and courageous professionals. In this regard, I find Mandell (1992) helpful when she contended that those who seek to train Social Work for social change must work against the dominant individualist ideology that manifestly discourages risk-taking. She argues that Social Work educators should act as role models for risk-taking by participating in transformative activities that carry with them considerable risk to their careers. They should demonstrate that one can take risks without being destroyed in the process. Outstanding social activists should also be invited into our classes to share their experiences of confronting the powerful. To deconstruct power, Mandell further argues that students must be assisted to be in continuous contact with power holders. They should be encouraged to talk to legislators on issues related to their vocation.

As part of the process of helping students to overcome the fear of the powerful, it is also empowering for students to engage in power analysis in relation to class, gender, race and ethnicity. The manuals produced by the United Nations Centre for Human Rights, International Federation of Social Workers and International Association of Schools of Social Work (1992) also advocate for teaching methods that uphold the ideals of human rights. Social Work students in Africa can benefit immensely from teaching strategies that deconstruct power relations in the society and the classroom. Such teaching methods would help them deal with manifestations of autocracy that are so prevalent in Africa, at both institutional and state levels. Teaching methods that give students opportunities for participation and self-expression should be prioritized to unlock their creative potential. The change in Social Work education should be matched with a concomitant radical change in the practice of Social Work. Social Work practice in Africa should shed its conservative posture and assume a transformative and activist approach as proposed in the next section. I elaborate this point in the next section.

### **Transformative and activist Social Work practice**

As has been already stated elsewhere in this paper, Social Work in Africa is dominated by the state. Its agenda and its terms of reference are defined by the state, and it has very little input in decisions that affect its conditions except to implement underdeveloped and inadequate social programmes. To transform itself, Social Work in Africa should find ways of shedding the state baggage and coming up with interventions that have emancipatory dimensions. It should utilize the social dexterity of the profession to progressively change unjust structures and institutions

in order for them to respond to the needs of the people. Some of the tactics that Social Work could be as discussed below.

### ***Addressing the basics***

First, the profession should strive to competently implement existing programmes such that potential beneficiaries derive maximum benefit out of them. In implementing such programmes, Social Work should explore all avenues that can enable it to expand access to available programmes and services. In this way, it would build friendship and solidarity with its clients. Secondly, Social Work should advocate for the improvement of existing programmes and services in the spirit of available instruments, conventions and declarations. Such advocacy could include engaging responsive and progressive legislators and other influential persons on the need to improve the welfare of the disadvantaged (Gil, 1998). Thirdly, Social Work should strengthen its own structures such as the National Association of Social Workers so that they can articulate the concerns as well as the vision of Social Work within the framework of social justice, human rights and peace. It should also build professional structures, such as the Council for Social Work, that would assure quality of service provision. Social Work standards of practice must also be developed for different fields of practice.

### ***Mounting public awareness programmes***

There is a knowledge gap between the people on the one hand and technocrats and politicians on the other. The various international instruments, declarations and conventions that define rights, entitlements, obligations or pledges for humanity are not known by most people in Africa. A lot of people view services rendered as a favour extended to them by the state. Social Work should see it as its responsibility to raise public awareness on available instruments that seek to uplift the standards of living of the people. Once people are empowered with knowledge, they are better able to articulate their rights and entitlements to the authorities. A clear articulation of needs by the people would mean governments are pressurized to respond positively to the needs of the general population. The task of mounting public awareness could be done by Social Workers in academia and those working for non-governmental organizations. Those in academia are well placed because they operate under the security of academic freedom which they do not always use maximally for the benefit of the Social Work constituency. Those employed by government can raise public awareness by participating in activities of the national

associations or other formations of Social Workers.

### ***Linking with social movements***

Wharf (1990) and a group of progressive Social Workers in Canada explored Social Work's involvement or potential areas of involvement with social movements in that country. This is relevant for Social Work in Africa because in Africa individual Social Workers are vulnerable to victimization by the state if they seek to embark in transformative Social Work. To find security, Social Workers, individually or collectively, can link with progressive social movements and work with them to challenge oppressive and unjust social structures. The social movements that Wharf found relevant to Social Work and which share some of the principles, values and beliefs of the profession include the women's movements, First Nations and labour movements. In Africa, Social Work can forge strategic partnerships with existing social movements and civil society organizations to exert pressure on governments and other structures to respond to the situation of the oppressed and marginalized. The net could even be cast wider to accommodate youth and children's organizations, differently-abled, homeless, human rights and other organizations. Networks could also be established with international bodies that seek to protect and safeguard human rights and fundamental social aspirations.

### ***Engaging in policy practice***

The plight of the constituency of Social Work is often shaped in the policy development process. The formulation, development and evaluation of policies determine the opportunities, benefits, and services that would accrue to the Social Work constituency. Social Work in Africa, and indeed in many other jurisdictions, is usually indifferent to the process of policy development and, in the process, professionals who have very little or no insight into the plight of the disadvantaged dominate policy processes. McDonough (1993) suggests that policy practice is a neglected Social Work intervention and argues that the policy process is normally dominated by lawyers, economists and politicians. Social Work in Africa must therefore strategically position itself in all stages of policy development so that it can have a meaningful influence on policy outcomes (Gray, 1996; Gray and Collett van Rooyen, 2000; Mazibuko, 1996). Social Work could forge links with politicians, economists and other persons of influence in policy making so that it can influence policy in favour of the disadvantaged. In exerting such influence Social Work would be guided by the broad principles of social justice, human



rights and peace, and by specific and relevant local and international instruments related to the same principles.

### ***Harnessing new media technologies in Social Work practice***

The information age has opened new avenues for information dissemination. Social Work should embrace the new information technologies and use the media to work for it and its constituency. The media influence public opinion and hold governments and people accountable. Social Work needs the media for a number of reasons. First, Social Work needs the media to bring to light the plight of its constituency. Secondly, the media is needed to expose transgressions against local and internal instruments and conventions geared towards achieving social justice, human rights and peace. Thirdly, they could be used to forward proposals for the improvement of the quality of life and, finally, the media could be used to report on the activities of Social Work with a view to improving the image, appeal and bargaining power of the profession. The profession could also use the media to appeal for financial and other support from the resourced.

### **Conclusion**

Social Work in Africa must transform itself in light of the various, deep rooted problems that affect the continent. It is no longer adequate for Social Work to resign itself to interventions that do not qualitatively improve the lives of the oppressed, dispossessed and the weak. It should connect with the profession's tradition and confront the challenges of the times. The profession should traverse the boundaries of narrow professionalism and social control and adopt approaches that could help liberate the African people from exploitation, poverty, injustice and different forms of violence. Social Work should work in cooperation and solidarity with other progressive elements in the society to deliver social justice, basic human rights and peace to Africa. To achieve the transformative agenda, Social Work should have the courage to change itself. It should redefine its vision and mission to align with the pressing problems that affect its clientele in Africa. It must overcome its confidence deficit and challenge oppressive and unjust structures, institutions and practices.

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