

The History of Social Work in South Africa and Zambia: A Comparative Perspective

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Satellite Map of South Africa and Zambia



Pre-colonial Polities of Present-day South Africa and Zambia

- There are ethnic groups in Zambia that migrated from present-day South Africa to Zambia in the early 1800s.
- These are the Bafokeng-Sotho from present-day Free State Province and the Ngoni from present-day KwaZulu-Natal Province, who were fleeing Shaka Zulu's military campaigns and expansionist agenda.
- Led by their leader, Sebetwane, they Sothos left South Africa in the early 1820s and conquered the Lozi kingdom in western Zambia in the mid-1830s.
- Zwangendaba, the ruler of the Ngoni crossed the Zambezi river into Zambia in 1835. After he died, one branch of the Ngonis settled in eastern Zambia.

Pre-colonial indigenous forms of Care and Mutual Obligation

- It is important to note that pre-colonial South Africa had indigenous forms of care and mutual obligation.
- The philosophy of Ubuntu prevailed during this era:

The notion that “we are not islands unto ourselves” is central to the understanding of the individual in African thought. It is often expressed in the phrase *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* which emphasises “communality and inter-dependence of the members of a community” and that every individual is an extension of others...This thinking emphasises the importance of community to individual identity and hence to human dignity... the late Chief Justice of South Africa Pius Langa cited in (Kende, 2009, p. 9).

Pre-colonial indigenous forms of Care and Mutual Obligation

- The pre-colonial era was undergirded by the communal and reciprocal ties that bound various African communities together before the advent of colonial rule.
- Africans were, in many cases, attached to each other through reciprocal relations of social support embedded in cultural norms and practices.
- Many African values, customs, idioms, poems, songs and riddles attest to this.

Pre-colonial indigenous forms of Care and Mutual Obligation

- In these times, it was considered taboo to ridicule the infirm, elders or other disadvantaged persons.
- Mendicants were quite rare in the pre-colonial era due to the fact that families were obliged to look after their less fortunate members.
- In such circumstances, widows, orphans and the aged were cared for by their relatives.
- The family was the first form of defence against want and deprivation as it provided for the emotional, material and spiritual support of its members.
- Mutual-help reinforced family solidarity as adults provided for the needs of children whilst the elderly socialised them (Boon, 2007; Noyoo, 2013).

The Birth of Social Work in South Africa

- The development of Social work in South Africa is inextricably bound up with the country's history of colonial conquest and occupation as well as apartheid.
- Africans were forcibly incorporated into the colonial system of exploitation and subjugation for close to 350 years.
- In this regard, the genesis of social work is linked to the initial occupation of the Cape peninsula by a European settler population that landed on the shores of this country in 1652.
- The settlers from the Netherlands eventually dispossessed most of the land of various African indigenous polities.

The Birth of Social Work in South Africa

- The initial impetus behind the development of social work in South Africa stemmed from a phenomenon known as the '***poor white problem***'.
- According to Fourie (2006), the poor white problem's cause, first noted at a Dutch Reformed Church (NGK) Synod in 1886, was unclear; later many blamed the inadequate education system, urbanisation, cheap wages or cultural factors, while others argued that external events such as the rinderpest disease and the South African war (formerly Anglo-Boer War) had increased the numbers of poor whites.

The Birth of Social Work in South Africa

- Religious organisations such as the Dutch Reformed Church and organs of civil society, for example, the Afrikaans women's group, the Afrikaans Christian Women's Association (*Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereniging*, ACVV), were primarily actively involved in the amelioration of the harsh living conditions of poor whites.
- The colonial state only became involved in earnest in meeting the needs of poor whites in 1910, after the Union of South Africa came into being.
- For the Africans, their indigenous social security systems still catered to their needs as the state and religious and voluntary organisations were only concerned with the plight of the European settlers.

Industrialisation of South Africa and Social Work

- The discovery of vast mineral deposits of diamonds and gold in South Africa unleashed forces of social change which transformed the South African society in significant ways and continue to shape the country to this day.
- The harnessing of mineral deposits for commercial use resulted in the industrialisation of South Africa.
- The Afrikaners, who were the descendants of the early Dutch settlers from the Netherlands, were negatively impacted by the industrialisation process and social change, leading to the erosion of their livelihoods, as they were mainly farmers.

Industrialisation of South Africa and Social Work

- As industrialisation unfolded, there was an influx of foreign, mainly British capital that put the mining industry on the world map and spearheaded the highly centralised character of the industry.
- Secondly, there was a rush of European immigrant labour, supplying the semi-skilled and skilled labour the mines needed.
- Thirdly, there was the dismantling of the African peasantry, becoming the chief source of cheap unskilled labour.
- By the late 1920s and 1930s the global Great Depression had negatively impacted South Africa and further compounded the poverty of the white population, especially that of the Afrikaners.

Enter the Carnegie Corporation

- Thus in 1928, at the instigation of the Dutch Reformed Church, the Carnegie Corporation of New York was persuaded to fund a new approach to white indigence, referred to as “a scientific investigation into the causes of white poverty, its extent, and the means by which it could be reduced”.
- The reason for establishing social work practice was crystallised after the ***National Conference on the Poor White Problem*** at Kimberley in 1934, resulting in the creation of a State Department of Social Welfare (DSW) in 1937. The new DSW employed social workers as well as subsidised similar posts in the voluntary sector.

Racialised Service Provision

- In 1948, South Africa was declared an Apartheid State, when the Nationalist Party (NP) came to power.
- Apartheid literally meaning “Apartness” was a racist ideology based on **White Supremacy**.
- In the same vein, social work education and practice were informed by Apartheid.
- Also, the social welfare system was informed by racist values of ***white supremacy and defined by residual welfare services***.
- Social welfare services were remedial in focus and were not attuned to the development of human capacities of all South Africans, but rather only came into play, for the European populations, when the normal structures of supply, such as the family and the economic system broke down.

Racialised Service Provision

- The colonial-apartheid social welfare system was founded on four principles:
 - ▷ racial division in the provision of welfare services
 - ▷ a rejection of socialism
 - ▷ a partnership between state and community
 - ▷ movement from residential and therapeutic services towards community-based and preventative facilities.

Racialised Service Provision

- Social work curricula did not reflect the needs of the larger African population group. It is for this reason that social work education was almost totally concerned with the preparation of highly skilled therapists to deal with the Developed North types of social problems (Mazibuko et al., 1992).
- The pressing problems of the African population group, such as poverty, unemployment and underemployment, were not captured during the training of social workers, hence the failure of social work practitioners to be responsive to the challenges facing the African population.

Democratic South Africa and the Welfare Sector

- On 27 April 1994, black South Africans voted for the first time and the country became democratic.
- In the same year, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) was developed by the African National Congress (ANC) government.
- Through the RDP, the ANC-led government endeavoured to create sustainable growth and development and thereby addressing unemployment, poverty, and inequality.
- One of its key strategies entailed the provision of basic social services including housing, education, health-care and various forms of social grants.

Democratic South Africa and the Welfare Sector

- In 1996, the country adopted a new Constitution thereby transitioning to an era of constitutional democracy.
- The new Constitution had a whole chapter dedicated to human rights encompassing socio-economic rights.
- Of importance, in the Bill of Rights, Section 27(1C) provides for the right to access appropriate social assistance.
- In 1997, the White Paper for Social Welfare was finalised and became the country's social welfare policy.
- The White Paper was significant because it broke with the apartheid era's inequitable, inappropriate, and undemocratic welfare policies.
- The approach adopted by the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) was developmental social welfare or social development.
- Social work has since been shaped profoundly by the foregoing issues and developments in the post-Apartheid era.

Genesis of Social Work in Zambia

- Zambia was initially an outpost of the British South Africa (BSA) Company based in South Africa and overseen on behalf of the British Empire.
- The BSA Company was headed by the arch imperialist, Cecil John Rhodes.
- The BSA ruled Zambia from 1881, as two separate territories, namely: North-Eastern Rhodesia and North-Western Rhodesia.
- In 1911, the two territories were amalgamated to form the quasi colonial territory named Northern Rhodesia.
- In 1924, Northern Rhodesia became a British colony.

Genesis of Social Work in Zambia

- The missionaries were initially preoccupied with providing education to the local populations and later health-care.
- Kelly (1991) observes that during the British South Africa Company (BSAC) rule (1891-1924), the development of education depended upon the missionary societies' initiative, perseverance, and financial resources.
- By the turn of the twentieth century, there were about 17 missionary societies managing churches, schools, and a hospital in the land.
- The European missionaries introduced the rudiments of social work during this period.

The Discovery of Mineral Wealth

- When mineral deposits were discovered in the area that came to be known as the Copperbelt, Europeans began to arrive in large numbers in Northern Rhodesia from 1911.
- Many of these were petty merchants, traders and farmers who came from South Africa and had left that country after the Anglo-Boer/South African War (1899-1902).
- For the minerals to be exploited, infrastructure such as roads and a rail-line had to be built.
- The erection of a rail line from Victoria Falls to the Copperbelt led to an expansion of European settlements along its course.
- Fertile land was allocated to Europeans for agricultural purposes as well.

Migrant Labour and Urbanisation

- In 1901, the BSAC introduced the hut and poll tax (collectively known as the African tax) which coerced Africans into the emerging capitalist system and wage employment.
- Following these developments, Africans migrated in large numbers to the urban areas in order to work in the mines and factories.
- Thus a new phenomenon arose in colonial Zambia where able-bodied young men were uprooted from their villages to the urban areas and mining towns.

Migrant Labour and Urbanisation

- The migration of predominantly males to the urban areas posed serious threats to the stability of the extended family and the African mutual-aid system, which had safeguarded the livelihoods of its members.
- Urbanisation further threatened the old order in the way that the new and young “urbanites” quickly discarded their traditional values for modernity and also assumed new social roles in the towns.
- The money economy also spurred on radical changes in the emerging colonial setting, as traditional communal goals of the extended kinship group were relegated for those of personal achievement and individual careers.

The Second World War and the Development of Social Work

- It was during the Second World War that the Colonial Office and the government of Northern Rhodesia began to think in terms of development planning and social welfare.
- Thousands of African men were recruited in Northern Rhodesia for the war effort and served in the army as far away as Burma/Myanmar.
- There was 'concern' at the impact that their return after the war might have on African society (Macmillan, 2005).

The Second World War and the Development of Social Work

- There were also tensions rising between Europeans and indigenous Africans.
- There were two major labour unrests on the Copperbelt's mining towns which shook the colonial order.
- The first strike action of 1935 by miners was followed by another one in 1940, during the Second World War. The 1940 strike was more organized and was primarily about higher wages, unequal working conditions and also a challenge to European racism.
- The 1940 strike also signalled a growing class consciousness amongst the African workers. In 1945, just after the end of the Second World War, there was another major strike by the African employees of the Southern and Northern Rhodesian railways.

The Second World War and the Development of Social Work

- The colonial establishment realised that a vibrant and healthy working population was needed to continue mining minerals from the ground.
- Thus, the mining and colonial authorities made some concessions, such as changes in the social welfare coverage of Africans and improvements in the labour conditions.
- Thus, welfare replaced law and order as the imperative of imperialism around this time, and in 1940, following the strike and riots by African miners, the House of Commons, the Christian churches and the Aborigines Protection in Britain had identified the poverty of the labour camps as the most pressing problem in Zambia (Heisler, 1974).

The Second World War and the Development of Social Work

- The Copperbelt and other urban areas were prioritised by the colonial authorities for social welfare service provision due to their economic importance.
- Also, the colonialists wrongly thought that those Africans in the rural areas would be looked after by their families - when the rural areas had already been decimated by the migrant labour system.
- Thus, the first Social Welfare Officer, Archibald H. Elwell, from Britain, was appointed the first Social Welfare Officer on the Copperbelt in 1945.

The End of the Second World War, Consolidation of Social Welfare and Social Work

- In 1950, the Colonial Authorities approached the Apartheid Government of South Africa to solicit for both advice and help in order to constitute an organisation that would oversee welfare matters in Northern Rhodesia.
- The South African Director of Social Welfare then visited Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) in order to conduct a survey of welfare services in the country and make necessary recommendations on how they could be organised, co-ordinated and developed.

The End of the Second World War, Consolidation of Social Welfare and Social Work

- The findings of the survey were published by the South African Department of Social Welfare in a report:

“Social Welfare Services in Northern Rhodesia: A Report Presented to the Government of Northern Rhodesia (1950)” by Graham C. Bain.

- After this, the Department of Social Welfare was established by the colonial government, in the same year, 1950.
- Just like South Africa, Zambia had a racist and exclusionary system known as Colour Bar which separate social welfare services for the various population groups namely: Whites, Blacks, Coloureds (mixed race) and Indians.
- In this arrangement, provision of services for Africans was minimal.

The End of the Second World War, Consolidation of Social Welfare and Social Work

- In 1953, a central welfare assistance programme was established by the colonial government in order to help vulnerable individuals and to co-ordinate the policy governing such assistance.
- There were also attempts made to increase both European and African staff in the department as well as find a balance between recreational activities and social work.
- In 1961, the Oppenheimer College of Social Services was opened in Lusaka to train social workers and social welfare officers.

The End of the Second World War, Consolidation of Social Welfare and Social Work

- The Oppenheimer College recruited Lecturers from the United Kingdom and the United States of America.
- It can be noted that the colonial and Eurocentric social work models were merely replicated at this college.

Independence and the Quest to indigenise Social Work

- Zambia became independent in 1964 and sought to model itself along the lines of an ***African Democratic Socialist*** country.
- When the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences was opened at the University of Zambia (UNZA) in 1966, the quest to indigenise social work got underway with an emphasis on community development, social policy and the generalist social work approach.
- This work has faced challenges over the decades.

Summary

- Both religious and voluntary sectors were instrumental in establishing social work and welfare structures in South Africa and Zambia.
- Later, the colonial authorities took more responsibility in these matters.
- The discovery of minerals and industrialisation/ urbanisation in South Africa and Zambia contributed to the rise of social work and the social welfare system in these countries.
- Race defined access to social work and social welfare services in both South Africa and Zambia. Whites got the lion's share, Mixed Raced groups were second in the pecking order, followed by Indians and then Africans.

Summary

- The Great Depression of the late 1920s and 1930s added impetus to the growth of social work and social welfare in both South Africa and Zambia.
- Both countries tried and still trying to indigenise and make social work and social welfare more relevant.
- However, colonial penetration has been very deep in South Africa spanning almost 350 years while in Zambia it was only 40 years.
- Zambia has had more latitude in the 1960s and '70s to be radical and push for socialist and indigenous approaches, while South Africa has been hamstrung by the neo-liberal agenda of the ruling elite in the political, business and academic sectors.

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