

Ubuntu and the decolonisation of humanitarian Social Work in Zimbabwe: A systematic review

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Abstract

The increasing humanitarian need in Africa and the rest of the world in the face of climate change, conflict and pandemics requires community-sensitive efforts to enhance the utility of response measures. Decolonisation within humanitarian social work offers opportunities through which humanitarian social work can become more responsive to the needs of the indigenous African people and enhance their participation in resilience building. This paper looks at the prospects for using the Ubuntu philosophy in the decolonisation of humanitarian social work in Zimbabwe. The humanitarian practice in Zimbabwe has often followed principles that are largely guided by foreign models such as the cash transfer model, rights based model among many others. However, this has had little or no consideration into the way of life of the people hence, limiting the utility and ownership of the humanitarian efforts by the communities in the face of adverse occurrences. This paper, therefore, is a clarion call for the decolonisation of humanitarian social work to make its impact in communities far-reaching and lasting. This paper is a systematic literature review of 33 publications on Ubuntu and the decolonisation of humanitarian social work practice. This culminated in the identification of opportunities for the use of the Ubuntu philosophy in the decolonisation of humanitarian social work in Zimbabwe. This paper makes recommendations through which humanitarian social work can embrace Ubuntu philosophy to augment the attainment of decolonisation such as the need for advocacy within humanitarian social work to adopt more community directed participatory approaches to improve ownership of the programmes,

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design and funding humanitarian interventions that are rooted in indigenous community practices, cultures, values and beliefs and prioritising the building of human relationships and enhancing the understanding of their interconnectedness with the environment among others.

Keywords

Humanitarian Social Work, Ubuntu Philosophy, Decolonisation, Community Participation, Indigenous Knowledge.

Introduction

The increasing incidences of humanitarian crises across the globe has more sharply focused attention on the humanitarian interventions and seeking ways through which their utility can be enhanced. This enhancement is specifically designed to ensure timeous responses, social inclusion and resilience building. Humanitarian social work in Zimbabwe as in most of the countries in the global south has often been influenced by the funding and the already developed models in the global north. This has offered the much needed resources especially considering the lack of a resolute structure for humanitarian intervention and response.

However, despite offering the much needed stop gap measures, the challenge has often emanated from differences in context with the global north where the resources will be coming from. This has resulted in humanitarian action failing to resonate fully with the aspirations and the way of life of the communities in crises. However, there are practical ways through decolonising humanitarian social work in Africa and in Zimbabwe can better resonate with the context of the indigenous people. This paper therefore argues for the Ubuntu philosophy as offering the practical means for decolonising the humanitarian social work practice. This has the extended potential of enhancing the full participation of communities in humanitarian crises and the provision of other resources that are largely social and not material in the recovery and resilience building process.

Background on decolonisation in Social Work

Tusasiirwe (2022, p. 11) defines decolonisation as «an analytical and activist process that recognises the impact of colonialism and actively seeks to reverse and dismantle it in order to create opportunities for local and indigenous approaches, epistemologies, ways of being...». Decolonisation of social work is a function of the historical activities in Africa (Twikirize et al., 2024). This is because Africa has been colonised by various European countries and nations in the global north. This political colonisation brought with it, different cultures, religions, spirituality and the way of life which was imposed on the indigenous

population of those countries (Tumale, 2020; Twikirize et al., 2024). The introduction of Social Work in Africa is considered to have been a colonial project, initiated based on the American- Eurocentric views guiding social welfare in the global north at that time (Bhanyi & Makoha, 2024). This process perpetuated and promoted the individualistic focus of social work in Africa and the subjugation of indigenous helping systems and structures living the people more vulnerable (Bhanyi & Makoha, 2024).

The profession of social work is largely as a result of colonisation in Zimbabwe as in many other African countries. Therefore, it has tended to reflect more the Eurocentric approaches which have over time limited its utility for local problems. This explains why the in Zimbabwe individuals rarely utilised professional therapy in favour of the traditional structures and religion for social support and healing. Therefore, decolonisation of social work practice in general seeks to ensure that the Eurocentric bonds within the African social work education and practice are broken down in order to ensure that the value systems of the people and locally relevant models, theories and systems are developed and followed. The liberation of people within the decolonisation framework requires that people are set free from the political, economic, cultural and religious forms of colonisation (Tumale, 2020).

The need for decolonising social work often transcends practice and finds its way within the academia. The standard practice for fieldwork among those studying social work is expected to be in agencies that are formal where they are anticipated to put into practice the theory learnt in class and to test the relevance of such theory (Bhanyi & Makoha, 2024). This for Bhanyi & Makoha (2024) results in missed learning opportunities in the unstructured African environments. This is because of the obsession in following the practice of social work utilising the colonial script that has been handed down yet the way of life of the people is not compatible with others. Nevertheless, this fieldwork education can be practiced as conventional, community development and creative models (Mugumbate, 2020; Dhemba, 2012). These community and creative models offer an opportunity through which Ubuntu and the way of life of the people can be incorporated into social work education for relevance and effectiveness (Bhanyi & Makoha, 2024).

Fanon (1965) noted that colonialism can be understood as a Manichean battle between the colonial settler and the native population, which is defined and sustained by violence. Ndlovu (2022) affirms that the dehumanization and the attempt to destroy the colonized people's culture are a central aspect of colonialism. For the colonised to overthrow the yoke of colonialism, Fanon argues for the use of violence. However, this study argues for the intentional decolonisation of social work to reflect the lives and aspirations of the people. Mbembe et al. (2006), eliminated academic barriers to decolonisation by highlighting that optimism and positivity, along with necessary pessimism and critique, play crucial roles in transformation and struggles for social justice.

The argument for decolonising within the African countries across the various professions is centred around the idea that despite colonisation being a thing of the past, the

structures that were set up where not dismantled when Africa gained political freedom (Tusasiirwe, 2022). Thus by decolonising social work education and practice there is evident opportunity for the creation of social workers that are relevant to the communities and contexts in which they operate, are effective, culturally relevant and immersed in the African thought (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Osei-hwedi & Boateng, 2018).

Mabvurira (2020) noted that due to the American-Eurocentric heritage in social work most indigenous African welfare systems are often ignore and not considered. Consequently, decolonisation within the social work fraternity has the duty of weaning the profession form the colonial elements and provide freedom based on the African thought (Bhanyi & Makoha, 2024). The failing of the neo-colonial and liberal policies in many African countries is enough testament of the foundational challenges on which attempts to build Africa are hinged on (Ncube & Noyoo, 2020). Therefore, there is need for decided shift to incorporate the African epistemologies, systems, beliefs and way of life among other things.

Ubuntu philosophy

Ubuntu is an African philosophy that has its foot print in the various groups of black Africans such as the Khoi, Sendawe, Hadza, Masarwa, Bantu and Kush among many others (Mugumbate, 2024). The classifications of these groups is based on the livelihoods of the people, their ways of life, language and migration patterns (Katanekwa, 2021; Mugumbate, 2024). Mugumbate et al. (2023) define Ubuntu as a worldview of black people in Africa from where they derive relational, communal, societal, environmental and spiritual knowledge's, values and practices. The Ubuntu philosophy is based on the interconnectedness among the black people in Africa, captured in the Zulu phrase «Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu» that is a person is a person through other people (Van Breda, 2019; Mugumbate & Chereni, 2019). This interconnectedness among people provided mutual care and consideration ingredients to building a harmonious community and families.

The Ubuntu philosophy is based on a concrete base is the way of life of the African people which makes it more possible to translate it into the indigenous practice of social work. Key values within the Ubuntu philosophy include among other things kindness, generosity, love, interconnectedness, relationships, indigeneity that is being black, valuing culture, relationships, history, responsibility, justice and freedom (Van Breda, 2019; Mugumbate, 2024). These critical values within the Ubuntu philosophy become guiding in the way individuals, groups of people and communities live out their lives (Mupedziswa et al., 2019). Therefore, they become a frame of reference in determining what is considered good or bad, acceptable and unacceptable. The emphasis of Ubuntu on relationships with one another and the environment is cherished and upheld. This relationship is based on co-existence and dependency between humanity and their environment. Therefore,

humanity has an inherent relationship with the communities in which individuals benefit from the environment and in turn have to look after it (Sekudu, 2019; Chigangaidze, 2021; Mugumbate, 2024). This within social work would relate to the issues around the concept of person in the environment hence, the need to look into the interconnectedness and relation between individuals, communities and their environment (Chitereka, 2024).

The Ubuntu philosophy further pre-occupies itself with the issues of human rights and the freedoms of people (Mugumbate, 2024). This means that the people have intrinsic freedoms of choice and rights that should be respected even in instances where individuals are powerless or are going through difficult and extenuating circumstances (Marovah & Mutanga, 2023). Consequently, culture within the Ubuntu philosophy is considered of importance that is dressing of the people, their ethics, food, knowledge and beliefs. These are a central part of the way of life of the people (Mugumbate, 2024). Ubuntu provides a framework under which all these freedoms in social work education and practice can be factored in order to be more responsive to the needs of the people.

Responsibility is another key value within the Ubuntu philosophy. This entails the understanding that we have an inherent responsibility towards others and the environment (Museka & Mudondo, 2012). It is incumbent upon the individual and the community to ensure that they take responsibility over the welfare of others, future generations and the environment (Komboni, 2024; Chitereka, 2024). This responsibility often drives the altruistic behaviours that communities and people do as they have an obligation and a sense of duty towards ensuring that such is upheld (Komboni, 2024). This is reflected in the way Ubuntu emphasises through taboos and other control measures on the preservation of the environment both for the current and future generations and also relationships between and among the people (Van Breda, 2019). The wisdom and knowledge of the African people therefore, becomes hidden in the beliefs, riddles and taboos that are often passed from generation to generation in Africa.

Ubuntu philosophy further values working together and as a community. Therefore, individuals do not find purpose in themselves but through working with the others for collective good and progress (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2019). The individual problems are shared with their kin and if need be the rest of the community in order to identify and find lasting solutions (Simbine, 2024). Thus the burden of dealing with an individual problem is diffused in order to find a collective and lasting solution, hence transcending the individual. It is through working together that people respect, correct and reprimand each other. Where there are circumstances that make it difficult for individuals to carry out, the communities may be the immediate first line of help (Chitereka, 2024). This in Zimbabwe is reflected in the *nhimbe* within the agricultural areas, where communities take turns to work in the field of a single family, finish in the shortest possible time and proceed to the next. This reflects community solidarity and unity which has collective social benefits known and appreciated by those that practice it (Mupedziswa, 2019). Collectivism and consensus in decision making is valued with the African communities following the

guiding principles of the Ubuntu philosophy (Mulaudzi et al., 2022; Simbine, 2024). Consequently, decisions are not unilaterally made but a participatory approach is utilised in order to ensure that their ownership of the decision that are made. Furthermore, history is an important aspect within the Ubuntu philosophy where communities and individuals look back in order to draw lessons from the past and in inform the future (Mugumbate, 2024). Therefore, the life of an Africa that is guided by the Ubuntu philosophy has interest in the past, present and the future.

Humanitarian work in the global north

Humanitarian crises can be defined as «a situation in which there is a widespread threat to human life, safety, health and well-being» (Nanda et al., 2021). Key humanitarian need drivers have included climate change, conflicts and epidemics across time despite an array of other causality factors. It is these adversities that call for the need of humanitarian assistance across the globe to restore individual and community social functioning while building resilience (Dominelli, 2018). The provision of the humanitarian aid across the world and responding to crises is a complex and multi-layered process that is vital for addressing emergencies and assisting vulnerable groups. The complexities are partly due to the fact that contemporary humanitarian systems emerged as a response to the changing political and social conditions, including the advent of imperialism, nationalism and capitalism hence, is entrenched in the western foundations and origins (Davey et al., 2013). The intrinsic origins of the humanitarian aid create challenges and opportunities that this paper seek to interrogate and proffer practical solution for Africa.

Humanitarian work across the globe especially from the countries in the global north to the global south has followed many interests, factors and alliances. There is a link between the foreign policy of funding states and the choice of the humanitarian work that they do and the destination of the aid that is provided (Taraboulsi-McCarthy et al., 2016). These interests range from the need to wield political power and influence over the receiving countries or where there are other subtler political interests (Awan & Malik, 2023; Nanda et al., 2021). The aid often is provided to countries that are considered to be democratic or having held successful election that are considered peaceful by the countries in the global north and their regional bodies, having strong institutions and being agreeable on what constitutes the human rights (Arhin et al., 2018). Economic interests for countries with vast natural resources have also been a critical aspect in determining the flow of humanitarian aid (Nanda et al., 2021).

Most of the European countries across time have considered security issues in determining the humanitarian destinations of the various aid that they have. Consequently, religious obligations such *zakat* determines the flow of humanitarian aid especially within the Islamic countries to other Muslim populations in need (Binder & Erten, 2013). This

demonstrates how the space of humanitarian work across the world has a multiplicity of complex issues.

The discourse to enhance humanitarian aid within the global north discourse has tended to focus on the supply chains, the use of technologies such geographic information systems and accessibility. These technologies are often utilised in humanitarian work to plan routes, accessibility evaluations, optimising and strategy distribution (Jones et al., 2019; Han et al., 2019). This focus when compared to the presenting circumstances in the global south has tended to be different hence, the need for a tailored approach. Humanitarian social work in the global north has tended to deal with the extended issues of separation and the consequential outcomes on families, individuals and communities. Separation as a life event has extended challenges and effects on the welfare of the people and their mental health (Dombo & Ahearn, 2017).

A study on the Sudanese young boys resettled in Belgium showed that there were more likely to suffer anxiety, and trauma compared to others who would have resettled with their parents (Dertuyn et al., 2009). Furthermore, humanitarian aid may have negative effects on the intended beneficiaries it is now well utilised. This has been evident in the use of aid for nefarious reasons other than addressing the needs of the people (De Torrenté, 2013).

Humanitarian work in Africa

Dombo and Ahearn (2017) noted that there were an estimated 42.9 million refugees, stateless and internally displaced people with the majority being from Africa and the middle east. The challenge within the humanitarian work in African has been that it is westernised focusing primarily on the individual. However, given the stress and losses associated with a humanitarian crisis such as displacement, both the individual and the community should be at the centre of social work interventions. This westernised humanitarian aid considers the survivors from the crises as helpless and powerless (Pupavac, 2008).

In humanitarian sectors across Africa and the rest of the world there are structured power hierarchies that often view whiteness as competencies hence relegated the more context knowledgeable people to the peripheries. Consequently, there are clear power differentials between those offering humanitarian aid and the survivors from a humanitarian crisis. These unequal power relations have been entrenched in the professionalization of humanitarian response hence, creating a divide between those receiving aid and those working in aid hence, stalling innovations and community informed practice (James, 2016; Saha et al., 2024). Promotion of health and community action are central to humanitarian work within the global south including among other things full participation of the people affected, social education, political actions, empowerment and shaping environments in which they should thrive (Dombo & Ahearn, 2017).

In Nigeria after the Boko haram insurgencies the humanitarian aid was largely from the international and national non-governmental organisations (Ada & Abdullahi, 2022). This funding often needs to be discussed in the context of power relations and the controls on how the humanitarian action is carried out, a critical component in ensuring relevance and utility of such. These various agencies have provided funding for projects in critical areas such as education, healthcare, training and resilience building (Mohammed, 2023).

The lack of coordination within the various humanitarian agencies in African countries such as Nigeria has limited the effectiveness which humanitarian interventions can have due to lack in data racking systems and proper supervision (Onyemaechi et al., 2020). This lack of coordination is further a subject on nefarious intention by various individuals and institutions when dealing with humanitarian crises. The lack of coordination between and among the various humanitarian agencies is signatory to the understanding that aid is given with third party interests and not only to cover humanitarian need (VanRooyen, 2013). Consequently, the basics on what could enhance the utility of the humanitarian aid such as coordination are not met in pursuit of other narrow agendas.

Furthermore, lack of trained humanitarian workforce in Africa has been problematic. This mainly is a function of the state of affairs in specific countries before the incidence of a humanitarian crises. Therefore, there is extended use of para-professionals who may not be well equipped to deal with the extended issues that cover a wide spectrum of the humanitarian needs (International Peace Institute, 2019). This lack of qualified professional has resulted in reported incidences of abuse for the survivors of diverse circumstances including sexual abuse (Ferris, 2007). These incidences though unfortunate worsen the plight of the individuals who are already under difficult circumstances while questioning the sincerity of the humanitarian mission. It is imperative therefore, to look for alternative systems that can serve the people under humanitarian crises with dignity, worthy and in manners that they identify with.

The inequalities and inequity of the international humanitarian sector has created challenges for humanitarian work in Africa and the rest of the global south (Saha et al., 2024). This has resulted in the discussion within the African humanitarian discourse in issues such as localisation. This discourse proposes that the humanitarian intervention and work in general has to be as local as possible in planning, execution, evaluation and funding among other such factors (Saha et al., 2024). Therefore, localisation becomes a political process that seek to redress the power relation within the humanitarian sphere, a proposition that is largely failing, limiting the role of the global south in determining and molding the humanitarian norm (Gomez, 2021; Spandler et al., 2022).

This is because localization has not sought to question and change the western norms but just seeks the locals who can implement them (Gomez, 2021). This has been hampered in terms of realization by the limited funding flows which raises questions on the intentions of the international humanitarian funders. This at its best reflects on the control that the western norms have within the humanitarian space, hence the argument

for decolonisation. This has resulted in possible explanations through concepts such as capacity development hinged on the understanding that the organisations in the global south are not equipped and capacitated enough to handle the humanitarian aid (Barbelet et al., 2021). The governance and knowledge production within humanitarian action in the global south as in many other African countries has been dominated by the perspectives from the global North (Combinido & Henry, 2022). This has led to innovative local communities in Uganda forming their own transactional networks for relevance within their communities (Pincock et al., 2021; Saha et al., 2024).

The fact that Africa is the largest recipient of aid from the global North is challenging and inhibitive of innovations within the humanitarian work and the related frameworks. This has been explained by concepts such as the *white man burden* in the dependency discourse (Easterly, 2006). This concept was coined to reflect the white supremacist views that while the global north can deal with adversities and develop without assistance, it is practically impossible for the global south to do so, hence the need to provide assistance (Easterly, 2006). The rising humanitarian need across the globe and in Africa and the un-corresponding increase in humanitarian funding is indicative of the fact that funding does not follow need but many other considerations (Bahati et al., 2023). Furthermore, the humanitarian institutions have often diverted from the humanitarian principles attempting to position themselves outside the crises power dynamics (De Torrenté, 2013).

Methodology

This article is based on systematic literature scope (Hu et al., 2022). The goal of the study was through literature scope to provide a comprehensive overview on the place Ubuntu in the decolonisation of humanitarian social work through synthesizing and analysing literature from individual studies. The literature from articles, book chapters and pamphlets was reviewed with the inclusion criterion focusing on those that argued for decolonisation within humanitarian social work in Zimbabwe and adoption of Ubuntu. Papers that did not meet this criterion were excluded from review.

A basic screening of the abstracts for the initial downloaded papers was done. The screening processes proceeded to the full text of the papers. A total of 33 texts that focused on humanitarian work, Ubuntu philosophy and decolonisation were used in the study. The utilised key texts were derived from the academic search engines such as Research Gate, ProQuest Central, Google Scholar, African Journals and physical library searches. The coding of the contents of selected papers was done through identifying related findings and giving them codes. These codes were later used for generating themes for the study findings.

The systematic review provided a method through which related studies, to the use of Ubuntu philosophy in pushing the decolonisation agenda, were identified and analysed,

developing themes. Literature that spans a period of eleven years was utilised in the study, that is between 2013-2024. Any other literature beyond the provided delimitation of the study would have to be considered important and classical for inclusion. This provided a framework through which the screening of the research articles could be done. A review of the research abstracts within the specific delimitation of the study was done first. This sought to identify key texts that related to the study for further downloading and consequent use of the full texts.

Study limitations

This study, being based on a literature review alone, may be biased towards the available literature. The study is skewed towards Ubuntu and its place in humanitarian social work. Therefore, it may have limited applicability in other fields of social work and professions in general. The Heterogeneity of the research methodologies, populations and purpose of reviewed studies can pose a significant limitation. This makes it difficult to synthesise the information, as the original meaning can be lost in the process. The reviewed literature, as highlighted in the methodology, is limited by time constraints.

Findings

Participation

The study findings show that Ubuntu philosophy within humanitarian social work can enhance participation of the people in decision making process.

The Ubuntu philosophy cherishes collectivism which can become a central pillar in decolonising humanitarian social work in Africa (Magezi & Khlopa, 2021).

Mabasa (2020) concurred that: «Participation becomes an asset for strengthening communities to collectively address social problems such as humanitarian need».

Another chapter from Simbine (2024) added that: «There is emphasis within the Ubuntu philosophy on healing through the participation of the people within a community».

Furthermore, the findings from literature pointed to the fact that other agencies are already incorporating Ubuntu in their humanitarian work in Zimbabwe.

The Red Cross in Zimbabwe has included in the spirit of Ubuntu the local communities in planning disaster risk reduction projects and strategies (International Federation of the Red Cross, 2020).

This is guided by the understanding that communities are an integral part in the success of humanitarian and risk reduction initiatives. This further cements the unity of

the individuals within the community, thus enhancing their capacity to build resilience of those affected by adverse events.

These humanitarian crises such as droughts in Zimbabwe have been addressed by indigenous schemes such as *zunde ramambo*, where the communities work collectively to produce food which would be stored in community granaries for safe guarding the food security of vulnerable communities (Ruparanganda et al., 2017; Zvomunya & Mundau, 2024).

Chigangaidze (2021) noted that: «Ubuntu philosophy invites the people to collectively unite in their responsibility to combat food security».

The fact that social workers in Zimbabwe are already central in the food deficit mitigation programme that offers humanitarian food aid, means that they can borrow from the traditional structures and Ubuntu to ensure enhanced community participation. In light of the above it can be noted that incorporating community participation as espoused in the Ubuntu philosophy can enhance humanitarian social work in Zimbabwe.

Service to the Community

The Ubuntu philosophy demonstrates the importance of offering community service as individuals do not live in isolation but rather get meaning out of the communities that they live in. The idea of voluntarism within the humanitarian framework is an important part of responding to crises.

Zvokuomba & Mundau (2024), commenting on the consequences of lack of humanitarian human resource, maintained that: «In instances where community service has been ignored by the humanitarian agencies there are extended challenges with relevance and shortages of human resources».

Dudzai & Mabvurira (2024) in tandem noted that: «Within the spirit of Ubuntu, social work learning institutions can utilise local communities as laboratories for both teaching and learning, leveraging critical aspects such as service to the communities for enhanced humanitarian social work practice» (Dudzai & Mabvurira, 2024).

Komboni (2024) gave the practical utility of Ubuntu in decolonising the humanitarian space by maintaining that: «In Muzarambani, Zimbabwe guided by service to the community, the community self-organise to respond to flooding which is a common natural hazard in the area with the help of institutions such as Red cross».

The inclusion of communities in disaster risk reduction within Africa, guided by the Ubuntu, may have different outcomes as compared with the Western way of living. Within environment, the spirituality of the people and their participation as equals in the disaster risk reduction initiatives. This further ensures that it is the values of Ubuntu that guide the engagement process, such as collectivism, respect among others.

Corporate social responsibility was further reviewed in literature as demonstrative of community service. Dudzai & Mabvuriara (2024) were of the view that: «Businesses for

instance may offer plough backs into their communities at the instigation of the humanitarian social workers to cover for the humanitarian needs that may arise».

Komboni (2024), more so, maintains that: «Central to humanitarian social work are idioms and practices that encourage sharing of resources and collaborative responses. These include; when one man’s beard catches fire others must extinguish him demonstrating how others are important in resolving a crisis though they may not be directly affected».

Community service was also identified within the reviewed literature as a means through which redistribution of resources can be achieved. Zvokuomba & Mundau (2024) were of the view that: «Proactive community service may go a long way in mitigating humanitarian risk among many other things while ensuring the redistribution of resources within the community».

Furthermore, traditional leadership within the Ubuntu philosophy has the duty to mobilise the community members for developmental activities. Therefore, any humanitarian work that does not incorporate traditional leaders as community gate keepers often face resistance from the communities (Dudzai & Mabvuriara, 2024).

Hospitality

The study findings demonstrated that hospitality within the Ubuntu philosophy offers grounds for the leveraging of decolonising humanitarian social work in Zimbabwe. The Ubuntu philosophy is hinged on individuals having to exercise generosity towards others, caring, being friendly and sharing among others.

Mupedziswa et al. (2019) maintain that: «Hospitality is a central principle within the Ubuntu philosophy and is encouraged within the social work practice and literature».

Simbine (2024) further highlighted that: «Social workers often have utilised hospitality as a means of creating rapport with the clients which is central in humanitarian practice».

Furthermore, sharing with others the resources that we have, is demonstrative of genuine acceptance of such individuals and can easily be leveraged on by social workers for enhanced humanitarian work (Simbine, 2024).

Consequently, Wuriga & Mugumbate (2020) highlighted the practical use of hospitality within humanitarian crisis situations: «Hospitality within the Ubuntu philosophy can be incorporated into humanitarian social work for a more decolonised practice. The first aid skills amongst many African people such as Remba can effectively be utilised in times of humanitarian need to save lives».

Komboni (2024), adding a new component of traditional medicines and culture, noted that: «Most of the African have traditional medicines and cultures that can cover the human resource gap in humanitarian social work dealing with ailments such as coughing, bleeding and pain which are synonymous with many humanitarian crises such as veld

fires, floods and droughts among others. Such first aid skills are central in community disaster management which can further enhance risk reduction by humanitarian social workers in communities».

Literature reviewed from Kurevakwesu & Maushe (2020) highlighted that: «Hospitality is built largely on the community interdependence and reliance a critical pillar in the Ubuntu philosophy».

Through hospitality Ubuntu seeks individual and communal good in order to ensure that the wellbeing of others is well looked after. This is achieved through community members mobilising for the needs of the vulnerable groups during a humanitarian crisis (Lefa, 2015; Komboni, 2024).

Culture, religion and spirituality

The study findings showed that consideration of the culture, religion and spirituality of the people as provided within the Ubuntu philosophy is important in the decolonisation quest of humanitarian social work in Zimbabwe.

Mavuka & Chikwaiwa (2020) noted that: «The reconstruction of religious sites and rights was important for the survivors of cyclone Idai in Zimbabwe».

Dudzai & Mabvurira (2024) augmented the idea by noting that: «There is need to view humanitarian action beyond a narrow materialistic view to include issues such as culture, religion and spirituality needs and resuscitation. For social work to be able to be able to play a part towards the restoration of human rights in the global south, there is need to restore first the rights of nature».

The African spiritual interconnection with the environment therefore, can be a channel through which the Ubuntu philosophy can effectively deal with the various emerging issues in humanitarian social work such as spirituality. The relationship that exists within the African set up between the humanity and the environment is considered to be sacrosanct and interdependent.

This means that individuals have a mandate to protect the rights of the environment whilst the environment looks after the welfare of humanity (Dudzai & Mabvurira, 2024).

Therefore, when this relationship is not mutual there arises natural hazards that lead to the humanitarian need. Within this line of thought therefore, in order for the humanitarian social work to be more responsive to the needs of the people, there is need to work together with the communities to restore the balance between the cosmic world and the environment for a mutually beneficial relationship.

Mavuka & Chikwaiwa (2020) further noted that: «Religion and spirituality of the survivors of natural disasters is an integral part of resilience building. Therefore, humanitarian social workers being cognisant of the spirituality and religion of communities and individuals can built on that to enhance community resilience».

Discussion

The study findings showed that the Ubuntu philosophy in humanitarian social work can be harnessed to ensure improved participation of the people in humanitarian crisis. Humanitarian crises by nature bring with it conditions of powerlessness among the affected people. Participation for the affected people through nurturing collectivism as provided in the Ubuntu philosophy can become bridges for decolonising humanitarian social work where there are power differential between the agencies and workers in humanitarian institutions and the people who are experiencing a humanitarian crisis (Magezi & Khlopa, 2021).

Consequently, this ensures that the people in humanitarian crises are not passive recipients of aid but participation becomes critical in strengthening resilience through collective working on available social capital to deal with the humanitarian challenges at hand (Mabasa, 2020). Humanitarian social work can further, leverage on the healing possibilities that are brought through participation of the affected people and communities. This has the potential to shift humanitarian social work in Africa away from the provision of aid to cover the physical needs of the people, enhancing the participation of people in the issues that affect themselves and their mental health.

This further has the capacity to enhance the ownership of the various humanitarian actions making them more responsive to the needs of the local people. Participation of the community in humanitarian action can act as a show of solidarity one to another. The Red cross in Zimbabwe, have already made strides in demonstrating the place of Ubuntu in decolonising the humanitarian space through community inclusion in disaster risk reduction initiatives (International Federation of the Red Cross, 2020). The leveraging on the already available community humanitarian practices such as Zunde ramambo demonstrate how food aid can be community based and participatory in nature (Zvomunya and Mundau, 2024). In light of the above, it can be noted that community participation within the Ubuntu philosophy can be key in the decolonisation of humanitarian work in Zimbabwe.

The study findings showed that decolonisation of the humanitarian social work in Zimbabwe can be hinged on the Ubuntu philosophy ideas in community service. This is based on the understanding that people find meaning and expression through other people hence, they do not live in isolation. Therefore, in times of humanitarian crises voluntarism becomes as key source of human resources. Furthermore, in humanitarian instances where community human resources have been ignored the gaps presented have often been dire (Zvokuomba & Mundau, 2024). This further calls for the social workers within these various humanitarian agencies to actively look for ways in which various communities and individuals can offer services to their communities during times of humanitarian crises. In Zimbabwe, Muzarabani community guided by community service people self-organise to respond to the recurring flooding and humanitarian agencies then offer technical and

other support services (Komboni, 2024). This has made it possible for communities to take ownership of the disaster risk reduction initiatives in their various areas.

Furthermore, businesses through corporate social responsibility can plough back into the community to intervene in humanitarian situations. This makes it possible to nature a practical relationship of co-dependency among community members (Dudzai and Mabvurira, 2024). Community service further offers opportunities for the redistribution of resources and wealth in times of crisis (Zvokuomba & Mundau, 2024). Community service in rural communities is usually driven by the traditional structures in those areas which makes it possible for people to fully participate in the humanitarian work. Consequently, there is need to respect the already available community structures by humanitarian agencies and leverage on them for enhanced humanitarian social work.

The study findings showed that the ideals of hospitality within the Ubuntu philosophy can be useful in the decolonisation process for humanitarian social work in Zimbabwe. This is through the cumulative use of the values such as being friendly, sharing and caring for others (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). In Zimbabwe social workers already are identified to have already been utilising hospitality in the various fields of social work to create rapport (Simbine, 2024). This can be harnessed within the humanitarian social work for improving the working relationship and neutralising the power differentials.

Consequently, sharing with the others the resources that we have in times of their need is considered within the Ubuntu philosophy to be indicative of our acceptance of them as individuals' worthy of living dignified lives. This has been utilised among the Remba through first aid skills to save lives in humanitarian situations (Wuriga & Mugumbate, 2020). The use of the African traditional medicines during humanitarian crises to deal with arising ailments such as coughs, pain and bleeding among others is indicative of how sharing of traditional knowledge can then be considered hospitality (Komboni, 2024). This therefore, can be leveraged on in the decolonisation quest for humanitarian social work practice in Zimbabwe. Consequently, the communities are able through values such as love and respect to cushion individuals in times of adversity and humanitarian need such as droughts, floods among many other things. This reflects on the understanding that the Ubuntu philosophy becomes a tool through which individuals in the community can exercise the much needed hospitality in times of crises.

The study findings revealed that humanitarian social work has often tended to be overly materialistic ignoring needs that are religious, spiritual and cultural. The reconstruction of religion and spiritual sites is important in the resilience and recovery of the affected people after humanitarian crises (Mavuka & Chikwaiwa, 2020). Due to the intricate relationship between humanity, nature and religion and culture in Africa there is need to ensure that humanitarian action cuts across the issues. The restoration of the nature rights is considered to be as important as the restoration of the rights of the people for the African hence, the need for humanitarian social work in Zimbabwe to focus also on the restoration of nature rights (Dudzai & Mabvurira, 2024). Therefore, there is need

for spiritually sensitive humanitarian social work, where the religion and spirituality of individuals is brought to the fore in the recovery process to enhance resilience building.

Recommendations

Based on the wealth of evidence presented on the need to decolonise humanitarian social work, this paper recommends the following:

1. There is need for advocacy within humanitarian social work to adopt more community directed participatory approaches to improve ownership of the programmes.
2. There is need to design and fund humanitarian interventions that are rooted in indigenous community practices, cultures, values and beliefs
3. Prioritise the building of human relationships and enhancing the understanding of their interconnectedness with the environment.
4. There need to emphasise on the collective humanitarian wellbeing, where individual welfare is intricately connected to the welfare of the rest of the community.
5. There is need to build more local based funds for humanitarian need, moving away from foreign funding which often has attachments that limit tailoring humanitarian action to resident needs.

Suggested Research questions for future studies

1. How can the community-led initiatives that reflect Ubuntu inform humanitarian social work policy and practice?
2. What is the place of Ubuntu in building cultural competency for humanitarian social workers?
3. How can Ubuntu be leveraged to shift power dynamics in humanitarian social work?

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper looked at the prospects of decolonising humanitarian social work in Africa utilising the Ubuntu philosophy. Key deliberations centred around Ubuntu enhancing community participation, service to humanity, hospitality, culture, religion and spirituality of the people. Ubuntu was highlighted as adaptable to humanitarian social work as it ensured that communities were able to participate effectively and as equals in the disaster risk reduction initiatives in their local areas. The drive for being useful to fellow humanity through offering service for the common good can be leveraged to improve the efficacy of humanitarian social work. The culture and religion of the people are key

in resilience building to disasters while promoting the altruistic behaviours consistent with the humanitarian call, among other things. There is, however, a need for continued research to develop an operational model through which the Ubuntu philosophy can improve humanitarian social work in Africa and beyond. A closer look at the prospects of the utility of Ubuntu in humanitarian social work shows that it can be tailored to individual cultures beyond Africa. This is due to the easily adaptable values as has been discussed in the paper. This paper, therefore, has provided sufficient basis and grounds through which that can be achieved.

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