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EDITORIAL

PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORK ASSOCIATIONS IN AFRICA: A MIRROR OF HARSH REALITIES OR BEACONS OF HOPE?

Professional social work associations offer opportunities to network with other social work professionals, provide access to training opportunities for professional development, and form part of a representative voice for the social work profession. In this editorial of the 60th volume of *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*, we raise awareness of the Association of Schools of Social Work in Africa (ASSWA) and Social Work Month. Specifically, we reflect on whether professional associations of social workers should mirror scepticism, merely acknowledge existing realities, or foster positive endeavours for the future.

The purpose of the ASSWA is to promote the interests of social work education in the African region. The objectives of the Association include providing opportunities for consultation and the exchange of ideas, as well as educational resources to benefit both faculties and students; channelling resources to social work educational institutions in the region; and promoting inter-regional, regional, and international cooperation in social work education. Numerous challenges are evident in Africa, such as political instability, economic volatility, vast geographical distances, and persistent electricity crises, all of which hinder social work scholars from attending organised academic or professional events either physically or online. We believe that greater engagement with scholars to achieve objectives, such as those propounded by ASSWA, should not be met with scepticism but rather embraced as a beacon of hope.

The readers of *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk* are invited to support the objectives of ASSWA by utilising the *Journal* platform either as readers or authors to contribute to the body of both academic and practice-based social work knowledge in Africa. This will be in alignment with the World Social Work Month and Day, celebrated in March every year, which provides an opportunity to acknowledge the achievements of social work academics and practitioners while raising awareness and garnering support for the vital role social workers play in the lives of

children, families, and communities facing adversity. This year's theme, *Buen Vivir: Shared future for transformative change*, rooted in the Global Agenda for social work and social development, emphasises the necessity for social workers to adopt innovative, community-led approaches grounded in indigenous wisdom and harmonious coexistence with nature. This theme is expounded in the first issue of *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk* in 2024.

To celebrate the publication of the *Journal's* 60th volume, 10 articles will be published per issue throughout this year. The first three articles of this issue, focus on specific aspects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Ashraf Kagee argues in the first article that it may not be appropriate to regard the Covid-19 pandemic as a traumatic stressor. If the criteria for what constitutes a traumatic stressor are widened, there is a risk that the concept of trauma may become so diluted that many events, even mildly distressing ones, may be regarded as traumatic. Next, Mpumelelo Ncube argues that the Covid-19 pandemic, combined with significant wealth inequalities, has put the social policies of countries in Southern Africa to the test. He postulates that modern capitalism has shaped the world, but for many, its principles have disproportionately favoured the prosperity of a minority while neglecting the prospects of the majority. Therefore, Covid-19, together with neoliberal capitalism, has made it difficult to achieve social developmental objectives in Southern Africa. In the third article on this theme, Fadzaishe Bridget Zingwe and Maditobane Robert Lekganyane report on a qualitative study, highlighting the fact that leaving a familiar environment can be daunting. Although previous studies have investigated the experiences of youths who had left care centres, few have considered those who left such centres during the Covid-19 pandemic. The authors propose specific exit strategies for these youths, clear follow-up plans to support them, and collaboration with practitioners in the field of child and youth care.

In the fourth article, Rebecca Mmamoagi Skhosana and Hanna Nel argue that while community development interventions are welcomed in communities, their sustainability is often questioned. The authors found in their research that top-down interventions can create dependency and hinder communities from achieving sustainability and self-reliance. Greater emphasis should be placed on facilitating a process in which community members take charge of their assets and strengths to mobilise local solutions and improve inward functioning. Local solutions are indeed suggested by Babalwa Pearl Tyabashe-Phume, Rina Swart, and Wanga Zembe-Mkabile in their mixed-method study in the subsequent article, where they administered a hunger scale to include 120 participants, and conducted in-depth interviews with 23 primary caregivers of children under 2 years of age. They found that despite food insecurity, many households had stable childcare arrangements, presumably due to a child support grant and the age of the children at the time of the study.

Shifting the focus from households to social workers, Zama Maxhakana and Mbongeni Shadrack Sithole use role theory as a lens to explain the experiences of social workers working in healthcare multidisciplinary teams. They concluded that the ineffective management of multidisciplinary teams impedes different professionals' ability to communicate, work, and learn together. The authors recommend preparatory training for multidisciplinary team members and propagate the need for a structured framework for interprofessional engagement. Moving again from service providers to social service users, Manare Belsie Ngwasheng and

Rembuluwani Paul Mbedzi assert that marital infidelity is a common phenomenon in modern society and a major factor in marital dissolution globally. Their qualitative study was aimed at developing an in-depth understanding of the experiences and impact of infidelity among young married couples. The research findings highlight that these couples may benefit from intervention provided by social workers to understand the process of recovery and to effect improvement and change in their marriage.

In the eighth article, Douglas Mavhunga and Pieter John Boshoff concluded, following on their qualitative research, that child sexual abuse may be perceived differently by isiZulu-speaking caregivers than by other cultural groups. Their findings revealed that isiZulu caregivers in Tsakane, South Africa, are hesitant to report incidents of child sexual abuse, owing to cultural, environmental, and psychological cost factors. This implies that social workers should address child sexual abuse comprehensively, but with cultural sensitivity, and a focus on the specific community.

In the penultimate article Kgashane Johannes Malesa and Magala Erick Mashamba argue that research into parental involvement in children's diversion programmes has been lacking in practice. Therefore, they specifically focus on parents' experiences in the implementation of diversion programmes for children in conflict with the law. Their findings present a succinct evaluation of the current situation regarding such parental participation. Based on their findings and the lack of clear models and measurements, programme planners, researchers, policy developers, governments, and institutions of higher learning are advised to advance the development of programmes that offer direct parental participation.

In the final article of this issue, Sandile Ntethelelo Gumbi, Ntombifikile Margaret Mazibuko, and Mbongeni Shadrack Sithole posit that the historical development of social work supervision reveals that professional and organisational demands do not coexist without challenges. Tensions often emerge between professional and managerial supervision, and the authors explain this by drawing an analogy with "polity dualism," a concept widely employed in political science to describe the coexistence of democratic and traditional rule. The authors offer several recommendations based on their findings, such as the need to limit supervisors' responsibilities to providing supervision only. In addition, the challenges posed by polity dualism should be addressed by relying on professional supervision that offers greater support and guidance, thus encouraging collaboration between supervisors and supervisees.

The book review for this issue has been conducted by Christopher G. Thomas on *In the balance: The case for a universal basic income in South Africa and beyond*, by Hein Marais (2022). Social work practitioners are at the coalface of intervention with individuals, households, and communities whose livelihoods and security have been ravaged by South Africa's worsening poverty, unemployment, and inequality trends. The reviewer considers this a resourceful book that may empower activists lobbying the government to transform social policies into services to address collapsed livelihoods.

This issue introduces yet another historical milestone for *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk* and is densely packed with peer-reviewed research articles by mostly social work scholars, but also interdisciplinary researchers, aimed at the professional social worker in South Africa and

beyond. We trust that this issue will once again offers critical discourses of multifaceted, cutting-edge advancements in social work that may contribute to the aspirations of social work professional associations such as ASSWA - as a beacon of hope, and not merely as a mirror of harsh realities in our troubled world.

Buen Vivir - wishing all readers a shared future for transformative change!

Lambert K Engelbrecht
Editor-in-Chief
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