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EDITORIAL

CO-BUILDING INCLUSIVE SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The demands made by a rapidly changing society are embodied in persistent issues such as inequality, poverty, hunger, conflict and displacements, all exacerbated by climate change and its impacts. This reflects a world in crisis. Social work, committed to social justice and human rights for all, is at the forefront of social transformation. The International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) strives to enhance the visibility of social work as a global actor in building an inclusive, just, peaceful and sustainable society. Realising this vision requires multi-level partnerships at the international, regional and local levels, facilitated by social work educators and practitioners, in collaboration with marginalised individuals and communities who are disproportionately affected by social and economic exclusion and environmental injustices.

Relevant social work education programmes and research should be in place to prepare social workers to lead social change, advocate for justice, and ensure that marginalised individuals and communities are heard and included in the process of co-building inclusive social transformation. Among those affected, the already vulnerable, especially children, are hit the hardest. With a focus on sustainable development, social work must be driven by the goal of co-creating and building a future for children born into poverty, who are hungry or starving, trapped in war zones, deprived of access to education and health services, and left to fend for themselves in degrading environments.

As a global leader in social work education, IASSW addresses issues that impact on social work education and practice across regions and countries at all levels. Global standards for social work education should be integrated with local ethical and professional standards to create a cohesive framework for both international and local social work education and practice. This requires a deliberate commitment from social work educators and practitioners, in partnerships with others, to develop research-informed social work education programmes

that effectively prepare social workers to contribute to inclusive and sustainable social transformation. To achieve sustainable development outcomes, social work must expand its focus on social justice to include economic, environmental and ecological justice. This broader perspective aligns with the spirit of *Buen Vivir* by integrating the human-nature nexus into social work programmes and interventions.

Social work educators, practitioners and researchers can help drive inclusive social transformation by engaging with and collaborating on the themes of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development. This engagement will strengthen social work's global and local connectedness, fostering the development of a new eco-social world where inclusion and diversity are honoured in the spirit of ubuntu. Additionally, social work educators and practitioners should advocate for the integration of technology into social work education and practice to further promote inclusive social transformation.

IASSW aims to advance social work education and research by engaging educators, practitioners and students in dialogues about international social work and its role in responding to a world in crisis. This includes considering the implications for social work research, education and practice at both global and local levels. In a world in crisis, social work must be recognised both globally and locally for its role in reaching those who are left furthest behind through inclusive social transformation for sustainable development.

In line with the aim of the IASSW, the primary focus of this third issue of 2024 of *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk* is on social work with children, their care and the wellbeing of vulnerable women. Additionally, this issue explores two significant areas of social work: social work with older persons and financial social work. The issue concludes with a review of a recently published textbook that makes a significant contribution to the social work profession in South Africa and beyond.

The first article by Mkhavale, de Jager and Mokwele discusses qualitative research on social workers' perspectives on the implementation of legislation guiding service delivery to child-headed households. The study reveals substantial gaps in social work services for these households and in the implementation of the National Action Plan for Orphans and Vulnerable Children.

Regarding parenting, Danhouse and Erasmus' research highlights the challenges experts face and the absence of evidence-based parenting programmes aimed at strengthening family connectedness for children with behavioural problems, particularly in rural areas of South Africa. To enhance children's safety and wellbeing, Reyneke explores a social service programme in Free State township schools, South Africa. The author's findings suggest a significant reduction in gangsterism and psychosocial issues, leading to improved behaviour among children following the introduction of psychosocial services.

Addressing the transition of intellectually disabled and/or autistic care-leavers, Mupaku notes the paucity of studies on this subject. The author seeks to shed light on the experiences of this overlooked group in South Africa, particularly concerning their preparedness for transitioning from residential childcare facilities to adulthood. This research complements Dhludhlu's exploration of the challenges and barriers faced by youths exiting the foster care system in

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South Africa. The author emphasises the need for collaboration among policymakers, social workers, and social service practitioners to create a more comprehensive safety net for care-leavers and to address the critical challenges they encounter.

Similarly, Hill and Calitz argue that South African female adolescents face daily challenges posed by their social, economic, cultural, political and historical contexts, which collectively threaten their development and functioning. The authors' quantitative, quasi-experimental, evaluative study aims to enhance a multidisciplinary psychosocial support programme and contribute to evidence-based practices in school social work. Shifting the focus from female adolescents, Ajodhia and Makhanya emphasise the need for psychosocial interventions and a comprehensive emergency plan for single mothers during natural disasters, such as the floods in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The authors, grounded in the strengths perspective, advocate for intensive social work interventions and strategic resource management among community stakeholders and political leaders to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of support. In line with policy development favouring women, Fluks and colleagues argue that the COVID-19 pandemic exposed deeply entrenched gender inequalities. They draw on multiple studies conducted between 2020 and 2022 to explore the pandemic's impact on the psychosocial and economic wellbeing of women and their families, presenting recommendations for intersectional gender-responsive policy responses that position women as central figures in families and the economy.

Dhemba, Makofane and Mabetoa discuss the decline in intergenerational solidarity, exacerbated by socio-structural processes such as modernisation, globalisation and migration, which have made older persons in many African countries increasingly vulnerable. They argue that social workers should adopt a social development approach, which includes advocacy, the implementation of income-generating projects, asset-building for the poor, and promoting productive employment to create long-term social security for older persons. Nonetheless, Jordaan and Engelbrecht contend that social workers remain metaphorically entrenched in the war on poverty, with limited tangible evidence of poverty alleviation resulting from their direct involvement in social development. Their article seeks to stimulate scholarly discourse on financial social work in South Africa and beyond, and to establish this practice perspective firmly within sustainable social development.

This issue concludes with a book review by Ncube, who regards the 2nd edition of *Introduction to Social Work* (2023), edited by Rautenbach, Maistry and Shokane, as a valuable resource for students, educators and practitioners. The book is described as both informative and engaging, offering readers a comprehensive understanding of the theory and practice of social work.

The hope is that through the articles and book review presented in this issue, *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk*, together with organisations such as the IASSW, will contribute to co-building inclusive social transformation for sustainable development in South Africa and beyond.

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