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ENHANCING SOCIAL INTERVENTIONS BY INFORMAL PEACE COMMITTEES IN ZIMBABWE: A DEVELOPMENTAL SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE

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Informal peace committees are community-based responsive and supportive mechanisms that deal with social issues such as interpersonal conflicts, small-scale violence, poverty, hunger and social injustice. As human-service-oriented structures designed and created to represent the interests of local people, informal peace committees have an often unseen correlation with developmental social work in tackling social issues in their host communities in Zimbabwe. This article, therefore, argues that developmental social workers should become involved in these peace committees and identify the contributions they can make as a profession in order to enhance these successful initiatives

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INTRODUCTION

Informal peace committees (IPCs) are a form of community-based mechanism that has had a remarkable impact on peace-building processes (Giessmann, 2016: 9). IPCs are primarily created by local people as precautionary, responsive and supportive mechanisms to prevent the eruption or escalation of nascent micro-level conflicts into violent and more widespread conflicts, as well as to promote development ideals (Chivasa, 2017: 1). Peace and justice, non-violence, development and improved livelihoods are some of the values that underpin IPCs (Issifu, 2016: 147). In order to promote these values, IPCs have to tackle social problems such as interpersonal conflict and direct violence, poverty, hunger and social injustice at the local level (Van Tongeren, 2012: 108). Thus the link between developmental social work and IPCs involves addressing social problems as well as the realisation of social justice, human rights and peace. Although the attributes of peace committees resemble those implemented in developmental social work, there is still a dearth of information on the possibilities of a collaborative working relationship between peace committees and developmental social workers at the community level. This article will therefore argue that developmental social work, as a fully-fledged profession, should encourage a more collaborative relationship with peace committees with a view to enhancing their operations, given that these structures are already advancing social justice and peace through their social activities.

Developmental social work has been defined by Gray (2002: 13) as a type of social work practice whose approach to service provision stems from a strength-based as opposed to a needs-based approach. A strength-based approach considers recipients of services as partners rather than clients and seeks to identify resources at the disposal of local people with a view to utilising them to address problems affecting people's wellbeing. Accordingly, developmental social work "focuses on strengths, potential, capacities, assets, and resources rather than needs, problems and deficits" (p.1). IPCs can be considered as part of the resources at the disposal of local communities and are largely drawn from local culture, traditions and the collective interests (Adan and Pklaya, 2006: 5). Moyo (n.d.: 92) thinks that IPCs are responsive and supportive mechanisms drawn from the participation and collective interests of local people to address peace and development challenges at the village level. Cele (2013: 4) and ECUMENICAL CHURCH LEADERS FORUM (2015) (ECLF) report that in some communities in Zimbabwe, the creation of IPCs is aimed at strengthening the capacities of women and youths through income-generating projects to improve their livelihoods as a way of addressing their peace challenges. Within this framework it can be argued that developmental social work and IPCs converge in their primary goals to empower local people to take responsibility for their own wellbeing by generating ways to generate solutions to peace and development challenges.

The aim of this article is to explore the often unseen correlation between developmental social work and IPCs in order that social workers can become involved in peace committees to identify the contributions they can make as a profession in order to further enhance the successful initiatives. To address this aim, various secondary sources, including peer-reviewed reports on developmental social work and peace committees, grey literature on IPCs, and reports by civic organisations involved in setting up peace committee interventions, were reviewed. Another source of data was the personal experience of the first author, who was involved in setting up peace committees in Mashonaland East Province, Zimbabwe, in 2014 and 2015. This hands-on experience in creating peace committees combined with peer-reviewed literature provided insights into the procedures for the creation and strengths and weakness of IPCs as well as social issues addressed by peace committees at the village level.

The remainder of the article is organised as follows: the next section reviews the underpinning theoretical framework. The section following that is a discussion of the concept, history, role and practices of IPCs in Zimbabwe and beyond. This is followed by a presentation and evaluative discussion of the work done by IPCs in Zimbabwe from 2000 to date, and the implications of IPCs for developmental social work. The article concludes by arguing that the link between developmental social work and IPCs lies in the shared values of peace, justice and development, and in addressing interpersonal conflict and direct violence in its various forms and magnitudes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This article is framed within the discourse on the possibilities of collaboration between social work and peace-building, which started in the 1990s. In this collaboration various scholars have proposed integration of the peace paradigm or the adoption of a peace consciousness in social work practice as one of the strategies to fully realise the values of social justice, human rights and peace (Yesufu, 2009; Lucas, 2013; Kafula, 2016).

Social justice is defined by the International Federation of Social Workers (2012) (cited in Mtetwa & Muchacha, 2013: 49) as a process that seeks to "prevent and eliminate domination of, exploitation of, and deprivation of freedom and liberties against any person or group on any basis". Peace and social justice are two sides of the same coin. By extension, peace challenges are social justice challenges too (Morgaine, 2014 cited in Chivasa, 2018:15).

Human rights, on the other hand, are non-negotiable entitlements. Woods (2014:192) classified human rights into three broad categories namely; first-generation right, which are individual rights such as the right to life, health and shelter, to cite but a few. Second-generation rights involve social, economic, political and cultural rights. Third- and fourth-generation rights involve solidarity rights in which peace is declared a collective right.

Notwithstanding the above, peace has increasingly been viewed as a precondition for social, economic, political and cultural development in both theory and practice (Weiss, 2010 cited in Chivasa & Mutswanga, 2014: 122). By implication, peace is a pre-condition for human rights to be realised, without which human rights will continue to become wishes rather than a reality. Within this framework, peace-building signifies the idea that peace is more than just the absence of violence, but constitutes a dynamic positive state of affairs that needs to be built and reinforced (Chivasa 2015:12).

Yesufu (2009: 85) sees peace-building and social work as highly complementary and asserts that "social work needs to be involved in building peace-enhancing structures". IPCs are classic examples of peace-enhancing structures because of their focus on building peace (Sangqu, 2014: 424). Despite Yesufu's (2009:84) call for social workers to be involved in building peace structures, he is not prescriptive about which types of structures should be put in place when doing social work practice. So we are left with questions concerning the nature of peace structures that social workers should consider supporting or helping to establish. This article proposes IPCs as a suitable structure.

Lucas (2013: 88) picks up on the theme of a change of paradigm and suggests that the structural nature of poverty, inequality and violence in Africa should compel social workers to revise conventional approaches to practice. Thus, Lucas proposes that issues of social justice, human rights and peace should be bundled together. Similarly, Kafula (2016: 115) makes a call for the adoption of a peace component in social work with a view to advancing human rights, social justice and development ideals. From his perspective, only peaceful societies have the potential to create conditions that contribute towards the creation of a more just and humane society. From this, Kafula (2016:116) seems to believe that social work with a peace component (in this case the peace committee interventions) will help to "reduce hate and violence, and thus, promote institutional building, dialogue, and reconciliation, which is fundamental to development". The adoption of a peace component, as Kafula (2016:116) argues, will help to mitigate poverty, inequality and social injustice, which are seen as major drivers of violent conflict in the world. The foregoing discussion is pivotal and provides a theoretical basis on which developmental social work can build a collaborative working relationship with IPCs.

Discussion and explication of the concept, history, role and practices of informal peace committees (IPCs) in Zimbabwe and beyond

This section reviews the concept of IPC, its history in Zimbabwe, how these structures are created, and their challenges and strengths.

Informal peace committees defined

Moyo (n.d.: 92) defines IPCs as structures created by community members to be responsible for maintaining peace within the community. In other words, these structures create space for inclusive peace-making and peace-building. They spearhead "dialogues in divided communities, resolve community conflicts and protect their communities from violence" (Van Tongeren, 2012: 108). Accordingly, IPCs are known for helping their host communities to prevent and resolve conflicts, and broker peace between conflicting individuals, ethnic groups or communities (Issifu 2016: 142). All these attributes help to create conditions that contribute to social justice and human rights.

Brief history of IPCs in Zimbabwe

From the late 1990s Zimbabwe's economic and political conditions have shown a downward trend, putting the lives of ordinary people at risk of poverty, hunger and disrupted livelihoods. Communities have felt let down by the incumbent government and developed an interest in creating parallel structures to take care of their peace and development needs. One such structure was the IPCs.

The first appearance of peace committees in Zimbabwe is attributed to the Zimbabwe Civic Education Trust, 2014 (ZIMCET), a grassroots organisation founded in 2000 following electoral and farm-invasion-related violence. ZIMCET (2014) defines a peace committee as the liaison grouping that seeks to promote peace and tolerance between individuals and groups. This liaison group is comprised of individuals representing various constituencies in a community. For example, a peace committee may comprise political leaders, traditional leaders, church leaders, war veterans, women and youths. The composition differs according to each particular community (Moyo, n.d.: 92).

Nationally, ZIMCET has facilitated the creation of peace committees throughout the ten provinces, beginning in 2002. By the end of 2004 an estimated nine peace committees had been created in the Harare-Chitungwiza region; 11 in the Mashonaland region, comprising Mashonaland West and Central; 13 in the eastern region, comprising Masvingo, Manicaland and Mashonaland East; and 16 in the southern region, comprising Bulawayo, Matabeleland South and North, and Midlands (ZIMCET, 2014).

Before creating peace committees, ZIMCET facilitated conflict-resolution workshops. These workshops were focused on sensitising communities to conflict management, gender issues, and violence against women and children. Some 72 workshops, which drew about 3,804 participants, were

run in Mashonaland West, while Mashonaland Central had 54 ZIMCET-run workshops attended by an estimated 3,982 participants (ZIMCET, 2014).

Another civic organisation that helped to set up peace committees is the Ecumenical Church Leaders' Forum, (ECLF) 2014 founded in 2008. ECLF was created in response to the upsurge of electoral violence in 2008 and was registered as a trust in 2010 (Cele, 2013: 4). The first author worked closely with ECLF between 2011 and 2015, leading to the creation of a ward-level and three village peace committees between 2014 and 2015 (Chivasa, 2017:1).

Other civic organisations which have also advanced the peace committee framework in Zimbabwe are the Heal Zimbabwe Trust, which has facilitated the creation of peace clubs in Birchenough Bridge, and Buhera West and South in Manicaland Province, Gokwe in Midlands Province, Muzarabani in Mashonaland Central Province, and Zaka in Masvingo Province (Heal Zimbabwe Trust, 2015). In addition, Envision Zimbabwe established peace committees in the Hurungwe district of the Mashonaland West Province and elsewhere (Envision Zimbabwe, 2015). Not all civic organisations and communities involved in setting up peace committees in Zimbabwe are covered in this article, but insights from those mentioned provide a basis upon which the contributions of IPCs to peace in Zimbabwe can be understood.

Forming IPCs

Overall, IPCs are set up by the community to advance their common interests. Similar structures have been created in the Wajir district in South Kordofan, Sudan, as well as in Colombia, and in some districts in the DRC, Burundi, Uganda and Afghanistan, to mention but a few examples (Adan and Pkalya, 2006: 3; Van Tongeren, 2012: 108; 2013: 41-51).

In Zimbabwe IPCs have been created using self-selection, where local people volunteer to join the committee, but with the community subsequently approving those individuals demonstrating qualities such as faithfulness, honesty and trustworthiness, or who have conflict-resolution skills (Sangqu, 2014: 424). IPCs are made up of individual people representing different constituencies at the community level. For example, as Moyo (n.d.: 93) notes, IPCs comprise "civil servants, church leaders, traditional leaders, state security sector actors, political party leaders, women, youth and other stakeholders such as organizations operating at the community level". Sangqu (2014: 424) adds that IPCs are comprised of different components of society, including youths, women, children and religious groups. She notes that these social groups represent different cultural, ethnic, political, religious and economic status and power dynamics prevailing in communities. In the literature IPCs demonstrate an imperative to become inclusive in terms of involving all the relevant stakeholders in the peace structure, particularly the vulnerable and marginalised groups like women and youths (Odendaal, 2010: 6). Both men and women occupy strategic positions and participate equally in decision-making processes. Glowachi and Gonc (2013: 20) contend that the inclusivity of the IPCs confers on women and youths the legitimacy to address peace challenges in their host community. The principle of inclusivity is also a critical factor in social work practice, because "social work is also interested in [inclusive] social interactions between men and women in their everyday lives" (Chivasa, 2018: 15). This article focuses on inclusivity in the context of peace-building, in which all social groups affected by social problems participate in taking responsibility for their own problems. However, although IPCs embrace inclusivity in their composition, which represents multiple perspectives, they do face some challenges.

Challenges and strengths of IPCs

The volunteer nature of IPCs is both a strength and a challenge. IPCs depend upon individuals volunteering and serving, but if volunteers are not forthcoming, or do little after they are appointed, an IPC can be ineffective (Van Tongeren, 2012: 107).

Gender dynamics within communities can hinder the participation and involvement of women in IPCs (Moyo, n.d.: 92). If a community is male-dominated, the composition of the peace committee will probably be predominantly male. In Nepal the male domination of IPCs resulted in women losing

confidence in the committees and they shied away from participating, thus limiting their participation in local peace initiatives (Frogh, Abdela & Okumu-Alya, 2010: 20). As Adan and Pklaya (2006: 5) have pointed out, although peace committees draw many of their norms and values from both customary and cosmopolitan frameworks, they are faced with the reality of the exclusion of women and youths, because traditional communities normally insist on maintaining the gender status quo.

Richmond (2009: 572; 2014: 115) suggests that peace formations such as IPCs are sustainable, resilient and legitimate in their host communities when they actually meet local needs. The strengths of IPCs are critical for social work practice, because these structures complement the values of social work at the community level.

Presentation and evaluative discussion of work done by IPCs in Zimbabwe from 2000 to date

IPCs are tackling a number of social issues in their host communities. In a study of IPCs conducted by Chivasa (2015: 321) in Seke district, Mashonaland East Province, the peace committees were found to be involved in addressing the following issues:

- Hunger and food insecurity at the household level;
- Lack of finances to pay school fees;
- Rape cases involving girls;
- Domestic violence;
- Stock theft;
- Robbery and theft;
- Fighting;
- Disputes regarding land boundaries.

With regard to interventions, a report by ECLF (2015) showed that in the Chivi district of Masvingo Province, the Nkai district in Matabeleland Province, and the Mudzi district in Mashonaland East Province, IPCs were building peace through improvements to livelihoods. In 2014 the Chivi district had an estimated 23 ward-level peace committees, which were involved in the following interventions:

- Poultry projects;
- Establishing village banks where community members borrow and pay back money;
- Goat projects;
- Assisting orphaned children with payment of school fees and purchasing school requisites;
- Repairing roads and boreholes;
- Building a crèche;
- Organising various religious groups to pray for rain;
- Teaching conservation farming.

There are reasons to believe that the work of the IPCs resulted in reduced election violence as a result of bringing together stakeholders from conflicting parties to jointly explore ways of reducing electoral violence. The establishment of inclusive peace committees comprising ZANU-PF and MDC members in Chivi, Nkai and Mudzi districts and other parts of the country helped to break down the polarisation between members of different political parties in Zimbabwe (ZIMCET, 2014). ZIMCET (2014) asserts that in some of Harare's high-density suburbs where peace committees were created, a higher level of peaceful co-existence and tolerance was noticeable during the 2013 election by contrast with the two

preceding elections. A similar outcome was attributed to the work of IPCs in the Mutasa district of Manicaland Province (ECLF 2014).

Another report by ECLF (2015) on the Chivi district of Masvingo Province showed that committees have contributed significantly by empowering local community members with skills on how to handle conflicts constructively. Many local people in the Chivi district seem to have changed the way they address conflict in their local traditional courts in which conciliation, as opposed to expulsion of offenders, is becoming almost the primary method of dealing with conflict (ECLF, 2015).

These reports point to the transformative role of the peace committee framework in terms of how conflicts are to be handled at the community level and are consistent with Van Tongeren's (2012: 108) findings. He found out that in South Kordofan (Sudan, in the region of the Nuba Mountains) and Unity State (South Sudan), a network of IPCs was set up with the aim of responding quickly to conflicts, preventing smaller conflicts from escalating, and helping communities resist any pressure to become involved in local conflicts; this meant that,

- 54% of IPC interventions have resulted in communities "that previously fought alongside one of the parties now have chosen not to";
- in "80% of interventions where violence had occurred, no repeated violence has been reported";
- in "94% of interventions, the conflict appears to have been resolved or partially resolved" (2012: 108).

The discussion above indicates that IPCs are intently performing social work-related roles and tackling social problems, particularly small-scale violence, using techniques related to social work methods.

However, for IPCs to be effective in achieving the desired goals, a number of factors relating to the composition and internal dynamics of the committee are pertinent. The most important factor with respect to composition is the calibre of people who make up the peace committee; this relates to issues of personality, status in the community, level of education and degree of maturity, among other factors (Chivasa, 2015: 355). Naturally, people are more prepared to heed the advice and censure of those whom they look up to or respect in some way. The internal dynamics of the peace committee hinge on the extent to which members are prepared to work together, and the extent to which the committee itself is at peace, which is strongly dependent on a having a common understanding of, and commitment to, the vision and mission of the peace committee. At the formation stage of the committee, therefore, a lot of effort must be expended in selecting members and educating them on the vision and mission of the committee and the nature of its work. For example, the members recruited must have the ability to relate to all types of people in the community, to function as a cohesive unit and, perhaps above all, to be committed for the long term (Chivasa 2015: 355).

Notwithstanding the above, IPCs have limited capacity to deal directly with political-level conflicts (Richmond, 2014: 114), a limitation which may be especially noticeable during election time when political polarisation in communities intensifies. This follows in part from the fact that these types of conflicts (electoral conflicts) are usually instigated from outside the community and local political functionaries merely follow orders (Chivasa, 2015: 356). However, the lower-level social conflicts that IPCs typically deal with can contribute to political stability, because such conflicts often have their roots in local inter-personal conflicts.

IMPLICATIONS OF PEACE COMMITTEES FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

This article has shown how IPCs are tackling social problems in Zimbabwe and are thus performing social work roles. It has demonstrated that the core values of social work, which include, among others, social justice, human rights, gender equality and non-violence, find expression in the peace paradigm. The thrust of IPCs is on promoting peace. In the first place, peace creates the conditions where human needs can potentially be met and social justice realised most fully. These contributions closely

resemble those incorporated in Sponsel's (1996: 98) concept of peace as being "the dynamic processes that lead to the relative conditions of the absence of direct and indirect violence, plus the presence of freedom, equality, economic and social justice, cooperation, and harmony".

In the second place, IPCs are a prime example of the responsive and supportive mechanisms that help to ensure that peace is sustained. Odendaal (2010: 6) sees IPCs as an "inclusive forum operating at … a village in which stakeholders take a joint responsibility to build peace within their community." Of particular note here is their responsive and inclusive nature. Peace is made possible by the fact that IPCs are primarily initiated, owned and driven by their host communities (Van Tongeren, 2013: 40). In social work practice, peace is a key component for social justice and human rights to be realised. Without peace it is difficult if not impossible for social work practice to realise the values of social justice and human rights. Thus, IPCs appear to be a significant vehicle for the promotion of social work values.

Third, there is an obvious correlation between IPCs and social work practice. In terms of interventions, the actions of IPCs in both the Seke and Chivi districts fall squarely within the scope of the social work interventions described by Mugumbate and Chigondo (2013: 107), viz. casework (provision of food handouts, school fees, conflict resolution and mediation services); group work (support to widows and orphans); and community work (embarking on income-generating activities, building crèches). This correlation underlines the need for social work in Zimbabwe to join with IPCs in order to have a greater impact on addressing peace, human rights and development challenges bedevilling communities.

CONCLUSION

This article has argued that the link between developmental social work and IPCs lies in the values of peace, justice and development, and in addressing violence in its various forms and magnitudes. In essence, developmental social work seeks to empower local people through the identification of resources, skills and talents at the disposal of local people experiencing social problems, with a view to utilising existing resources to address problems affecting people's wellbeing. It also seeks to address the underlying causes of social problems such as violence, poverty and inequality, among others, at local community levels, which corresponds with the core functions of IPCs. Accordingly, in line with the call for social workers to integrate peace issues and perspectives, this article has demonstrated that IPCs can be an important resource for developmental social work practice.

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