

THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES IN RESEARCH AND EXTENSION FOR SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION AND PRACTICE IN KENYA

***A paper presented at the Social Work Symposium held on 4th
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Introduction

The Principal, CHSS

Dean, Faculty of Arts

Chairman, Dept. of Sociology & Social Work

Social Work Academics

Library Representatives from Invited Universities

Social Work Practitioners

Social Work Students

Invited Guests

Ladies & Gentlemen

Good Morning!

I am delighted that you have made time out of your busy schedule to attend this symposium. This launch presents an opportune time for you to network, exchange ideas on current social work trends, deliberate on matters to improve social work education and practice and share the research based documentation of social work in East Africa, which in

itself is a great feat in the region. A core mandate of the RPE Office is to support and facilitate academic research and to ensure the documented outcomes reach potential consumers from the grassroots to policy levels.

Social Work discourse

Ladies & Gentlemen

We live in a society full of inequalities, social ills, greed, natural calamities and other vices that often make human life and general wellbeing sad realities. Life therefore becomes unpleasant with a cry for help from different quarters eg. from the peasant farmers crying for help over exploitation by middlemen who sell their products, high cost of medicare for the majority of Kenyans, increasing cases of domestic violence and spouse abuse, consumption of illicit brews to shameless grabbing of public land which amongst other consequences denies children their right to grow up as children – The Lang’ata road primary school episode is still fresh in our minds.

In this connection, social work professionals must unite to safeguard human dignity and wellbeing for a just society.

The social work profession (quoting from the book to be launched- Professional Social Work in East Africa, page 218 second Para) *'....that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people...'* must not only be deemed to be driving this process but must be conceptualized, seen and felt as the grid that triggers, maintains momentum and finally facilitates broad interventions for the uplift and betterment of individuals, families, groups and communities. In this process, the principals of social justice, human rights and collective responsibility become predominant.

You will agree with me that the mechanism for change is not easy! The process of social transformation for real change in our societies is often met with resistance due to different factors some of which may be cultural, institutional, and political amongst others. This therefore, requires concerted efforts by different stakeholders including social work practitioners, policy makers, social work trainees and social work educators as well. For this reason, we are gathered here to deliberate on how best we can all be partakers in this change process for a better and just society.

Role of universities in research and extension

Ladies & Gentlemen

Institutions of higher learning must therefore play a central role in generating a sound knowledge base to drive this process keeping in mind the diversities and interests of the different stakeholders involved. In addition, they are centers of information creation for poverty reduction in our communities. On our part at the University of Nairobi, we are ready to support and facilitate joint research initiatives between social work academics and social work practitioners that will yield practical result based interventions for social work clients at the grassroots level.

In this connection therefore, I urge the social work organizations and practitioners gathered here to feel free, consult with us and partner with us for collaborative social work research on issues affecting your various client groups at the practice level. I must emphasize that practical and durable social work interventions can best be realized when research, teaching and community outreach are brought together hence our gathering here today.

We are also ready to help disseminate the same through scholarly publications and symposiums in order for that the knowledge base can reach generations of upcoming social work practitioners and related disciplines. Equally important in this is the assurance that the documented outcomes of such initiatives will be safely preserved while at the same time ensuring that interested stakeholders can easily access them without unjustified inhibitions. It is the responsibility of universities to package and disseminate information that can contribute to development for maximum utilization by the target groups. Universities must be facilitators of knowledge sharing between communities and other stakeholders. It is for this reason that we have representatives of different university libraries here with us.

In this regard, I wish to inform the social work practitioners and social work academics gathered here that as an institution, we value collaborative research and strongly cherish the outcomes derived from such process. This not only informs new intervention strategies to improve the livelihoods of our people but also has a potential to contribute immensely in support of the social pillar of the Kenya Vision 2030, the blue print for our national development. It will therefore be our joy to see social work

practitioners and social work academics joining hands for joint research initiatives in pursuit of this endeavor.

The Book Launch

Ladies & Gentlemen

Allow me now to share with you a notable product of information generated through empirical research and other sources by different social work scholars and practitioners in East Africa. Social work students, practitioners, researchers and academics in social work have for years struggled to find any documented material about social work in East Africa but in vain.

However, through the joint collaboration of the University of Nairobi, Makerere University, University of Rwanda, Institute of Social Work in Tanzania and Carinthia University of Applied Sciences, Austria under the auspices of PROSOWO project, the book *'Professional Social Work in East Africa: Towards Social Development, Poverty Reduction and Gender Equality'*, edited by Helmut Spitzer, Janestic Twikirize and Gidraph Wairire.' is now a reality.

The book has contributed immensely in documenting the origin, development and current state of social work education and practice which has been a major gap in East Africa. It is now available through "AFRICAN BOOKS COLLECTIVE", a company that seeks to strengthen indigenous African publishing and to increase the visibility and accessibility of the wealth of African scholarship and culture. It is our hope that social work students, researchers and academics in related subjects will find the book useful in their scholarly pursuits and interventions. I now declare the book officially launched and wish you all sound, enjoyable and happy reading.

Thank you.