

U b u n t u

U mo ja Ni Ng u v u
T I A N A N G U V U N A D U N I A Z I M A

SIKU YA DUNIA
16TH MARCH 2021
#WSWD2021

www.ifsw.org

U b u n t u

N d i r i N e k u t i T i r i
K U S I M B I S A K U B A T A N A M U N Z V I M B O N E P A S I R O S E

ZUVA REBATSIRIDZO YEMAGARIRO
16 KURUME 2021
#WSWD2021

www.ifsw.org

U b u n t u

N d ī N ī T o n d ū W a n y u
G W Ī K Ī R A H I N Y A Ū R Ū M W E W I T Ū N A W A M A B Ū R Ū R I M A N Ī

MUTHENYA WA KIURUMWE WATHI
MWERI WA ITATU, 16, 2021
#WSWD2021

www.ifsw.org

U b u n t u

A n D h a n o N i k e c h e W a n t i e
A D W A R O T E G O C H U N G ' N A M O T E G N O M A R P I N Y M A N G I M A G I L A L A E O D I E C H I E N G ' M A R R A P A R

ODIECHIENG' MOYIEDHI MAR JOTICH OGANDA
16, MARCH 2021
#WSWD2021

www.ifsw.org

Jacob Rugare Mugumbate



ASWNet
Africa Social Work Network



UNIVERSITY
OF WOLLONGONG
AUSTRALIA

www.africasocialwork.net

[YouTube](#)

Ubuntu Social Work

These slides were part of a presentation that I made during World Social Work Day 2021 event organized by IFSW Africa.

How to cite these slides or the presentation

Mugumbate, J. R. (2021), Ubuntu Social Work. Available at:
<https://africasocialwork.net/ubuntu-social-work/>

UBUNTU MISCONCEPTIONS

- It is new – it is not new, it has always been there
- It is only written, no, it exists largely as orature, that is, unwritten literature
- It is about submission – no, it is about social justice, freedom, liberation
- It is only about giving, sharing, working together, solidarity, forgiveness, no, it deals with structural issues too

Ubuntu misconceptions

- Ubuntu should sit or ride on other philosophies, no, ubuntu is an independent philosophy
- It originated from South Africa, no, it didn't, it originated from Africa
- It is just about the individual, no, it is about family, community, society, environment and spirituality

WHAT IS UBUNTU?

Ubuntu is a collection of values and practices that black people of Africa or of African origin view as making people authentic human beings. While the nuances of these values and practices vary across different ethnic groups, they all point to one thing – **an authentic individual human being is part of a larger and more significant relational, communal, societal, environmental and spiritual world** (AJSW, 2020).

Linguistical meaning

U

Means *being*

buntu, bantu, botho, munhu, tu, ntu

Means *a human being or person*

What is the opposite of ubuntu?

Umhuka

Umhuka means to act like an animal and in ways not expected of a human being.

Urimhuka, hauna unhu – means you are an animal, you are not human

ORIGINS AND SPERAD OF UBUNTU



Several years ago, most Africans lived in the west of the continent. There they developed ubuntu, migrated and spread it.

Migration map from Google

The spread of ubuntu



Sharing ubuntu with the world



Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, former
President of Tanzania
promoted ujamaa



Ubuntu is spiritual and theological
Desmond Tutu popularised ubuntu



Former President, South Africa
said ubuntu has several aspects

UBUNTU IS A PHILOSOPHY



How is ubuntu a philosophy?

1. It is Africa's way of thinking about family, community, society, environment and spirituality
2. That is why we have:
 - Ubuntu education or pedagogy
 - Ubuntu justice
 - Ubuntu diplomacy
 - Ubuntu spirituality
 - Ubuntu politics or political philosophy
 - Ubuntu morality or moral philosophy
 - Ubuntu research philosophy
 - Ubuntu welfare
3. Different societies of the world have their philosophies

FIVE ANGLES OF LOOKING AT UBUNTU

Ubuntu can be viewed from these different angles :

1. Orature and lived experience – unwritten sources of ubuntu
2. Scholarly – scholars different views of ubuntu
3. Liberation and justice – liberators view of ubuntu
4. Practice and policy – ubuntu use in social services
5. Integrated – combination of the four aspects

Ubuntu as orature and lived experience

- The orature framework says that Ubuntu is largely not written but is 'tacit, sacred and embedded in practices, relationships and rituals' (Muwanga-Zake, 2009, p. 414).
- Ubuntu knowledge is carried in folklore (*ngano*), songs (*nziyo*), stories (*nyaya*), poems (*detembo*), teasing (*zvituko*), epics, jokes or humour (comic/funnies) (*nyambo*), irony (*dimikira*) and proverbs (*tsumo*) and (*zvirahwe*).
- It is a rich oral tradition and a lived experience which form part of the African culture.

Scholarly angle

- The scholarly framework emanates from the work of writers and scholars
- Mbiti and Samkange are regarded as the fathers of written Ubuntu.
- Mbiti's view, often termed the African view of man says: "What happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: 'I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am', (Mbiti, 1969, p. 106).
- Samkange and Samkange (1980) classified ubuntu into three maxims: valuing human wellbeing, respectful relationships and people-centred leadership.
- There are more recent scholars of the subject

Liberation and justice angle

- The liberation framework of Ubuntu was advanced during the fight against, and transition from colonial rule.
- The philosophy of Ubuntu was adopted and popularised as a social and political ideology by Africans (Dolamo, 2014).
- Fighters, supporters and promoters of the liberation wars would always tell communities that they were fighting so that Africans 'could become humans again'.
- To decolonize was to bring lost Ubuntu back.
- Ubuntu was used before these statesmen and continues to be used

Liberation angle

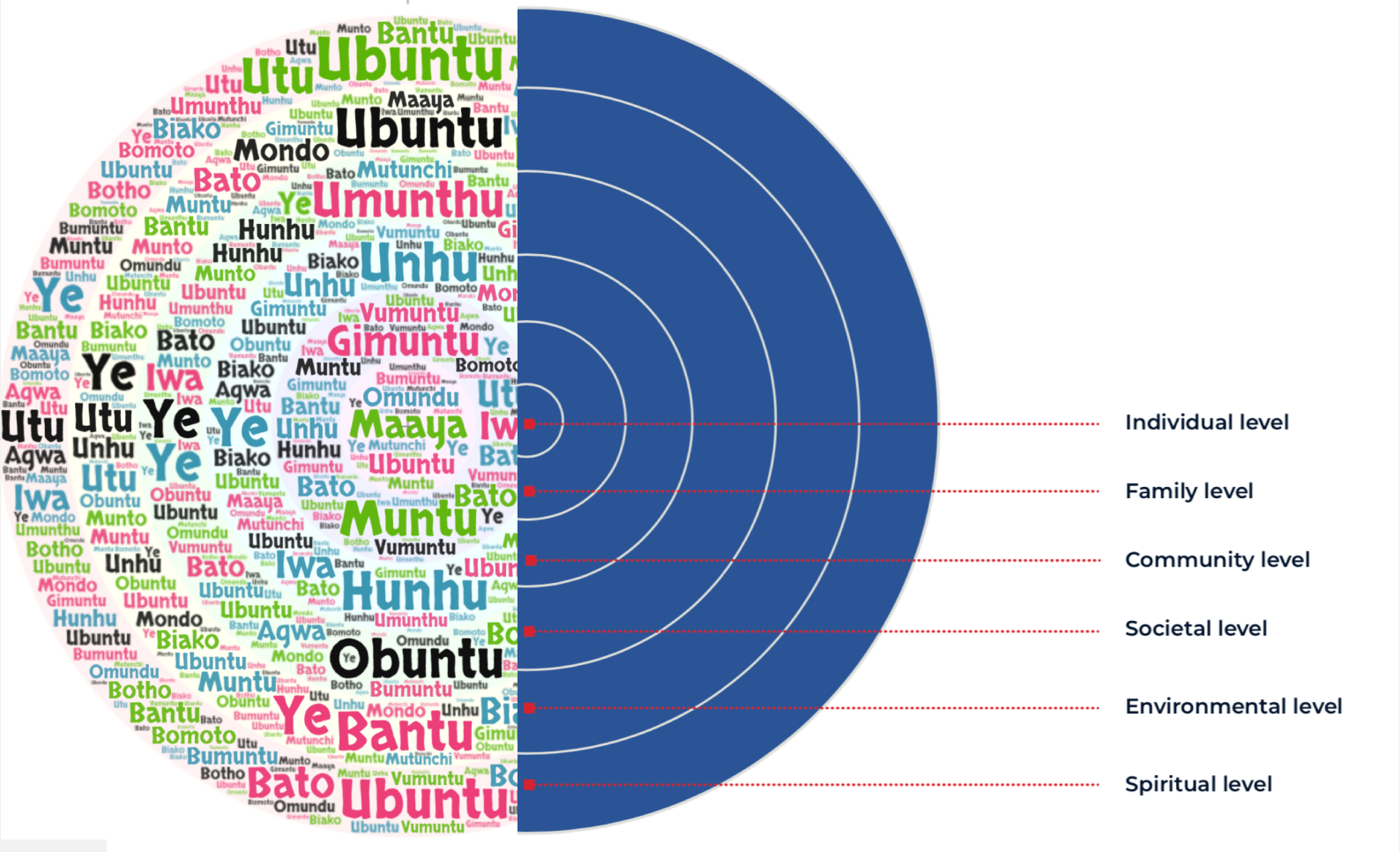
Examples of statesmen and liberators who used ubuntu:

- Kwameh Nkrumah of Ghana (ubuntu, being African)
- Julius Nyerere of Tanzania (ujamaa)
- Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia (ubuntu, being human)
- Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe (ubuntu, total independence and importance of land)
- Nelson Mandela of South Africa (ubuntu, reconciliation)
- Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya (harambee)
- Samora Machel of Mozambique (ubuntu, total independence and importance of land)
- Seretse Khama, Botswana, (Kagisano)

Practice and policy angle

- Ubuntu exists in professional practice and policy.
- The Code of Ethics of Social Workers in Zimbabwe produced by the CSW describes Ubuntu as humaneness (CSW, 2012, p. 1).
- It further states that the mission of social work includes promoting social justice, unhu/ubuntu, human rights, positive change, problem solving and improvements in individual and community relationships and the development of society in general.
- South Africa's White Paper for Social Welfare states that social development is guided by key principles such as democracy, partnership, Ubuntu, equity, and inter-sectoral collaboration, among others (Government of South Africa, 1996).
- The Paper describes Ubuntu as the principle of caring for each other's well-being and fostering the spirit of mutual support.

Integrated framework



Ubuntu can be seen at 6 levels or aspects which rise in significance from the middle out.

Ubuntu aspects summary

- **Individual** aspects – needs, rights, choices, failures, progress, crimes, interventions etc are seen through the family and community. Family rules and identity are valued.
- **Family** aspects – ubuntu is the foundation of African families. Family needs, choices, desires, resources etc are seen through the larger family, tribe, clan and community. Continuation of the family is highly valued.
- **Community** aspects – ubuntu is the foundation for African communities. Community members and families are expected to work collectively, to be reciprocal, volunteering, responsible, just etc
- **Societal** aspects – ubuntu is the foundation of African society. It shapes the economy, politics, justice, education, religion, pan-Africanism, liberty, human rights, power etc
- **Environmental** aspects – connection to, and protection of the environment is highly valued. People connect with their land by building a permanent home (*musha*) on it, protecting the land and passing it onto to future generations. Birth-in-place and death-in-place (meaning on one's soil or land) are valued. Land is a heritage that provides income and livelihoods. The land is the home of deceased family members, their graves are located there. So will be those of future generations.
- **Spiritual** aspects – ubuntu is the spiritual foundation of African societies. Spiritual strength comes from connectedness with God, connectedness with living or deceased parents, relatives and Elders, connectedness with family, connectedness with land and the environment.

UBUNTU MAXIMS/STATEMENTS

- Munhu munhu nekuda kweVanhu (Zimbabwe; Samkange, 1980)
- Ndiri nekuti tiri (Zimbabwe)
- Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu (South Africa)
- Mambo vanhu (Zimbabwe; Samkange, 1980)
- Chikuru upenyu (Zimbabwe; Samkange, 1980)
- Motho ke motho ka batho (Botswana)
- Mwana ndewemunhu wese (Child belongs to the village)
- Umoja ni nguvu (Swahili)
- Ndi nii tondu wanyu (Kenya)
- An dhano nikeche wantie

Can you think of
more statements
from your lived
experience,
interactions or
reading?

UBUNTU THEORIES AND MODELS

- Samkange's theory of ubuntu (Samkange and Samkange, 1980)
- Ubuntu social justice framework (Rankopo, Osei-Hwedie and Modie-Moroka, 2007)
- Unhu ethical model (Council of Social Workers Zimbabwe (CSW), 2012)
- Ubuntu as a philosophical framework for African social work (Mugumbate and Nyanguru, 2013)
- Ubuntu as a pan-African philosophical framework for social work in Africa (Mupedziswa, Rankopo and Mwansa, 2019)

Ubuntu theories and frameworks

- The Tswana Kagisano framework (2016)
- Anti-poverty and social protection model of ubuntu (Metz, 2016)
- Ubuntu ecological and eco-spiritual perspective (van Breda, 2019)
- The decolonial framework of ubuntu (several authors)
- An integrated framework of Ubuntu (Mugumbate and Chereni, 2019)

**SO, OF WHAT
VALUE IS UBUNTU
TO AFRICAN
SOCIAL WORK?**

IT STARTS WITH OUR PHILOSOPHY OF SOCIAL WORK

What philosophy shapes our social work?

Can western or other philosophies adequately align with African values of family, community and spirituality? No.

Ubuntu shapes our social work ethics, values and principles.

UBUNTU SHOULD SHAPE OUR SELECTION OF LITERATURE

The books we use in social work, together with the theories and frameworks should align with ubuntu philosophy. Is Biestek's 1957 principles of casework relevant? No. But we have Biestek's book in African libraries today.

UBUNTU SHOULD SHAPE OUR HISTORY OF AFRICAN SOCIAL WORK

The history of African social services, social welfare, social action and social work goes back to ubuntu.

How?

Helping existed before western social work was introduced to Africa

Helpers or workers existed before schools of social work opened in Africa

Helpers existed before social workers were imported to Africa

Helpers were motivated by ubuntu

History of social work in Zimbabwe



**Maj Musodzi
Chibhaga-Ayema
1885-1952**

Started providing planned social services and advocacy for women around 1910, founded a welfare organisation



**Baba Jairos
Jiri 1921-1982**

Started providing planned social services in 1940, founded a disability organisation

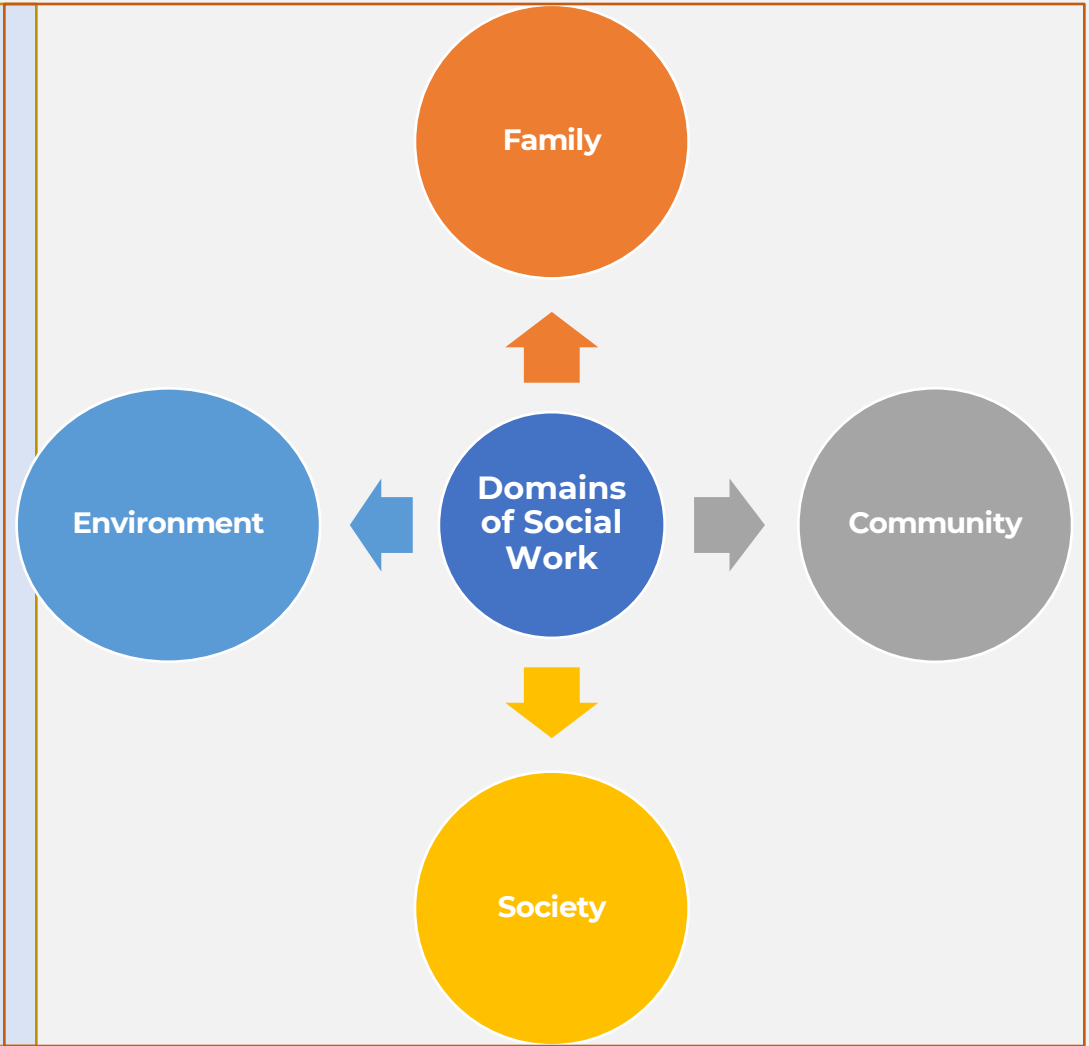


**Mkabuko Joshua
Nkomo, 1917-1999**

Started trade unionism in the early 50s, diploma in social work in 1952; liberator, vice-president of Zimbabwe

DOMAINS OF AFRICAN SOCIAL WORK ARE SHAPED BY UBUNTU

1. Understanding, Developing and Protecting **Families** and their members
2. Understanding, Developing and Protecting **Communities**
3. Understanding, Developing and Protecting **Society** and Nations (Socially, Economically, Politically and Spiritually)
4. Understanding, Utilising & Protecting the **Environment** (Domain 4)



Social work with families

What ubuntu **concepts** can you use in family work – **ukama, harambee, kagisano, shosholoza, kuumba, ujima**

Examples of strategies for social workers to use, could vary with level of government welfare:

1. No money for immediate family needs like food and rent – possible sources of support include the family, community, church or Leaders
2. Conflict – find the family member who is responsible for conflict resolution to play their role; if they can't come because of transport the role of social work could be finding the money for transport
3. Child in need of safety – find the relative responsible for child safety, find a relative's home that is safe, do a family meeting to handover the child.
4. Domestic violence - find the relative responsible for marriage counselling to play their role;
5. Child with a disability – provide educative counselling to the whole family; rehabilitate in the home and community
6. Youths problems – identify the family mentor or mentors to take their role
7. Teenage pregnancy or pregnancy before marriage - find the relative responsible for marriage services to play their role; where marriage is not possible because of age or refusal, there are procedures to compensate for pregnancy care and child care
8. Crime – if a family member commits crime, the whole family feels responsible not just the individual
9. Child rights – children's rights are viewed through family rights with emphasis on obligations and responsibilities; involve parents
10. Adoption or fostering – adoption by non-relatives or across races is not valued, adoption/fostering with biological relatives is valued
11. Institutionalisation - it is against ubuntu values to put old, disabled and orphaned family members in institutions

Social work with communities

What ubuntu concepts can you use in community work – **ujamaa, umuganda, umoja, simunye, kuumba, ujima**

Examples of strategies for social workers to use:

1. Lack of infrastructure - community members work once a week to build infrastructure; community contributions
2. Funeral – community will make contributions; relatives do night vigils for psychosocial support; church do prayer, vigil or contributions;
3. Drought – livestock will be taken to another relative in another community; food can come from there
4. Neglect by the government – approach Leaders, organise community meeting with government representatives
5. Want to introduce a new project or raise health awareness: approach the Leader first; listen to people's voices
6. Delinquent behavior e.g. sex before marriage – involve the community in understanding the behaviors so that they can all help to educate their children, and reprimand or report if they see that behavior
7. Prevent community problems, creativity, sustainability, use local resources – developmental social work
8. Build people's capacity to have income and to be able to sustain livelihoods – developmental social work
9. Mentoring – ubuntu shapes mentoring; there are different mentors in families and community to utilize (child mentors, youth mentors, adult mentors and elder mentors)

What other examples can you think of?

Social work at societal level

What ubuntu concepts can you use at societal level work – **uhuru, umachobane, ujamaa, umuganda, ururami, ubunyarwanda, umoja etc**

Examples of strategies for social workers to use:

1. Political conflict – use local medication strategies
2. Leadership – a king is a king because of his people
3. Pan-Africanism, celebrate being African, use ubuntu to build critical minds
4. Economy – use ubuntu to address corruption
5. Use ubuntu for legal justice – deterrence/warnings; returning/replacement/compensation; apology/forgiveness/reconciliation; ad punishment
6. Think of sustainability

What other examples can you think of?

Environmental social work

What ubuntu concepts can you use in environmental social work – **umachobane, musha, kuumba, iterero etc**

Examples of strategies for social workers to use:

1. Funerals – death and burial on land is valued
2. Land ownership – land is a God given heritage that can not be taken or given away
3. Protecting the environment as a source of income and livelihoods
4. Using existing knowledges to protect the environment
5. Doing activities outdoor connects people with their environment
6. Using existing days of rest or days of the environment to take care of the environment

What other examples can you think of?

UBUNTU IS A TOOL DECOLONIZE AFRICAN SOCIAL WORK

Social work has been taught as if Africa has no philosophy of its own.

African knowledges, theories, values and voices that are often sidelined or silenced.

Ubuntu gives African social workers confidence, and makes social work more acceptable to our families, communities and society.

Ubuntu is a tool to decolonise, maintain and sustain indigenise approaches that are often trivialised.

WHAT CAN UBUNTU DO FOR YOU? HOW CAN YOU USE UBUNTU IN YOUR ROLE?

- 1. Leader**
- 2. Practitioner**
- 3. Student**
- 4. Researcher**
- 5. Lecturer**
- 6. Librarian**
- 7. Policy maker**
- 8. Administrator**
- 9. Regulatory board**
- 10. Professional association**
- 11. Author**
- 12. Publisher**

“What happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: ‘I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am’, (Mbiti, 1969, p. 106).

“Whose fault is it if no one knows about the philosophy of your grandfather and mine? Is it not your fault and mine? We are the intellectuals of (Africa). It is our business to distill this philosophy and set it out for the world to see”,
(Samkange, 1980).

IN SUMMARY

- Ubuntu says an authentic individual human being is part of a larger and more significant relational, communal, societal, environmental and spiritual world
- Ubuntu is a critical philosophy, concerned with micro, meso and macro issues.
- We can look at ubuntu from five angles: as lived and orature; as an ideal of the liberation struggle; from the angle of scholars; or practice and policy.
- If we integrate these angles we can see that ubuntu exists at these levels: individual, family, community, society, environment and spiritual.
- Ubuntu concepts and values include umuganda, rurami, ubulungiswa, ubutabera, ukama, harambee, ujamaa, bunyarwanda, uhuru, umachobane, itorero, umoja, kagisano, musha, simunye, shosholoza, kuumba and ujima

In summary

- Ubuntu maxims maximise our understanding of ubuntu. Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu; Munhu munhu nekuda kweVanhu, Ndiri nekuti tiri; Motho ke motho ka batho; Umoja ni nguvu, Ndi nii tondu wanyu; An dhano nikeche wantie
- Ubuntu shapes the way we think about social work, our social work philosophy.
- It shapes our the histories, foundation, definitions, values, ethics, domains, and methods of social work.
- Ubuntu is a tool to decolonize and sustain indigenous approaches.
- We can utilize ubuntu at any level of social work as leaders, practitioners, students, researchers, lecturers, librarians, policy makers, administrators, regulatory boards, professional associations, authors, reviewers/editors or publishers.

RESOURCES

For a detailed theory of ubuntu see <https://africasocialwork.net/african-theories-of-social-work/>

For the special issue on ubuntu published by the African Journal of Social Work see Ubuntu contributes to: <https://africasocialwork.net/current-and-past-issues/>

To view or download lecture resources see <https://africasocialwork.net/academics/>

If you are interested in contributing a book chapter on ubuntu see <https://africasocialwork.net/publishing/>

To join the ASWNet visit <https://africasocialwork.net/join-our-network/>

To see videos about African social work visit <https://africasocialwork.net/biography-of-african-social-work/>

REFERENCES AND READINGS

Council of Social Workers Zimbabwe (CSW) (2012). Social workers code of ethics. Statutory Instrument 146 of 2012.

Dziro, C. and Rururwokuda, A. (2013). Post-institutional integration challenges faced by children who were raised in children's homes in Zimbabwe: The Case of "Ex-girl" Programme for one children's home in Harare, Zimbabwe. *Greener Journal of Social Sciences*, 3, 268-277.

Gade, C. B. N. (2011). The historical development of the written discourses on ubuntu. *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 30, 303-329.

Gade, C. B. N. (2012). What is Ubuntu? Different interpretations among South Africans of African descent. *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 31, 484-503.

Metz, T. (2016). Recent philosophical approaches to social protection: From capability to Ubuntu. *Global Social Policy*, 16(2), 132–150

Mugumbate, J. (2020). Samkange's theory of Ubuntu and its contribution to a decolonised social work pedagogy. In Morley, C. (Ed.), Ablett, P. (Ed.), Noble, C. (Ed.), Cowden, S. (Ed.). *Routledge Handbook of Critical Pedagogies*. London: Routledge.

Mugumbate, J. R. and Chereni, A. (2019). Using African *ubuntu* theory in social work with children in Zimbabwe. *African Journal of Social Work*, 9(1), 27-35.

Mugumbate, J., and Nyanguru, A. (2013). Exploring African philosophy: The value of ubuntu in social work. *African Journal of Social Work*, 3(1), 82-100.

Mupedziswa, R., Rankopo, M. and Mwansa, L. (2019). Ubuntu as a Pan-African Philosophical Framework for Social Work in Africa. *Social Work Practice in Africa Indigenous and Innovative Approaches*. Eds J. M. Twikirize and H. Spitzer. Kampala: Fountain.

Rankopo, M. J., and Osei-Hwedie, K. (2011). Globalization and Culturally Relevant Social Work: African Perspectives on Indigenization. *International Social Work*, 1, 137-157.

Samkange, S. and Samkange, T. M. (1980). *Hunhuism or Ubuntuism: A Zimbabwean indigenous political philosophy*. Harare: Graham Publishing.

Tshoose, C. (2009). The emerging role of the constitutional value of ubuntu for informal social security in South Africa. *African Journal of Legal Studies*, 3, 12–19.

van Breda, A. D. (2019). Developing the notion of Ubuntu as African theory for social work practice. *Social Work*, 55(4), 439-450.

Whitworth, A. and Wilkinson, K. (2013). Tackling child poverty in South Africa: Implications of ubuntu for the system of social grants. *Development Southern Africa*, 30, 121–134.

