

Title

The role of the Council of Social Work (CSW) in regulating the social work profession in Zimbabwe

Author

Bohwasi, P.

Chairperson, Council of Social Workers, Zimbabwe, Email: pbohwas@oici.org

Abstract

Professional regulation is an important part of any profession. It ensures that standards are maintained, and that only those qualified practice. Such is the case in social work, regulation is a necessity. In Zimbabwe, the regulatory role for social workers is carried by the Council of Social Workers (CSW). This article looks at the work of the CSW starting by a brief history of its functions and current regulatory activities. The CSW is a product of the Social Workers Act 27:21, number 9/2001, enacted by the President and the Parliament of Zimbabwe in November 2001. The Council was established with a mandate to register social workers and regulate the

practice of social work, to define and enforce ethical practices and seeing to it that the codes are adhered to and if not take necessary punitive measures. The discussion concludes that even though Zimbabwe has laws and structures to regulate the profession of social work, there is an urgent need to reform social work from what it is today but also to regulate so that professionalism is maintained. Regulation ensures that ethics are adhered to. Reforms to social work will require extensive consultations and it will take time before we achieve what we aim to see, as building a safe and confident future social work.

Key words

education, Council of Social Work (CSW), social work profession, regulation, Zimbabwe

Introduction

Professional regulation is an important part of any profession. It ensures that standards are maintained, and that only those qualified practice. Such is the case in social work, regulation is a necessity. In Zimbabwe, the regulatory role for social workers is carried by the Council of Social Workers (CSW). This article looks at the work of the CSW starting by a brief history of its functions and current regulatory activities. The CSW is a product of the Social Workers Act 27:21, number 9/2001, enacted by the President and the Parliament of Zimbabwe in November 2001. The Council was established with a mandate to register social workers and regulate the practice of social work, to define and enforce ethical practices and seeing to it that the codes are adhered to and if not take necessary punitive measures.

Functions of CSW

As already, stated the CSW is a product of the Social Workers Act 27:21, number 9/2001 (Government of Zimbabwe, 2001). The Council executes its duties through four Committees, and these are the Practice, Regulation & Ethics, Membership and Registration Committee, Program and Fundraising Committee and most importantly, the Education and Curriculum Development. The main functions of the Education and Curriculum Development Committee are to supervise the education and training of social workers in the country, to ensure that the curriculum of both undergraduate and post graduate programs are appropriate and relevant to the social work profession in Zimbabwe and to examine all foreign qualified social workers seeking registration with the Council by assessing their course contents. The Practice, Regulation & Ethics Committee is ceased with developing a code of ethics for Social Workers in line with the rest of the global best practices. This committee regulates the professional behavior of social workers in accordance with practices as laid down in the code of ethics, which must be adhered to and signed for by every practicing social worker. The Membership and Registration Committee serves the function of mobilizing all professional social workers, assessing their fitness to practice and recommending to the board for their eventual registration. It runs a number of publications, researches on social work practice and creates publications of council. Program Development and Fundraising Committee is the management committee of Council that monitors CSW programs, engaging with funding stakeholders and approves funded programs for implementation on behalf of Board Government of Zimbabwe, 2001).

Registration

To regulate the practice of Social Work in Zimbabwe, the Registration By-Laws of 2005, Section 5 of statutory instrument number 179 on prohibition against practice without practicing certificate, aptly states that:

No person shall practice as a social worker, directly or indirectly, by himself or herself or in partnership or association with anyone person except in accordance with the terms and conditions of a valid practicing certificate issued to him or her by the Council.

Each year social workers are compelled to renew their practice certificates. This is a statutory requirement placed in order to regulate and monitor on an annual basis the professional behavior of social workers. It is a practice that is global and social work joins other professions like medicine, and law that place stringent measures to protect clients from malpractice by un-professional candidates or people that masquerade as social workers. The certificate of practice is a measure of protection and CSW places renewing members to a set test and examination or requirements that compel them to have upgraded themselves hence improved practice. It is equally illegal for employers to employ unregistered social workers, hence CSW has created public awareness targeting employers of social workers, advising on the need to produce a practice certificate (CSW, 2012).

Code of ethics

The Council, as a statutory body developed a Code of Ethics for Social Workers recently. The rationale of having a Code of ethics was prompted by the realization that social workers handle very delicate cases which require high levels of professionalism and self-awareness. Social workers deal with vulnerable children who look up to them as sources of hope for a better future (Government of Zimbabwe, 2010). Further, the Code of Ethics removes ambiguity on what is acceptable and not acceptable, it provides a standard towards which the profession aspires, and it clearly stipulates what the profession will not tolerate. We strive to influence the behavior of social workers to be responsible in the execution of their duties.

Key ethical principles for social workers which are based on the core values, and which facilitate the accomplishment of the mission of social work and also set forth the ideals all social workers must aspire to, include the expectation that:

- a) A Social Worker has, as a primary goal, helping people in need and addressing societal problems. This entails service to others above personal interests, prioritising the needs of service users, and occasionally offering service pro deo, especially in times of natural calamity, and all the time drawing on all acquired skills, knowledge and values of the profession of social work.
- b) A Social Worker promotes social justice. This will include being ready to challenge injustice in policies and practices, discrimination, prejudice, promoting positive social change especially for the benefit of the vulnerable, weak and disadvantaged, encourage equity in opportunities and access to resources, full participation and empowerment of all.
- c) A Social Worker recognises and promotes *unhu/ubuntu*, she knows that inherent in each person is dignity and value, and that each person deserves respect and that a person exists within a cultural setting and a community and that the individual and community shape, influence and benefit from each other.
- d) A Social Worker exhibits the highest standards of professional integrity. She will thus act in a manner that is trustworthy, dependable and responsible and engenders public confidence in the profession of social work.
- e) A Social Worker practices within her area of expertise. This means that she will take steps to enhance and develop her skills and that of her colleagues and bring such skill and knowledge to her duties.
- f) A Social Worker recognises the criticality of human relationships. She will thus purposefully strengthen and harness the relationships among people for positive social change and development, and in promoting the profession of social work.

Social work education standards

The world over Social Work is a regulated profession. It is encouraging to advise you that work in the SADC region, Zimbabwe is one of the three countries that have successfully regulated the practice of Social work together with South Africa and Namibia (Government of Namibia, 2004). Further since the late 1990s, Zimbabwe School of Social Work has been the hub of regional learning, with students from Malawi, Swaziland, Botswana and Namibia enrolled at the University of Zimbabwe's School of Social Work. To achieve that standard, it means the International social work bodies like International Federation of Social workers (IFSW) and the international Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) have also set International minimum standards of practice for which all schools of social work, the work over, including Zimbabwe should aim to adapt.

Probation work

Strengthening Department of Social Services (DSS)'s capacity by promulgating the enactment of a Statutory Instrument which allows for the appointment of Social Workers from private practice as Probation Officers has become very important (Bohwasi, 2012). The appeal seeks to influence the engagement of appointed non-public service probation officers. The Statutory Instrument whose draft is already out acknowledges that: "the Minister of Labour and Social Services may from time to time engage on a contract or consultancy basis, persons on the list of appointed non-public service probation officers, to perform the following functions of a probation officer as stipulated in section 46(1) of the Children's Act (Chapter 5:06):

- a) To enquire into and report on the character and environment of any minor on trial or undergoing a preparatory examination and into and upon the causes and circumstances contributing to the delinquency of such minor; and
- b) To devise and carry out measures for the observation and correction of tendencies to delinquency in children and young persons; and
- c) To counsel, supervise and control any person placed under the supervision of the probation officer; and
- d) To perform such other duties as may be imposed upon them in terms of the enabling Act or any other enactment.
- e) We shall keep engaging the government to ensure this important step is achieved and that private probation workers are engaged by government.

Strategies the CSW can take to enhance regulation and quality of social work in Zimbabwe

- a) Consultations on a new framework for the "reform" of social work in Zimbabwe.

- b) Developing a career structure for social workers so that experienced practitioners can progress in front-line roles as well as in management. This must ensure that social workers are appropriately rewarded for their work.
- c) Setting new standards for employers to ensure that all employers put in place the conditions that social workers need to practice effectively, including high quality supervision, time for continuing professional development and manageable workloads.
- d) Consultation on a new framework for continuing professional development in social work with opportunities for post qualifying courses accredited by the Council of Social Workers and setting up a “newly qualified social workers’ development programme” so that social workers can keep their skills up to date and develop specialist knowledge as they progress in their careers.
- e) Reforms to initial social work training, so that people of high calibre enter social work and all students receive good quality education and practice learning placements, equipping them for the challenges they will face when they begin to practice.
- f) Work to strengthen social work education will need to begin with the aim of improving the quality and quantity of practice placements for trainee social workers, introducing changes to the curriculum to take cognizance of the socio-economic-political environment.
- g) Setting out to build on newly qualified social worker programs and building workforce development programs and skills for care for new qualified social workers.
- h) As capacity is developed in other parts of social care systems, the council will lobby Government to introduce the “license to practice” as probation officers, as has already been started by council. Licensing will be done by both council and government and linked to the “social work protected title” so that eventually, anybody will not be able to practice social work, unless they are licensed.
- i) The “licensing” system which will introduce an assessed probationary year in employment for new social work graduates. This must ensure that they are both properly supported in their first year in practice and are properly assessed before they are fully licensed.
- j) The license to practice, which the council is already issuing at registration and which council has also applied additionally to government, will be dependent on the council and government (system) having the capacity to give social workers the support they need to practice effectively. The council of social workers and government are consulting extensive on “licensing”
- k) There is need for strong representation of social workers at policy level, in order to engage authorities and responsible stakeholders on improving the policy environment for our clients.
- l) Social work, both education and practice has dwindled, as professionals are no longer in the system to practice social work. Majority of our own social workers are practicing out there in the diaspora. While this form of brain drain happens, it is communities that suffer. Social services delivery is impacted negatively. There is need for CSW to look into this. Is Zimbabwe training social workers for foreign markets? Are foreign markets targeting Zimbabwean social workers? How can this brain drain be resolved?

Conclusion

This article looked at the role of CSW in regulating the social work profession in Zimbabwe. It described the functions of the CSW, and the laws that it uses. In conclusion, there is an urgent need to reform social work from what it is today but also to regulate so that professionalism is maintained. Regulation also ensures that ethics are adhered to. Reforms to social work will require extensive consultations and it will take time before we achieve what we aim to see, as building a safe and confident future social work.

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