Presentation at the IFSW Africa regional Hybrid International Social Work Conference
Towards Ubuntu and Sustainable Development: Social Work position in achieving Sustainable Development Goals
Rwanda, 23-26 November 2021

UBUNTU
AND ITS ROLE IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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WHAT THE PRESENTATION COVERS

1. **Ubuntu as Africa's overarching philosophy**

2. **Ubuntu philosophers and theorists**

3. **Pan-Africanists and ubuntu**

4. **Ubuntu in social work, welfare and development**

5. **The integrated or holistic model of ubuntu**

6. **Ubuntu and the SDGs**

African philosophy

EXPLORING AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY: THE VALUE OF UBUNTU IN SOCIAL WORK

Mugumbate, Jacob[a] and Nyanguru, Andrew[b]

ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the concept of ubuntu, how it has been applied in different fields and lessons that can be drawn for the social work profession. Ubuntu can best be described as an African philosophy that places emphasis on 'being self through others'. It is a form of humanism which can be expressed in the phrases 'I am because of who we all are' and ubuntu ngumuntu ngabantu *in Zulu language. So far, it has been successfully applied in theology, management and computer science. This paper concludes that its utilisation in these disciplines makes it suitable for application in social work especially to enhance practice ethics, community work and conduct in research. the paper was based on desk research.*

KEY TERMS: ubuntu; African philosophy; social work; humanism

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Downloads in last 5 years. More views, citations and conference invitations.

Western philosophy

Disability, employment, and social justice

Employment experiences of people with epilepsy in Harare, Zimbabwe

Jacob Mugumbate

BSW (Hons), MSW, University of Zimbabwe

B

Thesis submitted for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy (Social Work) at the University of Newcastle,

Australia

400

Downloads in last 5 years. Less views, citations and no conference invitation.

July 2017

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UBUNTU IS AFRICA'S OVERARCHING PHILOSOPHY

This is work in progress.

In most African communities or countries, descriptions of being human are similar or very close.

The cultures, practices and values in **?????** areas are very close to ubuntu.
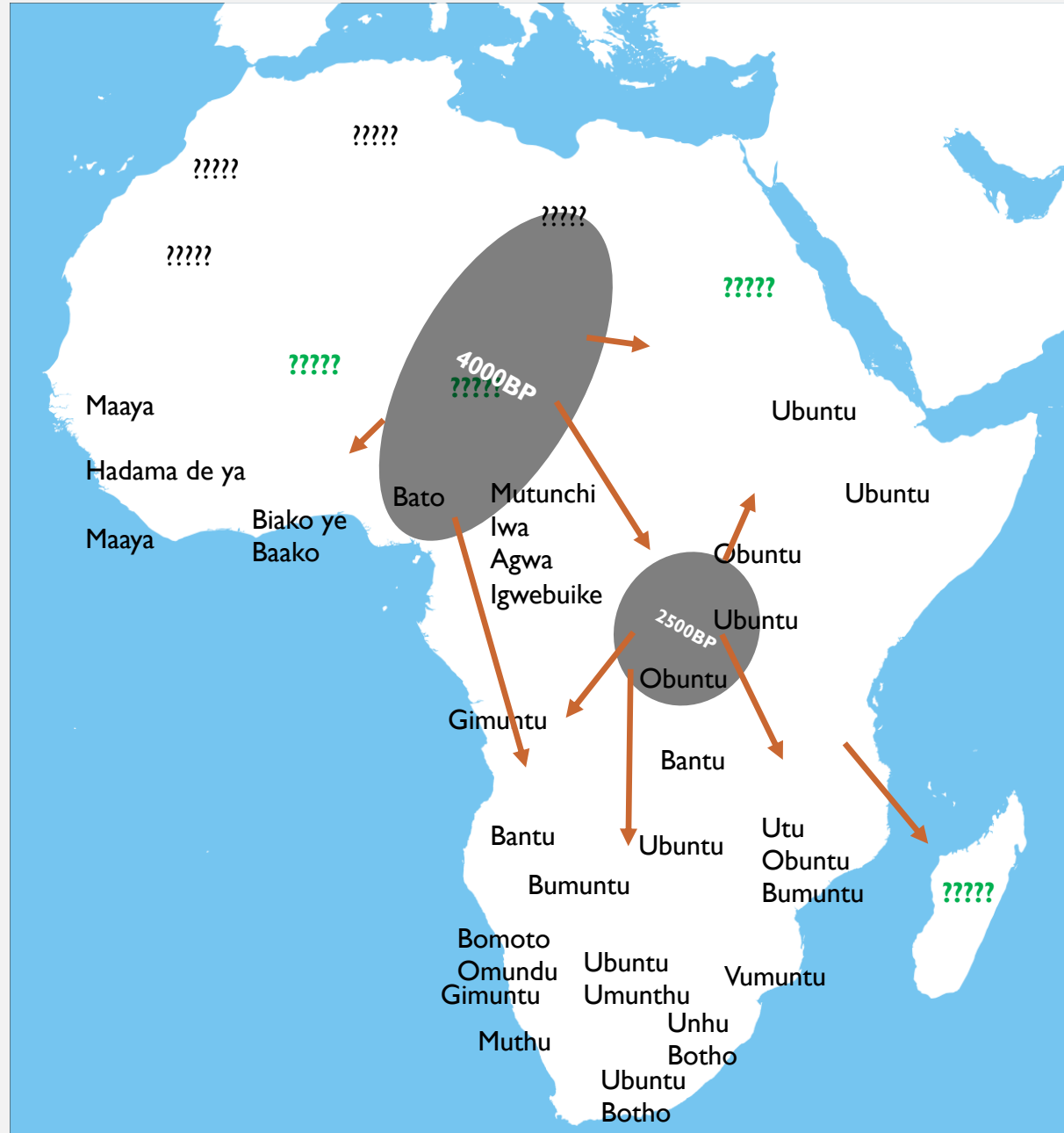
The likelihood that ubuntu is there is very high. The presence of ubuntu among some black communities in **?????** can not be discounted.

Map labels:
?????
?????
?????
?????
?????
?????
Maaya
Hadama de ya
Maaya
Bato
Biako ye Baako
Mutunchi Iwa Agwa Igwebuike
Ubuntu
Ubuntu
Obuntu
Ubuntu
Obuntu
Gimuntu
Bantu
Bantu
Ubuntu
Utu Obuntu Bumuntu
Bumuntu
Vumuntu
Bomoto Omundu
Gimuntu
Muthu
Ubuntu Umunthu
Unhu Botho
Ubuntu Botho
?????

Where did it start or originate?

It is wrong to say this philosophy originated from South Africa. It is shared by Black communities in Africa.

When?

Ubuntu terminology was spread through migration that started about 4000BP (before present time).

Maaya

Hadama de ya

Maaya

Biako ye Baako

?????
?????
?????
?????
?????
?????
?????

4000BP

Bato

Mutunchi Iwa Agwa Igwebuike

Gimuntu

Bantu

Bumuntu

Bomoto Omundu Gimuntu

Muthu

Ubuntu Umunthu

Ubuntu Botho

Ubuntu

Obuntu

2500BP

Ubuntu

Obuntu

Bantu

Ubuntu

Ubuntu

Ubuntu

Utu Obuntu Bumuntu

Vumuntu

Unhu Botho

?????

Some common ubuntu aspects

1. Relations
2. Culture
3. Indigeneity
4. 'Wholism'/holism/holistic
5. Justice and Freedom
6. Responsibility
7. Community/Collectivity/Reciprocity
8. Respect
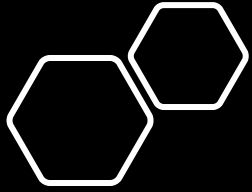
DEFINITION OF UBUNTU

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).

Some definitions limit ubuntu to 'I am because we are' or 'A person is a person through others'. These short definitions limit ubuntu to communalism but ubuntu has several other aspects.

UBUNTU MAXIMS/STATEMENTS

Munhu munhu nekuda kweVanhu (Zimbabwe; Samkange, 1980) – human through others	**Ndiri nekuti tiri** (Zimbabwe) – collectivity, communalism	**Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu** (South Africa) – collectivity, communalism	**Mambo vanhu** (Zimbabwe; Samkange, 1980) – people-centred leadership	**Chikuru upenyu** (Zimbabwe; Samkange, 1980) – valuing life
Motho ke motho ka batho (Botswana) – collectivity	**Mwana ndewemunhu wese** (Child belongs to the village) - collectivity	**Umoja ni nguvu** (Swahili) – collectivity	**Ndi nii tondu wanyu** (Kenya) – collectivity	**An dhano nikeche wantie** (Kenya) – collectivity
Musha mukadzi (Zimbabwe) – valuing women	**Miti upenyu** (Zimbabwe) – valuing the environment	**Mhosva hairovi** (Zimbabwe_ - valuing justice	**Ndiri nekuti tiri (**I am because we are**)**	**Can you think of others?**

Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu is the most popular maxim but it is one of several maxims.

UBUNTU VALUES

Upenyu – valuing life

Umhuri – familyhood, blood relations

Umuganda – service to others

Ururami, Ubulungiswa, Ubutabera – justice

Ukama, Harambee – familyhood, blood relations

Ujamaa – familyhood or communityhood

Ubunyarwanda – nationhood

Uhuru – liberty/independence/freedom

Umachobane – sustainability

Itorero – good members of society, and a strong sense of cultural values and leadership skills

Umoja – unity, peace and harmony

Kagisano – good neighbourliness

Musha – permanent home in ancestral lands

Simunye – strengths in numbers, we are one

Shosholoza – resilience

Kuumba – creativity

Ujima – collective responsibility

Utungamiri – leadership

Ushavi – workmanship, enterprising

Urithi, Nhaka – inheritance

Uroho – spiritual connectedness

Unyanzvi – professionalism

Kuumba – mentoring

Igwebuike – strength in numbers

Sankofa – look back to inform the future

UBUNTU ETHICS AND PRINCIPLES

Upenyu – valuing life. **The ethic is do not harm or kill**

Umhuri – familyhood, valuing blood relations. **The ethic is protect families and marriages**

Umuganda – service to others. **The ethic is help others in need or reciprocity**

Ururami, Ubulungiswa, Ubutabera – justice. **The ethic is for people to be just**

Ukama, Harambee – familyhood, valuing blood relations. **The ethic is protect families and marriages**

Ujamaa – familyhood or communityhood. **The ethic is promote cooperation and collectivism**

Ubunyarwanda – nationhood. **There are many ethics including promotIng peace**

Uhuru – liberty/independence/freedom. **The ethic is liberate and protect African liberation**

Umachobane – sustainability. **The ethic is to do programs that are sustainable.**

Itorero – good members of society, and a strong sense of cultural values and leadership skills. **The ethic is to respect our cultures**

Umoja – unity, peace and harmony. **The ethic is to promote oneness.**

Kagisano – good neighbourliness. **The ethic is to promote harmony**

Musha – permanent home in ancestral lands. **The ethic is to protect and maintain permanent homes**

Simunye – strengths in numbers, we are one. **The ethic is promote cooperation and collectivism**

Shosholoza – resilience. **The ethic is remaining strong despite adversity**

Kuumba – creativity. **The ethic is not to imitate**

Ujima – collective responsibility. **The ethic is to look after one another**

Utungamiri – leadership. **The ethic is people centered leadership**

Ushavi – workmanship, enterprising . **The ethic is hardworking**

Urithi, Nhaka – inheritance. **The ethic is to protect inheritance**

Uroho – spiritual connectedness. **The ethic is to be holistic**

Unyanzvi – professionalism. **The ethic is to act professionally**

Sankofa – **look back to inform the future.**

UBUNTU PHILOSOPHERS AND THEORISTS

UBUNTU THEOLOGY

John Samuel Mbiti

- John S. Mbiti is regarded as the father of modern African theology.

- Challenged the European view that Africa has no religion of its own, and the colonial and Christian view that African religious views are primitive, demonic and evil, and Africans are savages.

- African religion and religious views are just as legitimate and require respect as Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism.

- **'I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am**', (Mbiti, 1969, p. 106).

- Ubuntu carries African religious beliefs

- We should use ubuntu to decolonize African religious beliefs

- African religious beliefs are mostly not written, they exist in orature

Conflict, mental health, lawlessness, suicide and violence are closely linked to religions that came from outside the continent.

After studying all these tribes, Mbiti concluded that Africa has its own religion, a religion white people did not want to exist in favour of Christianity or Islam.

UBUNTU IS CARRIED IN AFRICAN LANGUAGES

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o

- Founded decolonizing the mind theory

- African languages are at the centre of his thesis

- Challenged the colonial European view that African languages were inferior and lacked substance.

- Challenged the prioritisation of English, French and Arabic as linguicide, leading to the genocide of African languages.

- Used Gikuyu his mother tongue and insisted that he writes in Gikuyu first then translate to other languages.

- Language carries ubuntu, African philosophy, ideas, values, meanings etc

Decolonising the Mind, 1986

EDUCATION SHOULD TRANSMIT UBUNTU

Stanlake Samkange

"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).

- We should use ubuntu to decolonize African education and learning
- Ubuntu also crucial as an African political philosophy

UBUNTU MANAGEMENT

Lovemore Mbigi

1. African has its own style or philosophy of management, ubuntu management

2. "Community is the cornerstone in African thought and life (Mbigi, 2005, p. 75).

3. **Masibambane** which means ubuntu inspired business culture marketing, leadership, accountability, training and production.

4. **Nhorowondo** – understanding organisations, needs, motivations, processes and phenomena in their context.

5. **Mumvuri** - shadow corpse theory – often, when organisations are not functioning, there is a 'shadow'.

6. Collective leadership and decision making is important. Collective fingers theory (**chara chimwe hachitswanyi inda**)

UBUNTU - HUMANISM PHILOSOPHY

Kenneth Buchizya Kaunda – African humanism

- Need for maintaining an African overarching philosophy in all spheres of life – political, economic and social.
- Doing away with colonial mentality, breaking with colonial past
- Appreciation of African values, heritage and worldviews
- Socialism – ensuring that the means of production, distribution, and exchange is community owned and controlled
- Authentic African identity
- African spirituality

"Humanism abhors every form of exploitation of MAN by man."

"Humanism seeks to create an egalitarian society–that is, society in which there is equal opportunity for self-development for all…"

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PAN-AFRICANISTS, ACTIVISTS AND UBUNTU

FIRST WAVE PAN-AFRICANISTS
To be human is to be free!
Ubuntu means freedom

Mbande Nzinga (1583 – 1663), sister and advisor of the king of Ngola (now Angola). In 1624 his brother killed himself as a result a a demand for slaves by the Portugese. She became Queen. Had an all-women government.

Mbuya Nehanda (1862-1898) - led Shona people against colonists led by Cecil Rhodes. Hanged by the colonists but said deconolisation will happen "mapfupa angu achamuka" – meaning my people will liberate themselves, decolonisation will happen.

Yaa Asantewa (1840-1921), Queen Mother of Ejisu, Ghana – "if you the men of Ashanti will not go forward, then we will. We the women will. I shall call upon my fellow women. We will fight the white (British) men. We will fight till the last of us falls in the battlefields."

Can you think of others in West, East, North, Central and Southern Africa?

SECOND WAVE PAN-AFRICANISTS
Ubuntu means liberation. To be human is to be free.

Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana (ubuntu, being African, father of neo-colonialism)

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)

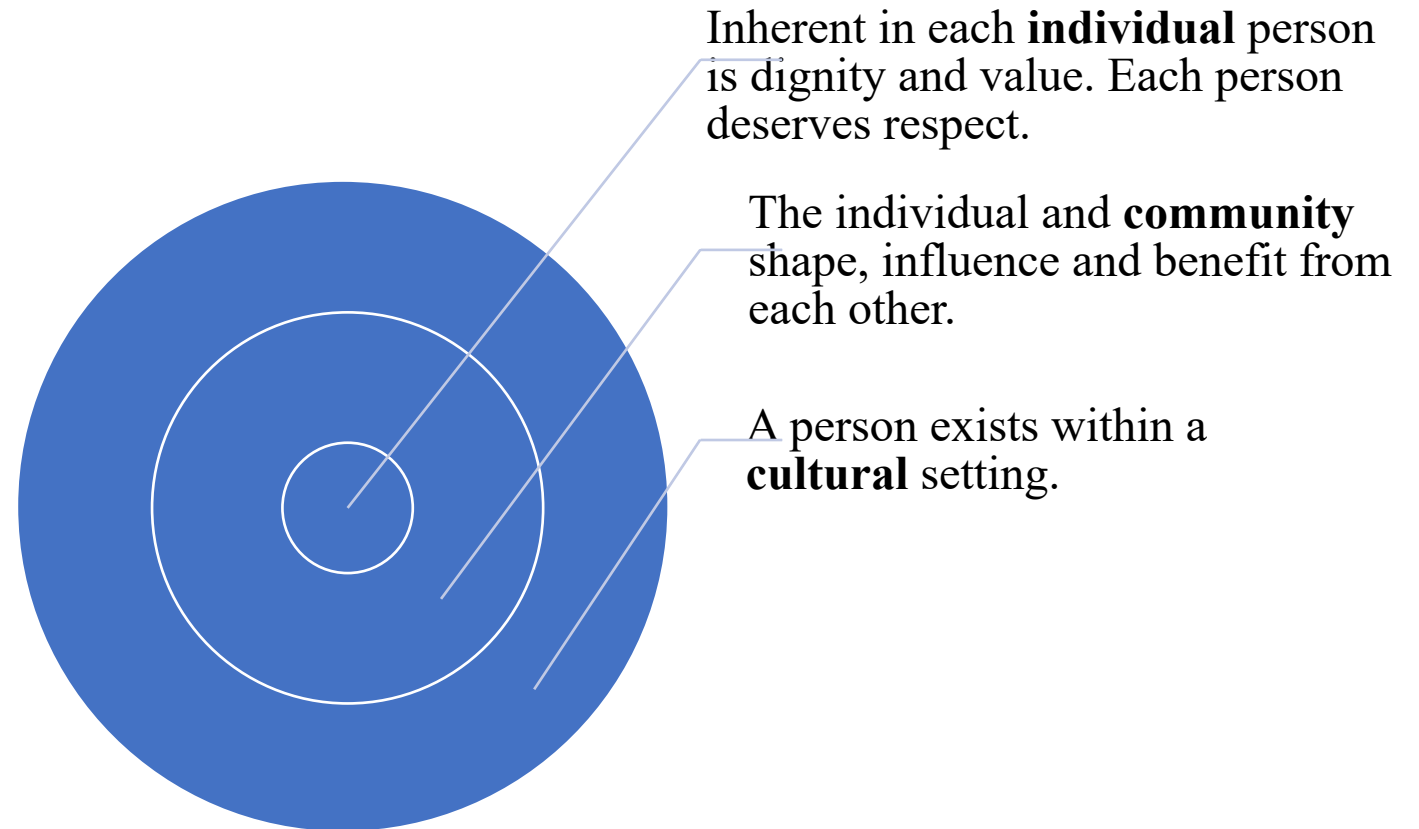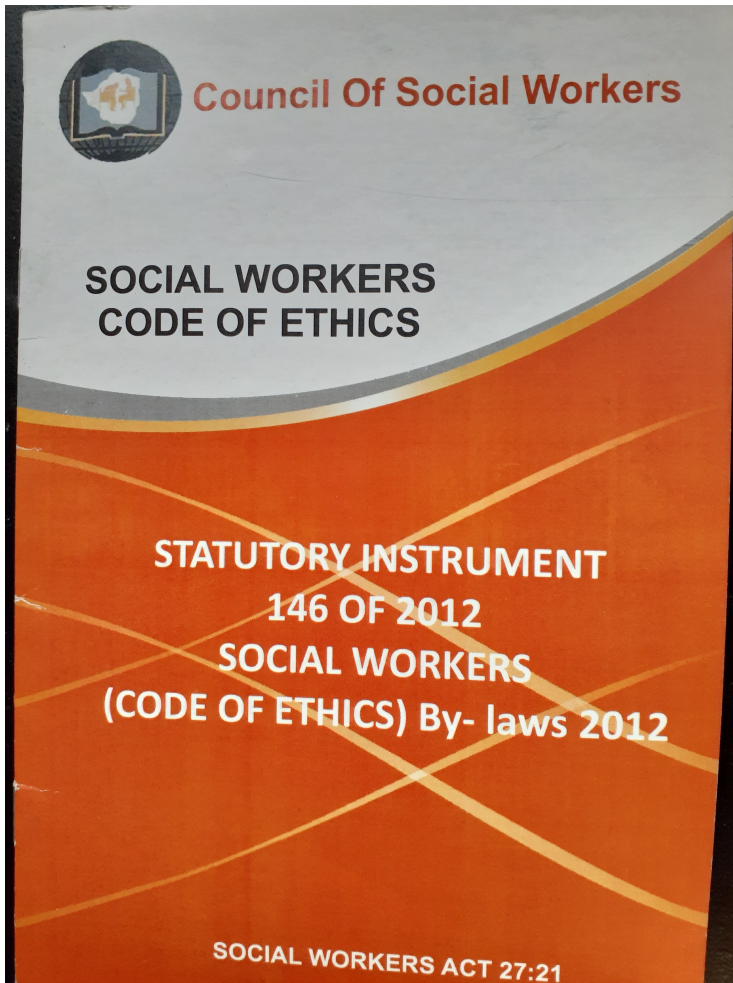**Samora Machel** of Mozambique (ubuntu, total independence and importance of land)

Seretse Khama of Botswana (Kagisano)

Desmond Tutu (ubuntu, reconciliation)

Can you think of other and emerging 3rd wave Pan-Africanists in **West, East, North, Central and Southern Africa**

Although each of these people has/had their strengths and weaknesses, they were all motivated by ubuntu - **to be human is to be free!**

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APPLICATION OF UBUNTU IN SOCIAL WORK, WELFARE AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Council Of Social Workers

SOCIAL WORKERS
CODE OF ETHICS

STATUTORY INSTRUMENT
146 OF 2012
SOCIAL WORKERS
(CODE OF ETHICS) By- laws 2012

SOCIAL WORKERS ACT 27:21

Inherent in each **individual** person is dignity and value. Each person deserves respect.

The individual and **community** shape, influence and benefit from each other.

A person exists within a **cultural** setting.

"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" (Council of Social Workers Zimbabwe, 2012)

UBUNTU JUSTICE

- Ubuntu justice emphasizes these elements:

  - **Deterrence** which can be done socially, physically, economically or spiritually

  - **Returning and Replacement** – meaning bringing back what has been stolen, replacing it or compensating. In Shona language this is called *kudzora* and *kuripa*

  - **Apology, Forgiveness and Reconciliation** (restoration of *ukama* or relations) after meeting the above

  - **Warnings and Punishments (retribution) from community**, leaders and elders if the above have not been achieved or ignored

  - **Warnings and Punishments from spiritual beings** if the above have not been met. In Shona culture, these are called *jambwa* and *ngozi*

Can international laws and conventions foster justice in Africa? Can colonial or western law bring justice to Africans? Are they compatible with ubuntu?

UBUNTU SOCIAL JUSTICE FRAMEWORK

- Reciprocity and Sharing
- Respect and Empowerment
- Equitable distribution of resources
- Promotion of social justice
- Inspiring economic progress

Rankopo, Osei-Hwedie and Modie-Moroka, 2007

UBUNTU RESEARCH ETHICS

African Research Ethics and Malpractice Statement (AREMS)

- Value for Family (*umhuri*, familyhood
- Respect for Community (*ujamaa*, 'communityhood)
- Decolonising
- Developmental and capacity building research
- Sustainable research
- Justice
- Value for life
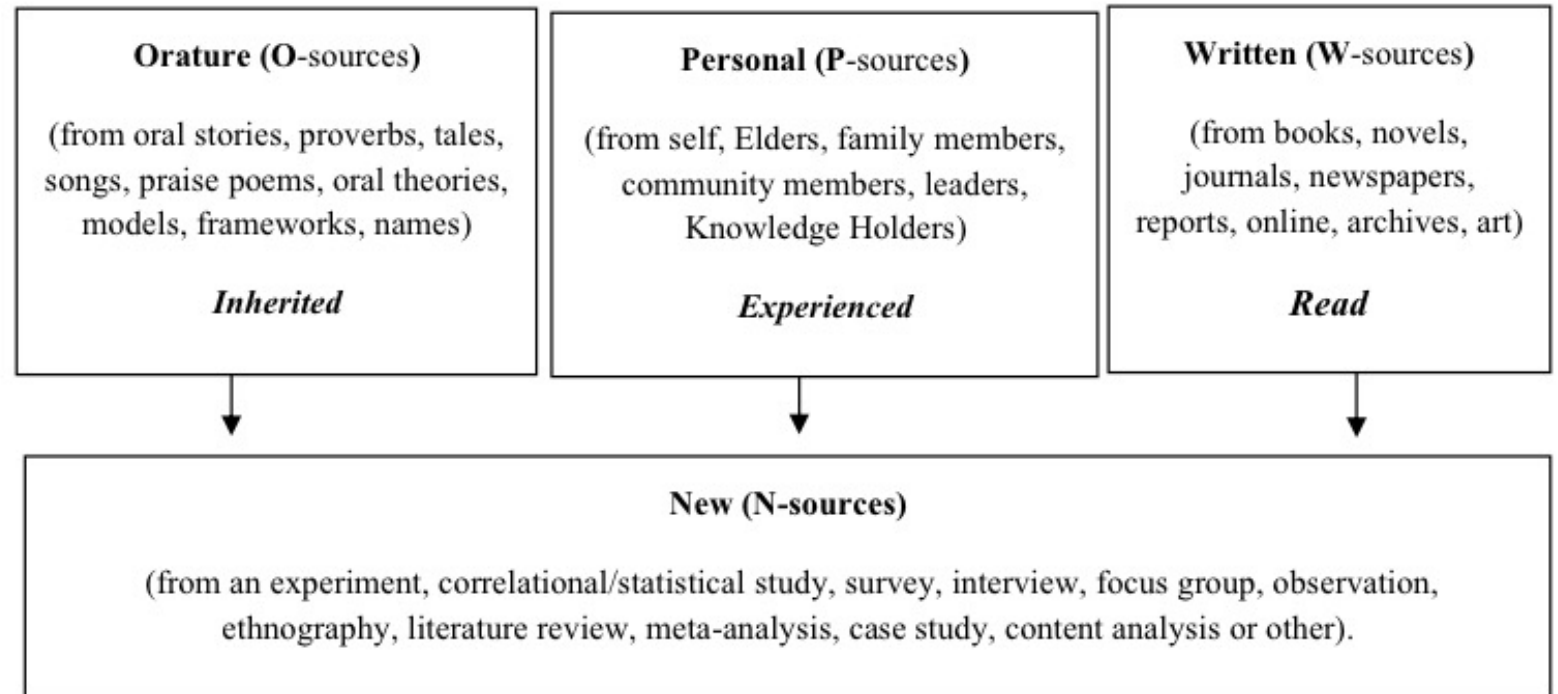- Protection of most vulnerable populations

ASWNet
Africa Social Work Network

UBUNTU INSPIRED RESEARCH

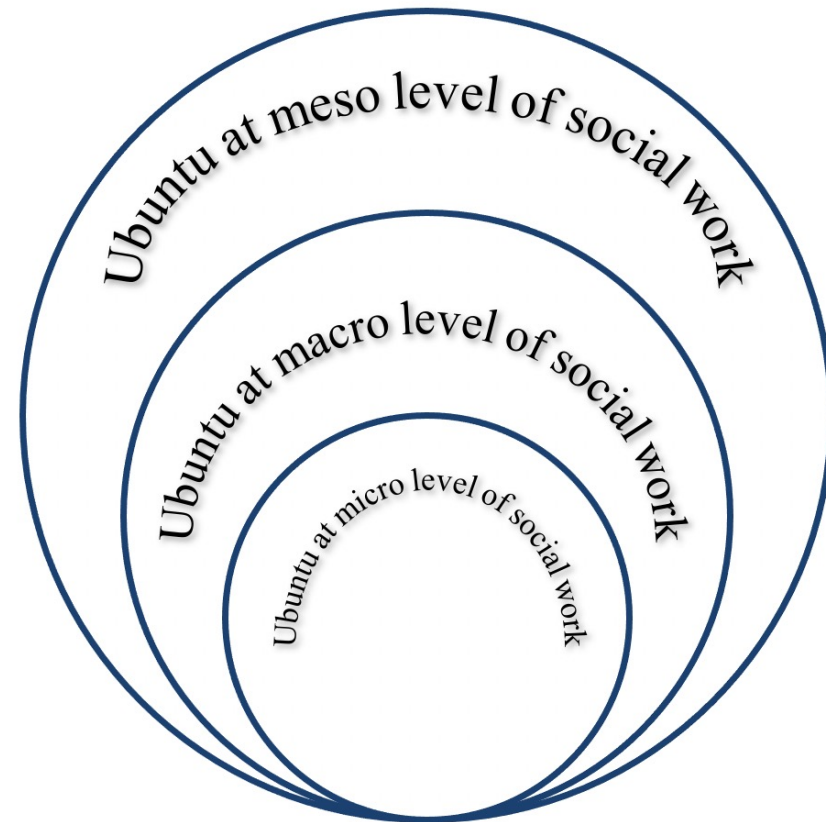Figure 8: AJSW Framework for Classification of Sources of Knowledge (AJSW, 2019)

Orature (O-sources)

(from oral stories, proverbs, tales, songs, praise poems, oral theories, models, frameworks, names)

Inherited

Personal (P-sources)

(from self, Elders, family members, community members, leaders, Knowledge Holders)

Experienced

Written (W-sources)

(from books, novels, journals, newspapers, reports, online, archives, art)

Read

New (N-sources)

(from an experiment, correlational/statistical study, survey, interview, focus group, observation, ethnography, literature review, meta-analysis, case study, content analysis or other).

Ubuntu inspired research acknowledges African philosophy, different sources of information, uses ubuntu ethics and methods.

UBUNTU ECOLOGICAL AND ECO-SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE

1. Embracing the whole of humanity as part of our global community or clan, not only those who are related to us or those who are like us (van Breda, 2019, online)
2. Embracing our history (in our ancestors) and our future (in our descendants) and to live our lives in the world in a way that honours the former and ensures the wellbeing of the latter.
3. Embracing the earth as a member of our community, both because we are made from earth and because earth is a divine being with whom we have a reciprocal relationship.

van Breda, 2019

UBUNTU AS A PAN-AFRICAN PHILOSOPHIC AL FRAMEWORK (DECOLONIAL)

Ubuntu at meso level of social work

Ubuntu at macro level of social work

Ubuntu at micro level of social work

"Ubuntu, as a concept and approach, provides for considerable opportunities for social work practice in Africa, both in the context of its academic and its practical endeavours. In short, it does provide a framework for social work across the continent. Learners and practitioners alike can develop their competencies, techniques and skills based on the framework of this philosophy.", (Mupedziswa, Rankopo and Mwansa, 2019)

IN SOCIAL WORK LITERATURE

1. Social work should be tied to our philosophy, histories and cultures.
2. Professional education must be a continuation (not a discontinuation) of learning that starts in the family.
3. The role of social work education and literature should not be to un-educate or de-school us about our culture, environments, families and spirituality.
4. Western-centred social work training makes it difficult to practice in Africa.
5. In our social services, there is room for 'borrowed strategies' but these should not displace our indigenous strategies.

ON DECOLONISATION

"Immanuel Kant, who was one of the leading and most influential philosophers of the Enlightenment period, concluded through his scientific and philosophical analysis that African people were incapable of developing philosophy because of their inferiority to White people. Hume and Hegel held similar views. Such cultural-genocidal racist views are, therefore, now written into many of the baseline layers of Western thought which **we as social workers are now obligated to challenge**", (Mayaka and Truell, 2021).

Africa has its philosophy – ubuntu!

THE HOLISTIC OR INTEGRATED MODEL OF UBUNTU

THE HOLISTIC OR INTEGRATED MODEL OF UBUNTU

Mugumbate and Chereni, 2019

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.

INTEGRATED MODEL

Ubuntu level	What does this level encompass?	Universal aspects at all levels
Individual	Individual characteristics ('heart', 'blood', body, mind, gender, heritage etc)	**Relations** (social, economic or political)
Family	Immediate, extended family, kins and tribe	**Culture** ○ Values & principles
Community	Geographically connected households, village or villages	○ Beliefs ○ Language
Societal	Country (chiefdoms and kingdoms) country (nation) Africa as a whole	○ Laws ○ Ways of knowing ○ Knowledge ○ Philosophy ○ Theories
Environmental	Land and everything on and under land Water and everything on and underwater Atmosphere and everything in it	○ Ethics ○ Education **Indigeneity**
Spiritual	Connection with living and deceased family members Connection with living and deceased community & society members Connection to the environment Connection to God	**Community/Reciprocity/Collectivity** **'Wholism'/holism** **Justice and Freedom** **Responsibility** **Respect**

How much of these do we have in the SDGs?

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UBUNTU AND THE SDGs

SOME STRENGTHS IN THE SDGs

Strengths from an ubuntu perspective	SDGs
Collectivity – all countries of the world involved	All goals 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development
Equality	10. Reducing inequality 5. Gender equality and empower all women and girls
Poverty as the number one problem	1. No Poverty 2. Zero Hunger
Governance	16. Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions
Environment focus	13. Climate action. 14 Life below water. 15. Life on land

But?

SOME GAPS IN THE SDGs

Gaps from an ubuntu perspective	SDGs
Top down, the bottom not in the collective. Yet family, community and societal approaches are more preventive, pro-active, relevant and sustainable.	All SDGs
Greater community participation, **rural areas not fully covered**. Rural subsidize the urban. Dependence theory.	11. Sustainable Cities and Communities
Western concepts of health – not holistic	3. Good Health and Well-being
Lacks family and community strengthening - does not adequately promote systems of care and social protection, owned by the family and community.	Most
Economic empowerment, agriculture, markets, no **trade equity**, **WTO whose bidding?**	8. Decent work and economic growth
Focus on economic growth will not reduce but increase poverty – **increases extraction, consumption**	8. Decent work and economic growth
Colonial education – has it reduced poverty? Has it increased employment? Still dominantly colonial - primary, secondary and tertiary	4. Quality education
Human **rights without responsibilities**	Some

SOME GAPS IN THE SDGs

Gaps from an ubuntu perspective	SDGs
High levels of poverty require **more developmental approaches** – small holder farmers	1. No Poverty 2. Zero Hunger
Inequality – **underlying structural and historical inequality** not adequately addressed e.g. land return. True justice is needed.	10. Reducing inequality 5. Gender equality
Brain drain, energy drain and migration – inadequate professionals in health, development etc. **Neo-colonialism not adequately addressed.**	10. Reducing inequality
Governance – but **ignores Country 'traditional' institutions**	16. Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions
Western interpretations of environmental issues, climate change	13. Climate action. 14 Life below water. 15. Life on land
Aid – **will NGOs end poverty in Africa?**	1. No Poverty 2. Zero Hunger
Evidence and data – where does this come from – mostly the west?	All

WHO WILL MAKE SDGs MORE RELEVANT TO AFRICA? WHAT ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES?

Politicians – national/state leaders	Academics (in teaching or researching roles)	Practitioners and students	Librarians
Internet influencers and content creators	Publishers	Communities	Country leaders
	AU and regional institutions	SW leaders (schools, associations and global)	

WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS?

Brain and energy drain

Incomplete decolonisation

Western and Middle-eastern religions

Western laws and human rights

African librarians, writers, researchers

Donors, NGOs

International associations

Migration

Western knowledge pushed by western publishers, writers

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the concept of ubuntu, how it has been applied in different fields and lessons that can be drawn for the social work profession. Ubuntu can best be described as an African philosophy that places emphasis on 'being self through others'. It is a form of humanism which can be expressed in the phrases 'I am because of who we all are' and ubuntu ngumuntu ngabantu *in Zulu language. So far, it has been successfully applied in theology, management and computer science. This paper concludes that its utilisation in these disciplines makes it suitable for application in social work especially to enhance practice ethics, community work and conduct in research. the paper was based on desk research.*

KEY TERMS: ubuntu; African philosophy; social work; humanism

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This publication has succeeded because it used an African philosophy. Authors were more relevant.

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1. Our philosophies and knowledges should influence global development policies, not just implement them.
2. We should be able to evaluate what comes to us from the world - think, teach, practice and write in a decolonised way.
3. SDGs will succeed in Africa if they become more relevant and grounded in African philosophy.
4. **Ubuntu is a powerful tool to make SDGs more relevant.**

These slides available at

https://africasocialwork.net/ubuntu-social-work/

Or can be requested from
asw@africasocialwork.net