

## Kaseke, Edwell

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### Summary

Professor Edwell Kaseke (1954–2017) was a respected African scholar who left an indelible mark in the field of social work and social development in Africa. During his professional career, he made immense contributions to scholarship both in Africa and internationally. Incontrovertibly, his writings made a significant contribution to the development and strengthening of institutions and approaches to addressing the plight of vulnerable groups in Africa. He might be gone, but his ideas live on.

**Keywords:** social development, social work, Zimbabwe, social security, social protection, vulnerable

**Subjects:** Biographies

## Early Years and Education

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Edwell Kaseke was born in Zimbabwe on October 9, 1954. He completed primary education at Musanhi primary school and secondary education at Nyamuzuwe High School. He attained a diploma in social work (1979) and a bachelor of social work degree (1980) at the University of Zimbabwe. A near-fatal mishap in the third year of his studies did little to dampen his resolve to carve himself an illustrious career in the social work field. Edwell obtained a master of science (social planning) degree from the London School of Economics and Political Science (1982), and later a doctor of philosophy (social studies) degree from the University of Zimbabwe (1994).

Following a brief stint in the Zimbabwe civil service, in 1984, Prof. Kaseke joined the School of Social Work as a lecturer. He later served as director of fieldwork, before being appointed principal, and later director (School of Social Work, 1995). In 2000, he was awarded a professorship in social work by the University of Zimbabwe. In all, he served the School of Social Work for over 25 years.

## Professional Career

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Prof. Kaseke was easily one of Africa's most distinguished contributors to social work and social development scholarship. His work shows great ability and maturity as a scholar and an educator. He earned the support and confidence of professional colleagues, both within the region and internationally. He had a rich understanding of the fields of social work and social development. He published several books, book chapters, monographs, occasional papers, and more. He

presented papers at numerous international, regional, and local conferences, workshops, and symposia. His publications have been widely used at tertiary institutions in the subregion and beyond (Mupedziswa, 2018, 2020).

Prof. Kaseke undertook his research work with a thoroughness and sophistication that was the hallmark of his work. He had a passion for social security and social protection access by the poor. Chisupa (2020, p. 18) observed: “The immense contribution of Professor Edwell Kaseke to the development, among others, of social security and social protection in South Africa, Southern Africa and Africa, cannot be emphasized enough.”

## **Contribution to African Scholarship**

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Nayoo (2018, p. 12) observed of Prof. Kaseke: “One thing the late professor always sought to do was to advance African scholarship and African perspectives, especially in his area of expertise.” Prof. Kaseke was deeply concerned about issues relating to relevance and appropriateness of social work in Zimbabwe and Africa. He often remarked that social work education in Zimbabwe was taking place in an era where social problems were vast and escalating, expressing regret that millions of Africans were wallowing in the quagmire of poverty. He therefore set out to steer social work education in Zimbabwe in the direction of social development. He yearned to produce a social work cadre that would promote human development (School of Social Work, 1995). He believed the most valuable resource that Zimbabwe had was its people; they are “the means and the end of socioeconomic development.”

## **Impact on International Arena**

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In 2009, he accepted a position as chair of the Department of Social Work at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in Johannesburg. Apart from teaching, he supervised PhDs and masters dissertations and carried out administrative work. He collaborated with various scholars and was a consultant for numerous organizations, including United Nations agencies, government departments, and international non-governmental agencies. Chisupa (2020, p. 18) remarked in a tribute: “The rich body of research that he left behind will undoubtedly continue to influence current and future research in the area of social work, social security, social protection, social policy and social development.”

Prof. Kaseke’s scholarly work clearly shows that he dedicated his life to the task of seeking solutions to the massive problems faced in Africa. His solid understanding of social work theory and practice made him an outstanding academician. He brought an analytic sense to the discourse on relevance and appropriateness of social work, accurately critiqued earlier models of education and training adopted from developed countries, and put forward arguments backed by solid evidence on how to carry out a uniquely developmental approach to social work education and practice on the African continent (Mupedziswa, 2018).

His passion for scholarship is also signified by his accepting to serve on committees of a number of organizations, such as the Southern African Social Protection Experts Network (SASPEN) Advisory Council, the Core Group of Social Security Specialists in Southern Africa, the editorial board of the *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, the International Advisory Board of the *African Journal of Social Work*, board member of the internationally acclaimed *International Social Work*, and overseas corresponding member of the *Journal of Social Policy and Administration*. Prof. Kaseke sat on the Board of Directors of the International Association of Schools of Social Work and served a term as president of the Association of Schools of Social Work for Eastern and Southern Africa (Mupedziswa & Mugumbate, 2018).

## Leadership Skills

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Prof. Kaseke had substantial managerial and leadership skills, and he used these positively and creatively. He handled disputes with employees in a mature and rational manner. “You do not have to like each other in order to work together” was his favorite refrain. He had a broad and accepting view of life and of diversity. Nayoo (2018, p. 13) explained, “Professor Kaseke was not an ‘Ivory Tower’ academic, therefore he always tried to find better ways of effecting positive change in the lives of citizens.”

The news of his untimely death reverberated across the world. Colleagues on the SASPEN initiative, produced in his honor a book: *Liber Amicorum: Essays in Honour of Professor Edwell Kaseke* (Olivier et al., 2020). The School of Human and Community Development at Wits University conducted a memorial service and launched the Professor Edwell Kaseke Annual Memorial Lecture. The University of Johannesburg too had an event of its own, while the *Journal of Social Development in Africa* had a special issue in his honor. Where African scholarship is concerned, he was truly an academic giant.

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