

Human Rights Education in Social Work in Africa

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Abstract

Social work is a human rights profession and assumes that human rights are embedded in social work practice and education. However, in Africa where human rights violations are rife, with severe implications for social work practice and education, thus far, a human rights focus in social work education has not yet received the attention it deserves. A critical analysis of human rights education in social work in Africa in the context of decolonisation and development shows the interrelatedness of human rights and human development, which, in turn, informs the learning content of the social work curriculum and pedagogy of human rights in social work. Social work educators in Africa are encouraged to take up the challenge of adopting and integrating a pedagogy that will fast-track the infusion of human rights values in the social work curriculum.

Keywords: human rights; human rights education; social work education; decolonisation; developmental approach; Africa

Introduction

Since its inception, social work has in effect been “a human rights profession” (Healy 2008, 735). This implies that human rights principles are relevant to “every level of social work theory and practice” (Wronka 2012, 444). However, even though social work undeniably draws on human rights principles, a human rights focus in social work education has not yet received the same attention at universities in Africa that it receives at such institutions in the West, where bold strides have been taken to integrate human rights purposefully into social work curricula (Healy et al. 2014; Staub-Bernasconi 2016). Apart from some data collected in the African region on human rights education promoting human dignity, for the Second Report on the Global Agenda for Social Work



and Social Development, (Lombard and Twikirize 2016), little is known about the human rights content in African universities' social work curricula.

Article 19 of the *African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights* (OAU 1981) stipulates that all people are equal, and should therefore all receive the same respect and rights, but nowhere “do we witness such a terrible violation of human dignity than on the continent of Africa” (Koopman 2010, 241). The imprint of colonialism can be traced in these violations. Sewpaul (2014a) points out that, after colonial rule, many violations of people's rights occurred because colonial and/or post-independence governments abused power and resources, impeding the optimal development of people and the environment. Mwansa and Kreitzer (2012) explain that colonialism corrupted the social fabric of the African continent by fostering animosity between ethnic groups, culminating in wars and the predicament of underdevelopment. The inevitable result is poverty, which in the context of colonialism emerges as both a precursor to, and a consequence of, conflicts and human rights violations. Poverty “is a constant, on-going disaster” (Dominelli 2012, 3) that is exacerbated by human rights abuses under the pretext of culture and religion.

Teaching human rights in social work curricula in post-colonial Africa requires a conceptual framework embedded in approaches that embrace the inextricable links between democracy, development, culture and human rights in the pursuit of justice for all (Lucas 2013). This includes gender justice, which challenges inequalities regarding both the distribution of resources and opportunities that would enable women “to build social, human, economic, and political capital [...and...] conceptions of human dignity, personal autonomy and rights that deny women physical integrity and the capacity to make choices about how to live their lives” (Goetz 2007, 30–31).

This article presents a critical analysis of human rights education in social work in Africa in the context of decolonisation and a developmental conceptual framework which is embedded in human rights. It starts with a discussion of social work education in Africa, tracing the footprints of colonisation and its influence on social work education. It then discusses a conceptual framework for social work education in Africa, pointing out the interrelatedness of human rights and human development. Next, it considers facilitating human rights education in the social work curriculum in Africa and the pedagogy of human rights in social work. Finally, conclusions are drawn on human rights education in social work.

Social Work Education in Africa

Social work education and practice in Africa are intrinsically shaped by colonisation and post-colonisation. Before colonialism, Africa had its own rich history and culture, reflecting the vast diversity of its ethnic groups, each of which had its own political, social and economic infrastructure (Kreitzer 2012). Communities were organised in

ways which allowed them to deal with social issues as they arose; assisting those in need was seen as a family and community responsibility, and it was customary for those who were wealthy to assist the poor (Mwansa and Kreitzer 2012). Unfortunately, the traditional system of kinship or communal care was greatly impeded by colonialism (Kreitzer 2012), altering family structures and communities, and creating individuals, families and communities in need of external social work services in the post-colonial era.

Social work was brought to African countries by missionaries and explorers from the global North; it was not a product of “indigenous inspiration” by the people of the land (Kudchodkar 1963, 96). Consequently, social work education in Africa was strongly influenced by the West. Kreitzer (2012) attributes this influence to a deliberate strategy to control Africans by ensuring that students at colonised universities did not oppose the colonisers’ views. Controlling curricula ensured that the colonisers’ knowledge was taught, and westernising students’ awareness and consciousness was the springboard to manipulate faculties to serve the colonisers’ interests, and ultimately to control higher education institutions (Kreitzer 2012).

Schools of social work currently train students in a post-colonial context. A post-colonialised context refers to a decolonisation environment where colonisers’ footprints are identified and their influence on oppressing local and indigenous cultures, languages, and ways of being and doing is turned around (Midgley 2014).

Colonisation is about oppression and power, culminating in the violation of people’s rights.

Human rights are

those rights, which are inherent in our nature and without which we cannot live as human beings. Human rights and fundamental freedoms allow us to fully develop and use our human qualities, our intelligence, our talents and our conscience and to satisfy our spiritual and other needs. Human rights are based on mankind’s increasing demand for a life in which the inherent dignity and worth of each human being will receive respect and protection. (United Nations 1987, 4)

Shetty (2018, 4) describes the relationship between human rights and colonialism as “symbiotic.” He explains that “the lens of decolonisation” can be used to comment about the past, present and future of human rights (Shetty 2018, 3). Firstly, the crux of decolonisation and human rights is similar because both fight against the abuse of power. Decolonisation was part of the birth of the modern human rights framework, a historical context imprinted in peoples’ minds. Secondly, the quest for colonialisation subjected human rights to manipulation for political ends and misappropriation. Consequently, the struggle to decolonise human rights is a never-ending one. And thirdly, a need exists to reconnect with the struggles of ordinary people against power

abuses in order to “be true to the character of human rights” (Shetty 2018, 3). Rights-based social work education aims to reconnect with oppressed and marginalised people.

Mwansa (2011) states that social work in Africa needs a platform that will enhance discourse on its character, nature and direction. Finding such a platform is not easy, given that “social work education and training varies considerably across Africa, both within and across countries, with some countries not offering any formal education and training in the discipline” (Sewpaul and Lombard 2004, 537). Moreover, challenges for social work education include a lack of resources (material and financial) and of proper professional recognition of social workers in Africa (Chitereka 2009), where, in most countries, it is not a regulated profession. Social work has traditionally been taught as a sub-discipline of sociology at African universities and lacks its own identity, although there has been a shift to independent social work departments (Mwansa and Kreitzer 2012). Not being trained in social work in itself threatens the commitment of educators to teach social work as a human rights-based profession.

Professional associations and regulatory frameworks could advance the development of social work education in Africa. The advantage of developing social work in Africa is that the profession is relatively young, and is also “growing quickly due to the clinical and development needs of the continent” (Mwansa 2012, 369). Some progress has indeed been made in the region. One example is the professional and research outcomes in promoting social work in East Africa through the Promotion of Professional Social Work towards Social Development and Poverty Reduction in East Africa (PROSOWO) project (Austrian Development Cooperation n.d.). This success is contributed to a follow-up project: the Centre for Research and Innovation in Social Work (CRISOWO) at the Makerere University in Uganda. The Association of Schools of Social Work in Africa (ASSWA) (formerly ASWEA) has recently been reorganised. Its aim is to provide leadership, focus, and guidance regarding the indigenisation process of social work education (Hokenstad 2012). This is evident in the regional conferences on current themes that ASSWA convenes in collaboration with national social work bodies (for example the theme of the 2017 Association of South African Social work Education Institutions (ASASWEI) and ASSWA international conference in South Africa was “Rethinking social work in Africa: Decoloniality and indigenous knowledge in education and practice in South Africa”). Africa’s active promotion of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development is also evident from the regional reports included in the global reports on the first three themes, namely “Promoting social and economic equality”, “Promoting the dignity and worth of all peoples” and “Promoting environmental and community sustainability” (IASSW, IFSW, and ICSW 2014, 2016, 2018).

These initiatives present platforms for social work schools in Africa to reflect critically on their curriculum content, pedagogical methods and the conscious effort to constitute an African perspective on social work (Mwansa and Kreitzer 2012). A human rights focus in social work education aims to deal with marginalised and oppressed peoples

and individuals' struggle against power imbalances and the recognition of their rights (Shetty 2018, 5). The purposeful adoption of a developmental approach as a conceptual framework for human rights education in social work is inherent to this process.

Conceptual Framework for Human Rights Education in Social Work

The conceptual framework for human rights education reflects a development approach in which human development and human rights are connected through social and economic development. In this regard, De Béco (2014, 52) points out that development has “gradually come to be defined as human development, [and] not just as economic development”. A further connection is that “both human rights and human development are characterised by overlapping values, of the similar goals, and identical practices” underpinned by the principles of dignity and the equal worth of all people (Sano 2014, 30). Economic, social and cultural rights are vital to improve living conditions, ensuring that everyone can live in dignity (De Béco 2014). A human rights-based approach for social work education constitutes

a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights. It seeks to analyze inequalities which lie at the heart of development problems and redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power that impede (UNICEF 2016, 1).

A rights-based approach acknowledges the right to development, as Article 1 of the Declaration to the Right of Development (United Nations 1986) stipulates:

The right to development is an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized.

The right to development is linked to the capabilities approach of Amartya Sen, which provides the means to guarantee basic human freedoms and promotes a holistic approach where the right to development is prioritised to transcend the distinction between first and second generation human rights (Dean 2015). Green (2012) argues that a rights-based approach resists a discourse which portrays people who are poor as passive recipients of charity who have no other means of meeting their needs; instead, they should be acknowledged to possess the capabilities they need to take charge of their own development to make their rights a practical reality.

The main aim of a rights-based approach to development “is to identify ways of transforming the vicious circle of poverty, disempowerment, and conflict into a virtuous circle in which all people, as rights-holders, can demand accountability from states as duty-bearers” (Green 2012, 24). This requires that governments play their roles

embedded in a “social contract” between states and citizens (Green 2012, 455), where the understanding of “power and how it shapes the lives and struggles of both powerful and powerless people is essential in the effort to build the combination of active citizenship and effective states that lies at the heart of development” (Green 2012, 25).

In a rights-based developmental approach, social work’s advocacy role is to challenge structural injustices that permit or impose human rights abuses, and promote democracy and participation instead of neoliberalism. The state has to be held accountable for securing rights for its citizens:

If rights-based approaches are to be progressive, then a vigorous opposition to prevailing neoliberal ideology is required. Such opposition will need to reconceptualise the role of the state, inclusive of its ability to take the necessary interventionist and redistributive measures to secure rights for its citizens. (Gready and Vanderhole 2014, 5)

Structural injustices must be challenged at the macro and policy level, but this process starts at a micro level, where social workers must prepare and mobilise “previously marginalised people and groups who have the ‘power within’ to demand their rights by challenging elites with ‘power over’ them, and assert their rights by acquiring the ‘power to’ do the things they need to improve their lives” (Green 2012, 26). Because the basic concepts and principles of human rights are compatible with those of social work, human rights principles offer a “unifying framework relevant to micro and macro social work as well as to local and global social issues”, confirming the place of human rights in social work curricula (Healy and Libal 2012, 4).

While a developmental approach provides a framework for human rights teaching in social work, the platform for implementation is embedded in a post-colonised context. A post-colonised context refers to a decolonisation environment where colonisers’ footprints are identified and their influence on oppressing local and indigenous cultures, languages, and ways of being and doing are turned around (Midgley 2014). According to Yellow Bird (2013, xxi), the “decolonisation” of social work requires “acknowledging and harnessing the strengths of Indigenous communities rather than engaging in blaming games compounding deleterious effects of several hundred years of colonisation”. He warns that “[s]ocial workers have the opportunity either to support Indigenous People’s rights or continue with practices that further erode them” (Yellow Bird 2013, xxi).

Dominelli (2012) points out the absence of a common understanding of indigenisation; hence, in this article, the authors acknowledge the recent tendency to refer to indigenisation as “cultural relevance” (Gray and Coates 2008, 13). Indigenisation and cultural relevance or appropriateness are seen as “a process of *localisation*, [...] achieved more easily [...] through grassroots participation [...] than from the top down through the imposition of Western theories and models totally foreign to local cultural

contexts” (Osei-Hwedie and Rankopo 2012, 733). Furthermore, localisation is aligned with democracy and participation that are embedded in the developmental approach.

The challenge for decolonising social work education ultimately lies in decolonising the social work profession and pedagogies to become a practice of liberation (Mohanty 1994). This means transforming higher education to become a means of liberation and progression for postcolonial peoples, and adopting critical pedagogy as a fundamental form of resistance to the “colonisation of minds and hearts” (Mohanty 1994). In this regard, Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Zondi (2016, 3) rightly call for cognitive justice to guide decolonial discourses – they explain: “At the centre of the demand for cognitive justice is the problem of epistemicides and colonization of the minds.”

Taking South Africa as an example the broader transformation agenda of decolonisation has to be aligned with students’ call for decolonising the country’s universities to include “structural changes; curriculum change; epistemological paradigm shifts from Eurocentric knowledge to Africa-centered knowledge; and a change of university cultures and systems that are alienating as well as increased and affordable access to education in general” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Zondi 2016, 4).

Human rights education in post-colonised Africa is therefore more than just teaching students about the rights of service users and international declarations, but undeniably about how to respect the rights of all peoples to hold their particular world views. It requires transforming the curriculum to include more local and indigenous content, but also conducting research on locally relevant social work practice, producing more African texts for students to study, drawing on the work of African philosophers, and orienting and training lecturers to engage with Africa-centred texts which can inform their teaching and research. For the purposes of this article, it raises the question of what is taught in the social work curriculum on human rights and how it is taught, bearing in mind that “racism, genocides, epistemicides, and linguicides are a central leitmotif of coloniality” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Zondi 2016, 4).

Facilitating Human Rights Education in Social Work in Africa

This section is divided into two parts – the human rights learning content in the social work curriculum within the broader discourse of social work education, and the pedagogy relevant to teaching human rights in social work in an African context.

Learning Content on Human Rights in the Social Work Curriculum

As a human rights profession, social work is globally connected to the struggle against human rights violations and promotion of social justice. The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) both acknowledge the unique opportunity that social work provides for teaching human rights (Steen and Mathiesen 2005). To achieve a post-colonised

curriculum that reflects a localised context, it is important “to establish curricula and practice methods that embrace the local context [and] find paradigms that address social issues built on the sociocultural, economic, political and environmental conditions pertaining to their communities” (Mwansa 2012, 370).

Osei-Hwedie and Rankopo (2012, 735) remark that it may be useful to promote universal social work values, but they also quote Midgley (2001), who calls for a “commitment to discuss and understand the issues involved”. The debate on cultural relativism and universalism is relevant in the context of human rights and social work. In this context, Staub-Bernasconi (2010, 9) highlights human rights as a universal denominator in international social work documents:

In all consensual documents about the ‘definition of the profession of social work’, ‘ethics in social work’ and global standards for the education and training of the social work profession’, human rights are mentioned as a universal regulative idea for critical reflection on the theory, ethics and practice of social work.

She points out that in various places, these documents mention that social workers should be “sensitive to context-specific realities”, show respect with regard to people’s beliefs and religions, as well as their cultures and traditions, and even the particular ideologies among different societies and ethnic groups, in so far “as these are not in conflict with people’s fundamental human rights” (Staub-Bernasconi 2010, 9). Although there is consensus that human rights can be seen as universal norms for the social work profession, it requires maintaining a delicate balance on the tightrope between universalism and contextualism or relativism. Staub-Bernasconi (2010, 9) argues that it implies that the social work profession is “legitimised to criticise context-specific, cultural or religious values, ideologies and norms when they contradict the universal claim for the respect of individual human dignity and human rights”. Training in human rights should prepare social workers and social work students to identify intended and unintended harm. Furthermore, these students should be trained to prevent and deal with human rights abuses and injustices (Sewpaul and Jones 2004). A focus on gender is also important in guarding against violations of women’s rights – gender is widely acknowledged as an integral aspect of development and is considered both a development concept, and a significant analytical tool (Twikirize 2014).

Social work history in Africa does not yet reflect whether and how Africans have been involved in developing and influencing the emergence of human rights in the social work profession, including practice and education, according to African perspectives and needs. Preliminary findings from the qualitative phase of Giliomee’s doctoral study (in progress) on human rights education indicate that the inclusion of a human rights focus in African social work curricula is mostly restricted to making students aware of these issues by including declarations, conventions and documents such as the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the *African Charter on Human and People’s Rights*, and documents related to the rights of children, women, people living with

disabilities, and other vulnerable groups. Thus far, there is no conscious effort to infuse these curricula with the deeper philosophical principles of human rights and their core values, or inviting students to internalise human rights as a point of departure from which to engage with all people. Her findings further show that the level of integration of human rights in social work curricula is closely related to the socio-political context of the country concerned. The degree to which human rights are publicly upheld in the country influences individual lecturers' perspectives on how and to what extent human rights should be integrated in social work curricula. The findings suggest that teaching staff may choose to engage with human rights differently when lecturing than what they believe and inherently committed to as social workers, especially in countries where human rights violations are evident and controversial.

Giliomee (in progress) has also found that in some countries, the safety and well-being of social workers and social work educators could be threatened if they challenged human rights violations by their governments. This finding exposes the dilemma related to human rights texts written in contexts where freedom of speech is explicitly allowed, versus contexts where an impression is created that it is tolerated, but in fact it is not. Students can thus be prepared to uphold people's rights and learn how to speak about human rights and individuals and groups' freedoms in the classroom at university, but at the same time they may be severely restricted when they try to act on what they have learned in field placements and/or when they enter into practice.

The above preliminary qualitative findings of the study by Giliomee (in progress) are similar to those of a study by Lombard and Twikirize (2016) on the integration of human rights in social work education. Both studies suggest that human rights are covered to some extent in the curricula of schools of social work in Africa, albeit in different forms, ranging from a separate module on human rights to integration into various modules, and/or into the practice component of the social work programme. There is evidence that students are made aware of human rights, but it is not yet clear how well students have internalised and assimilated these values in their thinking, value systems and ultimately their practice. The impact of the socio-political environment in some African countries with regard to human rights violations and how to deal with these in a social work educational context still needs to be explored.

One way to promote the internalisation of human rights values into Africa's social work curricula is to become cognisant of the broader discourse on human rights education in higher education, and to actively engage in these debates. The General Assembly of the United Nations proclaimed the World Programme for Human Rights Education on 10 December 2004, building on the accomplishments of the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995–2004). During Phase One (2005–2009) the focus was “on human rights education in the primary and secondary school systems” (UNESCO 2017, 2). Phase Two (2010–2014) “focused on human rights education for higher education and on human rights training programmes for teachers and educators, civil servants, law enforcement officials and military personnel” (UNESCO 2017, 2). The

aim of Phase Three (2015–2019) was to reinforce the implementation of Phases One and Two, while advancing human rights training aimed at journalists and various other media practitioners (UNESCO 2017, 2).

The models of human rights education have been catalogued by scholars according to the programme content of human rights education, as well as the level of participants' engagement (Bajaj 2011). The pyramid model focuses on general values and awareness of human rights (Bajaj 2011). The model that focuses on accountability applies to professional workers from different fields specifically involved with victims of violations of their rights (Bajaj 2011). The transformational model that is comprised of students and community members is considered representative of having a greater depth of engagement with rights and justice issues (Bajaj 2011).

All three models apply to human rights education in social work. Students are alerted to the values of human rights, are taught that accountability is essential where human rights violations have been committed, and are engaged on a transformational level regarding the deeper meaning of rights and justice issues. The preliminary findings of Giliomee's qualitative study (in progress) reveal that social work education mainly incorporates the first two models. The real challenge is to embrace a transformational model, where the philosophical foundations of human rights are considered, as well as the personal beliefs and values of both students and educators with regard to the deeper meaning of human rights discourses.

Pedagogy for Teaching Human Rights in Social Work

Social work education must be designed to engage students as active social citizens, underscored by an emancipatory pedagogy, and skilled in the art of truly being there for the other (Bauman as quoted in Sewpaul 2014a). The aim of emancipatory education is to train "graduates who are critically and actively engaged social citizens [...] willing to use their voices in the interest of deepening democracy and social justice" (Sewpaul 2014b, 356).

In the framework of development, social work students have to be prepared for a social work practice that respects all people as human beings, challenges structural injustices and systems that foster inequality and poverty, advocates for social justice, and mobilises and engages service users to become active and empowered citizens in developing their capabilities and freedoms. Social activism, emancipatory strategies and participation and democracy are key components of a human rights pedagogy.

Sewpaul (2014a) contends that social workers should transcend their particularities and unite around a common agenda. This entails the defence of the profession, service users and the world they inhabit, and the severe onslaught of capitalism and consumerism, underscoring human rights violations worldwide:

This certainly calls for greater system-destabilising and social change efforts, and not the traditional social control and status quo maintaining functions of social work. Social work cannot advocate for human rights within the very systems and practices that deny fundamental human rights. Thus there is a call in social work for the envisioning of another world based on social activism, on popular people participation and on emancipatory politics. (Sewpaul 2014a, 23)

In line with the principles of emancipatory practice, Lombard and Twikirize (2016) present an example of emancipatory social work education where students from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, under the leadership of Professor Vishanthie Sewpaul, made a difference because they were brave enough to take on issues of justice at an institutional, national and international level:

Based on the praxis and consciousness-raising strategies of Freire, Gramsci and Althusser – the cornerstones of anti-oppressive theory and practice – students showed how emancipatory social work education is concerned about the Self being the site of politicisation by using their awareness of their external sources of oppression and/or privilege, and building on their self-esteem and courage to engage in societal change efforts. As a collective, the students challenged university management regarding the structural impediments to the inclusion of students with disabilities; they lobbied provincial government for support of students threatened with exclusion on account of non-payment of fees, networked and collaborated with provincial government and various NGOs to hold a public march highlighting the issue of violence against women and children, and they made statements rejecting homophobia and challenging governments that violate people’s right to dignity based on their sexual orientation. (Lombard and Twikirize 2016, 46)

In order to produce social workers who can recognise human rights violations and become social activists, human rights training at schools of social work in Africa will have to be adapted and expanded to include learning opportunities such as those in the example above.

The internet has been suggested as a tool in social work education. However, access to the internet is not freely available to many citizens in African countries, exacerbating inequality (Sewpaul 2014b). Some students do not have internet access at their homes and may not have enough access even on campus, which limits the amount of internet-based teaching tools (such as YouTube videos, online discussion forums and other electronic aids) social work educators can use to enhance their teaching of human rights issues. Moreover, Kreitzer (2012) cautions that online teaching can risk maintaining a Western curriculum. Rambe and Moeti (2016, 631) affirm that the material presented in “Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have been advanced by Western Consortia, universities and online platform providers as panaceas for disrupting/transforming existing education models at African universities”. Higher education has thus not escaped the impacts of neoliberalism in which “[c]ross border education provides a lucrative market for Western course packages and textbooks that are transferred

wholesale [...] with nothing changed except translation from English” into the local vernacular (Sewpaul 2014b, 355). Such exploitative online education clearly disregards emancipatory constructionist and radical approaches to higher education and is driven by neoliberalism, and it privileges information and vocational instruction (Sewpaul 2014b).

A final important aspect of human rights education for social work is that it must include focusing on students’ and lecturers’ own personal beliefs that surround human rights and related justice issues. Flowers et al. (2000, 36) state that human rights content can be communicated easily through traditional teaching methods, but when it comes to affecting the values and attitudes of people, it is a very “difficult, slow, and idiosyncratic process that will never be accomplished if this education fails to come ‘close to home’ to involve individual experience, aspirations, and deeply held values” (Flowers et al. 2000, 36). Students must therefore not only have a deep knowledge, rooted in their own reality, but also concrete factual knowledge (Flowers et al. 2000). To navigate through the complexities of cultural relativism, students need to be aware of their own perceptions, experiences and values when it comes to cultural practices. One way to become more aware of one’s own world view and perceptions is by means of auto-ethnography. Zufferey (2012, 664), drawing on Ang (2001) and Chang (2008), explains that this method, adopts “various ethnographic methods, such as self-observation, self-reflection, memory work, personal documents, journals and reflective notations, to examine ‘the self’ within the social context”. Through self-reflection, students can develop their critical self.

The entrenched impact of colonialisation in Africa creates an immense challenge to social work educators to integrate and adopt a pedagogy that will fast-track the integration of human rights in social work education in Africa.

Conclusions

The level of human rights violations on the African continent makes it vital for social work, as a human rights profession, to commit to greater effort to infuse human rights values into social work practice and education to achieve justice for all. Decolonisation in Africa and guarding against new forms of imperialism that impede people’s freedoms remain an ongoing priority for the continent. Human rights education in social work can help the profession to strengthen principles of democracy and participation towards a more just and inclusive African society.

By adopting a developmental approach for social work and social work education, African universities can contribute to a human rights-based approach that tackles poverty and inequalities holistically. Social work educators should adopt an emancipatory pedagogy to prepare students for social activism and advocacy practice. This requires both educators and students to cultivate self-awareness and critical self-

reflection of their own oppression and/or privileges and how these affect their world views.

African countries' socio-political contexts are different, which influence the level of open discourse on human rights and human rights violations. These contexts also influence the extent of inclusion of human rights in the social work curriculum, the level of internalisation and enactment on the learning, and most importantly, the freedom and space in the academic and practice environment for lecturers, social workers and students to adopt a social activist and advocacy role to speak out against human rights violations and social injustices.

Although progress has been made regarding the position of social work on the continent, much remains to be done. In the framework of human rights, social work educators and practitioners in Africa should commit to joining efforts to develop “culturally relevant social work knowledge and skills to address unique social issues” (Osei-Hwedie and Rankopo 2012, 735) that could be exchanged equally on an international social work platform.

Opportunities for integrating human rights value and awareness into social work education should be seized: “We are at an exciting time of enhanced public awareness and interest in human rights. We must not lose our chance to help make human rights education a critical approach to examining and building our just societies” (Tibbitts 2002, 170).

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