

## **International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW)**

### **International Project Grant**

#### **Final Report**

**[publication date- 6.12.2023]**

### **Developing an East Africa - UK collaboration project on Indigenous Voices in Social Work Education**

#### **Executive Summary**

The Department of Sport, Health Sciences and Social Work through the Principal Lecturer, Jill Childs, submitted a funding proposal to the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) titled 'Developing an East Africa - UK collaboration project on Indigenous Voices in Social Work Education'. The \$5,000 grant was awarded to the project team. The grant enabled the project team to travel to Kigali, Rwanda, to take part in a community consultation event focused on decolonisation, valuing Indigenous knowledge, and international collaboration. This enabled the project team to collaborate across East Africa and the United Kingdom to co-produce and create an action plan for developing Indigenous Voices in Social Work Education throughout social work internationally. This links in with the IASSW vision and mission priorities. For example, as an international collaboration we focussed on representing and promoting social work education across the United Kingdom and East Africa in order to create, and maintain, an engaged community of social work educators. We seek to advance this through mutual exchange of research and curriculum resources by promoting educational strategies and policies for a more just and equitable world in line with decolonisation.

#### **Co-ordinating and Delivery Group**

##### **Project Coordinator –**

Jill Childs, [jchilds@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:jchilds@brookes.ac.uk), Sport, Health Sciences and Social Work, Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, Oxford Brookes University, Headington Campus, Gypsy Lane, Oxford, OX3 0BP.

##### **Affiliates –**

Consolee Uwihangana, [uwihanganaconsolee@gmail.com](mailto:uwihanganaconsolee@gmail.com), University of Rwanda, Rwanda.

Susan Wanjiku Muchiri, [muchiriwanjee13@gmail.com](mailto:muchiriwanjee13@gmail.com), Hope Africa University, Burundi.

Janestic Mwende Twikirize, [janestic@gmail.com](mailto:janestic@gmail.com), Makerere University, Uganda.

Doreen Ainembabazi, [ainembabazi.dorynn@gmail.com](mailto:ainembabazi.dorynn@gmail.com), Makerere University, Uganda.

Bienvenu Magorwa Munyerere, [socaction\\_dev@yahoo.fr](mailto:socaction_dev@yahoo.fr), Social Action for Development, Burundi.

Innocent Kayumba, [kayumbai934@gmail.com](mailto:kayumbai934@gmail.com), University of Rwanda, Rwanda.

Elizabeth Clarke, [e.clarke@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:e.clarke@brookes.ac.uk), Oxford Brookes University.

Karin Cooper, [Karin.Cooper@hull.ac.uk](mailto:Karin.Cooper@hull.ac.uk), University of Hull.

#### **Research Assistant –**

Omar Mohamed, [omohamed@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:omohamed@brookes.ac.uk), Oxford Brookes University.

#### **Definitions**

**Ubuntu** refers to 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.

**Ikibiri** refers to an indigenous Burundi model of bringing people together to bring people together to achieve a given outcome.

The term **community** refers to the people who attended the community consultation event, however, this also involves drawing on our understanding of working with our own communities and representing them insofar as we can.

The term **Indigenous** can be varied, however we will use the understanding the Indigenous refers to groups of people who share a common identity with land, ethnic heritage, and culture, with a history of oppression and colonisation.

#### **Rationale and purpose of the project**

The call to indigenise social work is one that has been advocated for across the globe, and many scholars explore the significance of social work utilising a globally diverse knowledge base. The current global knowledge base for social work is currently dominated by a White, Western, Eurocentric, and Global North perspective on how social work can be practised effectively. Therefore, the need to indigenise social work is significant. There is evidence that locally produced knowledge and home-grown solutions have been able to support collective recovery in the post-genocide context of Rwanda. There are also examples of Maori social workers in Aotearoa, New Zealand promoting methods of social work that are embedded in the ancestry and knowledge of indigenous populations which have been welcomed by the indigenous Maori communities as well as the wider population in this context. This is positive in evidencing the value in learning from indigenous knowledge and wisdom to be able to contribute to culturally and contextually relevant knowledge.

Current research furthers these points to deconstruct understanding of the colonial legacy, where indigenous populations are left feeling disconnected and removed from their ancestral beliefs, culture, and ways of being. For example, within their language, landscapes, and social structures. A call for locally and empirically based knowledge production is needed where more culturally adapted solutions to contexts are made, to benefit indigenous populations. For example, in Nigeria, using indigenised practices were effective both for the Indigenous populations living in Nigeria, as well as descendants

living elsewhere. This highlights the importance of the potential internationalisation impacts that indigenisation of social work can have, when there is an increase in valuing indigenous philosophies and knowledge bases. This will, we would argue, ultimately ensure that social work knowledge across the globe is culturally and contextually relevant to local populations and communities.

Using the context of decolonisation of the curriculum and ideas stemming from Ubuntu as a backdrop, this project will use a method of community consultation with partners from Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda and UK. The aim will be to collaborate with East African countries of Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda to undertake learning on indigenous voice and application to social work practice within the context of internationalisation of the social work education curriculum. A future project will make indigenous voices central to the social work curriculum, so the funds for this project will seed fund the initial conversations and develop a wider project action plan as an output. The project will be followed on by a further initiative using UK based Turing funds to enable UK based social work students to engage in a research project centering on capturing indigenous voices, methods and approaches to inform the internationalisation of the Social Work curriculum. It will build on the Oxford Brookes University award winning work to decolonise the curriculum showcased here

<https://www.brookes.ac.uk/research/units/hls/projects/anti-racist-university-experience/>

The activities planned involve a visit to Rwanda by East African and UK colleagues to take part in an event using community consultation and a co-learning approach. It will aim to develop a student engagement research project focussing on indigenous voices and build on the ideas of Ubuntu and other indigenous models from Burundi and Rwanda (for example Ikibiri in Burundi and Ubudehe in Rwanda). The community consultation will explore how these indigenous concepts might be further integrated into the UK based Social Work Curriculum. The consultation will develop a project action plan as an output, to take this work to the next level. The second stage of the project will be a plan to draw on Turing funding to develop a full visiting research and placement project between the UK and East Africa <https://www.turing-scheme.org.uk/>. (Brookes Social Work students are identified as a 'special project' in the next round of Turing fund bids).

### **Description of the process of implementation**

In initial consultations between UK and East Africa partners, we have identified we are keen to collaborate to support work with locating a place for, and capturing the impact of indigenous voice within the internationalisation of the social work curriculum. Methods of community consultation and mediation, for example, are approaches that can help to shape the future of social work education. The focus of the community consultation event was to collaborate to develop an evidence base and embed indigenous approaches more formally into the social work education curriculum. In addition, it allowed us to start to further evidence the value of indigenous approaches into the future of social work education and practice.

The project was led by a project coordinator to help bring together the partners through virtual meetings with the aim of discussing, developing and creating the community consultation event. This included setting out the focus, ground rules, agenda, location, and practicalities. The research assistant was then tasked with these actions to ensure that the project was implemented effectively and that the community consultation event could take place. It was important at this early stage to address power

imbalances and colonial imperialism, for example, ensuring that support was offered for mutually beneficial plans around travels, the process of paying, and enabling participation. The decision for the UK team to lead on this aspect of the project through the research assistant with a focus on humility and openness to understanding cultural needs enabled the event to truly follow the aims of Ubuntu and Ikibiri.

The community consultation event benefited from brief, online meetings before meeting in person, to help plan out the agenda for the event. At the event itself, ground rules were agreed in the form values around open discussion and humility. These included a focus on what good collaborative international working looks like, e.g. developing relationships, openness and transparency, valuation of others, equal partnerships, co-production, mutual respect, avoiding assumptions, respecting diversity, platforming one another, kindness, and trust. A further focus on anti-racist and anti-imperialist practice was discussed, e.g. promoting social justice, avoiding professional imperialism, recognising and challenging racism, using white privilege well, and challenging each other constructively.

### **A discussion of outcomes and/or feedback to the project**

The community consultation event felt transformational for all involved, as the focus on international collaboration between the Global South and Global North focused on decolonisation and mutual benefits, with African Indigenous philosophies underpinning and spearheading our work together. This ultimately led to a community consultation event to build a long-lasting connection between the United Kingdom and East Africa to work together on the aims of decolonisation and valuing Indigenous knowledge towards a more decolonised, anti-racist and anti-imperialist understanding of global social work.

### **Short-term impact**

In the short-term, social work academics and students in East Africa and the UK gained further opportunity to build relationships and develop a plan for future years to shape the decolonisation of the curriculum in social work education. In doing so, we not only use principles of Ubuntu but also draw on ideas of belonging and creating a place to inhabit.

### **Medium/long-term impact**

The hope is to utilise the learning from this event to support social workers in training, who will graduate to play a fundamental role in working with communities to heal the wounds of conflict as promoting peace/reconciliation is vital in this process. To adopt an evidence-informed approach to drawing on indigenous models will have long-term benefits for the profession and citizens of Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and the UK. Building on the work of other international collaborations, we will also lobby the government to recognise and fund social work as a profession with the sharing of our final report.

## **Dissemination of the project outcomes**

The dissemination of outcomes will be delivered at one UK based and one East Africa based conference by the core project team (team leader and affiliates).

## **Highlights from the event**

The event benefited from reflections and learning from previous work, for example, Karin's work around sexual and gender based violence and abuse using a Forum Theatre approach, and Bienvenu's work around the Social Action Service which provides psychosocial support to students, utilising workshop based learning. The key strengths of these projects were that there were clearly articulated project aims and objectives, which enabled everyone to progress. Key challenges included funding coming from the UK and control over managing budgets, as well as the difficulties around travelling to the UK and complexities around visas. Other barriers included language barriers and finer nuances of context being lost in translation through interpreters.

Janestic's PROSOWO projects were also reflected on. This involved work completed in 2018 which was a joint initiative of 4 East African institutions of higher education and one Austrian partner of which the University of Rwanda and other Makerere and Hope Africa partners were key players in this successful initiative. We were able to reflect on capacity building, curriculum reviews, advocacy, dissemination and publications. Principles were agreed around respect, Ubuntu, cultural humility, communication and language. A key focus on sustainability for international partnerships was made.

Further discussions around examples of home-grown solutions were undertaken, such as in Uganda around child abuse and child marriage and impact on education, Tanzania's work around poverty amongst older people, Rwanda's work around work with youth and unemployment and single mothers. Whilst the usefulness of learning from these are clear, it is also clear that there is insufficient adequate published formal knowledge, literature, and research around this. There is a discord between what's happening on the ground in terms of practice and what's being taught in the classroom. Further discussions were agreed in terms of supporting the action plan of how to address these.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor of University of Rwanda was able to attend and share his insights into how home grown solutions are needed to address knowledge creation for other University based teaching topics, and discussions were had around how we embed the use of indigenous knowledge systems in social work education to foster home grown solutions in social development.

## **Key learning for the United Kingdom**

In England alone, [Government statistics](#) reveal a 21 per cent rise in vacancies for children and family social workers from 2021 to 2022. Meanwhile [Skills for Care](#) states that the vacancy rate in adult social care was 10.7 per cent in 2021/22 - the highest since records began in 2012/13.

The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) responded to those statistics, criticising the UK Government for a lack of investment in social work. [The BASW report](#) states: "Without urgent action we are risking highly motivated and experienced social workers leaving the profession, as well as risking the

loss of newly qualified social workers early in their careers as they are not being supported to stay in the sector.”

The need for more social workers in the UK is well documented, but there is a need globally not just for more social work practitioners but for a change in how social work is taught. Therefore, a focus on working with communities in East Africa to think about how our own curriculum might become more inclusive would be beneficial. This is because East African curriculums might draw on more indigenous voices. Some East African curriculums, like the UK, are largely based on Anglo-American literature, however, with capturing the Indigenous voices and practices, there can be a lot of learning from the wisdom of African ideas and concepts.

Social Work England’s latest [State of the Nation report](#) states that social work students want more opportunities to engage with diversity and difference, including in relation to religion and faith and the need to draw on international perspectives.

UK Universities should be aiming to promote international students to study social work. There is clear evidence of the need for more social workers in the UK and we hope this will help us solve some of the workforce recruitment and retention challenges. There are also further benefits in working on developing more international placement opportunities for students at Oxford Brookes.

There are specialist insights in East Africa, for example, working with street children, child soldiers and women experiencing sexual violence. By gaining insights into their experiences and perspectives, there is further evidence to be able to look at how to develop more inclusive curriculums globally and locally, as well as exploring international study opportunities.

### **Key learning for East Africa**

It became clear that an anti-racist and anti-imperialist approach to international collaboration between the UK and East Africa was possible throughout this event. This includes the focus on empowering ground rules embedded in African philosophies at the start of the event which primarily focused on power imbalances and allowed for vulnerability and humility to be explored mutually between the UK and East African participants. Doing this in partnership and seeking leadership from the East African partners meant that key insights were given around what this should look like, which spearheaded the rest of the event.

This helps social work globally to be reminded of the usefulness and benefits of African philosophies such as Ubuntu and Ikibiri which can beautifully inform the process of international collaboration. The valuation and respect of these philosophies, and the action to make use of these enables East African partners to truly understand that African Indigenous knowledge has multiple benefits and uses, which inherently combats historical and current impacts of colonialism on African Indigenous knowledge.

A reminder that social work in East Africa benefits from a decolonisation approach, to unpick and change the impact that colonialism and imperialism have had on African Indigenous knowledge, and therefore their communities. Indigenous voices need to be heard, captured, and presented into the global social work sphere as valuable, rich, and meaningful to impact the global social work community

into understanding how better to work within the cultures, contexts and communities that social workers find themselves in.

### **Conclusions and future of work**

Overall, this project has helpfully enabled a collaboration between East African and UK partners to better work together through a decolonised approach, with aims and outcomes to further decolonise social work through developing an Indigenous voice in social work education. International collaboration through a decolonised approach is possible, and the evidence of the benefits of this will be shown in our action plan where we will continue to take this work forward through our long-lasting relationships that this project has created.

We call on those interested in international collaboration, decolonisation and valuing Indigenous voices to utilise the learning from this project to further your work with international partners in a meaningful approach.

## Appendix 1

### Pictures















### Appendix 3

#### Action Plan

Strategic Goal	Actions
<p>Documenting indigenous knowledge to be shared across social work as a global profession</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Developing a document titled “Indigenous voices in SW education: good practice guidance” that responds to the global standards, linked to the Values / Ground Rules</li> <li>2. Documenting indigenous knowledge through case studies</li> <li>3. Develop a theoretical model</li> <li>4. Developing teachers on indigenous approaches and decoloniality</li> <li>5. Literature review on indigenous voices in social work</li> <li>6. Creating a case study and literature repository for indigenous voices to be used in social work education</li> <li>7. Evaluating indigenous voices in social work curricula</li> <li>8. Contributing to magazine articles</li> <li>9. Develop research papers</li> </ol>

Developing the understanding of international collaboration for social work as a global profession

1. Develop a document that is called 'Ubuntu ground rules for successful international partnerships'
2. Developing future funding bids
3. Create a PowerPoint presentation to be used at conferences highlighting details of the Indigenous voices in SW education: good practice guidance"