

## Editorial

This issue of the Journal contains articles from several countries – Uganda, Ghana, South Africa, Malawi, and Nigeria. Although the topics are diverse, ranging from social security, migration, social work education, counselling, employment, social policy and community development, there is a theme running through them. This has to do with the marginalisation, inequality and exclusion of groups – sometimes in fact comprising the majority – from the benefits of socioeconomic development within the respective countries. Each author examines this from their own perspective and makes useful recommendations to improve the situation.

Ouma considers the need for social protection in the face of considerable adversity in the context of Uganda through the use of modern systems of social security. The fact that Uganda, like other countries in sub-Saharan Africa will remain poor and largely rural for the foreseeable future suggests the need for developing an effective system of social security through innovative rural development programmes, in addition to the formal provision of social security. He points out clearly that social protection is of critical importance in national development, particularly where the majority are in a vulnerable and dependant status. If properly conceived and implemented, social protection schemes can promote the redistribution of resources and contribute positively to national development.

Twumasi-Ankrah examines the situation of rural-urban migration within Ghana and its relationship to development. The author points out that Ghana, like many developing countries suffers the problem of “uneven development” where there is a skewed relationship between the urban and rural areas, with the former absorbing a disproportionate share of the available resources. A complex relationship exists between urban and rural areas, while the migrants have a vital role to play in this scenario; yet positive inducements are necessary to stem the ‘brain drain’ to the urban areas and special incentives are required to encourage migrants to contribute to rural development initiatives.

Dlamini extends this discussion on inequality and underdevelopment to the South African situation. The era of *apartheid* forced many social workers to compromise their integrity by working within an unjust system. This was manifested through the roles they played in means testing and the enforcement of various rules and regulations. Today they are challenged to re-define their roles in the new South Africa and to contribute in a meaningful way to the Reconstruction and Development Programme. This requires a new social work curriculum, and one that empowers students with skills that will enable them to play a significant role in social development initiatives.

Crowley, also writing within the context of South Africa, focuses on an issue of immediate concern, and one which this Journal is committed to exploring – how to deal with the serious consequences of the AIDS pandemic. Her contribution initially charts the extent and nature of the pandemic within South Africa and then considers the question of counselling persons living with the virus, assisting the counsellors themselves, and the family and friends who care for and survive the person's death. A particular concern, explored in some detail in this article, is the critical matter concerning the need to help the counsellor deal with transference and countertransference issues. The author considers how assistance can be given to those dealing on a day-to-day level with persons with HIV/AIDS, where shattering and traumatic encounters become an everyday reality. In a very real sense the pandemic symbolises the fragmentation and disintegration of South Africa which occurred through the *apartheid* years – the challenge now is to help heal and contribute in a positive way, both to those with HIV/AIDS, the helpers who are dealing with this illness and the South African community as a whole.

Kishindo continues the theme of marginalisation, exclusion and inequality by examining the need to extend adult education and vocational training to out-of-school youth, whose employment prospects remain bleak. In spite of an improvement in school provision in recent years in Malawi, the literacy rate is still very low, and many children either do not attend school, or dropped out at an early age. Adult literacy programmes were launched, but these were not particularly successful; however when linked through functional literacy programmes geared to socioeconomic development, these became more relevant and successful. Kishindo explains the modalities of this scheme, but also links it to the need to develop vocational training and employment. Village skills centres where out-of-school youth can be apprenticed would provide a greater motivation for participation in the existing literacy programmes.

Aka looks at inequalities that occurred as the result of administrative policies and political actions that occurred during the colonial period of Nigeria's history. This created spatial imbalances within the country which led to the creation of social and economic disparities on regional and ethnic levels. This led to a mushrooming of states and disproportionate allocation of resources and socioeconomic opportunities. The author critically examines this situation and suggests that a new development strategy that is "self-reliant, sustainable and people-centred" is warranted.

Schenck and Louw, writing from South Africa, use the concept of "peoplecentredness" to stress the fact that it is the people themselves who should determine social development initiatives. Exclusion from decision-making and involvement can only be countered through the participation and empowerment of local people. This requires that those agencies working on behalf of the community genuinely trust and respect the judgement and wishes of the people. Although much more is required to bring about an equitable social development, the right attitude is at least a good place to start.