

Editorial

This issue of the Journal brings together a variety of articles. The contribution by Madzingira provides some insight into how poverty is affecting the elderly in Zimbabwe. She uses statistics provided through the recent Poverty Assessment Study Survey to highlight the plight of the elderly who remain one of the most disadvantaged groups within the country. In addition to their economic marginalisation, the elderly have to shoulder the additional burden of caring for the increasingly large numbers of "AIDS orphans." She proposes among other strategies that planners should try to enhance family-focused social welfare services, promote community-based care and create income security for the elderly.

Hall, Kanyowa and Mathe investigate an area new to this Journal, but one which is increasingly gaining in relevance to social development within Africa – building the capacity of social workers' associations to deliver professional services to their members. Social work has not developed to the extent that it should have as a professional activity, yet social workers are engaged in a wide variety of occupational settings, many of which are critical to development within Africa. There are many reasons why social work has remained a "Cinderella" profession, some of which are outlined in the article, but there are strategies that could be employed to reverse this situation and make social work much more meaningful as a professional activity. The experience of the National Association of Social Workers (Zimbabwe) in developing a workers' education project, assisted by the International Federation of Social Workers, provides one model which could be used by other aspiring associations to assist them in developing an organisational development strategy.

Kaseke takes the theme presented by Madzingira of the need to improve income security for the elderly further by examining the status of social security systems in eastern and southern Africa. He points out that no country in the region – apart from South Africa – has a comprehensive social security system. Kaseke examines the various types of social security systems and then proposes possible options – which include a mix of contributory and non-contributory forms of social security. He points out that it is important to improve the productive capacity, particularly of the rural population, if they are to be able to contribute to social security schemes, as the major problem that all the countries in the region face is a weak resource base to fund these schemes.

The article by Clarke-Ekong provides an interesting arena of social activity which has not been previously explored by the Journal – the importance of

traditional festivals as public events that provide social meaning and cultural value to society. Ghana is the country selected for this study. Clarke-Ekong points out that although Ghanaian festivals serve many traditional functions, they also have a powerful role in the political and 'nation-building' sense. They are vehicles that can be used in developmental activities, where "*culturally comprehensive integrative principles*" must be taken into account if development is to have any validity and if it is to be accepted by the people.

Dube continues a discussion that started in a previous issue, concerning the impact of HIV/AIDS on the population of street children found in most African cities. Harare is chosen as the focus of this study and Dube provides us with information on the various patterns of risk to street children, their misconceptions and views of the disease. It is clear that street children are seriously at risk of contracting HIV, due to their vulnerable lifestyles which inevitably bring them into exploitative and abusive relationships with adults. By focusing on the way that the children themselves view the problem, Dube presents some useful conclusions on how to approach the children and educate them to reduce their risk of infection.

Muzvidziwa continues many of the concerns raised by Dube, focusing instead on another "vulnerable" group, that of prostitutes. This presents the findings of field research conducted by the author in Masvingo, Zimbabwe. Using an anthropological approach, Muzvidziwa provides a very detailed and compelling account of life as it seen by the prostitutes themselves. He categorises the different types of prostitution engaged in by the small group of prostitutes he observed, and indicates the costs and dangers involved in this activity. The author views prostitutes as "vendors of another type" in the sense that they are doing what they can to survive in difficult times. However he also indicates that our reaction to their activities is in many ways unfair and stigmatising and that they suffer exploitation in their own right, for example by law enforcement agents.

The article by Zindi discusses the concepts of open and distance learning and how these systems can assist persons with physical disabilities. Distance education is an educational tool which has not been fully utilised within Africa, yet with recent technological developments a higher quality of distance education is now available. The programme is very cost-effective and appropriate for a widely-dispersed population where formal education systems are expensive and impossible to provide to everyone. Distance education offers new possibilities, especially for the those with physical disabilities who experience the added problems of transport and the need for aids and appliances in order to move about.