

Culturally Responsive Social Work Practice in Uganda: A Review of Selected Innovative and Indigenous Models

Ronald Luwangula, Janestic M. Twikirize, Justus Twesigye and Stanley Kitimbo

Introduction and Background

Culturally responsive practice is often influenced by the extent to which social work practitioners apply indigenous and innovative philosophies, methods, approaches, and models. There is consensus among social work scholars regarding the need for the social work profession to develop and adopt models and approaches that promote culturally relevant social work practice. Conventional Western-oriented practice models have been challenged by a number of scholars as being largely irrelevant to local contexts, hence, presenting applicability challenges associated with contexts that are significantly dissimilar to those in which they were developed (Midgley, 1981; Osei-Hwedie, 1993 and 1995). Scholars such as Ife (2000), Gray and Allegritti (2002), Gray, Kreitzer and Mupedziswa (2014), Spitzer (2014), and Twikirize (2014) share similar concerns. Haug (2001 and 2005), Nagpaul (1993), and Nimmagadda and Cowger (1999) contend that social work models based on the British or American cultures are not universally relevant. Recent conferences in Africa with themes such as *Rethinking Social Work in Africa: Decoloniality and Indigenous Knowledge in Education and Practice* that took place in South Africa in October 2017 illustrate a continuing discomfort with the Western-oriented, mainstream theories and models of social work and the demand for culturally responsive social work practice and education. And yet to date, these models still dominate social work curricula in Africa, including in Uganda. During such conferences, panels, and meetings, social workers often criticise the Western social work models. Yet, they hardly invest in efforts to research, analyse, and document alternative models. Twikirize (2014), for example, questioned whether the practice models framed as part of indigenisation were documented.

Generally, indigenisation literature is skewed towards offering a framework for theorising and conceptualising indigenisation (see Midgley, 1981 and Gray et al., 2007), placing emphasis on the importance of culture and context in social work training and practice (Weaver, 1999; Spitzer and Twikirize, 2014). This in part explains the rather enduring phenomenon where the Western social work models are identified with inherent gaps in the African contexts, on the one hand, and their continued dominance on the continent, on the other. As a result, social work graduates less exposed to home-grown literature on indigenous and innovative models of social work practice struggle to make themselves relevant at service delivery and policy engagement levels. Under the PROSOWO project (*Professional Social Work in East Africa*), one of the important themes addressed was the indigenisation of social work in East Africa. Twikirize (2014, 75), reflecting on the experiences of international social work students on internship in Uganda, illuminates the reality of the indigenisation discourse in Uganda. She reports that students from universities in Europe characterised social work practices in agencies where they were placed as 'not social work' because it did not fit in their theoretical orientation.

In this chapter, we show how the social work profession in Uganda is repositioning itself to become culturally responsive and relevant in practice. We share examples of home-grown indigenous and innovative models of helping that can positively influence social work education and practice. We attempt to reawaken the indigenous voices which Gray, Coates and Hetherington (2007, 56) describe as silenced through the imported 'western thinking from Britain and the United States'. We argue that mere acknowledgement of the social work profession's ethnocentric foundation (Weaver, 1999) is not enough. According to Munroe et al. (2013), the indigenisation process involves a shift from Western, Eurocentric approaches to teaching a curriculum where the indigenous people are more visible. The documentation of these local models thus sets in motion the conditions necessary to achieve the indigenisation of the social work curriculum, that is, social workers having a clear understanding of the local values and appropriate models of intervention for effective service delivery to the community. The indigenous models presented fit very well within the call by Gray and Allegritti (2002) upon social workers to clearly define and describe indigenous models of social work helping.

Methodology

This chapter draws from data collected in a broader study conducted in Uganda under the PROSOWO project. The study was purely qualitative and aimed to analyse and document indigenous and innovative models of social work practice in Uganda. The study sites were the Northern Region (Gulu District), the Central Region (Rakai District) and the Western Region (Rukungiri and Mbarara Districts). These sites were purposively selected to represent the distinct cultural and ethnic groups in Uganda.

Gulu is the largest metropolitan district in Northern Uganda and also lies at the centre of post-conflict recovery, rehabilitation, reconstruction, and development. The Northern Region where Gulu is located suffered from a two-decade civil war (1986-2006), which affected the social fabric and cultural heritage of the Acholi, a predominant ethnic group in this region. Northern Uganda is historically known to be deeply traditional, with a rich community-oriented culture and traditional institutional set-up. Rakai District is found in the Central Region and has one of the oldest cultural institutions and the largest ethnic group in the country, i.e. Baganda. It thus provided an ideal site for studying an array of approaches and practices from a historical and contemporary perspective and how these relate to social work. Rakai is one of the districts that were much affected by the HIV and AIDS epidemic, which resulted in a large number of child-headed households. It thus provided a good opportunity to examine local models of dealing with the orphan crisis and, more generally, with household poverty and deprivation. The Western Region where Rukungiri District is located is home to the ethnic groupings of Banyankore and Bakiga. The different study sites yielded diverse and yet interrelated models of helping and problem solving that we present in this chapter.

The study used participatory methods of data collection, including individual interviews, focus group discussions, and case narratives. Data was collected from social workers or community development workers in the public service realm at district level (six in total) as well as in the civil society sector (seven in total). Other study participants were community and traditional leaders (eight in-depth interviews), community members and service users (seven focus group discussions); and five case studies. Data was transcribed verbatim, followed by editing for structural and grammatical errors. Interviews and discussions held in local languages were blind back-translated into English. Data analysis entailed the identification of patterns and themes using thematic analysis.

Indigenous and Innovative Models of Helping

In the course of the study, a number of indigenous and innovative practices were discovered. Although they varied according to the specific regions where the data was collected, most of them shared characteristics of mutual helping and community-oriented rather than individual practice or orientation. According to Ouma (1995), mutual help and reciprocity formed one of the indispensable principles that for long bound people together in the indigenous systems in a spirit of sharing and caring. In this chapter, we present a number of selected models to illustrate the notion of culturally responsive practices. The models presented address social work concerns such as child protection, socio-economic empowerment and security, and responses to HIV and AIDS. It is worth noting that the models presented are not unique to the study sites, but that they are a common feature of communities in Uganda. The

chapter illustrates examples of the applicability of such indigenous and innovative models in mainstream social work in Uganda.

Village savings and loan associations: An innovative model for socio-economic empowerment

The developmental approach to social work is emphatic on empowering clients (Midgley and Conley, 2010). Particularly in low-income settings, as social workers strive for relevance, efforts are increasingly being committed to interventions that empower their clients as well as improve their socio-economic status. In Uganda, village savings and loans associations (VSLAs) form a common feature in efforts to empower clients. In all study sites, VSLAs were a common feature, with a range of similarities. Development literature attributes VSLAs to the international development organisation CARE, which introduced the approach first in Niger in 1991 (CARE, 2016). Since then, VSLAs have increasingly gained popularity in many parts of Africa, including Uganda.

Most of the problems that clients present to social work agencies in Uganda are strongly linked to poverty (Twikirize et al., 2013). Owing to this, social workers working with grassroots communities and groups in Uganda have embraced VSLAs as one of the mechanisms for supporting their clients towards economic empowerment. Under the VSLA approach, community members, with or without external support, mobilise themselves into groups of about 15-30 people to form a savings and loans association. The group sets its rules and procedures, determines the group leadership structures, the minimum and maximum amount of money a member can save per sitting, and the regularity of meetings (e.g. weekly or bi-weekly) during which members save a portion of their income into a pool from which they can borrow at very low interest. The group also determines loaning terms, including the loan amount (often two or three times one's savings portfolio), the interest rate on loans (usually 10%), the repayment period (often three months), the length of the saving cycle (normally a year), and the amount of a social or emergency fund that every member contributes during every sitting. Depending on the socio-economic status of community members, the minimum saving per sitting (cost of a single share) may range between 500 Uganda shillings (UGX) (approx. 0.14 US\$) and 2,000 UGX (approx. 0.57 US\$) for most VSLAs in Uganda, but some may set the value beyond that. The setting of the share price is done by the group members themselves, often at the beginning of the saving cycle, and it is maintained until the end of the cycle (Luwangula, 2015, VSL Associates Ltd, n.d.). At each meeting, every member is required to buy a minimum of one share and a maximum of five shares.

Members' savings are kept in a simple metallic box, which serves as a local safe. The local safe might be provided by a facilitating social work agency or purchased

from group contributions. The custody of the savings box, kept under lock and key, is often entrusted to the group treasurer. The group chairperson, secretary, and treasurer may each have a key to only one of the three locks at any one time. However, as some groups' savings increase, they can choose to open accounts in formal banking institutions. This reduces the risk of losing money through theft or misuse due to rudimentary means of keeping the money in group members' homes. Such groups fix their deposits for a period of one year, which corresponds to a saving cycle.

Other than the regular savings, group members at every sitting contribute towards a social or emergency fund, often set at a rate much lower than the share price. The social fund is a contingency fund from which members borrow at no interest to cater for pre-defined emergencies such as the loss of a loved one, or the sickness of a member or his or her child. The members' savings serve as collateral. At the end of the saving cycle, the members share their savings and dividends, which they use for individual productive activities. Those willing to roll into a new cycle do so. But in-between the old and the new cycle, members may review their constitutions to address issues such as increasing the share price, or the admission of new members to replace dropped members or members unwilling to continue. With respect to gender, VSLAs attract both men and women, although at times in unequal proportions, with most groups constituting more women than men. For instance, in VSLAs that bring together a particular category of people such as widows, or persons living with HIV, women tend to be dominant.

Qualitative interviews and discussions with study participants underscored the critical role that VSLAs are performing in empowering people living on the verge of poverty. The participants recounted various benefits that have accrued from their membership of such groups, ranging from the acquisition of household items, house construction, and raising capital for starting small-scale businesses to other alternative livelihoods. Other common benefits especially relate to supporting children's education. Most participants do, in fact, borrow short-term loans from the VSLAs to pay school fees for their children. Whilst this might not be directly seen as an immediate economic investment, the education of children is, in fact, one of the most recognised means of socio-economic empowerment. Children's education also has the potential to break the cycle of poverty at household level.

Besides the economic benefits, participants also referred to the power that emanates from belonging to a group. Through these groups, some have been able to advocate for better services from the government. Although the VSLAs do not offer substantial financial services, most participants prefer to borrow from such groups rather than from formal banking institutions. This is both due to uncomplicated collateral requirements and the fact that in case of default on a loan, the members

do not anticipate harsh repercussions since they virtually know each other and relate at a more personal level.

VSLAs constitute a social group work approach where the staff of social work agencies serve as group facilitators. Commonly referred to as community-based facilitators, these staff facilitate the savings and loans groups through the group formation stages. They go on to provide counsel to the groups whenever the need arises. Once the groups attain maturity, they are gradually left on their own. Mature groups facilitate the formation of new groups, in which case the members of the former assume the role of facilitators for the latter.

VSLAs are relevant to the Ugandan context on many fronts. To begin with, many of the social work clients are either poor or their problems and challenges are strongly linked to poverty (Twikirize et al., 2013). This is true for issues such as the failure of men to provide for their families – often resulting in conflict, gender-based violence, child labour, early marriage, teenage pregnancy, and school dropout. Moreover, where such challenges would be ameliorated through access to credit, most social work clients lack the capacity to access formal financial services, which require significant collateral such as salaries or fixed assets, which many lack. VSLAs create opportunities for social work clients to save and access credit that they otherwise would not access owing to bureaucracy, illiteracy, lack of collateral, and the cost of formal financial services. Hence, they contribute towards improvement of the welfare of the vulnerable groups. Through this model, social workers reasonably address their clients' life challenges such as children's school fees, health costs, food, capital for productive ventures, and lack of access to meaningful social protection in the wake of commodified social relations. In many instances, VSLAs have been a basis for community members to access government programmes that target organised and functional groups, such as Operation Wealth Creation, Community Demand Driven Development, Northern Uganda Social Action Fund, Youth Livelihood Programme, and Uganda Women Entrepreneurial Programme. Moreover, as household incomes improve, household stability also tends to improve. Through efforts to mobilise their clients to join and benefit from VSLAs, social workers are contributing towards improved social welfare of their clients.

Community organising models

Community organising is one of the core methods of social work that is mainly focused on community mobilisation, capacity-building, and empowerment. Staples (2004, xvii) argues that 'organising is based on the notion that ordinary people *can* and *should* join together to gain more control over their life conditions'. Staples (2016) further argues that together, community members set their own goals and take collective action to help themselves and that, based on this notion, 'the act

of organising is an article of faith in community members' collective power, lived expertise, wisdom, competence, and judgement to bring about progressive change' (xx). In the following sections, we present two innovative practice models that take the form of community organisation in Uganda's context. These are *akabondo* by World Vision and *nkwatiraako* implemented by Rakai Counsellors' Association (RACA) – an HIV and AIDS-focused organisation in Rakai District in Central Uganda.

Akabondo: The household cluster approach

Akabondo – an equivalent of a household cluster approach – is more of an innovative than indigenous approach to problem solving. It was introduced by World Vision, a non-governmental organisation that operates in many parts of Uganda responding to the plight of vulnerable children and communities. The model involves mobilising community members in a neighbourhood to form groups of 15-20 households, and through these groups, to reflect on their problems and challenges, the cost of inaction, whether and how they would like to address their challenges and foster their own community development.

Akabondo is a Luganda word meaning a shell or sac that contains the eggs of a jigger. Whilst the analogy is negative, the implied message is positive. Within this sac, all the eggs are of the same size, and when they grow, they all progress together. In other words, they mutually support each other. Analogous to the eggs of a jigger in *akabondo*, members of the community within the neighbourhood are seen as belonging to the same context, having more or less similar social development challenges, and thus ought to lift themselves together out of their challenging situations.

Under *akabondo*, the neighbours identify what they consider to be their priority problems and aim to address them by using locally available resources. The approach involves identifying Trainers of Trainers (ToTs) from the clusters themselves, who facilitate the growth of the neighbourhood group while keeping the group focused. The process of identifying ToTs is done by community members together with social workers from the agency. The social work agency (in this case World Vision) facilitates the groups through the forming, storming, norming, and performing stages of group development (see Tuckman, 1965). The members of *akabondo* meet regularly to undertake activities of a common purpose geared towards collective problem solving. Some of the activities include collective farming to ensure food security, provision of informal education to pre-school children, and provision of counselling and guidance to children and adolescent youths. Essentially, this approach is engineered by the local communities themselves and, thus, addresses the ownership and sustainability gaps integral to common interventions by NGOs

whose conception and operation is largely from outside the community, a practice that compromises sustainability and community stability.

Under the *akabondo* approach, community members acquire a sense of belonging, with a collective responsibility of working together to improve members' welfare. The members hold themselves accountable for their community development or lack thereof. The mentality is that when one struggles, for instance, with famine, disease, ignorance, illiteracy or poverty, the effects spill over to the neighbours. Thus, progress is not measured at individual or household level but in terms of community progress. The members reinforce each other, tapping into each other's strengths, while working to address their weaknesses. The sense of collective accountability is illustrated in the sense that:

...no one just looks and ignores intervening in matters where the neighbour's child misses school, immunisation, or suffers malnutrition. If I know it is a day for antenatal care at the health facility, I have the responsibility to remind my neighbour and his wife about it and to ensure that they actually go to the health facility. (FGD with members of *akabondo*, Rakai District)

It is everyone's responsibility to ensure that in your own and in your neighbour's home, the sanitation is good, they have a pit latrine, women do not default on antenatal care visits, and we all plant food crops during rainy season... (FGD with members of *akabondo*, Rakai District)

By the time World Vision initiated this model, the organisation had worked in Rakai for at least 15 years. During this period, the organisation supported various interventions across the health, water and sanitation, education, environment, and child protection sectors. However, the models of intervention used to fall short of guaranteeing lasting ownership and sustainability of interventions in the supported communities. This was partly due to individualistic tendencies and a lack of appreciation of collective efforts and collective responsibility. This led World Vision to innovate the *akabondo* model that is engineered by the local communities themselves.

We were awakened by the reactions of the community members when we started informing them about the pending closure of our Rakai ADP [Area Development Programme]. To us, we believed we had done a lot during the 15 years of service to the community across the five sectors of intervention. But people started asking us: 'So how are you leaving us? How shall we continue with life without you?' This was a wake-up call that our approach all along had a gap. That is when we thought about *akabondo*, and it has proven that it works. (World Vision member of staff, Rakai District)

This model was identified with a set of strengths, including: challenging externally driven approaches by NGOs; addressing core issues that affect communities as

identified by community members; promoting social cohesion; and promoting adult literacy. The model also laid the foundation for members to form and join a social enterprise model – the village savings and loans association (VSLA). Through *akabondo*, members acquired various domestic amenities, for example solar power panels (at a subsidised price, having bought them in bulk as a group). A common granary for all members was constructed in one member's home, while water tanks, sanitation facilities (lit pit latrines with hand-washing facilities and garbage pits) were constructed in the respective members' households. These domestic amenities were very critical for addressing drought, poor sanitation, and food insecurity. Solar power addressed the lack of access to the hydro-power grid by many residents in Rakai but also fire accidents associated with candles. The model further eased the work of some social service workforce such as village health teams, para-social workers, and community development officers responsible for promoting food security, mobilising for the immunisation of children, domestic sanitation and hygiene, child protection, early childhood development, and addressing domestic violence. In terms of gender, relations between husbands and wives were said to have improved. Men appreciated their role in childcare, provision, and protection. Husbands and their wives in every household (for those married) participated in the neighbourhood group activities, including the sale and management of farm products, although this reveals less about men's and women's respective control over proceeds from the sale of produce.

Some of the challenges associated with the model are: the members' livelihood activities are agrarian, hence, dependent on nature, which impacts their harvest; and fears that the mutual obligation of group members towards each other may fade once the social work agency (World Vision) stops providing some form of leadership. That notwithstanding, the model is largely effective. It represents a form of social work approach where clients are enabled to reflect upon their own agency and make use of their resources to transform their situations. Such social work practice makes sense especially at a time when social work in Uganda has come under scrutiny by the political regime that questions the contribution of the profession to development. Considering the household, neighbourhood, and community challenges addressed by the *akabondo* model, including drought, poor sanitation, food and economic insecurity, poor attitude towards health service seeking, adult illiteracy, and lack of access to pre-primary education particularly in the rural setting, this practice model impacts positively on the lives of cluster members.

Nkwatiraako practice model

Nkwatiraako, literally meaning 'give me a helping hand' in Luganda, is a self-help group approach. In the context of the study, the approach involved People Living with HIV and AIDS (hereafter referred to as PLHA) forming groups through

which they could collectively address their health, psycho-social and socio-economic challenges. This model with features of community organising was being applied in the Byakabanda Sub-County in Rakai District. The members of *nkwatiraako* were receiving HIV treatment, care, and support from the Rakai Counsellors' Association (RACA). But beyond HIV and AIDS-related medical and psycho-social support received from RACA, they shared the common challenges of daily living such as school fees for their children, hunger, drought, poor housing, and poverty.

For purposes of context, it should be stated here that, in the early days of the HIV epidemic in the 1990s and early 2000s, various actors, including RACA, provided a holistic care package to PLHA, ranging from medical care and food aid to livelihood support, and sometimes education support to the children of PLHA. In some instances, modest houses were constructed for critically vulnerable PLHA households. However, partly due to cuts in donor support, the intervention package to PLHA steadily reduced to medical treatment and psycho-social counselling, resulting in a response vacuum. This gap in formal provision compelled the PLHA to consider a self-help approach to address their challenges. Many groups of this nature have been formed across the country and are a major feature of the response to HIV and AIDS in Uganda. In this case we describe the *nkwatiraako* group approach to illustrate how such approaches function.

The *nkwatiraako* group approach was spearheaded by the local organisation, RACA, through their HIV and AIDS counsellors in 2005. The group started with seven members – four women and three men. By 2016 (at the time of this study), the group membership had grown to 31, although two of the founding group members had died. As has been indicated in the previous sections, most of these groups have more females than males, partly due to the fact that most males hesitate to disclose their HIV status.

The group members, with or without the support of the social work agency, conduct community HIV sensitisation and mobilisation for HIV testing, and foster disclosure of HIV status as one way of challenging HIV/AIDS-related stigma. These activities fit well within Goal 1 of the Uganda National HIV and AIDS Priority Action Plan (2015-2018), that is, to reduce the number of new youth and adult infections by 70% and the number of new paediatric HIV infections by 95% by 2020 (Uganda AIDS Commission, 2015a). The group also engages in the promotion of household sanitation and collective economic production. For instance, they collectively hire land, cultivate, sell produce in bulk, and share the proceeds. They further support the construction of modest houses for their very needy members. Activities involving food production and security, household sanitation, and housing support, among others, are in line with the social support and protection goal for PLHA articulated in Uganda's National HIV and AIDS

Strategic Plan. It is also in line with Goal 3 of Uganda's National HIV and AIDS Priority Action Plan (2015-2018) on reducing vulnerability to HIV and AIDS and on the mitigation of its impact on PLHA and other vulnerable groups (Uganda AIDS Commission, 2015b).

The group also ventures into income-generating activities. They buy household utensils such as plates and saucepans which they hire out to non-members during social functions. Group members in need of these items for a social event or activity do not pay any money. In 2011, RACA added a VSLA component to the group activities. Members were encouraged to form a VSLA group and RACA's support to the group came in the form of a savings box, ledger books, a stamp and stamp pad, as well as training, but not finances. By 2016, group members were each saving a minimum of 2,000 UGX (approx. 0.57 US\$) and a maximum of 10,000 UGX (approx. 2.86 US\$) per week. Alongside savings, every member at every weekly sitting was contributing 500 UGX as a social emergency fund. The emergency fund is borrowed from at no interest by any member in order to address emergencies such as buying school materials for their children, food, and transport to health facilities to access antiretroviral treatment. Members are also eligible to borrow from the group savings at a 10% interest for purposes of individual socio-economic improvement projects.

From a gender perspective, *nkwatiraako* was found to be predominantly comprised of females. This phenomenon is common in self-help groups. For instance, whilst Flynn (2013) underscores the impact of self-help on poverty alleviation and development in Uganda, Bamutungire and Kiranda (2010, 1) describe the self-help group approach as a women's 'thing' and a 'hidden treasure for women'. Flynn (2013) further makes reference to 2,600 self-help groups supported by a German organisation called Kindernothilfe (children's emergency help) in 27 districts in Uganda that registered an impact on poverty alleviation and development but with approximately 99% members being women. Understanding such gender dynamics is very important as, otherwise, resources can be misappropriated in attempts to engage men in self-help models, and yet they increasingly show less motivation to participate in group activities, preferring individual ventures. In general, men appear to engage more easily in revolving fund ventures while women can perform and identify more easily with self-help groups (Luwangula, 2015).

The appropriateness and contextual relevance of *nkwatiraako* as a model for community organising and development cannot be overemphasised. The practice model adheres to the principles of collectivism, sharing, reciprocity, and community empowerment. These are fundamental principles of traditional social protection and support systems in Uganda and in Africa at large (Ouma, 1995). The VSLA component enables people living with HIV/AIDS to economically meet their day-

to-day challenges. Otherwise, they would have overstretched their social capital and would, in turn, be labelled by their relatives, family, and friends as a burden. Social capital is not an inexhaustible resource. Once it gets overstretched, relations get complicated. Essentially, this practice model is welfare-enhancing both to its members and the community at large.

Culturally responsive child protection practices: Traditional reception and rehabilitation approaches by Twesitule Women's Group in Rakai District

Compared to contemporary times, the phenomenon of children and young people falling out of family care was less common in the past. In the African and Ugandan tradition, the family was a very strong childcare institution. Parents and other relatives assumed the childcare responsibilities, often without needing legal enforcement. In many communities and cultures, the notion of orphanhood was not as devastating as it appears today, especially in terms of the care that orphans received from their surviving relatives. Surviving relatives, including uncles and aunts, assumed the care for orphaned children. Therefore, with or without the biological parents, children had a social father or mother figure who took up the care responsibilities. This helped to deal with various circumstances that would otherwise victimise a child as an 'orphan', including saving them from dropping out of family care. This, though, is not to suggest that such children had their rights totally guaranteed. In some instances, the family care environment characterised what Save the Children Sweden (2011) and Ganga and Chinyoka (2010) refer to as platforms for abuse and meting out violence to children. Nonetheless, such families offered basic care that prevented most children from becoming destitute. However, factors such as HIV and AIDS, urbanisation, the commodification of life, and poverty have increasingly constrained the capacity and, in some cases, the willingness of the extended family to provide the needed care for orphans.

In Rakai District, at the peak of the HIV epidemic in the early 1990s when children orphaned by HIV had no guarantee to be taken in by equally HIV-affected kin relatives or community members, a group of women called *Twesitule* Women's Group took an initiative to offer help to children in the form of traditional reception and rehabilitation services. *Twesitule* is a Luganda word literally meaning 'let us uplift ourselves'.

Twesitule Women's Group in Kyotera, Rakai District was started in 1991 by a group of women as a response to the adverse effects of HIV and AIDS, including orphanhood and the sickness of parents. The impact of HIV and AIDS in Rakai inspired the practice of traditional reception and rehabilitation of affected children and youth, as noted by the group founder:

Here in Rakai, old people were dying a lot, leaving very many young children behind with no help. So, that influenced us to identify those children so as to give them a future by training them to make craft bags, necklaces, mats, and many other things.
(Founder of the group)

The group rented a residential facility in a nearby semi-urban centre where children with diverse vulnerabilities, including orphans, lost and missing children, and children with errant behaviour were admitted and taken care of. The group supported children through mainstream primary and secondary education as well as skills development through vocational training. Despite being a women's group, both male and female children and youths in need were admitted. Common vocational skills imparted to the children included making crafts, such as beads and mats, weaving baskets, and making other items. The children and youth were additionally trained in playing traditional musical instruments, performing traditional dances, playing football, and catering. Such training gave the children the opportunity to make music, dance and drama performances focusing on sensitisation and community awareness about HIV and AIDS. NGOs in Rakai focusing on HIV prevention, managing discrimination and stigma, and protection of people living with HIV and AIDS hired these children and youth groups to support their sensitisation campaigns. In some instances, it was during such performances that exceptionally talented children were identified and sponsored in school by other more established social work organisations. Some schools also identified children talented in football and music and offered them scholarships. Children in mainstream formal education were engaged in craft making after school and during holidays, while those who were not attending formal education spent their days at the centre.

Twesitule Women's Group helped children and youths to appreciate the essence of hard work. Proceeds from the sale of products made in the process of training the children were shared between the children and the women's group. The idea was twofold: to enable the sustenance of the group since they had no external support; and to motivate children through direct benefits from their participation. In the former case, the proceeds were used to pay rent for the residential facilities, buy children food and clothing, and partly to pay school fees for those in mainstream education. From a child protection perspective, the practices of the group to some degree present a form of child labour. However, close scrutiny of the model showed that the group took care to allocate age-appropriate tasks to the children. Through the age-appropriate and culturally acceptable tasks, the approach was seen as a way of strengthening the ability of children to develop skills for self-reliance under the supervision of caring adults.

The traditional reception and rehabilitation model by the *Twesitule* Women's Group is arguably instrumental in contributing to problem solving at the individual,

family, group, and community levels. For instance, group activities turned out to be an important mechanism for children that would otherwise not attend school to access school, and to meet their basic survival needs such as food and clothing that their HIV-stricken households could not offer. It is possible to imagine the difficult, risky, and vulnerable state these children would be exposed to without this group's intervention, amidst no meaningful social protection to vulnerable households in Uganda. Thus, this group's model protected these children and youths from a myriad of life challenges, including exposure to street life, the worst forms of child labour, child trafficking, and falling into institutional care. The contribution by these women fits well into the increasingly consensual view that, particularly in African contexts, women are more sensitive to, and appreciate the childcare roles more than men (Luwangula, 2015).

The practice also fits well within the developmental approach to social work. Developmental social work calls upon practitioners to prioritise interventions that empower their clients (Midgley and Conley, 2010). Skills training is one of such interventions as it prepares children and youths for the successful transition to productive adult life (Luwangula, 2017). Moreover, considering the unique vulnerabilities that children and youths affected by HIV and AIDS are faced with, interventions geared towards according them the skills for independent living later in life are desirable. Such skills development interventions have been found largely effective in the Ugandan context among uniquely vulnerable categories of children, such as older street children (Luwangula, 2017). Skills development for HIV-affected children and other vulnerable children assures them of relative economic independence. From a social protection perspective, this contributes to transformative social protection as well as child-sensitive social protection (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler, 2004; Department for International Development et al., 2009). Equipping children and young people with hands-on skills is a well-accepted social work practice in contemporary Uganda.

Discussion and Conclusion

The indigenous and innovative models presented in this chapter directly relate to the main themes of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development geared to promoting social and economic equalities, promoting the dignity and worth of peoples, working towards environmental and community sustainability, and strengthening the recognition of the importance of human relationships (see Jones and Truell, 2012). The *nkwatiraako* model as well as the *tvesitule* group model are underscored by principles of respect for the dignity and worth of individuals in the community while promoting the importance of human relations. Village savings and loans associations (VSLAs) serve a similar purpose but centrally promote the social and economic functioning of the members and their households. The same

can be said of the *akabondo* household cluster approach. At the centre of all these practice models lies the motivation to promote community and environmental sustainability. Thus, they are not only culturally responsive and contextually appropriate but also have the potential for being replicated in other parts of the country and most other African contexts since they are strongly rooted in the ethic of *ubuntu* and mutual support. These philosophical underpinnings characterise most communities in Africa.

Cognisant of the weaknesses integral to the imported and less contextualised modern social work models in the African and Ugandan contexts, the propagation of indigenous and innovative models makes sense. It is timely for the social work profession to boost its contribution to the socio-economic development of Uganda. The indigenous and innovative models presented in this chapter, however, are rarely documented as practices geared towards cultural responsiveness, yet they form part and parcel of the indigenised practice. No wonder, Twikirize (2014, 75), in her comment on the social work practice discourse in some parts of Africa, contends that such practice has been 'unconsciously or sub-consciously adapted to the prevailing conditions, needs and expectations of the target groups'. We see a scenario where social work practice in Uganda increasingly reflects an integration of the traditional, indigenous, and local ways of helping. This, according to Twikirize (2014), is an attribute of indigenisation. Indeed, these practice models affirm Spitzer's (2014) characterisation of social work in Africa as unique and the solutions it offers as specific. Spitzer (2014, 15) reported that social work practices in Africa endeavoured to 'provide meaningful responses to the needs of people living at the grassroots level'. Reflecting upon those remarks, the mainstreaming of economic strengthening elements through VSLAs into all these models serves as a case in point. It strengthens the responsiveness of social work to the identifiable needs of clients which are strongly linked to poverty. The economic strengthening interventions are more justified since addressing issues of poverty, vulnerability, and social exclusion is central to social work's relevance in Africa. In Uganda, this is being realised through such indigenous and innovative models. A number of the presented models reflect the principles of reciprocity, altruism, and social cohesion which for long guaranteed the local populace access to services with or without financial resources (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler, 2004; Barya, 2011; Ouma; 1995). To this extent, social workers adopt practices that they themselves and their clients identify with and appreciate.

Our arguments by no means imply that the imported social work models no longer have a place in the African and Ugandan contexts. Instead, we re-echo the necessity of the social work profession to reposition itself for purposes of achieving cultural relevance where social work principles and values become of

greater essence. Arguably, the models presented in this chapter are strongly linked to the developmental social work perspective which recognises that social work agencies use investment strategies infused with community-based, participatory and rights-based interventions (see Midgley and Conley, 2010). Such social investment approaches are relevant in contexts such as Uganda where problems presented by social work clients as illustrated are generally economic, social, political, and environmental. The approaches used to respond to these structural challenges fit well within the social development paradigm.

Finally, although the indigenous and innovative social work practice models identified and documented here are as well associated with some limitations, they remain culturally relevant. It is plausible that if integrated into social work curricula, trainees will identify more with the curriculum content. This is premised on the empirical evidence in East Africa (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Rwanda) where over 70% of students and 67% of social work educators from 25 higher education institutions expressed concern about the dominance of textbooks and materials authored in North America and Europe (Twikirize 2014, 83). Indeed, integrating local models of helping into the mainstream social work curricula has the potential to strengthen the match between theory taught in the classroom and skills demanded in the labour market.

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