

Corruption in Uganda: Does this Have Anything to Do with Social Work?

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Abstract This paper explores and discusses corruption in Uganda and explores the role of social work in addressing corruption. It notes that corruption is a form of social injustice and a major human rights violation. It deprives many citizens access to various essential services. The paper further notes that there is little or no social work interventions addressing corruption in the country. As such, it argues that this silence by social workers constitutes a negation of the profession's mandate and responsibility. The paper concludes by proposing various roles that social work may play to address this social ill.

Keywords Corruption · Human rights · Social work · Uganda

Corruption in Uganda, Its History and Dynamics

Uganda is bordered by South Sudan in the north, Kenya in the East, Democratic Republic of Congo in the west, and Tanzania and Rwanda in the south. It has a population of 34.6 million people with the total fertility rate of 5.8 children per woman, making it one of the countries with highest population growth rate in the world (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2014). Whilst it is naturally endowed with natural resources including minerals, conducive climate and fertile soils, it is one of the poorest countries in the world. For example, its Human Development Index (HDI) stands at 0.483 with 19.7% of the population living in abject poverty (United

Nations Development Programme [UNDP] 2015). Similarly, the country lags behind in most of the vital non-monetary areas such as access to electricity, education and improved sanitation (World Bank 2016). Overwhelming evidence further shows that 60% of the women experience gender- and sex-based violence, but only 5.5% report this crime to police, and 16 women die from childbirth every day (Department for International Development [DFID], 2012).

The origin of Uganda's high level corruption has been attributed to the colonial period (Ruzindana 1997). Uganda became a British Protectorate in 1894 and gained her independence in 1962. During this time, Britain had special strategic political, economic and social interests in Uganda. Politically, it colonised this country to obstruct the French and Germans from gaining access to the River Nile (Muhangi 2015). Economically, it was colonised to acquire raw materials for its mushrooming industries, obtain food supplies for her increasing population, secure market for her mass-produced goods and socially to secure a home for her surplus population (Kabwegyere 1995). Subsequently, to protect these interests, the British administration established state institutions such as the army, police and courts to subjugate, coerce and oppress indigenous communities to accept the British rule (Ruzindana 1997). These institutions served as legal conduits and enforcement mechanisms for the colonial administrators' interests. Nyago (2012) further adds that these institutions became authoritarian which intimidated indigenous communities from questioning and holding colonial officials accountable for their decisions. Therefore, British colonial administrators never accounted for their actions let alone the cash crop, hut and gun taxes they collected from the indigenous people but rather accounted to their superiors in England. This opaque governance system was even extended to the lowest administrative units (villages) where local chiefs never accounted for the taxes collected from the people (Nyago 2012). Additionally,

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Low (1974) contends that colonial officials ceded power to local chiefs, and they enjoyed a good deal of unsupervised power. In the same way, local chiefs only accounted to colonial administration but not to the indigenous communities. Therefore, it would appear that the lack of accountability gave way to deceitful governance systems that led to today's high level corruption.

Closely related, Ruzindana (1997) maintains that the British administrators never developed institutions that would hold and demand accountability from public service officers. This handed the public service officers latitude to execute their duties without being questioned by native communities. Recruitments of local chiefs into the colonial administration was carried out in exchange of collaboration/loyalty (to be recruited as a local chief you would promise support to the colonial officials and act in their interests). Uganda preserved the colonial governance system even after its independence in 1962 (Muhangi 2015). To that end, post-independence leaders inherited a system where state institutions such as the army, police and courts were used to protect the regime, suppress political competition, intimidate citizens, violate people's rights and facilitate resource plundering. Svolik (2012) gives an example of President Obote in 1966 who used the army to attack Kabaka Mutesa II, the then president and eventually forced him into exile. To further consolidate his power and acquire wealth for himself, Obote abrogated the 1962 constitution and replaced it with the 1967 constitution which centralised power to himself (Muhangi 2015). Additionally, concerned with consolidating himself onto power, in 1965, Obote protected and defended Amin who had allegedly sold gold and diamonds that he had received from the rebels who were fighting the Zaire (Democratic Republic of Congo) government in exchange of fire arms as motivation for preserving his regime (State House of Uganda, undated). Like the colonialists who used the army to establish its rule, in the same way, Obote by 1971 had established his complete government with the assistance of the army (Svolik 2012).

Citing structural challenges such as corruption and discrimination within Obote's government, Amin used the army to overthrow Obote in a coup d'état. This exacerbated corruption in the country as President Amin was more determined to stay in power at all cost. He established himself as a dictator unquestionable and unaccountable to anyone (Ruzindana 1997). Similarly, Byrnes (1992) in his state study on Uganda avers that President Amin was extremely corrupt throughout his eight years of rule. According to the World Bank (1997) Amin supported economically illogical projects, approved inflated military payments, flagrantly allowed kickbacks on state contracts and gave away Asian property to his loyalists and generals. To achieve his ill intended mission, Amin abolished all oversight institutions in the country including the parliament as well as suspending the constitution and replaced it with the rule by decree which allowed him a plunder public resources. He appointed governors mainly from the army who were only accountable to him. In public

service, he appointed public servants not on merit but rather based on loyalty and tribe. His government became authoritarian, there was no citizen participation, transparency and accountability (Muhangi 2015). As a result, accountability and management institutions collapsed creating a fertile ground for corruption to flourish. Yadav and Mukherjee (2016) further argue that Amin was only concerned with the army, and for that matter, he committed most of the public funds into the army at the expense of health, education, agriculture and infrastructural development. He appeared completely unbothered about corruption instead he allowed his supporters to mismanage state funds (Ofcansky 1999). World Bank (1997) brands Amin's regime as a system of organised crime that extorted money from the public. Consequently, his gross mismanagement of state resources witnessed the collapse of the economy. Evidence indicates that just like Amin, Obote remained unconcerned about addressing corruption during his second reign (Ingham 1994). Yadav and Mukherjee (2016) further add that he was more focused on regime survival and on acquisition of personal wealth for himself and his political allies.

By the time President Museveni took over in 1986, corruption was regarded as one of the country's major challenges (Yadav and Mukherjee 2016). Given president Museveni's strong stand against corruption in the 1980 general elections, it was highly expected that he would form "a clean government" that would institute strong measures against corruption (Ruzindana 1997). This anticipation was further reaffirmed by point 7 of his 10-point programme which emphasised government's commitment to eliminate corruption and misuse of power (Ruzindana 1997). Despite this, the literature continues to reflect Museveni's government as being highly corrupt (Tangri and Mwenda 2001; Amundsen 2006; Burnett 2013; Tangri and Mwenda 2013). Identical to his predecessors, he has ignored constitutional limits of his power and allowed police to deprive citizens of their basic rights and liberties. The last two decades of his rule have experienced an exponential increase in state orchestrated human rights violations particularly corruption, illegal arrest and detention of political opponents, police brutality, suppression of freedom of assembly, expression and association. Arguably, these violations emerge from the debate around presidential succession, accountability of public resources and governance (Human Rights Watch 2014). Any attempt to challenge these human rights violations have been dealt with maximum force by the police. More so, his government boasts of one of the largest parliaments in the world with 375 members of parliament and a bloated cabinet of 78 ministers. To consolidate his power, he uses parliament as a political tool to strengthen his position onto power (Barigaba 2015). It is dominated by his National Resistance Movement (NRM) political party members who keep changing the constitution to strengthen his grip on power (Izama and Wilkerson 2011). Most recently, media reports have reported stories about Members of Parliament taking bribes to change the constitution in his favour (Mugerwa 2010; Lumu 2012).

As Museveni celebrates his 31st anniversary in office, Uganda is one of the most corrupt countries in the world (Transparency International—TI, 2016). It ranks as the 151st out of 176 countries in the Corruption Perception Index. Furthermore, it has the highest rate of requesting bribes in East Africa (TI 2012). Uganda's corruption is principally manifested through bribery, extortion, illegal use of public assets for private gain, over-invoicing and under-invoicing, payment of salaries and wages to nonexistent workers (ghost workers), embezzlement of national funds, devious court decisions, nepotism and patronage (The Republic of Uganda 2003). To emphasise the enormity of corruption in the country, Serunjogi (2013), Okello (2016) and Serunjogi et al. (2016) profiled some high-profile corruption scandals under Museveni's government where large sums of money have been stolen. They include: the Global Fund Scandal of 2005 where over US\$37 million meant to aid the anti-HIV/AIDS efforts remained unaccounted for; the embezzlement of US\$5.774 million Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) funds in 2007 meant for organising CHOGM meeting; the misappropriation of US\$0.546 million earmarked for immunising children against killer diseases in 2007 through fraudulent procurements; and the embezzlement of US\$12.7 million donor funds from the Office of the Prime Minister in 2012 earmarked for the rehabilitation of the war-torn areas of northern Uganda. Additionally, New Vision (2012) documented more scandals which include the 2010 national identity card scandal where US\$5.244 million earmarked to supply and install equipment for production of national identity cards was misappropriated, the bicycle scandal of 2011 where US\$1.7 million allocated for the procurement of 70,000 bicycles for the village council leaders was stolen, the microfinance scandal of 2011 involving US\$16.56 million earmarked for poverty reduction was misappropriated, the Basajjabalaba compensation scandal of 2011 where US\$46.8 million was erroneously paid as a compensation for the loss of business in the city markets, the pension scandal of 2012 where US\$46.8 was diverted to nonexistent pensioners and the Prime Minister's office scandal of 2012 where US\$1.385 million earmarked for Peace Recovery Development Plan (PRDP) was siphoned. Most recently, another US\$ 1.7 million tax payers' money was spent on well-salaried public servants without following the normal financial and accounting regulations as a presidential handshake for winning an arbitration case against Heritage Oil and Gas and Tullow Oil over capital gains taxes on the resale of oil blocks (The East African 2017). The corruption scandals are many, and if they were export goods and services, Uganda would have a clear comparative advantage.

Whilst corruption is seen as a severe and growing problem by both Ugandans and the international community, the political will to address it seems to be lacking (Amundsen 2006; Human Rights Watch 2015). This has been reflected in the recent government's drastic actions against anti-corruption activists in the country. For example, Burnett (2013) points out that those anti-

corruption activists who provide public information about government expenditure are obstructed from doing so. She further highlights that in 2013, police arrested 28 members from the civil society organizations (CSOs) who were distributing Black Monday campaign materials. They were accused of inciting violence, possession of prohibited publications and spreading harmful propaganda against the government. The Black Monday campaign is a CSOs movement that publishes and distributes monthly newsletters that highlight the impact of corruption on various sectors, such as education and health, and protests the impunity within government (Human Rights Watch report 2013). The state repressive action against these CSOs coincides with World Bank (1997) observation that high degree of state interference in the fight against corruption contributes to the country's high level corruption. Equally, Odoy (2017) links Uganda's poor performance in the Corruption Perception Index to lack of commitment on the side of the leaders to address this ill. He states that

“politician's endless empty promises to tackle corruption and never deliver has made the situation worse by exciting the public with catchy phrases like “zero tolerance to corruption” and the recent ‘kisanja akuna muchezo’ (era of no compromise) and after turn around against the people they promised”

His argument corresponds with Martin (2013) who argues that whereas government has put in place some legal framework and institutions aimed at curbing corruption, in reality, they are largely symbolic. It has been further alluded by Tangri and Mwenda (2013) that corruption in Uganda is consciously and subconsciously sustained, because it promotes loyalty of the state allies to the incumbent regime, makes the incumbent leadership united and cohesive and used as a mechanism for buying off political opponents. Similarly, international writers have observed that the current government enjoys and encourages corruption, because it aids self-enrichment and power preservation (Amundsen 2006; Svolic 2012; Yadav and Mukherjee 2016). Hence, it is generally believed that fighting corruption in Uganda is a perilous venture, because it is allegedly endorsed by “mafias” who include close relatives of top leaders, party stalwarts, police and army top commanders who are above institutional control mechanisms (Amundsen 2006; Kayihura 2016).

Corruption as a Violation of International Human Rights Instruments

Undoubtedly, corruption remains a huge obstacle in the attainment of economic, social, cultural and political human rights (Viljoen 2012; Hemsley 2015; Peters 2016). This is because corruption undermines the countries' efforts to fulfil their human

rights obligations by compelling countries to maximally utilise their available resources to attain the realisation of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights (International Council on Human Rights Policy [ICHRP] (2009); Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR] (2013). Due to the interdependence and indivisibility of human rights, corruption violates all rights be social, economic, political, civil, cultural and development rights (Murray and Spalding 2015; Hemsley 2015). In Ugandan context, corruption has constrained the full realisation of human rights as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime (UNTOC) and the Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants Protocols. Most significantly, it has caused and deepened poverty and inequality in the country making it hard for some Ugandans to afford food, clothing and housing which violates Article 25 of UDHR (Human Rights Watch 2013; Martin 2013). Equally, Faller (2015) alludes that Uganda's high level corruption is a big constraint to economic growth and poverty alleviation. As a result, this has negated the country's ability to fulfil Article 2 of the ICESCR which requires 'state parties to the Covenant to undertake steps, individually and with international assistance to progressively achieve the full realization of all economic, social and cultural rights' (ICHRP 2009; Hemsley 2015). Arguably, had it not been for the high level corruption, Uganda by now would be an upper middle-income country, with her population able to enjoy full economic, social, cultural and political rights. Moreover, anti-corruption activists have maintained that the public resources that have been lost through corruption, since independence would have built 15 more referral hospitals, constructed more 4 Power Dams and supplied electricity to rural areas, reduced the cost of doing business in the country and increased per capita income fourfold from the current US\$ 571.96 (Larok 2012). He further suggests that the money lost through corruption could have added 3% to the economic growth statistics currently at 6.0% which could unlock opportunities for millions of unemployed youth.

Corruption in Uganda has considerably interfered with the country's obligation to fulfil the attainment of the right to medical care and education services as outlined in Article 25 and 26 of UDHR and 12 and 13 of ICESCR, respectively. Under the health services for instance, overwhelming evidence shows that due to diversion of public resources, hospitals in the country do not have adequate supplies, referral hospitals suffer from inadequate facilities, old equipment, and in most cases, patients are referred by doctors and nurses to private clinics for drugs that would have been provided by public hospitals (Burnett 2013; ActionAid Uganda 2014). This explicitly affects the rights of Ugandans to attain standard health services. Still, reports of stolen drugs continue to dominate the media where drugs are stolen from public health

centres and taken into private clinics, and others have reportedly been sold in Democratic Republic of Congo and Kenya by public officials (Bwambale 2009; Nisiima 2015). As earlier on indicated, the health sector has witnessed scandals after scandals which has left the health of Ugandans in a precarious state. More so, corruption has negatively impacted the attainment of quality education services. Teachers in public schools, colleges and universities go for months without salaries which affects their motivation to teach students to their expectations (Education International 2012). Likewise, media reports have reported cartels of head teachers, district education officers and officials from the ministry of public service paying out salaries to nonexistent teachers (Aber 2008; Wanambwa 2010). Certainly, this compromises schools' ability to perform as they receive less teachers against the required ceiling. For the fact that, the education sector is marred by corruption scandals, the country's efforts to realise social and cultural rights have been greatly dented. It is vexing to note that corruption affects the rights to health and education of the poor people more than the rich people (Schatz 2013). The rich and corrupt take their children in good private clinics and schools for quality health and education services, whilst the poor people rely largely on public facilities that are overcrowded and under facilitated.

Whereas, every person has a right to social security, Uganda's formal social security which is majorly comprised of Public Sector Pension Scheme and National Social Security Fund is highly marred with high level corruption. For example, under the Public Sector Pension Scheme meant for the retired public civil servants, corruption has made it impossible for the pensioners to receive their money. Recently, the scheme has been hit by scandal after scandal. For instance, in 2014, US\$3 million pension money was diverted to the accounts of nonexistent pensioners (Obore 2015). Two years later, officials from the ministry of public service could not account for US\$7.24 million (Kyeyune 2016). As a result, older persons who served the country diligently and are supposed to be revered for their honest service are home rotting in poverty. Worst still, the pension payment process takes ages, and many have passed on without ever receiving their payments. Besides, the National Social Security Fund meant for those who worked for the private sector has neither been free from this social ill. For example, in 2007, it was involved in conflict of interest which resulted into the loss of US\$3.2 million (Serunjogi 2013). It is also alleged that the war veterans take ages without receiving their retirement benefits, and many are languishing in poverty. This violates Article 22 of UDHR and Article 9 of ICESCR which guarantee people a right to social security.

Largely, corruption in Uganda has remained the biggest obstacle to the realisation of civil and political rights outlined in the ICCPR. Corruption in Uganda since independence has remained a tool to preserve regimes in power which has undermined

democracy and the rule of law (Tangri and Mwenda 2013). UNDP (1997) argues that corruption in Uganda has violated human rights, perpetuated electoral malpractices and increased lawlessness which has undermined Article 21 of UDHR. Conspicuously, leaders are more concerned with ‘regime survival’ rather than serving people’s interests which has undermined public trust in the government. Yadav and Mukherjee (2016) argue that Ugandan leaders are more concerned with remaining in power and amassing personal wealth rather than establishing democratic and pro-people government. As averred by Rose-Ackerman (2004) and Kaufmann and Dininio (2006), corruption is highly corrosive to the state and Leads to unprecedented political consequences. This is because it endangers political competition, transparency, participation and accountability which are essential features for the realisation of political rights stipulated in the UDHR and ICCPR (Faller 2015). On this note therefore, corrupt leaders get re-elected in office as voters are bribed with sugar, bars of soap and money to vote for the incumbents. This does not only violate Article 21 (3) of the UDHR but also compromises the quality of leadership. Evidence has shown that since 1980, elections in the country have been marred by voter bribery and buying off political opponents (Faller 2015). With this unprecedented electro fraud, voters can not sanction politicians for bad performance. It is for this reason that sceptics have argued that because of political corruption, elections in Uganda are for mere ceremonial legitimacy intended to confuse the international community.

Likewise, corruption has exacerbated human trafficking in the country (US Department of State 2016). The Department further maintains that Uganda remains a source, transit and destination country for human trafficking partly due to corruption which violates the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the UNTOC and the Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants Protocols. Anecdotal information shows that some police and border officials take bribes from the perpetrators to facilitate and foster human trafficking. This constitutes a big constraint for the country to fulfil its obligation of addressing this problem. Despite the human rights violations caused by corruption, Clague (2003) and Hodge et al. (2011) have agreeably argued that corruption helps to overcome bureaucratic rigidities that characterises service delivery. However, social work being ethics centred profession, this argument makes less merit.

Human Rights and Social Work: The Nexus

A growing body of literature has confirmed that human rights are closely related to social work profession (Ife 2001; Healy 2008). They further maintain that social work profession aligns with human rights framework in promoting self-worthiness, freedoms and social justice. Conversely, Reichert (2006) asserts that human rights principles present nothing new to social work profession. She further adds that both social work profession and human rights share similar values such as equality, respect, fairness and

independence which undoubtedly makes social work profession a human rights profession. Besides, several international bodies have associated social work’s core mandate with the promotion and protection of human rights. For example, United Nations Centre for Human Rights (1994) called on social workers to advocate for the inherent dignity and worth of every person as well as promoting respect for human rights. Similarly, the International Federation of Social Workers ethical principles are in concomitant with the human rights philosophies that include honouring the ‘intrinsic value of every person’ and use of ‘individual and collective action to promote social justice’ in the form of ‘equitable social structures that provide people security and development while upholding their dignity’ (International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW] 2012, p. 1).

Healy (2008) traces the historical development of social work profession to ascertain the degree to which the profession has been involved in addressing human rights issues. She concluded that human rights were crucial within the social work profession. Her conclusion coincides with the global definition of social work approved by International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work [IASSW], (2014) which says that

“Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing” (IFSW/IASSW 2014).

This definition undoubtedly confirms that principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work. Therefore, eliminating human rights violations such as corruption is a justification for social work profession across the world. This is further contained in the IFSW (2012) professional obligations “where social workers are called on to eliminate domination, exploitation and deprivation of freedom and liberties against any person or group”. Intuitively, social workers should be seen promoting the right to people’s participation in all aspects of decisions and actions affecting their lives.

Implications for Social Work Practice in Uganda

Unlike other professions such as law, medicine, education and engineering, the social work profession in Uganda is relatively new. This is because for many years, the social work functions such as taking care of the orphans, older persons, the poor, child protection and psychosocial support were under family-

based care systems (Kabadaki 1995 cited in Twikirize 2015). The history of social work profession in Uganda can be traced back towards the final years of the colonial period (1950s) when it was introduced by the British colonial administration largely to deal with urbanisation challenges (Ministry of Planning and Community Development, 1965 cited in Twikirize 2015). Furthermore, the introduction of probation services, children protection and community development services during the same period called for the employment of professional social workers. To that end, the colonial administration in 1952 established Nsamizi Training Institute for Social Development to train social workers (Twikirize et al. 2013). Due to the growing demand for more qualified professional social workers, the Department of Social Work and Social Administration was opened at Makerere University in 1963 basically to offer pre-service and in-service training in social welfare, community development and social administration (Twikirize et al. 2013). In 1969, the same Department started offering degree programmes in Social Work and Social Administration. Currently, there are over 31 higher education institutions offering a bachelor's degree in social work which has tremendously increased the number of social workers in the country (Twikirize et al. 2013).

Despite this professional evolvement, social work in Uganda has not positioned itself in the fight against corruption, and in most cases, it is silent. Arguably, the numeric strength and professional development should be an opportunity towards building sustainable efforts in addressing corruption in the country. This is a negation of the profession's mandate and responsibility. Fundamentally, social work profession should be seen challenging societal barriers, promoting human rights and social justice. Informed by anti-oppressive social work practice, social workers should be cognizant of the fact that most of the human problems in human living emanate from oppressive and inconsiderate political systems that perpetuate social injustices that serve personal interests and grip on power (Mmatli 2008; Chu et al. 2009; Reisch and Jani 2012). The principles of human rights and social justice are clearly regarded as fundamental to the practice of social work (Chu et al. 2009). To that end, social workers should be at the forefront of promoting human rights and social justice. Like in other countries where this profession prevails, social workers should be seen challenging societal barriers, inequalities and injustices; promoting human rights; advocating changes in policies and structural conditions that allow people to remain in vulnerable positions (Fine and Teram 2013). The prevalence of high level corruption in Uganda amidst social workers' silence depicts that social workers are either forgetting the key principles of the profession or have identified themselves with the aggressor as suggested by Preston-Shoot (1996) that

“If social work in particular, and professional groups with which it interacts, lose the ability or willingness to question, they risk losing the empathy, values and practice skills

which seek to counter the inequalities, internalized oppression, alienation and exclusion characteristic of contemporary social life. They risk identifying with the aggressor rather than using their position to promote an empowering difference” (p. 39).

Unlike the social work profession, other professions such as the legal profession have been visibly active in the fight against corruption. For example, the Uganda Law Society, an association of lawyers charged with a responsibility of ensuring high levels of professionalism, in 2016 petitioned Parliament of Uganda over bribery in the judiciary and unethical conduct (Parliament of the Republic of Uganda 2016). It has also keenly participated in the analysis of the legislative and policy framework for combating corruption in the country.

Regarding social workers' silence over corruption, evidence has shown that social work practice in Uganda is more deep-rooted in responding to social emergences such as poverty and other vulnerabilities caused by hunger, floods, landslides and wars (Twikirize et al. 2013). Additionally, social work practice in this country is greatly influenced by its colonial past dominated by casework and community development methods (Kabadaki 1995). Paradoxically, these approaches cannot address political and structural problems (Mullaly 2007; Mmatli 2008). Therefore, this poses a huge limitation for social work to combat corruption. Considering the magnitude of corruption in the country, social workers should be active agents challenging the dominant political, financial and institutional powerful forces and hold them accountable to values of greater social, environmental and economic justice. They should strive to transform individuals and communities and make them mutually respectful co-creators of public life rather than passive objects of decisions made by others. As suggested by Stanford (2011), social workers should work outside the box and traditional social work space and be relevant in addressing contemporary social problems that are causing human suffering. Particularly, social workers should facilitate good governance and fight for social justice despite the risks involved. Writers have shown that acting against corruption requires courage, since it involves stepping on some people's toes which yields into persecution, isolation and distress (Banks 2004; Webb 2006).

Whilst the risks associated with the social workers' involvement in the fight against corruption are well-documented (Banks 2004; Webb 2006), social workers should take the risk, since this profession is both a moral and political practice (Specht and Courtney 1994; Chu et al. 2009). Moreover, combating corruption and other forms of social injustice is both a motivation and justification for social work profession (Chu et al. 2009). Hence, social workers should be at the forefront in fighting against this vice that has eaten the social resources potentially available to Ugandan society. The role of social work in the fight against corruption has been emphasised by

Fine and Teram (2013) and Chu et al. (2009). So, this profession needs to depart from its traditional practices as (Weick 1987) claims that

“No matter what its historical role has been, social work does not have to support the existing paradigm. Because of its uniquely preserved wisdom about the radical potential of human beings to recreate themselves, social work can take a leading role in articulating a new view” (p. 228).

Similarly, Twikirize et al. (2013: 3) highlights that

“Social work in Uganda has an important role to play in addressing contemporary social problems; and to proactively engage in the development process alongside other disciplines”.

Therefore, the social work profession is instrumental in contributing to sustainable development issues like combating corruption (Global Agenda 2012). However, there is a critical step that should be taken to realise this goal. For example, fighting corruption in Uganda requires mainstreaming anti-oppressive social work practice in social work education. This will not only raise awareness on its consequence but rather emphasise on the need for a corruption free society. It has been argued that introducing anti-oppressive social work practice will enable paradigm shift from traditional social work to contemporary justice informed social work (Mullaly 2007). It is further believed that exposing social work students to anti-oppressive social work practice will build their capacity to question corruption practices and hold those in power accountable for their actions and inactions. Furthermore, social workers should engage in public education and awareness campaigns to stimulate citizen action against corruption (Healy 1999). It is believed that education and awareness campaigns meaningfully enhance people’s participation which is crucial in addressing corruption (Schneider and Lester 2001). Additionally, social workers should provide public information including distributing access to public information laws and regulations to build people’s confidence in holding their leaders accountable. This corresponds to Christensen (2005) who states that promotion of the right to public information laws enhances citizen participation in the decision-making process. Relatedly, social workers in Uganda should demystify the idea of people power. This will enhance civic agency among ordinary Ugandans and deconstruct negative attitudes such as apathy, disconnectedness, and hedonism.

Since social workers are torch bearers for the people whose rights have been violated, they have a primary duty to engage in advocacy as a tool to address corruption in the country. Undoubtedly, social workers have the necessary knowledge, values and ethics base that exceptionally equips them to take on advocacy role in addressing corruption (Dominelli 2002a; Payne 2006). Therefore, they should support and participate in

advocacy activities to challenge corruption practices (Brandon and Brandon 2001). Better still, they should lobby government to act against the corrupt officials. Besides, advocacy being collective action-oriented, social workers should work with the media in publishing press statements that call for government action against the corrupt. Internationally, social workers’ use of media advocacy has proved to be effective tool in addressing corruption. Successful stories have been documented in countries such as Armenia, Colombia, India and Kuwait.

Furthermore, social workers should actively participate in political engagement to curb down corruption (Gray et al. 2002). They should particularly partake in political engagement to promote public accountability which is a key ingredient towards the attainment of a corrupt free society. Domanski (1998) believes that political engagement is crucial in the realisation and fulfilment of human rights and social justice. Social workers need to hold both local and national engagement meetings involving oversight bodies such as Inspectorate of Government, Parliament, district and subcounty councils on matters of accountability and transparency and come up with concrete action points on addressing corruption. Most significantly, social workers should set a good example in society by desisting from corruption practices, because it compromises their integrity and their role in addressing this social ill. They should also play a whistle blowing role among the already established professional duties. Lastly, due to the several skyrocketing incidences of corruption in the country, there is an urgent need for social workers to adopt litigation campaigns against the corrupt officials to recover the lost money.

Conclusion

Corruption as a violation of human rights has undesirably affected service delivery in Uganda. It has worsened the vulnerability of the disadvantaged groups such as the women, children, people with disabilities and persons living with HIV/AIDS by interfering with the quality of service provision. The social wellbeing of these groups has been threatened by corruption, since they heavily depend on social services such as health and education. This paper urges social workers to actively engage in the fight against corruption, since it violates social justice and human rights which this helping profession stands for. Social workers should not shy away from partaking in advocacy activities such as peaceful demonstrations if they are to remain relevant. They should adopt public education campaigns as a strategy to address structural challenges in the country. This will help to stimulate citizen action against impunity. Better still, social workers can combat corruption by organising broad-based integrity meetings involving all stakeholders, lobby and advocate for the citizens’ charters to give communities an opportunity to participate and openly engage government leaders on decision-making process. They need to build alliances with the media to report and shame those involved in corruption.

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