

Ubudehe: A Social Work Analysis of Indigenous Solutions to Poverty Reduction in Post-Genocide Rwanda

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Abstract : As part of the effort to reconstruct Rwanda and foster a shared national identity after the 1994 genocide against Tutsi, the government of Rwanda has drawn on aspects of indigenous culture and traditional practices. One of these traditional practices and cultural values is Ubudehe, which has been re-introduced after it has been gradually lost since colonial times. It is a form of collective action at the village level, which is inclusive, covering men, women, and the most marginalized community members. The philosophy behind Ubudehe is to increase the level of participation and institutional problem-solving capacity at the local level by citizens and local government. Since the early 2000s, the government re-introduced Ubudehe as a neo-traditional cultural institution in order to support the implementation of the country's poverty reduction and development programs. An empirical study on indigenous and innovative models of social work practice was conducted under the framework of the 'Professional Social Work in East Africa' (PROSOWO II) project. Field data were collected on traditional/indigenous approaches, including Ubudehe, from different categories of informants through focus group discussions (FGDs) and personal interviews. The research showed that professional social workers play a significant role in the whole Ubudehe process. While there have been some challenges in the administration and implementation, overall it has contributed to poverty reduction in a post-genocide Rwanda.

Keywords : development, indigenous approach, social work, Ubudehe

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