Conceptualising *Ubudlelane* philosophy as a communal approach to sustainable poverty alleviation

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ABSTRACT

Poverty remains a persistent challenge in many communities, necessitating sustainable, community-rooted solutions. This paper explores the ubudlelane philosophy, an emerging African communal framework, as a vehicle for fostering human sociability, shared resources and mutual support in the fight against poverty. Ubudlelane not only promotes collective well-being but also creates an enabling environment for Ubuntu, the recognition of shared humanity and interconnectedness, to flourish among community members. Grounded in the principles of communal living and reciprocal support, ubudlelane emphasises the collective responsibility of community members to assist and uplift one another, particularly those most vulnerable. This conceptual paper, leaning on a narrative review methodology, examines how the practical application of ubudlelane can contribute to poverty alleviation through active cooperation and solidarity within communities. We argue that ubudlelane offers a culturally rooted and contextually relevant pathway for addressing poverty, highlighting the potential of indigenous philosophies to advance sustainable development, social justice and community resilience. This article contributes to the growing body of scholarship on indigenous knowledges, particularly within the field of social work theory and practice. It advances the decolonisation of social work by challenging the dominance of Western-centric cultural and epistemological paradigms and advocating for the integration of contextually relevant, Afrocentric frameworks.

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INTRODUCTION

This article introduces the innovative concept of *ubudlelane*, a philosophy rooted in human sharing arising from social interactions aimed at combating poverty. It is closely aligned with the principles of Ubuntu such as humanity, reciprocity and communal solidarity as prominently highlighted in the social work literature, and within this article, Ubuntu and *ubudlelane* are presented interchangeably to demonstrate how they reinforce and facilitate one another. The article employs a narrative review methodology to develop this innovative concept, subsequently situating it within sustainable poverty alleviation strategies and social work practice, highlighting its practical implications.

Highlights of the Ubudlelane philosophy and its context

This article opens by reflecting on Nelson Mandela's assertion that sharing resources within communities has the power to create meaningful change, as captured in the following quotation:

> It is in the character of growth that we should learn from both pleasant and unpleasant experiences, but we must also be prepared to share what we have to benefit others (Mandela, 1994).

This quotation from the renowned Nelson Mandela reflects his philosophy of paying it forward, highlighting the idea that sharing is a hallmark of growth. When one gives to another, an act of kindness is fulfilled. In this article, we refer to this practice as *ubudlelane*, meaning 'to share'. *Ubudlelane* is a newly emerging African social philosophy, conceptualised by Xweso and Gwam (2024), which emphasises the importance of communal sharing among individuals living within a community setting to reduce poverty and promote collective well-being through mutual support. This philosophy builds on the principles of communal living and human sociability, advocating for a collective pooling of resources to achieve the common good. Rooted in African traditions of mutual support and interdependence, *ubudlelane* offers a framework that seeks to address contemporary social challenges, such as poverty, through the ethos of shared care. Xweso and Gwam (2024) envisioned this concept as a tool to inspire collective action, promote solidarity, and establish sustainable systems for resource distribution, akin to the practice of *'breaking bread'* with one another in communities. This approach fosters resilience among those who are disadvantaged by facilitating immediate support from others.

This concept draws much from the broader and well-developed African concept and now theory of ubuntu and its various interpretations across the African continent. Various African versions of the Nguni theory of ubuntu include Ujamaa African Theory and Ukama African Family Theory amongst others (Africa Social Work Network, 2024). Common elements include collectivity, *Ukama* (relationality), *ujamaa* (collaboration) and looking at people holistically. Plainly, evidence points to common themes that could link ubuntu philosophy as a broader theoretical concept and approach to social work practice whilst concepts like ujamaa and Ukama, and the emerging concept of *ubudlelane*, are approaches towards the overall goal of ubuntu. While ubuntu emphasizes communal well-being and collective responsibility, it has been critiqued for its limitations in adequately addressing issues of justice and fundamental human rights (Zvomuya, 2020). The philosophy of *ubudlelane* seeks to respond to these shortcomings by offering a more action-oriented and justice-sensitive approach to community support and resource sharing.

The proposition of an idea of *ubudlelane* aligns with the understanding that, despite thirty years of democracy, South Africa continues to experience extreme poverty, high inequality and widespread unemployment, particularly among the growing youthful population, especially those from indigent backgrounds. Despite being praised for having one of the most progressive constitutions in the world and well-formulated socioeconomic policies, the country continues to struggle with effectively addressing these triple challenges. This paper, therefore, advocates for a potential approach rooted in indigenous African thought, drawing on the *ubudlelane* philosophy as a decolonial alternative to the predominantly Eurocentric systems approaches to community functioning. By framing *ubudlelane* within an African context, the paper seeks to demonstrate how this concept aligns with the lived experiences of communities and offers solutions that are culturally relevant and better understood by local populations.

Furthermore, the paper contributes to ongoing debates around the pursuit of sustainable development within the context of global development frameworks such as the Millennium Development Goals (2000-2015) and the current Sustainable Development Goals (2015-2030) (United Nations, 2015) which South Africa is a signatory of. It highlights the importance of indigenous, embodied concepts such as *ubudlelane* in advancing sustainable development.

At the regional level, South Africa aligns its National Development Plan with broader continental objectives, such as the African Union's Agenda 2063 (AU, 2013). In this context, exploring diverse approaches to sustainable development, particularly those addressing poverty and promoting social justice, becomes crucial. One such approach is *ubudlelane*, which, through its core principles of communal sharing and mutual support, presents a

culturally grounded strategy for poverty alleviation. Based on this foundation, the aim of this article is to explore how the *ubudlelane* philosophy can be harnessed as a communal approach to alleviating poverty in South African communities.

METHODOLOGY

The authors employed a narrative review methodology to synthesize existing knowledge and integrate it with the innovative conceptualisation of *ubudlelane*. A narrative literature review consolidates and integrates existing research on a specific topic, providing an overview of key discussions, findings, and their interconnections through a coherent narrative structure (Ferrari, 2015). In conceptualising *ubudlelane*, the authors also drew upon their lived experiences in African contexts, positioning themselves appropriately within the communities in which the concept naturally emerges and is practiced. Chigevenga (2022) emphasises the importance of grounding knowledge production in African experiences, noting that such an approach ensures the creation of contextually relevant knowledge. Moreover, the African continent is characterized by significant cultural diversity, even within single countries, which further enriches knowledge generation (Chigevenga, 2022). The literature reviewed for this paper was drawn from a range of journals, with a particular focus on discussions related to *ubudlelane*, its intersections with Ubuntu, and strategies for poverty alleviation in African communities. The reviewed literature was closely aligned with the authors' experiences, which informed both the conclusions, and the recommendations presented in this article. A limitation of the literature search is that *ubudlelane* has not been previously documented, this article, therefore, represents the first attempt to conceptualize the concept, linking it to existing approaches and philosophies.

Introducing *ubudlelane*

Unequivocally, it is worth noting that there is currently no existing literature on the *ubudlelane* philosophy, as it is an emerging African concept. However, relational concepts have emerged from which *ubudlelane* also draws, aiming to reignite the spirit of *ukuhlalisana kakuhle kwabantu* (living well together) in the fight against poverty. In doing so, it adds value to existing philosophies. As such, this article serves as the first formal introduction to *ubudlelane* and therefore does not provide a well-established corpus of prior research. Instead, this article offers an initial conceptualisation of *ubudlelane* and explores how it can be applied within the context of African communities to alleviate poverty. *Ubudlelane* is an isiXhosa term meaning 'ukwabelana' which translates to 'sharing'. This concept is deeply embedded in human sociability and communal living, reflecting values that transcend national boundaries. In the Shona language, *ubudlelane* is synonymous with *'kupanana'* (Xweso & Gwam, 2024). We provide this translation and adaptation from another language to illustrate that the concept of *ubudlelane* exists in other cultures and nations. The philosophy of *ubudlelane* is epitomised by the African proverb 'ukuqhe'kezelana ngesonka' loosely translated to 'breaking bread'. This proverb highlights the critical role of compassionate communities where individuals come together to share, support, and uplift one another. The *ubudlelane* philosophy posits that poverty alleviation and the mitigation of various social ills in communities can be significantly advanced through the recognition and practice of compassionate sharing and mutual support (Xweso & Gwam, 2024). Upon its conceptualisation, the philosophy was built on the following tenets, as outlined in Table 1. These tenets form the foundation of *ubudlelane*, highlighting its core values of meaningful sharing and collective responsibility. *Ubudlelane* not only underscores the importance of sharing in addressing poverty, but also extends to other societal issues, such as promoting peace, fostering reconciliation for harmonious coexistence, and responding to various contextual challenges. Ultimately, it offers a holistic approach to poverty alleviation and social cohesion.

Table 1: The basic tenets of ubudlelane philosophy

Tenet	Description
Sharing and reciprocity	Recognising the value of mutual sharing and exchange, which is predicated on 'ukuqhe'kezelana ngesonka'.
Community and togetherness	Emphasising the importance of building and strengthening community connections.
Empathy and understanding	Fostering empathy and understanding among individuals and groups.
Inclusivity and diversity	Celebrating diversity and promoting inclusivity, just like gathering compassionately to support one another.
Respect and dignity	Promoting respect and dignity for all individuals, regardless of background or circumstances.
Collaboration and cooperation	Encourage collaborative efforts and cooperative problem-solving.
Gratitude and appreciation	Cultivating gratitude and appreciation of one's role in a compassionate community, including families ang group, and recognise the resources shared.
Social justice, forgiveness and reconciliation	Emphasising social justice as a significant value in shared relationships fosters a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation. Just as breaking bread can symbolize a new beginning, these values pave the way for renewed and harmonious interactions.

Source: Adapted from Xweso and Gwam (2024)

The philosophy of *ubudlelane* places emphasis on the significance of communal living and human sociability heavily and resonates within original foundations of communalism as propounded by many scholars (Mabovula, 2011; Khoza, 2005; Ramose, 2002). These authors view communalism in terms of collective existence and intersubjectivity and serves as the basis for supportiveness, cooperation, collaboration and solidarity. For Mabovula (2011), this view of communalism can be defined as communitarianism where a person is defined in the context of social bonds and cultural traditions rather than through individual traits. Ramose (2002) identified humanness, tolerance, and respect as key tenants for communalism. Whilst these authors associate communalism with ubuntu, the meaning of communalism in the context of *ubudlelane* speaks to the pooling of resources and collective action for the common good of the community, expressed through the tangible act of giving what one has to another in practice.

In agreement with the preceding authors, *ubudlelane* embodies the essence of ubuntu, however, it represents the practical enactment of ubuntu. The philosophy of *ubudlelane* is deeply rooted in the African value system of ubuntu, which emphasizes human interconnectedness, collective responsibility, and the imperative of sharing resources within communities (Kimmerle, 2016; Mugumbate & Chereni, 2019). Ubuntu, often encapsulated by the phrase "I am because we are", underscores the interconnectedness of individual well-being with that of the broader community (Tutu, 1999). In a similar vein, *ubudlelane* extends these principles by promoting communal cooperation, encouraging the sharing of resources, and prioritising the needs of the most vulnerable through collective action, as highlighted by Mabovula (2011). Mabovula (2011) argues that African communities have historically relied on relational and reciprocal systems to sustain social and economic cohesion, and we use this for *ubudlelane* as this provides a contemporary expression of these practices. By promoting intentional and sustained acts of mutual support, *ubudlelane* not only alleviates poverty but also creates conditions for ubuntu to flourish, ensuring that social solidarity, compassion, and shared humanity become embedded in the everyday interactions of community life. Through *ubudlelane*, communities embody ubuntu by centring the well-being of all, fostering dignity, and promoting social justice through shared responsibilities and collective care. Ubuntu and communalism are closely intertwined concepts that share core principles of community, collective responsibility, and the sharing of resources. *Ubudlelane* can be understood as a practical expression of this communal ethos, emphasizing active cooperation and mutual support. While ubuntu represents a broader African philosophical worldview encompassing various cultural values, *ubudlelane* specifically highlights the tangible acts of giving and working together for the common good.

Contextualising poverty in South Africa

South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP) Vision 2030 outlines a comprehensive strategy for addressing the country's long-standing socioeconomic challenges, with the primary goals of eradicating poverty and reducing inequality by the year 2030 (RSA, 2012). Despite these ambitions, South Africa continues to grapple with

entrenched issues of poverty, inequality, and high unemployment, alongside sluggish economic growth (Stats SA, 2025). Nearly a year into the 7th Administration, which ushered in the Government of National Unity (GNU), unemployment remains persistently high, and the economy has shown limited growth, offering little evidence of progress in overcoming the so-called 'triple challenges' (Stats SA, 2025). Although the current administration asserts its commitment to inclusive economic development, job creation, and structural reforms, particularly through partnerships with the private sector to boost investment, foster innovation, and expand opportunities for youth and vulnerable populations (RSA, 2025) recent data does not reflect significant improvements, raising questions about the efficacy of the GNU's interventions.

Like many Sub-Saharan African countries, South Africa continues to contend with widespread poverty, underscoring the urgency for more effective and targeted policy implementation. Poverty levels in South Africa remain considerably high relative to many other countries, with approximately 49.2% of adults living below the upper-bound poverty line (Mdluli & Dunga, 2022). These poverty rates are deeply stratified along racial and gender lines, a disparity largely rooted in the enduring legacy of apartheid (Mdluli & Dunga, 2022; Francis & Webster, 2019). Since the launch of the National Development Plan (NDP) in 2012, the South African government has made several attempts to address poverty; however, progress has been limited (RSA, 2012). Following the adoption of the NDP, Francis and Webster (2019) note that a policy-focused conference at the University of Cape Town of South Africa highlighted a shift in discourse - from poverty reduction to addressing inequality - based on a perception that modest gains had been made in reducing poverty, while inequality had continued to deepen. Nevertheless, by 2019, evidence indicated that poverty remained pervasive. While social grants have been shown to reduce poverty levels in some contexts (Schotte, Zizzamia & Leibbrandt, 2018), the number of individuals experiencing extreme poverty in South Africa continues to rise (Mdluli & Dunga, 2022). Gender and race persist as key determinants of poverty: female-headed households are more likely to experience unemployment, earn lower incomes than their male counterparts, and depend heavily on child support grants (Francis & Webster, 2019; Mdluli & Dunga, 2022). Regional disparities further compound the issue, with the Eastern Cape and Limpopo provinces showing the highest poverty rates, 72.9% and 72.2%, respectively. In contrast, although Gauteng has comparatively lower poverty rates, approximately one-third of its population still lives in poverty.

In light of the persistent and concerning poverty statistics, it is evident that conventional poverty alleviation strategies have yielded limited success. This underscores the need to explore alternative and complementary approaches aligned with the objectives of the National Development Plan (NDP). One such approach is the *ubudlelane* or relational ubuntu-based model, which may offer culturally grounded and community-driven pathways toward poverty reduction in South Africa. Emerging literature supports the value of Afrocentric models in addressing socioeconomic challenges. For example, Van Wyk (2017), in a study on the role of stokvels in rural communities, found that these ubuntu-informed, collective savings schemes provide both financial resilience and sustainable support networks for women, demonstrating significant potential for poverty alleviation. Similarly, Zvomuya (2020) argues that the ubuntu philosophy fosters cooperation, empathy, and collective responsibility, elements that are critical in addressing complex global issues such as poverty and in driving inclusive socioeconomic development.

Harnessing *ubudlelane* for sustainable poverty alleviation

As highlighted in the contextual overview above, poverty remains a critical challenge that continues to command the attention of governments, civil society organisations, and international bodies. Both globally and in South Africa, various community development strategies have been implemented to combat poverty by empowering communities to drive their own development. Internationally, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 1 (No Poverty), provide a broad framework that calls for community-led, inclusive approaches to poverty reduction (United Nations, 2015). In South Africa, community development initiatives such as the Community Work Programme (CWP) and the Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Programme (ISRDP) have been implemented to create work opportunities, build local skills and promote social cohesion within vulnerable communities (Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs [COGTA], 2020).

Globally, examples include Slum Dwellers International (SDI), which works through community savings groups and partnerships to upgrade informal settlements and improve livelihoods in countries such as South Africa, India, and Kenya (Mitlin & Satterthwaite, 2013). Similarly, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India represents a grassroots model that combines employment creation, capacity building, and collective organisation to uplift women working in the informal sector (Chen, 2005). These initiatives illustrate that community development strategies which prioritise participation, partnership, and local ownership are central to sustainable poverty alleviation. Despite these efforts, poverty remains pervasive, particularly as global shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic have reversed developmental gains. The United Nations (2015) projected that if existing trends persist, around 575 million people will remain in extreme poverty by 2030, a projection exacerbated by the pandemic, which forced an estimated 120 million people into poverty in 2020 alone (World Bank, 2021).

Effective poverty alleviation requires community development strategies that are context-responsive and build on indigenous philosophies. The philosophy of *ubudlelane*, for example, promotes the notion of interconnectedness, solidarity and mutual support. It calls on individuals, communities, and organisations to share resources and collaborate in addressing poverty through micro (individual), mezzo (community), and macro (societal) interventions. We propose that by practicalising *ubudlelane*, poverty can be uprooted in ways that are both sustainable and meaningful to local contexts. Our conceptual model (Figure 1) illustrates how poverty alleviation begins with the self in relation to others, extends to communal ties, and culminates in *ubudlelane*-informed resilience.
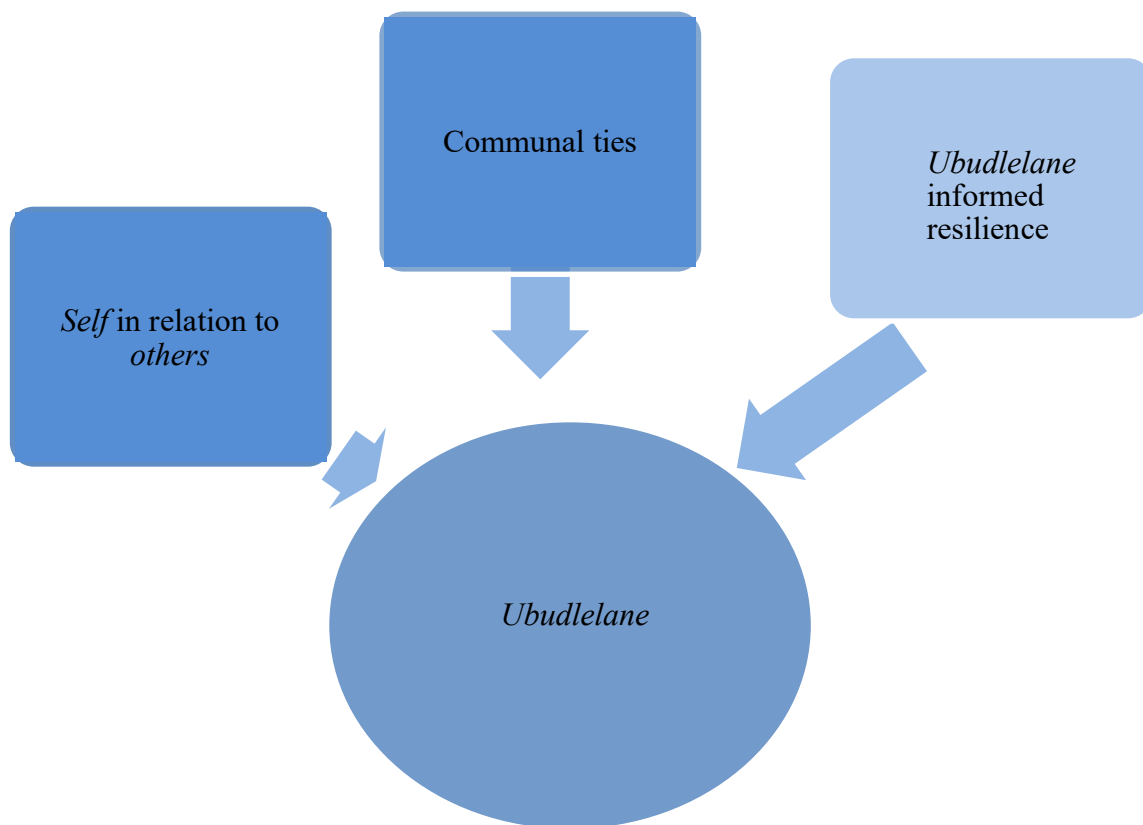

Figure 1: Key facets of ubudlelane for sustainable poverty alleviation

This diagram illustrates the three key facets of *ubudlelane* that we contextualise in this article as pillars for sustainable poverty alleviation. We propose that *ubudlelane* offers a pathway towards sustainability and long-term impact because it rests on the strength of interwoven connections, bonds that support individuals and communities alike. We begin by offering a nuanced explanation of the concept of self in relation to others. We position the self within a broader social fabric, acknowledging that while poverty affects individuals, its impact extends deeply into communities (Mosoetsa, 2011). From an individual perspective, practising *ubudlelane* means embracing a holistic ethic of openness, where one shares common values and material resources with those around them, not out of obligation, but as part of building mutual resilience (Nnaemeka, 2005). Our position aligns with that of Mbiti (1969:108) who observed that:

> The individual does not and cannot exist alone, except as part of the collective. The individual owes their existence to other people, both past generations and contemporaries and is simply part of a greater whole. It is the community that makes, creates, and sustains the individual, as the individual depends on the corporate group.

This view recognises that individuals may possess means through hard work, opportunity, or inherited resources that others in their community lack. Our framing does not advocate dependency, rather, it encourages drawing on the strengths and capabilities of those who have progressed, as a means of inspiring and capacitating others (Louw & Ncube, 2014). The goal is to cultivate a community where individuals are not left to succumb to hardship, but are supported to learn, grow, and thrive. If individuals with resources remain self-centred and disconnected from those around them, they may succeed in isolation. Yet, *ubudlelane* invites such individuals to practise openness,

recognising that their engagement with others can foster collective resilience and strengthen the community's capacity to overcome poverty (Dladla, 2020). This is not about erasing individual success but about leveraging it to build shared strength and sustainable futures.

The second facet of *ubudlelane* is community ties, which operates at the macro level. Here, *ubudlelane* places emphasis on collective values that enable communities to work together, harnessing social capital to achieve sustainable poverty alleviation. The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) defines social capital as the networks, connections, and relationships that people draw upon to pursue their livelihoods (DFID, 1999). In the *ubudlelane* lens, these relationships are not abstract, they are lived through daily acts of sharing, cooperation, and mutual support. Social capital underpins communities' capacity to create sustainable projects, initiatives that are not imposed from above but arise from the strengths and ties within the community (Patel, 2015; Mosoetsa, 2011). While many scholars and development practitioners have long advocated for community-based initiatives, *ubudlelane* offers a distinctive invitation, to practicalise sharing not just in theory but through visible, lived practices. Sharing in this context extends beyond food; it includes creating community hubs for skills development, platforms for exchanging information, and spaces where ideas for local economic upliftment can take root (Mukwevho, 2021). Those with access to knowledge and resources are called upon to act with an ethic of sharing. As Mandela (1994) articulated, true leadership begins with paying it forward within one's own community, ensuring that collective benefit flows outward and multiplies. This resonates with the biblical wisdom that people perish for lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6), underscoring how crucial access to information and opportunities is in breaking cycles of poverty. Through *ubudlelane*, social capital becomes a living force where cooperation, shared purpose, and collective agency translate into sustainable, poverty-reducing action.

The third facet of the *ubudlelane* framework for sustainable poverty alleviation relates to *ubudlelane*-informed community resilience. We propose that this third aspect represents both an outcome of the two preceding facets (self in relation to others, and community ties), and a critical force in the collective fight against poverty. Resilience, according to van Breda (2018), refers to "the multilevel processes that systems engage in to obtain better-than-expected outcomes in the face or wake of adversity" (p. 2). Our understanding aligns with this, we view resilience as the capacity of communities, grounded in *ubudlelane* values, to draw on their social networks, shared resources, and collective strength to overcome poverty in sustainable ways. We refer to this as *ubudlelane*-informed resilience, a form of coping and adaptation in the face of adversity, where poverty itself constitutes a core adversity. When communities pool their resources and strengthen their social ties, they create conditions for resilience, as opposed to siloed approaches that leave individuals vulnerable and isolated. In this way, *ubudlelane* nurtures resilience through collective action and shared purpose (Manganyi & Mahlangeni, 2023). The outcome is a form of resilience shaped by communal values and practices, which enables communities not only to survive, but to sustain meaningful pathways out of poverty.

The role of Social Work in advancing poverty alleviation through *ubudlelane*

Poverty alleviation is one of the core social challenges that social work seeks to address. The profession has long been committed to improving the well-being of marginalised and vulnerable populations. At the heart of social work practice is a vision of creating communities where all people can live free from poverty and experience social justice, dignity, and equality (Patel, 2021). As the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) (2010) highlights, social workers have an ethical responsibility to promote social change and work towards improving the social conditions of individuals, families, and communities. This ethical mandate places poverty alleviation at the centre of social work practice, recognising that poverty represents a fundamental barrier to human dignity, well-being, and full participation in society.

Social workers fulfil multiple roles that directly respond to the realities of poverty. These include empowering individuals and communities, advocating for policies that advance economic justice, facilitating access to essential services and resources, and promoting community development initiatives aimed at sustainable livelihoods. Through these interventions, social workers actively contribute to reducing poverty and enhancing both social and economic inclusion.

In addition, social work practice in South Africa draws on indigenous philosophies such as ubuntu, which provides a normative framework for how social workers engage with communities. To recap, ubuntu is founded on the principle of human interconnectedness and the belief that a person is a person through other people. This highlights the idea that human identity, survival, and well-being are deeply rooted in mutual care, compassion, and collective responsibility (Mupedziswa et al., 2019; van Breda, 2018; Mbedzi, 2019). This aligns with the person-in-environment perspective, which recognises that individuals are shaped through dynamic interactions with their environment (Weiss-Gal, 2008; Mbedzi, 2019).

Building on the values of ubuntu, *ubudlelane* provides a practical expression of these principles within social work practice. *Ubudlelane* encourages individuals to share what they have with those in need, reflecting values of generosity, solidarity, and collective welfare. This philosophy promotes the idea that "breaking bread" - that is, sharing resources - is a practical means of addressing poverty. When those with resources willingly share with

those who lack, communities can begin to narrow the gap between rich and poor, ensuring no one is excluded due to a lack of basic necessities. In this way, *ubudlelane* challenges the individualism that often underpins economic inequality, and reinforces the view that poverty is not merely the result of individual failure, but arises from systemic injustices, unequal access to resources, and a breakdown in supportive relationships within communities.

By promoting the values of ubuntu and *ubudlelane*, social work contributes to building social cohesion and fostering communities grounded in care, reciprocity, and shared responsibility all of which are vital for sustainable poverty alleviation and achieving broader social development goals (Patel, 2015).

Ubudlelane offers several positive implications for social development in South Africa. Firstly, it promotes social cohesion by fostering a sense of community and unity, which is critical for building a harmonious society. Secondly, it encourages collective responsibility, supporting a shared sense of ownership and accountability for community development efforts. This is essential, as united communities are better positioned to work together on initiatives that promote social development and reduce poverty (Patel, 2015).

Moreover, *ubudlelane* strengthens social capital by building trust, reciprocity, and cooperation among community members (Weyers, 2011). Such social capital serves as a safety net, especially for marginalised communities in rural areas or townships, enabling greater resilience (*ubudlelane*-informed) in the face of poverty.

Nonetheless, it is important to recognise potential limitations. Some may argue that emphasising collective action could, at times, restrict individual autonomy, as community needs might be prioritised over personal aspirations. However, the conceptual framework we present in Figure 1 offers a counter to this concern. It places self-responsibility as the core responsibility that is exercised in relation to others. This approach encourages individuals to live by values of care and sharing without compromising their capacity for individual entrepreneurship, innovation, or self-determination. In fact, when *ubudlelane* is genuinely practised and internalised at the micro level, it naturally extends to broader macro-level impacts, strengthening both personal agency and community solidarity. We also acknowledge that there may be a perception that *ubudlelane* could unintentionally foster dependency on the community rather than promoting self-reliance and individual initiative. Yet, this is not the intention of *ubudlelane*. Its focus is on creating opportunities for those without resources through the support of those who have whether through sharing material resources or, importantly, sharing information that connects individuals to services and opportunities. In this way, *ubudlelane* aims to foster autonomy and empowerment, rather than dependency.

Despite these challenges, *ubudlelane* offers significant potential for advancing social development and poverty alleviation in South Africa. It can promote reconciliation and nation-building by fostering a shared identity and collective responsibility. In rural development contexts, *ubudlelane* supports equitable access to shared resources and collective ownership of assets, contributing to poverty reduction and economic justice. Ultimately, by fostering social cohesion and a culture of care, *ubudlelane* encourages both community-based solutions and self-reliance, offering a pathway to inclusive and sustainable development.

Ubudlelane as a communal approach to poverty alleviation in South Africa – implications for social work

The conceptualisation of *ubudlelane* as a communal African philosophy offers a timely and culturally grounded response to the persistent challenge of poverty in South Africa. Rooted in indigenous African values of solidarity, mutual care, and resource sharing, *ubudlelane* builds upon and practically enacts the principles of ubuntu, shifting the focus from abstract ideals to tangible actions such as "breaking bread" and supporting one another within communities. This approach recognises that poverty is not merely a deficit of material means, but also a breakdown in social relations, collective responsibility, and access to opportunity.

In the context of social work, *ubudlelane* provides an important decolonial lens that challenges Western-centric, individualistic models of poverty alleviation. It affirms the importance of relational ethics and community agency, encouraging social workers to work collaboratively with communities in ways that are participatory, culturally resonant, and context specific. Social work education must therefore integrate *ubudlelane* not only as an indigenous knowledge system, but as a transformative framework that enhances professional competence in Afrocentric, anti-oppressive, and sustainable poverty interventions.

Practically, *ubudlelane* invites social workers to strengthen social capital, foster community resilience, and advocate for systems of collective care that uphold the dignity and autonomy of the poor. It also repositions poverty alleviation as both a micro and macro responsibility, involving personal acts of generosity, structural advocacy, and community empowerment. As South Africa seeks alternative solutions to address deepening inequality and exclusion, *ubudlelane* offers a vital conceptual and practical tool for reimagining social development through African philosophies of care, reciprocity, and interconnectedness.

CONCLUSION

In sum, *ubudlelane* affirms the value of "living well together" *(ukuhlalisana kakuhle)* and holds transformative

potential for rethinking poverty eradication in ways that are socially just, inclusive, and deeply rooted in African communal traditions principles that align squarely with the ethical and developmental mandate of social work. In view of the fact that poverty remains a persistent challenge in many communities, there is need for community-rooted solutions. This paper explored and we argued that the *ubudlelane* philosophy, as introduced is one vehicle in the fight against poverty. This is based on its strong principles such as notion of interconnectedness, solidarity and mutual support which are key to poverty alleviation. The use of the narrative review methodology was crucial in examining the practical application of *ubudlelane* on poverty alleviation and the social work profession is well pursued to pursue this community-rooted practice based on common principles and values. Henceforth, in so doing this article contributes to the growing body of scholarship on indigenous knowledge systems, particularly within the field of social work theory and practice. It advances the decolonisation of social work by challenging the dominance of Western-centric cultural and epistemological paradigms and advocating for the integration of contextually relevant, Afrocentric frameworks.

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