

Written by Bongane Mzinyane

Photograph(s):

Caption:

## **Academic and Community Convergence: Discipline of Social Work Celebrates World Social Work Day 2025 with Focus on Enduring Wellbeing**

The University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) Discipline of Social Work, within the School of Applied Human Sciences, commemorated World Social Work Day on March 18, 2025, with a powerful event centred on the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) theme "Strengthening Intergenerational Solidarity for Enduring Wellbeing". Held at the Howard College Theatre, the commemoration highlighted the crucial role of intergenerational collaboration in building robust societies and fostering a sustainable future.

Bongane Mzinyane, Lecturer in the UKZN Social Work department, spearheaded the event, bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders, including the KwaZulu-Natal Social Work Veterans Association (KZNSWVA), the UKZN Social Work Students Association, and practitioners from the MA'AT Institute. Academics, social workers, veterans, and students gathered to engage in meaningful dialogue about the past, present, and future of social work.

The event commenced with a powerful opening speech by the Academic Leader of the Discipline, Dr. Motloung, setting an inspiring tone for the day. Dr. Sibonisile Zibane, Senior Lecturer and Ma'at Project Specialist, further solidified the event's purpose, laying the groundwork for the insightful panel discussion that followed. In her speech, Dr. Zibane underscored the significance of intergenerational connections by invoking three powerful idioms: '*Isiziba sakhwa imifudlana*' (a bigger river is a culmination of tributaries), *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (I am because we are) and '*Indlela ibuzwa kwabaphambili*' (those who have walked the road know it better). She explained that these proverbs embody a fundamental truth: elders possess invaluable knowledge of history, tradition, and survival, while the working generation shoulders the responsibility of sustaining communities. "Today's theme is reminding us about *lolisikompilo lakwantu*, which translates to customs and tradition, which upholds that different generations coexist and need one another – for harmony, balance, and order to exist," Dr. Zibane added, emphasizing the cultural relevance of intergenerational solidarity. Dr. Zibane emphasized that the event aimed to reinforce the working generation's sense of shared responsibility and support, ensuring that elders feel respected and included in decision-making processes.

Dr. Nolwazi Ngcobo, Academic Leader of Community Engagement and Senior Lecturer in Social Work, served as the dynamic program director and moderated the central panel discussion, "Intergenerational Voices." This discussion aimed to bridge

the gap between experienced veterans and emerging professionals, fostering a collaborative approach to addressing contemporary challenges in the field.

Before the panel discussion, the social work first year students showcased a vibrant cultural performance that involved Zulu Dance, Poetry and ballet. The panel featured Ms. Khwezi Vabaza, Thobi Mhlongo, and Nomandla Ndlovu from the KwaZulu-Natal Social Work Veterans Association (KZNSWVA), alongside Mr. Bongane Mzinyane (Lecturer) and UKZN students Ms. Luyanda Mthethwa, Mr. Lindokuhle Shabalala, and Mr. Thabani Mthembu. The panellists explored how past societal challenges shaped current practices, emphasizing the importance of learning from the experiences of seasoned professionals *vice versa*.

The panel explored the benefits of intergenerational solidarity in social work education and practice, delving into how the understanding of well-being has evolved across generations. Key discussion points included:

- Identifying significant shifts that have impacted social work practice.
- Drawing lessons from past experiences to enhance efficiency and development.
- Addressing pressing social challenges through collaborative intergenerational efforts.
- Navigating the unique challenges of the current work environment.
- Leveraging intergenerational mentorship and knowledge sharing.
- Developing strategies to strengthen intergenerational solidarity within the profession, communities, and education.

These discussions aimed to empower students with wisdom and practical strategies, equipping them to become effective social work professionals and mentors for future generations. Panellists stressed the importance of young professionals seeking guidance from elders, advocating for a balanced approach that goes beyond reliance on internet resources.

Following the impactful panel discussion, participants engaged in a spirited march, showcasing placards that highlighted World Social Work Day and its empowering theme. This demonstration visually reinforced the event's message, bringing attention to the importance of intergenerational collaboration within the social work profession and society at large.

The World Social Work Day commemoration at UKZN served as a powerful reminder of the importance of bridging generational gaps to foster a more resilient and compassionate society, emphasizing the enduring value of shared wisdom and collaborative action.