



# Social Work and Sustainable Development

World Social Work Day at the UN in Geneva, 2017

## Background for round table (March 21st)

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*„There are so many complementarities and synergies between the UN agenda and the work of social workers; we must find better ways to work together”*

*Helen Clark Director of UNDP at WSWD 2010, New York*

### Social Work and the United Nations: Highlights in the Relation

The origin of the three international social work and social welfare organizations IASSW, ICSW and IFSW goes back to the first International Conference of Social Work 1928 in Paris. Already in the initial phase the international social work organizations did not restrict their activity to the development of social work training and profession but they knew about the interrelation of local, national and international level. They strived to cooperate with international organizations in search of political solutions for international problems.

- The International Conference of Social Work (ICSW, today International Council of Social Welfare) was founded in Paris including an International Permanent Secretary for Social Workers, which later became an independent organization as the international Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) 1956 in Munich. The International Associations of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) was decided in Paris but formally founded 1929 in Berlin.
- The conference in Paris was made possible by the founding and technical support of the League of Red Cross Societies and an ILO representation participated at the conference and at the foundation ceremony in Paris.
- ILO in cooperation with IASSW and the school of social work in Geneva set up a Centre of Documentation for social work training in Geneva, which documented social work statistics, curricula, reports of research and seminars.
- A working relationship was developed with the Commission of Social Questions of the League of Nation.
- Alice Salomon, founding president of IASSW, stripped from all her function in national social Germany was given the opportunity to do some research at the ILO Documentation Centre in Geneva in 1934. The result was a publication of the first comparative report on social work training around the world in 1937.

In the early years of the United Nations social work was given great attention and support especially through the Social Commission of ECOSOC. Social Work organizations engaged in the work of UN based on United Nations Consultative Status at ECOSOC granted in 1947 as two of the first NGOs to ICSW (in Category I) and to IASSW (in Category II) in 1947 and to IFSW in 1959. IFSW has also consultative status at UNICEF and UN-HABITAT.

1944-47 Many social workers contributed to relief efforts in Europe and China through the UN-Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (UNRAA). The social welfare functions were transferred to ECOSOC, which encouraged the development of social work and social services.

- 1946-70s After the foundation of the United Nations ECOSOC and especially the Social Commission of ECOSOC estimates social work important for social development. Great attention is put on the promotion of training, exchange and counselling /expertise programs, SW international scholarships, international exchange of experts and international seminars.
- 1950 ECOSOC and the General Assembly adopted a resolution proposed by the Social Commission of ECOSOC on the necessity of social work and social services.
- 1950 The first United Nations Survey of Social Work Education is published by ECOSOC Social Commission making recommendation on the promotion of social work and social work training. Following reports are published in 1955, 1958, 1965, and 1971.
- 1968 The UN International Conference of Ministers Responsible for Social Welfare in New York stated in its recommendation that social work profession developed from social welfare practice as a direct response to the need for particular skills in applying available knowledge to the solution of social welfare problems.
- 1987 The UN Interregional Consultation on Development of Social Welfare Policies and Programmes, Vienna recommends that comprehensive training programmes should receive high priority. "Social -work education and social welfare training should be firmly based in the realities of field practice and local cultural traditions, while fully taking into consideration emerging social issues and trends."

In the 70s there was a marked decline of the influence of social work in the UN. Social work nearly disappeared in UN decisions, Resolution, publication and research. According to Lynne Healey (2001 IASSW UN-representative in New York) the UN shifted its emphasis away from human resources to economic development, a field to which social work has less to offer. Even as the focus moved toward social development, social work was slow to adapt to the development movement.

Despite this loss of influence and relevance in the UN the international social work organizations remained firm in their engagement for human rights, social justice, and social development. And they continued to orient and base their activities and policies upon Human Rights, UN conventions and UN programs.

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is crucial for the Global Definition of Social Work and for the Statement of Ethical Principles (IASSW, and IFSW 2014 resp. 2004).
- Over the years representatives of the three international social work and social welfare organizations participated in many UN Conferences and present report and declarations.
- Social workers engaged largely in the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Relationships with the United Nations (CoNGO) and in diverse CoNGO committees such as: Human Rights, Aging, Status of Women, Indigenous People, Children's Right, Mental Health and others.
- 1994 A joint project of IFSW, IASSW and UN Centre for Human Rights resulted in the publication of: Human Rights and Social Work. A Manual for Schools of Social Work and the Social Work Profession, United Nations
- Since 1983 WSWD is celebrated at the UN in New York and since 2017 in Geneva, sporadically also in Vienna, Bangkok and Nairobi with speakers from various UN-organizations: UNICEF, UNRISE, UNDP, ILO, UNAIDS to name only a few.
- 1996 policy statement on Human Rights. Permanent committee.
- IFSW publishes a set of policy papers referring to different UN-Convention women, children, disabled, migrants etc.
- 2002 "A Professional Training Manual on the UN Convention. Social Work and the Rights of the Child" (IFSW)
- In 2012 the three social work and social welfare organizations adopt the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development: A Commitment to Action. The Global Agenda is a strong commitment to promote social and economic equality, the dignity and worth of people, environmental and community sustainability and the importance of human relationships. Target groups of the Global Agenda are the own organization, communities and other partners and the United Nations and other international Agencies.

## Summary Papers (in alphabetical order)

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Tuesday 21 March 2017, 4pm-6pm

Room XVI, Palais des Nations, United Nations Office at Geneva, Switzerland

**Christina BEHRENDT, Social Protection Department, ILO**

The World Social Work Day 2017 highlights the important contribution that social work makes to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda in its social, economic and environmental dimensions. Likewise, and very closely associated with the key role of social work in sustainable development, social protection contributes to all three dimensions of sustainable development, and is highlighted explicitly or implicitly in several SDGs, including

- SDG 1 on ending poverty in all its forms everywhere, particularly Target 1.3: Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable;
- SDG 3 on ensuring healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, particularly Target 3.8: Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all;
- SDG 5 on achieving gender equality and empower all women and girls, particularly Target 5.4: Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate;
- SDG 8 on promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work<sup>1</sup> for all, particularly Target 8.5: By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value;
- SDG 10 on reducing inequality within and among countries, particularly Target 10.4: Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality;

In addition, social protection systems also contribute to the attainment of other SDGs, such as SDG 6 on access to clean water and sanitation, SDG 7 on affordable and clean energy, as well as SDG 12 on responsible consumption and production and SDG 13 on climate action, given that social protection plays a key role in facilitating access to basic goods and services and in facilitating a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies.

Moreover, given that social protection systems, including floors, are one of the areas where governments directly interact with people, social protection also plays a key role in attaining SDG 16 on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels, particularly Target 16.6: Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels.

The important role of social protection across the 2030 Development Agenda also reflects the strong commitment to building social protection floors, as part of wider social protection systems, as reflected in the ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202).

Social workers have an important role to play in every single one aspect mentioned above, and have a key role in realizing the right to social security and other social and economic rights, and in promoting sustainable development.

## Cooperation between Social Work Organizations and UNAIDS to Promote the SDGs

**David CHIPANTA, Senior advisor social protection, UNAIDS**

UNAIDS considers social workers as the conscience of the AIDS response. They are peer educators, researchers and decision-makers – and work at the centre and margins of our communities, with influencers and vulnerable people.

Social workers ground our responses to meet the personalised needs of vulnerable people. They accompany people through their life-cycle, connecting people to services and making services work for people.

*How do UN Agencies responsible for SDGs implementation involve social workers? What are the key and unique contributions that social workers can make to achieve the SDGs?*

Social workers can help the new generation of children to start free, remain free and stay AIDS free. Social workers can also help to move the spotlight onto an important group of vulnerable children—children born HIV-free from parents living with HIV. Such children experience more health issues and deaths than children whose parents are not living with HIV. They require systematic follow-up and care, which social workers can help to provide.

Social workers can help devise creative ways for us to meet the 90-90-90 targets where 90% of people living with HIV know their status, 90% of people living with HIV access treatment and 90% of people on HIV treatment achieve viral suppression that strengthens their immunity and reduce the rates of transmitting the HIV infection. They can do so by encouraging people to know their HIV status, linking people who test positive to HIV treatment and supporting them to remain on HIV treatment. Social workers can help to cut the time from diagnosis to starting antiretroviral therapy by advocating with different care providers to address practices that impede a rapid start of antiretroviral therapy.

Since many care and support services cannot be easily provided by one provider, social workers can advocate for, connect and accompany people to meet their multiple needs – where to get anti-retroviral therapy; where to get condoms, opioid substitution therapy or sterile needles, where to get food, how to access housing, employment, where to get help to prevent and treat gender and sexual based violence, what to do and who to call for help when people are arrested for who they are - just a few of the connections social workers do every day.

*What are the concrete forms of partnership between UN Agencies and Social Work organizations to build and foster in future?*

Since the work of social workers overlaps with many of the activities UN agencies, once concrete way would be for social workers to have joint activities with relevant UN agencies on an area of mutual interest. Social workers have worked with UNAIDS to develop a book that highlight key AIDS responses championed by social workers. This is part of a Memorandum of Agreement UNAIDS signed with the International Association of Social Workers in 2014.

We believe this is an important contribution to efforts of ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030. I encourage you to join us this evening and hear more about the book.

**Paul LADD, Director, UNRISD**

“The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) is an autonomous research institute within the United Nations System that undertakes interdisciplinary research and policy analysis on the social dimensions of contemporary development issues. Through our work we aim to ensure that social equity, inclusion and justice are central to development thinking, policy and practice.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides an important opportunity to strengthen the role and contribution of social work in national development processes. The 2030 Agenda seeks to make policies related to the economy and environment more consistent with sustainable human progress, and puts people front and foremost.

Social workers can be key agents for implementing many of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – not only those goals that relate to different aspects of social policy, but also those that require an understanding of how social policy is shaped by the natural environment.

Social workers, and the associations that represent them, can play active roles at many levels:

- at the local level engaging directly with communities and people to ‘leave no one behind’;
- at the national level when designing framework policies and institutions; and
- at the global level in advocating for a strong role for social work and in fostering learning across countries.

This requires involving social workers in UN processes – such as the annual High Level Political Forum that reviews progress on the SDGs – and strengthening collaboration with UN organizations for which social work is key for fulfilling their mandates.”

**Kirstin LANGE, Senior Disability Advisor, UNHCR**

Persons of concern to UNHCR include refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and stateless persons. These groups are particularly marginalized in society, face obstacles to access to rights, and are often excluded from development processes and denied opportunities to contribute to their host communities. Forced displacement disrupts social support networks, and displaced populations often face xenophobia and other forms of discrimination.

Social work has a rich history of working with communities to promote social cohesion. This experience is now more relevant than ever in contexts of forced displacement, with numbers of people forcibly displaced topping 65 million in 2015. Overwhelmingly, most refugees are hosted in developing regions, with least developed countries providing asylum to about 26% of the total global population of refugees. Former Secretary- General, Ban Ki Moon, has referred to this as a ‘crisis of solidarity’, and this context gives rise to an urgent need to build social cohesion between displaced and host populations. Social work, with its strong recognition of the importance of relationships between people, has an important role in this regard.

We know that when empowered, refugees and other displaced persons can be agents of positive change, with the potential to contribute to social and economic development of their host communities and to rebuilding efforts in their country of origin on return. Through the various methods and techniques of social work, including community work and capacity building, social workers have an important role in supporting displaced individuals, families and communities, to facilitate their empowerment to become agents of positive change in their societies.

Further, social work has an important contribution to make to the global dialogue on issues of forced displacement. Social work’s defense of human rights and focus on principles of collective responsibility have an important place in the current context, where debates about forced displacement are too often guided by fear and xenophobic rhetoric. By participating in this global dialogue, social work can contribute to shifting the debate further in a direction that respects the inherent dignity and worth of people and promotes a spirit of unity.

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Wednesday 22 March 2017, 10 am—4.30pm

Room XVI, Palais des Nations, United Nations Office at Geneva, Switzerland

**Green Social Work, Environmental Justice and the Global Agenda**

**Lena Dominelli, Durham University**

Social work has prided itself in being about the person-in-the environment, but for many decades, has defined the environment as being primarily the social environment. Its interest in environmental issues per se is more recent, particularly its engagement with the physical scientists who have dominated discussions about climate change, natural disasters and human disasters. I trace some of this development in my talk, and argue that green social work today encompasses not only the renewable energy agenda, but a holistic approach that embeds everyday life practices that form the foundation of social work practice and demands the inclusion of environmental justice in social justice discourses that aim to eliminate inequalities particularly poverty. This approach necessitates interdisciplinarity and a critique of neoliberal forms of socioeconomic development and governance structures.

**Leaving no child behind: the role of social work**

**Elena Gaia, Senior Advisor – Violence against Children, World Vision International**

The presentation explores the role of social workers to reach the most vulnerable children and thus contribute to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the overall Agenda 2030 objective of 'leaving no one behind'. It draws on the experience and work of the NGO World Vision around preventing and protecting children from all forms of violence.

Violence against children is one of the main factors affecting the rights and wellbeing of children today. It is estimated that more than half the world's children - that's a billion children between the ages of 2 and 17 years - experience some type of violence every year<sup>1</sup>. This is a universal challenge from which no country or context is spared. Violence harms each child immediately and jeopardizes their future survival, health and education. It simultaneously costs trillions of dollars, slows economic development and erodes a country's human and social capital.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes specific targets to end violence against girls and boys, grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international human rights treaties. Children free from violence are able to flourish, develop and exercise their rights. The elimination of violence against children is a pre-condition for the achievement of other rights of the child, including education, health, development and wellbeing, and of the 17 SDGs.

At the global level, a number of institutions and stakeholders have agreed on a technical package of multi-sectoral solutions to end violence against children: INSPIRE<sup>2</sup>. When we look at the implementation of such solutions on the ground, more than half of them involve, and are provided by, social workers or other professionals that perform social work functions, such as for instance home visiting nurses. These professionals are often the first and only to be able to identify and get in contact with the most vulnerable children. They act as 'bridge' between the children left behind and the formal systems of public social support.

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<sup>1</sup>CDC data published in Pediatrics, January 2016

<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2016/01/25/peds.2015-4079>

<sup>2</sup> <http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/207717/1/9789241565356-eng.pdf?ua=1>

INSPIRE interventions, while effective as standalone, see their effects maximised when they are implemented as part of a child protection system, defined as “a set of coordinated formal and informal elements working together to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation and other forms of violence against children”<sup>3</sup>. Social workers and other professionals performing a social work function often act as ‘glue’ between the different parts of the system. Not only they provide specific services directly to the most vulnerable children, such as parenting and counselling, they also inform parents and children about other services and benefits for which they may be eligible, refer them to these and support them in ensuring access.

As an illustration of these points, we can look at a case study from Armenia. Since 2009, World Vision has been working in the marz (administrative unit of Armenia) of Lori, supporting the most vulnerable children through its sponsorship programmes. The Armenian system of child protection at the time was relying at community level on volunteer committees that lacked specialized knowledge and expertise to meet the needs of vulnerable children and their families.

World Vision was operating at community level by employing community mobilizers: active community members (usually young people) selected from the community and paid a salary. As part of their work with children and their families, the mobilizers became aware of serious child protection violations happening within the families. However, they lacked the skills and training to handle them. Recognizing the need for specialized social work to respond to these situations, World Vision Armenia started training community mobilizers in basic social work skills, and began a more selective process of hiring, preferring workers who had backgrounds and experience in social work. Later on, World Vision made an agreement with the University social work department to give an opportunity for community mobilizers to complete a one-year distance learning course in social work. What started as community mobilizers then became community social workers (CSW).

While all countries of the world have some form of social work focused on children, public support for this work is often limited and difficult to sustain. The Armenia example is illuminating in this regard.

As the communities recognized the benefits of the community social workers, particularly in terms of improved child well-being, it became clear that the model of paid and trained community social workers service needed to be institutionalized. Advocacy focused on having CSW salaries partially paid by local governments; this was achieved in 2012 in 11 communities, with local governments paying between 7 and 30% of the CSW’s salaries. In 2012, the national government developed the new National Strategy and Action Plan for Child Rights Protection for 2013-2016. Among its propositions, the policy requires local governments to hire and pay the salary from local budgets of at least one CSW or make a public and convincing declaration as to why not.

#### Conclusions & recommendations

Social work is essential to protecting children from violence and reaching the most vulnerable.

Civil society, in partnership with academia, can help demonstrate new models of social work adapted to local conditions, and even provide these temporarily when publicly supported social work functions are not possible due to situations of conflict, fragility or extremely low public resources.

UN Member States wishing to achieve the SDGs and leave no child behind should increase the numbers and capacities of social workers and case managers handling children, in accordance with internationally recognized standards of service provision.

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<sup>3</sup>[http://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Systems\\_Approach\\_to\\_Child\\_Protection.pdf](http://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/Systems_Approach_to_Child_Protection.pdf)

## The challenge of social change for social work in rural Cambodia

Christophe Gironde, IHEID

### Introduction

Over the last 20 years, Cambodia has witnessed strong economic growth and profound transformation in social organization and people norms and values. This process creates new challenge for social work. Rural populations used to rely on farming and natural resources available around villages. They enjoyed free access to land for farming as well as forest and water areas for hunting, fishing and the collection of non-timber products that were crucial to their livelihoods. The village was central to economic and social life, for which traditional leaders and communal officers (notably the chief of commune) played a key role. Interventions by civil societies organizations were in the domain of agriculture and social services such as health and education.

### Social change

The situation has greatly changed and at a very fast pace. Local economies have been perturbed by the lease of large tracts of land to outsiders for industrial farming and mining, and by the concomitant arrival of numerous immigrants in search for land and jobs.

Economic Land Concession (ELC) area, has tripled between 2005 and 2013, growing from 33 concessions and 750,000 ha, to more than 240 concessions representing over 2,2 million ha (Peeters, 2015). ELC represents approximately one eighth of the national territory and a quarter if mining concessions for exploration are included. There is no doubt that many peasants consequently lost part of the land they used to farm as well as free access to forest and water areas.

This process have forced and inclined populations to engage into more commercial livelihoods, including land sales, a preference for cash crops rather than food crops, for salary work rather than household economy, and migration. These strategies correspond to growing needs for cash to meet needs, whether for purchasing farming inputs, food (that they do not produce anymore), construction materials, consumption goods, and expenses for new ways of life and social achievement. Norms and values have changed in relation to this process: a will to improve manifests itself in response to new opportunities and constraints.

This process impact very unevenly rural populations, with an obvious increase of inequality of opportunities depending on various factors such as initial resources (land and labor force), and more important social capital to develop activities outside agriculture and outside the vicinity of their home place / village.

This process of change in/of livelihoods, and even more in/of aspirations is a challenge for any organizations that aim at providing support to the populations.

### Matching populations needs and aspirations

Many of them propose quite 'classic' support and interventions that are not totally in line with people's aspirations and strategies in resource allocation. It is typically the case of food security programs, with the rationale that farmers should keep on rice production for their food 'safety first', whereas populations have different rationale: they need/want to grow cassava, and/or rubber, because they provide cash. Yet, famers have to get indebted to develop those crops, have then to buy rice, and the intensification and specialization in cassava may have detrimental effects on land fertility and be not that profitable on the mid-term.

Another typical case of project found on the highlands of Southeaster Cambodia is support to poultry; populations are rather in search for salary jobs, with which they expect to be able to buy meet.

More generally, youth are more oriented towards the 'outside', in search for salary job outside, and may be not much responsive to traditional support programs.

Thus, there is a gap between what development practitioners propose and what populations want or, more important, need (indebtedness trap).

### Who to cooperate with?

Another challenge for social work relates to change in community organization, leadership and legitimacy.

First, there is a loss or contestation of both traditional and formal leadership. NGOs and other organizations aiming at working with and within communities may miss leadership to raise awareness, mobilize inhabitants, etc.

Second, recent political development has made development organizations' work much more controlled and repressed when it comes to issues that are sensitive (such as access to land, land rights, land use).

Third, political parties are competing throughout assistance measures they provide to communities. They somewhat occupy the space for development and social work through patronage.

## Transformative Change for Sustainable Development: Implications for Social Work

Katja Hujo, UNRISD

The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) is an autonomous research institute within the UN system that undertakes interdisciplinary research and policy analysis on the social dimensions of contemporary development issues. Through our work we aim to ensure that social equity, inclusion and justice are central to development thinking, policy and practice. Our motto is "Research for Social Change", and we define social development as a process of change that leads to improvements in human well-being and social relations that are equitable and compatible with principles of democratic governance and justice.

The international definition of social work resonates with UNRISD's mandate in terms of shared values and objectives: the firm grounding in human rights, promotion of well-being, welfare and social development, social and environmental justice, empowerment, diversity, and social cohesion. Social work is an important field within social policy and social policy practice. Vice versa, social work faculties and schools are often key institutions where social policy research is conducted and future professionals are trained (in addition to faculties of political science, economics, sociology, or social policy).

While all people are entitled to social protection and social services as a human right, social workers cater specifically for those groups (or sub-groups) that are deemed vulnerable, such as children and youth, persons with disabilities, migrants, women, unemployed or elderly persons. Social workers are also at the forefront of supporting groups that are victims of violence or abuse, or of conflict situations and natural disasters. They provide support to people who are often considered to be "undeserving", for example prisoners or persons suffering from drug or other addictions. This inclusive and empowering approach is closely related to one of the key principles of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, "leaving no one behind", and social workers have a key role to play in the implementation of the SDGs at national and local levels.

UNRISD has recently published a flagship report on "[Policy Innovations for Transformative Change: Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)". The report aims to uncover the concept of transformative change which is at the heart of the new global compact the UN and its member states are forging, with many more partners around the world. Transformative change attacks root causes of poverty, inequality and environmental destruction and requires fundamental changes in economic, social and political structures. In line with the self-understanding of social work, it requires both individual agency and collective action by societies. In terms of outcomes, transformative change would lead to "...visible and measurable economic and political empowerment of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups; greater gender equality in all spheres; more equal redistribution of income and wealth; active citizenship with greater agency of civil society organizations and social movements; changes in North-South power relations and global governance institutions; empowerment of small enterprises, rural producers and informal workers; and a reversal of the hierarchies of norms and values that subordinate social and environmental goals to economic objectives." (UNRISD 2016: 6)

In my presentation, I will focus on several examples taken from the report, where social work is important in driving the eco-social turn that is needed to achieve sustainable development and the SDGs:

One set of examples is on innovations in social policy, from new generations of cash transfers for the poor, to comprehensive and gender-equitable care policies, to upgrading of community health insurance programmes.

Another set of examples is on eco-social policy – policies that aim to combine both social and environmental objectives, and where social workers have a role to play, in particular in engaging with communities during

the design and implementation of policies, assessing their specific needs, and avoiding promotion of projects or technologies that are socially inappropriate or unsustainable.

A final set of examples refers to the transformative potential of alternative approaches such as Social and Solidarity Economy, organizations and enterprises that prioritize social and often environmental objectives over private economic interests and profit motives. Social workers have a potentially important role to play in helping states to support and upgrade these organizations and their members without undermining their transformative potential.

The presentation will end with some reflections on the role of social workers and social work researchers as political actors and drivers of transformative change, in collaboration with other advocacy groups, social movements, trade unions etc. This perspective is different from one that reduces social work to service provision for “clients”, individualizing social problems instead of seeing them in the context of wider social realities shaped by market dynamics and social and economic policies at national and global levels, which need to be changed for the better.

## **Sdg's, Social Work and addressing inequalities**

**Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria, Malaysia**

### Introduction

The global community in September 2015 collectively agreed to a global transformation agenda with 17 goals and 169 targets. Subsequently they agreed to 230 indicators. This is the first time such a comprehensive policy has been agreed encompassing economic, social and environmental concerns including human rights and good governance. The theme of 'leaving no one behind' is indeed relevant now to both developed and developing countries as there are the poor around us. This comprehensive policy definitely has implications for social workers and we too can use the SDGs as useful tools to enhance social work practice in addressing root causes through effective social work intervention strategies.

### Focus on SDG 10 in address inequalities

While poverty eradication is the focus of SDG 1 and 2, the issues pertaining to rising inequalities in our world is addressed in SDG 10. Here the thrust is upon inclusive development and empowerment. In addition the focus is in reducing inequalities. It is not just in providing access through equal opportunities but also in addressing inequality of outcomes.

In this context four major themes are relevant for our discussion. First, the emphasis must be on increasing income as referend to in SDG 10:1. Second, there is the need to eliminate discrimination (SDG 10:3); Third, there is some focus on social protection as in 10:4 and fourth, it is people's participation and voice (SDG 10.6)

These are significant in addressing SDG 10 concerns but we cannot do this in isolation of other SDG which are also relevant such as health goals (SDG 3), education (SDG 4)and gender related targets (SDG 5), economic growth (SDG 8), living in cities (SDG 11) and SDG 16 on access to justice. So we must recognise the inter-connected nature of social intervention.

### Issues and challenges

We are faced with a global phenomenon of unprecedented rural-urban migration. In ASEAN cities whether at Manila, Jakarta, Bangkok or Kuala Lumpur we see people moving to the cities and town in search for a better quality of life. This impacts community living and social cohesion as many are displaced in the cities, even facing tremendous hardships due to inadequate public facilities. In many context there is a breakdown of both social support and informal social control systems which create a new set of problems with the rise of crime, violence, drugs, alcohol abuse, domestic violence etc.

In Malaysia rural people from the rural villages especially Malay Muslim families and Indians largely Tamil Hindus from the plantation sector, migrated to urban squatters and slums in the 1970s. In the early 2000s a majority were housed in high rise low cost flats which is densely populated with very little public facilities. There is tremendous demand for the very limited public facilities. Communities which were isolated in the rural are now in the urban context living side by side which can be challenging due to ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic differences. As there are limited public provisions, there is some contestation for these resulting a lack of social cohesion thereby proving us new opportunities for building and community network.

In this context the Malaysian government through the Eleventh Malaysia Plan has introduced an inclusive socio economic development agenda between 2016 and 2020 in line with the SDGs as a first phase for implementation. They have also introduced a multi-dimensional understanding of poverty especially urban poverty and inequality moving beyond the income measurements. The government has welcomed civil society organisations to partner them in the SDG process.

While this is positive and good however the social work professional community is small and social workers are not formally recognised as a profession. However, both at the government agency level and also in civil society organisations, many have been recruited and there are efforts to improve the competency and practice level. The Malaysian Association of Social Workers (MASW) is trying their best and it is hopeful that a new social workers act to be introduced soon might boost up the arm of grassroots workers.

#### Social work intervention

SDGs provide an excellent opportunity for social workers to develop an integrated intervention programs at the grassroots. Social workers have the knowledge, competencies and skills as well as the social work values in working with people at the individual, family, group and community levels. Let us explore five key possibilities:-

First, we can undertake with the local community leaders a community profile of the neighbourhood identifying local issues and concerns. This can be undertaken in a collaborative way with locals so as to address the trust deficit in many local communities. The local stock taking will enable us to capture the local needs and concerns. Focus group discussions at the local community hall can further enhance a sense of ownership as the identification of needs and issues is not 'top down' nor 'authority defined' but coming from the views of grassroots.

Second, it is of utmost importance that we work with all local leaders recognising the kind of group and neighbourhood we are in. We need to recognise the local leadership structure if it is ethnic, religious, class divide or base. Working with these leaders including those in the informal sector is necessary to have access to local communities. Undertaking some local capacity building and awareness program. In Malaysian we are working with 30 neighbourhood groups and engaging with them has become very necessary for effective action

Third, while case work is necessary depending upon the circumstance, what is more effective is group work and community work where the neighbours as fellow peers can support each other in addressing local concerns. In Malaysia we are working with the women and young people in B40 neighbourhoods as we see them as being most vulnerable and at risk to crime & violence, drugs and alcohol abuse, unemployment and underemployment.

Four, we recognise that in many places local grassroots communities are alienated from delivery agencies and therefore social workers can be "bridge builders" between grassroots communities and the government agencies. SDGs provide a good opportunities for agencies to also work closely with local people and among themselves in addressing complex problems in a cross cutting way. Confidence building along with the hand holding process is very necessary to integrate alienated communities who feel that the agencies are not for them. Social workers can play this essential role of being go between these two groups.

Fifth and finally, social workers with the local neighbourhood profile can work on disaggregated data on the local population which might differ with the national average data. One example in the Malaysian context is that while an ethnic community namely Malaysian Indians are about 7% of the national population, however in a number of districts in Malaysia they form between 10 to 20%. This figure might differ in specific neighbourhoods. Ground realities will make or break effective delivery as communication, cultural appreciation and specific targeting is essential to solve local issues and concern.

## Conclusion

In this write up we have noted the potential of the SDGs with its comprehensive development agenda encompassing economic, social and environmental concerns. We noted the challenges faced by urban poor communities, especially the socio-economic category referred to as the bottom 40%, and the multiple dimension of urban poverty and inequalities. We recognised that we need a comprehensive intervention plan which addresses the inter-connected nature of social problems and solutions. In so doing we are hopeful that all people will experience social mobility and a better quality of life.

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## **Le travail social dans la construction de territoires durables. Le cas des préfectures du Haho et du Moyen Mono au Togo.**

**Alejandro Mackinnon, HETS**

### Introduction

Le Togo, qui reste un des pays les plus pauvres de l'Afrique de l'Ouest, présente une inégale répartition des richesses et des ressources sur son territoire, couplée à une organisation politique fortement centralisée. Ces conditions défavorisent le développement des zones rurales et des petites villes où la population se trouve généralement dans des conditions d'extrême pauvreté et démunie face au manque drastique d'accès à l'eau, à la santé et aux autres infrastructures et services de base<sup>4</sup>. Par ailleurs, le Togo n'a jamais réellement connu d'alternance politique et le pouvoir est finalement exercé de façon oligarchique, par la famille Gnassingbé depuis plus de 50 ans. Dans ce contexte, l'exercice du droit de vote, obligation civique, est vécue d'une manière particulière par le peuple togolais qui doit encore acquérir une confiance face à l'exercice démocratique.

Dans ce contexte, la mise en œuvre du processus de décentralisation implique le transfert du pouvoir du gouvernement centralisé vers les autorités locales (rurales et urbaines). La mise en place d'un système décentralisé, qui encourage l'autonomie des autorités locales et favorise l'intégration des citoyens dans les décisions qui les concernent directement, a pour objectif de mieux répondre aux besoins des communautés et de stimuler l'économie locale. Ceci devrait constituer un levier important de l'Agenda 2030 et des engagements togolais dans le cadre des ODD- objectifs de développement durable, notamment en ce qui concerne l'objectif 16.

Déjà mis en place progressivement à partir des années 90 dans les pays voisins, la décentralisation peine à devenir effective au Togo, malgré des avancées législatives. La réalisation des réformes repose aujourd'hui principalement sur la tenue d'élections locales qui sont repourvues *sine die*.

### Justification de la démarche

En tant que processus de réforme de la gouvernance de l'Etat engagé vers la démocratisation, la **décentralisation** ne déploie des effets durables que si elle est comprise, acceptée et utilisée dans l'intérêt de tous les citoyens. La préparation de la population et des collectivités locales sur les objectifs et les instruments du processus de décentralisation est dès lors indispensable.

C'est dans cet objectif qu'une ONG togolaise, ETD - *Entreprises Territoires et Développement*<sup>5</sup> développe depuis 2009 un projet de soutien à la décentralisation. Le projet encourage et soutient le dialogue, la

<sup>4</sup> Eau, assainissement, gestion des déchets, accès à la santé, routes, éducation, électricité, infrastructures, etc.

<sup>5</sup> Avec l'appui de GeTM- Genève Tiers-Monde de Suisse (Cf. <http://www.etd-ong.org> et <http://getm.ch>).

concertation et la collaboration entre la société civile et les pouvoirs publics locaux, afin qu'ils puissent définir ensemble des projets de territoires durables. Cela contribue à la création d'une éthique commune et de citoyens responsables. Concrètement, il s'agit de mettre en place toute une série d'actions et d'outils fonctionnels innovants, tels que des cadres de consultations, des projets territoriaux et des comités de développement, qui favorisent, dans une démarche participative, l'émergence de diagnostics, de propositions et d'initiatives locales. Il s'agit d'un véritable travail d'animation sociale visant l'empowerment des habitants de ces territoires afin qu'ils deviennent des citoyens à part entière.

N'ayant toujours pas d'autorités locales élues par suffrage universel, il s'agit d'une démarche anticipative qui favorise la concertation et la collaboration entre la société civile locale et les pouvoirs publics locaux. Ce travail d'accompagnement, effectué dans le cadre du processus de réformes politiques et administratives en cours, a pour objectif la mise en place d'une société durable qui permette la production et la gestion concertée des biens et services publics de qualité pour la population.

A partir des lois adoptées au Togo visant la décentralisation, ce projet concrétise sur le terrain un travail d'ingénierie institutionnelle et d'animation socioculturelle, permettant d'identifier les modalités d'implémentation les plus efficaces<sup>6</sup>.

#### Quels défis pour le travail social dans ce contexte ?

**Une animation socioculturelle qui revalorise les savoirs populaires :** La mise en place de cadres de concertation et de décision entre les différents acteurs appelés à prendre part au processus de décentralisation est devenue fonctionnelle à différentes échelles territoriales (villages, communes, cantons). Les acteurs ont été formés à l'animation de comités et aux méthodologies de diagnostic, de cartographie sociale, d'élaboration et mise en œuvre de projets de territoire, ainsi qu'à des mécanismes de levée de fonds. Des méthodes participatives de récolte de données ont impliqué l'ensemble des habitants et ont recueilli la diversité de points de vue. Ces méthodes permettent de saisir la complexité de l'action collective et d'accéder aux savoirs tacites qui sont issus des compétences et des expériences de chacun. Ce processus implique de « rendre le savoir aux habitants » car ce sont eux qui connaissent au mieux leur territoire. Comment articuler les savoirs populaires aux savoirs techniques apportés par les services de l'Etat ? Quelle place donner aux savoirs ancestraux incarnés par la chefferie traditionnelle ? Le grand défi de l'animation sociale est alors de déconstruire les hiérarchies des savoirs et de les faire dialoguer dans une approche interculturelle.

**Le développement durable construit à partir des cosmovisions locales :** Les rapports harmonieux que les communautés rurales ont historiquement entretenus avec leur environnement s'effondrent aujourd'hui face aux limitations flagrantes des ressources naturelles (infertilité des sols, réductions des régimes pluviométriques, déforestations) ainsi qu'en raison de la forte augmentation de la population. Les phénomènes de pauvreté, de précarité et d'exclusion sont indissociables des préoccupations économiques, de la dégradation environnementale et de l'épuisement des ressources. Agir sur la pauvreté et la précarité des habitants implique de retravailler la relation population-économie-environnement pour qu'elle redevienne durable. Il s'agit de réinventer les activités agricoles par une transformation de la production qui apporte de la valeur ajoutée sans augmenter la pression sur l'environnement. Il s'agit aussi de faire bénéficier le maximum de personnes de cette distribution. Des questions restent encore ouvertes : pour ce qui est des territoires les plus fragiles, comment réfléchir sur la capacité réelle de production et d'accueil des populations ? Comment articuler les limites imposées par la durabilité et les besoins concrets des habitants ? Le travail social a encore du chemin à faire dans ce sens.

**L'empowerment des acteurs locaux, en particulier des femmes :** Il s'agit surtout de sensibiliser les populations à une approche territoriale qui dépasse les intérêts locaux et individuels. Comment s'approprier le « Penser globalement, agir localement » ? Comment, à partir de réalités très fragmentées, donner du sens à la construction d'un territoire ? Comment ces habitants qui ont toujours tout attendu du pouvoir central peuvent devenir acteurs de leur territoire ? Il s'agit également de renforcer leurs compétences et leurs capacités, que ce soit en termes d'estime de soi, de mise en confiance, de prise de parole en public. Cela est d'autant plus important quand il s'agit de donner la parole aux femmes : elles sont les plus concernées

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<sup>6</sup> Les acteurs engagés dans le programme sont les élus et le personnel technique des Conseils des Préfectures du Haho et Moyen Mono, les Comités Communaux de développement de 14 cantons du Haho et Moyen Mono et de la commune urbaine de Notsé, les Comités Villageois de Développement (CVD), les organisations de la société civile et les habitants des territoires ou encore les Services techniques déconcentrés de l'Etat togolais.

par les services publics et elles ont été historiquement marginalisées de la prise des décisions. Quelle place donner aux jeunes, qui constituent déjà aujourd'hui la majorité des habitants ? Peut-on construire une approche territoriale intergénérationnelle ?

#### En guise de conclusion

Les actions mises en place dans le cadre de ce projet constituent des pratiques innovantes. Elles sont systématisées, capitalisées et diffusées. Cela nous offre une belle occasion pour réfléchir sur la contribution du travail social à un développement plus durable.

Certes, la durabilité des changements dépendra de la qualité des dynamiques et du partage de responsabilités entre les pouvoirs publics, les acteurs privés et la société civile. La consolidation de ce processus prendra encore du temps et le rythme des activités devra se conformer aux potentialités des habitants et à la capacité de promotion des autorités locales. Cela oblige à repenser régulièrement les résultats, les méthodologies employées ainsi que la qualité des partenariats proposés. En paraphrasant Denis Meadows, le but est de créer des « îlots alternatifs de développement résilient ». Les changements structurels apportés par ce projet devront donner un cadre pour permettre aux populations de rebondir face aux adversités futures.

### **Social Work and Environmental Justice: A Natural Fit**

**Samantha Teixeira, MSW, PhD, Boston College School of Social Work**

Environmental justice interventions aim to promote a safe, clean environment and meaningfully involve all people in policy and development decisions that affect their environment. Environmental justice does not just focus on traditional environmental conservation issues, though those are important, but also maintains a focus on issues such as equitable development, social vulnerability to climate change effects, and responding to threats in the urban environment like neighbourhood change and displacement of poor and marginalized individuals.

Often, when we discuss environmental issues such as these, we turn to the hard sciences and medical professionals. These professions certainly play a crucial role. However, addressing environmental degradation is not a new area for social work, but a return to the roots of the profession—a focus that was marginalized as the scope of social work education and practice was narrowed following a move toward a clinical, medical model in the early twentieth century. Social workers at multiple levels of practice are primed to respond to environmental issues. Social workers can play a role in direct services when it comes to addressing individual needs, including mental health issues associated with being exposed to hazardous environments. Social workers also have an important role to play in policy advocacy and community intervention at the macro level. At the heart of it, I think one of the key roles for social workers is to emphasize the underlying social, political, and economic systems that produce environmental degradation. Social workers, traditionally concerned with the promotion of human rights and social justice, are primed to be strong partners in environmental justice movements.

The social work profession utilizes the 'person in the environment' (PIE) perspective to understand individual and community level problems. However, the profession has largely defined this environmental perspective through the lens of the social environment, despite a great deal of knowledge that the built and natural environments matter for health and well-being. There is a growing push for social workers to better understand the interdependence between people and their cultural, economic, and physical environments. These environmentally focused social workers, including some who are speaking at world social work day, have highlighted the profession's role in simultaneously promoting environmental and social justice.

Research suggests that environmental degradation does not impact all populations equally; low income and minority communities are more likely to be exposed to air, land, and water contamination, and are least equipped to mitigate the resulting harm to human health and the natural environment. Global environmental issues, such as climate change, cut across political, economic, cultural, and social boundaries. These global phenomena, however, disproportionately affect members of low income and minority communities. The communities most affected by environmental injustices are the same communities where social workers are already entrenched in service provision at the individual, family, and community level. Social workers have a

role to play in ensuring that these traditionally disenfranchised populations have a voice in decisions that affect their individual and environmental well-being.

Environmental justice interventions aim to promote a safe, clean environment and meaningfully involve all people in policy and development decisions that affect them. Environmental justice is social justice, and we all have a role to play in addressing environmental degradation at the individual and the community level.