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Basic Considerations in Social Work and Social Development

In discussing current trends in social work in an international perspective it will be helpful to make a few preliminary comments about basic considerations in social work and social development activity in any country. We know that in the future, as at present, social work will be faced with the challenge of responding to the people-oriented developmental concern in society. Any society in the throes of social change is increasingly faced with the issues of social conflict, just allocation of resources, humanizing development, assessing the impact of policies on people and fostering social justice, to mention only a few. In this context reference could be made to at least five major considerations of considerable significance and with and with implications for the future in the field of social work.

(i) First, is the emphasis on human considerations in development or on the social aspect of development. We are becoming reluctantly and painfully aware that economic development so vital to overall growth is not an end in itself. In addition to economic indicators we need to increasingly in the future focus on social indicators of growth and consider the social aspects of development at all levels. It is clear that social and economic development are interrelated, that policy and plans in one area affect the other. We shall need increasingly in the future broad social and economic goals for development based on social and economic data. Planning for the future and legislation in the social and economic fields should not be based only on economic criteria and predictions. There are important "social" considerations, for example, in planning in the areas of mass transportation and housing and likewise important "economic" considerations in family planning and health education that need to be acknowledged.

(ii) Second, we are beginning to see growing emphasis on interdisciplinary and intersectoral approaches to the solution of individual and societal problems. However, we see more lip service paid in this area--especially in relation to societal problems--than substantial efforts to make it a reality. But, the growing complexity and interrelatedness of problems in our respective societies almost dictates such collaborative action in the future. Interdisciplinary collaboration increasingly will be at all levels of intervention. In addition, to collaboration at the policy, planning and program development level, it is also vital in the

actual delivery of services.

(iii) Third, there is increasing realization that research and development activity should be more closely related. In the social work profession there is likely to be increased efforts at establishing linkages between research and practice in the future. While we have stressed the fact that there should be "no research without therapy" in the past, we are now finding out that the reverse is equally true, i.e. that there should be "no therapy or developmental activity without research". There is the need for theoretical research (related to knowledge building) and also more practical research in all social work and developmental activity. In the social sciences and social work we are familiar with the plea that research be oriented to action, based on tangible field experiences and work with people. This is vital and needs to be encouraged in both education and practice. However, it is equally important to encourage theory building and formulation of models—especially alternate models—in our practice and developmental activity at all levels.

(iv) Fourth, we have yet to acknowledge fully the reality of conflict in developmental activity and efforts to deal with individual and societal problems. It is evident that in developmental activity especially at the societal level where there are issues of allocation of resources and competing interests and likely changes in relative power and status, conflict is likely to be an integral part of this effort. The social worker does not have to create conflict for the sake of conflict. But it is necessary to acknowledge the reality of conflict, especially in developmental activity related to concerns of social justice and to focus on efforts directed to working through conflict to effect positive change.

(v) Fifth, a key consideration in social work and social developmental activity focusing on societal problems is the participation of people. There is the need to involve people especially those likely to be affected more directly by the efforts of developmental activity. This must not be token participation but participation in planning, determination of priorities, allocation of resources and evaluation of outcome.

In the light of these basic considerations, it is important to recognize that the ultimate test of social work and social development activity is its influence on people. The goal is the enhancement of the quality of life of all people. Any further examination of specific trends in social work and their implications for education and practice has to be against the background of these major considerations discussed so far.

Specific Trends and Issues in Social Work

Reference has already been made to some of the trends in the fields of social work with implications for the future in discussing the major considerations in social work and social

development activity. However, it is pertinent here to focus on some specific trends and issues which have a more direct bearing on practice and education. Given the fact that it is difficult to comprehend fully trends and issues in the field of social work even in the context of one country it will be all the more difficult to discuss these in a comparative perspective, across national boundaries. There is an inevitable arbitrariness in this effort that needs to be acknowledged. Yet, there is no denying the fact that in so far as it is possible to recognize the biases and the limitations, the effort will contribute to a better understanding of a particular country's or region's current and future social welfare developments.

It will be helpful before discussing further specific trends and issues in the field of social work to point out that some of them are broader in scope and affect all fields of practice in different countries and regions. There is also an essential interrelatedness between education and practice, and trends and issues influence and in turn are shaped by both practitioners and educators. There are also societal trends that are to some extent beyond the control of practitioners and educators. Further, it is important to recognize that the trends and issues considered here are not developments that have sprung up dramatically or overnight. They have been on the horizon for some time, with some variation between countries; they are emerging realities in the field and are likely to be increasingly so whether we like it or not.

Let me move on to comment further on some of the emerging trends and issues in social work. In view of the limited time, I can only make brief reference to these trends and issues. (i) First, we are experiencing the trend of a *shift in social work from a remedial to a developmental perspective and approach* in work with people. This change in the profession is related to the concern of humanizing development and emphasizing the social aspects of development. Interestingly, some of the third world countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America have moved more in this direction than western schools of social work. This, however, is not to deny similar developments in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and other industrialized democratic countries. The growing emphasis on the developmental perspective in social work is based on the need for the profession to move into the broader societal context and to deal with human concerns and problems from a preventive, anticipatory and resource development stance within the context of national development. Traditional social work has been preoccupied with individual remedial approaches to the neglect of the social context and, at times, even has stood in the way of positive effort toward broader environment and policy changes. Excessive preoccupation with remedial services to the neglect of the preventive and the developmental has the danger of perpetuating dependency and ironically in some situations creating increased demands for the services

development, institutional change, just allocation of resources and optimal use of human resources. This is not to abandon social work's traditional roles, but to increasingly face up to the newer demands on the profession in the efforts to intervene more effectively along with and on behalf of people.

(ii) Second, we are seeing *the emergence of a continuum in practice and education* that may increasingly be a major pattern in the future. Practice is seen as being at different levels and is no longer identified exclusively with one level of training. Here there are variations between regions and countries. In the United States, for example, practice was at one time identified almost exclusively with the Master's degree trained personnel. Currently, in the United States, there are two entry levels for social work practitioners—the bachelor's degree (BSW) and master's degree (MSW) and some social workers have had advanced training beyond the master's degree. This fact gives rise to issues of job classification, and the relationship between BSW & MSW workers. In Asian and African countries in the past, practice was identified largely with bachelor's level persons. This is no longer true. I am aware that in Korea, the Philippines, and India, even in the past there was emphasis on master's level preparation, for social work practice. Currently you have initiated doctoral level study in social work. Education and practice form the level of paraprofessionals, to BSW workers, to MSW workers to personnel with advanced training beyond the masters is a reality in Korea.

(iii) A third trend that practitioners and educators are increasingly aware of in recent times is that *accountability*. This is especially so in the United States and Canada. More and more questions will be raised in the future as to whether we are meeting the stated goals and objectives of our social welfare programs, both short-term objectives and long-term objectives. There are issues of accountability of the worker to the clients, to the agency, to the board, to the funding agency, to the profession, to the community, to the government and to the larger society that gives social work the sanction to intervene to solve problems. The current crisis in social services in the industrialized countries of the west is partly a crisis of credibility based on an inadequate system of accountability. Accountability implies a reasonable expectation that the purpose for which funds were raised have been achieved with optimum efficiency and effectiveness. Here again we see a variation in the extent to which accountability is a significant trend in the profession in different countries and regions. It is partly related to the extent to which social work is acknowledged as a profession in a given country, receives sanctions from the society and support from the national and local governments. There are also other historical, cultural and special considerations—such as the extent to which social work has been a largely voluntary effort—that need to be considered

(iv) Fourth, related to accountability there is the increasing trend of *evaluation of effectiveness of programs and emphasis on effective utilization of resources*. Tougher questions such as: Does the present system of service delivery, organizational arrangement and approach promise the best results? Are there alternate ways, using the same resources, that could produce better results? Is there need for more effective coordination among private agencies and between private and public agencies? Emphasis on evaluating the effectiveness of programs ensures the possibility of assessing whether stated objectives are being met and whether the services provided are meeting the needs of the people. In the United States, Canada and some of the western countries this trend of emphasis on the evaluation of effectiveness of social welfare programs is more specialized. Countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America are also concerned about the directions and accomplishments of their social welfare programs and their contribution to national development. The contribution of social welfare programs to national development is becoming more and more a consideration in the assessment of the success of programs in third world countries. In most countries there is growing awareness of both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of evaluation and interest in developing appropriate techniques for evaluation which take into account the particular culture and socio-economic conditions.

(v) Another trend that will be emphasized increasingly in the future is the *focus on culture factors pertinent to practice*. Related to this is the growing emphasis on practice being more pertinent to the life situations and family patterns of diverse ethnic, cultural and minority groups in a given society. There is emphasis on the social work educator and practitioner understanding the traditional and changing values not only of the mainstream in a given society, but also the varying ethnic groups and classes in that society.² Included in this perspective is also a critical look at the premise and value system on which planning and development activity in a given society is based. The concern with varying emphasis in different countries is largely in relation to the impact of intervention on people, the environment and ecology. There are questions such as: whether in direct or indirect practice how do we avoid stereotyping ethnic and cultural groups with which we are not familiar? How do we focus on strengths and resources within these cultures as we attempt to help them? These and related questions have to be explored more thoroughly in the context of a particular country culture and socio-economic background.

There are other trends such as inter-disciplinary collaboration and team effort in practice, greater experimentation in the field, and the involving of clients and consumers in the planning, organization and delivery of services to which I can make only a passing reference.

not especially new, but it is likely to be more and more a feature of practice in the years ahead. The human services field will increasingly involve collaboration of professionals such as social workers, lawyers, public health workers, psychologists, anthropologist, sociologists, educators, clergy and so on. In a sense this is already a feature in practice, but it is likely to be much more sustained with more sophisticated team effort, experimentation in the field and accountability for specific areas of responsibility by the respective professional workers. The changing conditions and the emphasis on the developmental perspective in social work will necessitate newer forms of interdisciplinary collaboration and team work designed to ensure more integrated development and the enhancement of the quality of life for all.³

The Response of Social Work Education

It will be helpful at this stage to consider briefly the necessary response of social work education to the trends and issues identified. Given the trends, what is or what ought to be the response of social work education? It is important to note that social work educators like practitioners are being called upon to make decisions in the context of uncertainties and varying demands.

What are some of the specific responses called for in key areas, in the context of a given country's culture, tradition and socio-economic conditions? (i) First, it is necessary to respond to the shift in social work from a remedial to a developmental perspective and approach. The developmental perspective will increasingly in the future necessitate a radical stance and a critical spirit both in education and practice. The professional education imparted in the new approach would emphasize considerable student freedom and independence in learning and the capacity to exercise independent judgment.⁴ Students will have opportunity to mobilize resources along with and on behalf of clients and client concerns to effect desirable changes. Skills in relating to citizen groups and social movements and the ability to collaboratively work toward effecting positive change becomes crucial in the developmental perspective. The newer emphasis in the profession will also necessitate a restructuring of curricula to incorporate in both class and field learning more content related to social development, development administration, social movements and cognate fields such as politics, economics and anthropology. In the educational preparation of future practitioners there will also be emphasis on a social conflict as a vehicles of change. There will be acknowledgment of the reality of conflict in practice at all levels and opportunities provided to students to acquire knowledge and skills pertinent to conflict management and resolution.

mine, given its stage of development, how far this is a reality and the level at which greater emphasis seems necessary. There should be opportunity provided to move from one level of training to the other with a reasonable degree of flexibility. This will allow for social work positions at different levels of competence and skills. The interrelation between the bachelors, masters, and doctoral level training has to be carefully worked out in relation to student interest, practice needs and consideration of standards.

(iii) In relation to the trends of greater accountability in practice and evaluation of effectiveness of programs, it will be necessary to state the goals and objectives of our educational and service programs with greater clarity and in operational terms. Increasingly, opportunities would have to be provided to select students to specialize in the area of research and evaluation. Research is to be seen not only in terms of evaluation of particular techniques, but also in terms of problem definition, of measuring goals and objectives, and of answering the basic question—are the needs of individuals being met by the operation? And if so, how effectively?

(iv) In regard to the trend of focusing on cultural factors pertinent to practice, and related to this the emphasis on interdisciplinary team effort, it is necessary to progressively introduce cross-cultural content into social work curricula and encourage interdisciplinary efforts in both class and field. We need to respond to the practice demands for more specialized skills and at the same time more breadth and versatility in the future practitioner. Social work cannot afford the luxury of a cafeteria style, professional education—a phenomenon of the 1960's in the United States. Nor could the profession confine itself to a single method emphasis of an earlier era. In the context of the respective countries, socio-economic conditions and manpower needs the student has to be challenged to come to grips with the question of what kind of practice he or she is preparing for.

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Notes and References

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