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## International Symposium

# International Definition of Social Work Review

—A Voice from Asia and the Pacific—

July 16, 2011

Waseda University, Tokyo, Japan

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Asian and Pacific Association for Social Work Education (APASWE)  
Social Work Research Institute Asian Center for Welfare in Society (ACWels),  
Japan College of Social Work

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## THE APASWE/IASSW INTERNATIONAL DEFINITION OF SOCIAL WORK REVIEW PROJECT

The IASSW=IFSW International Definition of Social Work was adopted by the IFSW and IASSW in May 2001, and they were “committed to a 10 year cycle of its review.” 2010 was the year for the revision. (“Introduction to the joint IFSW and IASSW document”, International Definition of the Social Work Profession; Ethics in Social Work, Statement of Principles; Global Standards for the Education and Training of the Social Work Profession, Supplement of International Social Work, Sage.)

The IFSW and the IASSW are behind schedule. The APASWE decided to take the lead at its first national association+ meeting in June 2010 in Hong Kong—for each national association to hold its national workshop with its mother tongue hopefully by around 20 October 2010, and for the APASWE to hold a regional workshop at the beginning of November 2010 and a summary conference at the 21st Asian and Pacific Social Work Conference in 2011.

In one country in our APASWE Region, the definition is now part of a law, and in many countries, the definition and two other documents above (i.e. Ethics Statement and Global Standards) which include the definition in them have been used as a yardstick to promote the standardization of competency and curricula and the social work profession itself. One hears the comment that “Convergence is inevitable and necessary.”

Wherever we go, however, similar criticisms and complaints have been heard—“It is the West’s”. For example:

- a. Is “social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being” appropriate as aims and activities of social work?
- b. Is the dichotomic way of thinking, e.g. people vs. environment, acceptable?
- c. Is individualism or the individual-centered way of thinking, including “to develop their full potential”, suitable?
- d. Aren’t stability in society, harmony in human relations, respect for others, an emphasis on unique traditions and culture, an emphasis on responsibility, and the importance of family, kin, and community core elements for social work? (cf. Footnote 2 of Global Standards)
- e. How about inserting a non-English word, e.g. “kyôsei” (interdependent living, living together or coexistence; cf. symbiosis) [Each non-English country/regions inserts a word from its own language.], in the definition?
- f. Aren’t there any objections to designating human rights and social justice as the fundamental principles of social work?
- g. Between the lines, Western democracy, Christianity, and modernism can be read.
- h. The element of spirituality is missing.

Another opinion is also heard: More fundamentally, “It is a “developed” country model.” “Is it OK to begin with ‘The social work profession promotes....?’” “Is social work a profession? What we need first is the definition of social work—before the definition of the social work profession, don’t we?”

Is it necessary to revise the definition or not? If necessary, which parts must be revised and “how” and “why?” The examination is to be made both at the conceptual level and the empirical level.

(Tatsuru Akimoto, APASWE, 11 June 2010; 19 August 2010 and 15 December 2011.r)

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# Introduction

## History of APASWE/IASSW International Definition of Social Work Review Project

The present International Definition of Social Work by the IFSW and IASSW requires that it be reviewed every 10 years. (Introduction to a joint document, *Social Work Definition, Ethics Statement and Global Standards of Social Work Education and Training*, Sage, 2001)

At this opportunity, the IASSW requested each regional and national association in the world to carry out this review. The Asian and Pacific Association for Social Work Education (APASWE) responded to this request and initiated the APASWE International Definition of Social Work Review Project. (See the “APASWE International Definition of Social Work Review Project” on the reverse page of the cover.)

In June 2010, the first APASWE National Association+ Meeting (+ means the inclusion of representatives of countries which do not have national associations) agreed that (a) each national association or its alternative body would hold a workshop to review the definition using their own mother tongue, (b) the APASWE was to hold a regional workshop later in the year to integrate the results. Seven national associations+ were present—from Japan, Korea, Australia, New Zealand, China, Thailand, and Malaysia. Members from India and Vietnam were present as well.

Later, national associations and their alternative bodies from the Philippines, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Nepal expressed their interest in joining the project. The IASSW (International Association of Schools of Social Work) generously offered financial assistance, and the project was renamed the APASWE/IASSW Joint Project.

On 4 November 2010, an Asian and Pacific regional workshop by representatives from 11 countries was held in Tokyo. Based on its accomplishments, immediately afterwards, Japan, New Zealand, and the Philippines had workshops within their own countries. All these results were compiled as the *APASWE/IASSW International Definition of Social Work Review Workshop*, (March 2011) by the APASWE and Social Work Research Institute Asian Center for Welfare in Society, Japan College of Social Work, and distributed to all national associations+ and member schools.

All results till this point were reported and shared with members of member schools and some feedback was received from participants on 16 July 2011 at the

symposium in the 21st APASWE/IFSW(AP) Asian and Pacific Social Work Conference in Tokyo. The symposium was designed as follows: Mark Henrickson (New Zealand) coordinated the entire symposium, Mary Lou Alcid (the Philippines) presented a representative voice of the November 4th Workshop, Nobuyuki Iwama challenged it from the view of an academic association, and Bala Raju Nikku (Nepal) challenged it from the viewpoint of indigenous people and also proposed a multi-layer model of the definition. These speakers, except for Dr. Nikku, were from the countries which organized their workshop after the November 4 regional workshop. This report (January 2012) is the record of this July 2011 symposium. An excellent summary by Dr. Henrickson has been inserted at the beginning. Contributions from Vietnam and Sri Lanka whose representatives did not attend the November 4 Regional Workshop and thus were not included in the previous report published in March 2011 have been attached at the end.

Brazilian Federal Council of Social Work and the African Regional Association have published their opinions for revision. The APASWE has not reached a concrete amendment proposal. At the July 2012 Stockholm World Conference, a session for discussion will be scheduled, but the IFSW and IASSW top leaders still do not seem to be ready to review and amend the definition at all. The APASWE International Definition of Social Work Review Project will continue towards and maybe beyond the Stockholm conference.

The APASWE respectfully expresses its heartfelt gratitude to all those in national associations and their alternative bodies, member schools, and individuals who intellectually tackled and contributed to the project to this day, and to the Japan College of Social Work which financially and logistically supported both the regional workshop and symposium.

Tatsuru Akimoto, DSW  
President, APASWE

January 2012

# An Asia-Pacific Response to the Discussions on Social Work Definition

Mark Henrickson  
Massey University

## The Asia-Pacific context

The Asia-Pacific region is unimaginably diverse and contradictory. In it we find the largest land and water mass on the planet, and the smallest islands and coral atolls. We have four of the most populous countries of the world, and also some of the world's smallest island countries. We are a region of ancient land and sea empires and rich histories, and a region where many places are still emerging from European imperialism. We are the birthplace of some of the world's great religions, and a region where many have adopted the creeds of Western colonial powers.

The roots of the social work profession are undeniably Western and European. Some of our languages do not even have a consistent workable agreed translation of 'social work'- we speak of social work, social welfare, community work, community development, social administration and so forth as though they were competing teams vying for dominance in the same league.

Our international organizations have established a working definition of social work, but that definition is not something we in the Asia Pacific have agreed; some country representatives have said that it is a nice definition, but largely ignored in their countries. Social change, empowerment and liberation, social justice and human rights are not concepts that have shared understandings throughout the world. Concepts such as social harmony, interdependence, and collectivity are concepts that are more highly valued in many Asian and indigenous Pasifika communities. At issue in this discussion are not only aspirational concepts, but also ways of working. Developing new understandings of social work ethics that take into account widely differing values systems must be the next step in making social work truly global: autonomy, self-determination and independence are Western values that are not universally shared by all Asian, indigenous or tribal peoples. That does not mean that these peoples are oppressive, but rather that they have different understandings of the 'self'.

It would be very easy for the West to continue its hegemony of social work and to make minor revisions of the current social work definition, nodding at but not really listening to the voices of Asian, Pasifikan African and Latin American social workers. That, however, would be an unfortunate and very risky thing to do because it would threaten the fraying global unity of social work. The world has changed enormously in the 150 years since the friendly visitors and settlement houses, and the rate of change has increased unimaginably in the last ten years. The locus of economic and political power has shifted from the West to the East, but we still deliberate under the constraints of the rules and languages set by the West. The Asia Pacific region brings diversity, contradictions and complexity to the discussion that creates the future definition—and thus direction—of what social workers around the world do. International discussions on the definition of social work must take seriously the emerged voice of Asia and the Pacific, as well as other post-colonial, self-defining regions.

#### Elements of an Asia-Pacific definition

In forums held throughout the Asia Pacific we have taken on the challenge of engaging seriously and robustly with the definition of social work. We have done this with energy and remarkable good will. In this diverse region we have come to agreement that we would like a structured definition of social work that creates shared ways of behaving and working with people, and that the current definition falls short in some respects.

- We have agreed that this international definition should be aspirational and not prescriptive or overly specific. A clear consensus has emerged that a revised definition is necessary, and should be layered. The definition should have the broadest possible consensus language at the international level, and specifically allow for amplifications that describe what social work does in particular national, regional and indigenous contexts.
- We have agreed that our practice must be informed by our theories, and our theories must be informed by our practice; in this way we bridge the divisions among theory, practice and policy, and clearly make connections among micro, meso and macro levels of practice.
- We agree that our attention remains focused on individuals in their environments or places, and we understand that we must maintain robust and informed relationships with governments and economies.

- We have agreed that spirituality needs to be a dimension of the way social work understands itself and its purpose in the region.
- The relationship that social work has with indigenous and local contexts currently differs, but is an essential one. Social work must take into account indigenous knowledges, and local contexts; equally, however, it must understand its position within the global environment.

#### The professionalism debate

The concept of 'profession' itself is contended in the context of social work, and remains in the background of discussions about definition. Social workers occasionally challenge ourselves that we do not meet classical definitions of 'profession'. And yet I wonder if it is not time for social work to stop apologising for itself, and put forward not only a new definition for itself, but also a new paradigm for what a profession looks like. Perhaps it is time for us to stop chasing after the professionalism debate, and to start leading it. It may not be necessary for us to have a unique body of 'social work' theories: it may be that we integrate or apply these in a unique 'social work' way. There is clear agreement among us that our theories need to be informed by our practice, and our practice needs to be informed by our theories; but surely we hold this in common with other helping professions. Social work has always been dedicated to working with the marginalised, the outcast and the voiceless, but this also is not exclusively true of social work, as people in various faith traditions have done this for millennia. As social work emerges in many countries we are still engaging with the issue of self-regulation, and in some places have relegated that authority to the state; but states also regulates the scope of practice of other disciplines.

What social work does uniquely is to receive its authority from our bamboo, flax and grass roots, from the people we serve, and who use our services, be they poor or powerful. Indeed, unique among the helping professions, we not only draw our authority from our communities, but reflexively allow ourselves, our practices and our profession to be changed and transformed by those interactions. The theoretical expertise that we claim is drawn from our practice experiences with those who use our services. That can, and perhaps should be a new paradigm for profession and professionalism. Our openness to reflexive change can, and perhaps should be a way that we define ourselves as social workers.



### An Asia-Pacific contribution

Just as social workers engage with our service users, international social work organisations have engaged with regional organisations in the review of the definition of social work. Just as social work practitioners allow ourselves to be changed and even transformed by our interactions with our clients, we hope that the international social work organisations will allow themselves to be changed, and even transformed, by this definition consultation process. To do so involves risk, and perhaps even loss. Not to do so also involves risk, and would be a missed opportunity. The Asia-Pacific presents these discussions as our contribution in the hope of shaping and defining a new, truly global understanding of social work.

# International Symposium

## International Definition of Social Work Review

July 16, 2011

### **Welcome and Project Outline:**

Dr. Tatsuru Akimoto (Japan College of Social Work)

### **Coordinator:**

Dr. Mark Henrickson (Massey University, New Zealand)

### **Presenters:**

Dr. Mary L. Alcid (University of the Philippines)

Dr. Nobuyuki Iwama (Osaka City University)

Dr. Bala Raju Nikku (Nepal School of Social Work)

## Welcome and Project Outline:

### **Prof. Tatsuru Akimoto:**

Good morning! APASWE and Social Work Research Institute Asian Center for Welfare in Society, Japan College of Social Work, welcome you to this international definition symposium.

The most greatest achievement of international social work community in the past few decades would be three fundamental documents: international definition, ethics documents, and global standards. These documents must be reviewed every 10 years. The authors of those documents wrote it in their own introductory chapter of their publication. IASSW requested regional and national associations to review the definition. Since the APASWE is very obedient, we took initiative. In Hong Kong last year, seven national associations agreed to have their own national workshops on this topic in their own countries, using their own mother tongues. On November the 4th, last year, 11 national associations and their alternative collective bodies gathered in Tokyo to hold APASWE-IASSW regional workshop. After this November the 4th session, three countries hold another workshop, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Japan.

Today, the essence of the fruits of this whole process will be shared with you, and should be discussed with you to take another step ahead to go forward, not staying at the same point. Judging from the interest of present international leadership, and judging from the difficulty to change this kind of documents, nothing may happen. No changes may be made next year in Stockholm, I am afraid. Or utmost one word or one phrase might be inserted, might be deleted, might be altered. But it is okay. Let's make our own definition, which would be the best to us, best to this region. It could be the one amendment proposal to the international definition or it might be our own international definition or our regional definition in this Asian and the Pacific.

During November the 4th workshop, there was a voice, the definition of social work should be multilayered. International definition, regional definition, national definition, or even local definition. There was one opinion. The present social work was born in Europe and grew up in North America. Present international definition of social work was made based on their experiences, realities and lives over 100 or 200 or 300 years. It's very heavy. It's okay as long as the social work remains as it is local. But once the social work becomes global one or we want the social work to be global, social work and the social work definition must

be made or must be thought, based on experiences, realities or lives of peoples and the parts of the world where present social work and the international social work definition were not born and did not grew up.

Thank you very much.

**Prof. Mark Henrickson:**

Thank you Prof. Akimoto. My name is Mark Henrickson. I am from Auckland, New Zealand. And I am delighted to be with you to help convene this session today. It is my privilege to stand alongside my esteemed colleagues, Associate Prof. Mary Lou Alcid from the Philippines who I will introduce each more fully later, Prof. Nobuyuki Iwama from Osaka City University, and Dr. Bala Raju Nikku from the Nepal School of Social Work.

It is a privilege to be with them because I have worked with many of them and with you on the board of APASWE and in international social work for a number of years now. And I am very impressed by the talent that social work has in the Asia-Pacific Region.

The definition of social work sounds boring. Let's face it, and yet it is the first thing that every one of us learns in our introductory social work classes. And it is one of the first things those of us who teach social work teach our first year classes. It is very important, and yet the definition of social work is not our own. I am delighted to be here this day to continue the conversations that we began in November and to be with you this day.

Now, because I am from New Zealand, I want to teach you something about New Zealand. I wanted to teach you how to say hello. And you need to hear the sound of your own voices in this room because after the speaker's present, then we are going to have some discussion. And I know that it is very intimidating to speak in such a large and beautiful room. So, I want you to hear your voices first.

We don't have any Māori interpreters. So I will ask you just to hold on for a moment. And I will teach you to say Kia ora – Kia Ora.

**Multiple Speakers:**

Kia ora.

**Prof. Mark Henrickson:**

Kia ora. Thank you very much. You have heard your voice. And I hope you will participate in our discussion.

Our speakers will each speak for a few moments. They will have presentations. And then we will have some discussions amongst ourselves. And then we will have a larger discussion here. When we have the larger discussion, someone will come to you with a microphone, so that we can interpret at the same time. So, please wait for the microphone. We very much want to hear from you. I also want to comment. I think those blue shirts are wonderful. Thank you volunteers.

**Presentation:**

**Prof. Mary Lou Alcid\* (From the aural presentation)**

Magandang umaga! That's good morning in our own language. I bring you warm greetings from our country, specifically from NASWEI, the National Association for Social Work Education Inc., and the University of the Philippines CSWCD. I also wish to take this opportunity to thank the associations of Japan for continuing to sponsor this international conference despite our own very serious problems within your country.

So, this presentation is an attempt to capture some of the main points that were taken up during the November 4, 2010, workshop which APASWE co-sponsored with the Japan College of Social Work in line with the ongoing international review process, and the follow-up workshops held by Japan, New Zealand, and the Philippines.

So, in view of the diversity of the socio-economic and environmental context in our region, it may not come as a surprise if we do not come up with just one but with many kinds of definitions of social work. I wish to go back to the earlier quotation from our colleagues in Japan. This should be "the world has been changing dramatically in the last decade, and the globalization." In the big wave globalization, it does not make sense to keep the definition as it is. So, this will somehow give you an insight into the tone and tenor of the discussions in the workshop. These are some of the basic agreements, which we had in November one: Any definition of social work must consider the diverse socio-economic,

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\* The part of Prof. Alcid's presentation here and comments later during the discussion session is the simple record of the simultaneous translation. No edit has been made by the presenter. The editor made the minimum error correction.

political, and cultural contexts of the countries and the region. So there are several implications. So this one is that the definition must be inclusive enough to capture or to reflect the range or continuum of social realities and social work practice in that region.

So, there is no one single social work module, but there can be many in the light of the diversity and complexities, the multi-dimensions involved in our respective country situations.

A second implication is that the definition of social work should reflect practice realities as earlier mentioned by APASWE President Akimoto. Third implication is that a society may indigenize and contextualize the definition based on the needs, the interests, and values of different social classes. This is an input from our Bangladeshi and New Zealand colleagues. A second agreement is that social work is a profession because earlier there was a discussion on whether or not social work should be considered a profession. Many of the countries during the November workshop underscored the fact that indeed social work is a profession. Then, third agreement is that principles of human rights and social justice as currently contained in the international definition of social work remain relevant to our region and should be retained.

The fourth agreement is that social work is guided not only by series of human behavior and social systems, but also by series of social change and social development. This will imply that we can work with individuals. But we should not be confined only working with individuals given the fact that we do have this framework of person and environment. And we see the connections between the micro, meso, and macro realities.

The social work as a discipline views the person as a biopsychosocial and spiritual being interacting with the social, physical, economic, political, and cultural environment. Here are some of the implications of this particular agreement. One is that we locate and we understand the situation of peoples, structures, and systems. So using, for instance, the ecosystem perspective, we recognized that to quote “individuals exists within families, families exist within communities, and neighborhoods. And all of them exist in a particular, political, economic, and cultural environment. And that the environment impacts the actions, beliefs, and choices of the individual.”

You find that we recognize personal agency. At the same time, we also recognize the limit situations that the macro conditions or macro forces can have on the micro situation. And this is a quotation from the New Zealand report “that as Maori we

are not separate from but in a world of many.” A person can have multiple identities, not necessarily becoming schizophrenic but just to say that there are many social identities we can assume in the light of the multiple roles we play in the different social systems we are located in.

A second implication is that, yes, as I said earlier we recognize personal agency. And that in terms of action, in terms of response, then we cannot work only with one client system, but we are challenged to adopt an integrative approach. So, this integrative approach requires at the analytical level, clarifying and exposing the connections between let's say personal anguish and inadequacies to issues of the systemic or structural discrimination, injustice, and oppression. And at the action level, this will combine personal and societal goals, so intervening at the micro, meso, and macro levels.

In terms of goals, the implication would be that we pursue not simply personal individual goals, but also big seemingly abstract goals like social change, social development, and people's empowerment. People's empowerment is a key concept in social work.

The fifth implication is that in terms of areas of concern, social work should address not just individual, personal inadequacies, but also the social conditions, which gives rise to such personal or individual inadequacies, the structures that maintain them and the processes and relations. We are concerned with empowering, with providing and empowering environment for peoples who are marginalized and excluded. And bringing about processes that would be consistent to principles of human right and social justice as well as relationships that would also be consistent with the same human rights.

Now, we have here five major considerations, which were taken up during the workshop. So, number one, we recognize that Asia is the birthplace of the world's major religions like Buddhism, Islam, or Christianity. Second, we recognize the global, regional, and national dynamics. So, we cannot act at the national level without considering the regional and global contexts. So, our problems and needs are now interconnected with issues of trade and economy. Then, we also recognize the diversity of faiths, of cultures, ethnicities, races, even sexual orientations, and social identities. And then we also recognize gender inequities. Many of us in social work are women. And yet, social work, I think, remains to be generally gender blind. And so, we put here the need to recognize that gender plays a very significant role in the way we relate with each other and in the way we respond to each other. Then fifth, we recognize the ecological context, particularly the damage

wrought by climate change and environmental degradation.

Just very quickly enough, description of the implications arising from the considerations cited. So, Asia is the birthplace of the world's major religion. Social work necessarily must consider people's spirituality. So, the current definition of the person as a biopsychosocial being must now include a spiritual dimension. Spirituality does not mean being part let's say of an institutionalized religion or a church. But it can also refer to a world view where you see ourselves and our connections, not just with each other as human beings but also with the different life forms within the universe. And living in harmony with each other versus domination, let's say, of each other and of the physical environment.

Number two, regarding the global, regional, national dynamics as framed by the global integration of economies under the WTO or World Trade Organization, the ASEAN and APEC. So, we recognize that globalization is happening not just at the economic sphere, but also in our cultural spheres and our social practices. So, there is a lot of emphasis now on individualism, competition, profit orientation as opposed to, let's say, service orientation, privatization of welfare services, reduced public spending for social welfare and international migration as a consequence of the uneven development within our countries and amongst our countries.

The major impacts of globalization would involve the pressure on individuals and families to fend for themselves. And to depend less on governments to provide for social welfare services. And so this leads to stresses – a lot of stresses on our mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual well being. So, you also recognize the widening gap between the rich and the poor within a country and between countries. So, this is just, for instance, an illustration of the widening gap between countries in our region. So, Australia and Japan have a GDP per capita of respectively \$42,000 and \$34,000. Then, you find on the other hand, over 950 million living on less than \$1.25 a day.

In the Philippines, you find that we have a few rich countries. So the rich – the net worth of 20 richest Filipinos is equivalent to the combined income in a year of the poorest 10.4 million Filipinos or families rather. So, that would be about 52 individuals. So ESCAP in its May 2011 report, anticipates that rising food and oil prices could lead to more impoverishment in the region. So, 42 million people may be added to the 19 million already affected in 2010. So, this might mean a delay in the achievement of the millennium development goal of eradicating poverty by up to half a decade in some developing countries.



The third consideration, the diversity of faiths, cultures, and ethnicities, races, sexual orientation, and social identities. So, implications, one, we recognize human rights as normative standards. There may be cultural differences, but the bottom line might have to be human right recognition, recognition of human rights. Second, we observed the social work principles of acceptance, nondiscrimination, multiculturalism as opposed to assimilation or social integration. The principle of self-determination and genuine democracy as against democracy only for the rich and famous.

Then three, we ought to have institutionalized mechanisms for dialogue between and amongst people who may be at wars. We need to find ways, mechanisms by which we can settle conflicts, differences in nonviolent ways. And fourth, we need to provide a balance of individual needs and rights, and collective needs and rights.

Now gender inequities, so this is just a definition of what gender inequities are all about. And that gender like class, age, ethnicity, or race or other social constructs is a social stratifier, and it's a divisive factor. It also stops us from fulfilling our fundamental human rights. So, the implication is that we consider, and we try to mainstream gender equity in our analysis and responses at the individual, household, community, and state levels. Then the fifth consideration, climate change. This is a quotation from the ADB that climate change poses as a real, economic, and environmental threat to our region, especially since our region is home to have more than half of the world's poor who will suffer the most from climate change.

So, implications one, we promote and really pursue seriously sustainable development. And that we engage in continuing community education and mobilization on climate change. Given all of these, this is like a summary of all the previously cited points phrased in the workshop that social work is a profession. It is guided by a body of knowledge on human behavior and social change by a set of values, principles, and a code of ethics where it recognizes the person, not only as a biopsychosocial, but also as a spiritual being interacting with the social and physical environment. And that as a profession, social work addresses, not only individual, personal, anguish, and needs, but also societal needs, problems, and human rights violation. We work with individuals, groups, communities. And we also intervene at the macro levels. This will mean more networking at the international level, more solidarity, more partnerships amongst us in the region. Social work should also promote people's empowerment, sustainable development, and even social transformation.

In terms of goals, social work should adopt, as a goal total, holistic, and sustainable

development as individuals and social collectivities, the creation of an enabling environment marked by participatory, gender-fair and democratic processes, relationships, structures as well as ecological protection. And these are some of the guiding principles, human rights, self-determination, gender equality, and social justice. There was a question raised, social justice for whom?

In terms of injustices, social justice will be for those who are victims of various forms of injustices and discrimination in a country. I was asked to present the proposed definition from the Philippines. So, I am sharing with you this definition, not because I am from the Philippines, but because this was requested of me.

This is a product of consultations within the associations:

The social work profession promotes empowerment and social transformation to overcome inequality, impoverishment, and oppression; thereby achieving sustainable personal well being and social development.

Guided by values and a code of ethics, social work utilizes series of human behavior and social environment as it intervenes at points where people interact with their milieu at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

Social work recognizes people's diversity and biopsychosocial and spiritual dimensions; hence, it is committed to the pursuit of their total and holistic development as individuals and social collectivities, and the creation of an enabling environment marked by participatory and democratic processes, relationships, structures, and ecological protection.

*Principles of human rights, self-determination, gender equality and social justice are fundamental to social work*

So, here you have the set of principles that guide the practice of our profession. These are some of the ideas that came out of the workshop. These are not definitive, conclusive statements. These are open to improvement, open to change based on the feedback that we will get from this workshop.

Thank you very much.

**Prof. Nobuyuki Iwama (Translation from the aural presentation)**

Thank you very much.

I am Iwama of Osaka City University. Point of confirmation at the outset. In November last year, there was a workshop organized, and since then we have continued – we have been unable to continue series of mature discussion. In other

words, that is still missing. So, we are still in the process of putting together ideas that would eventually lead to a definition. And, of course, there is no consensus whatsoever within Japan about the definition.

So, within the framework of JSSW, Japanese Society for the Study of Social Work, we have done some work. So, I would like to share what we have done so far and also share my personal thoughts. In the limitation of time, I would like to be succinct and give you just a quick summary of some of the important points. Needless to say, social work must adapt to the needs of the time and the society in which they engage. And otherwise there is the value of social work diminished.

I think that is destined or what is expected of social work. So, with the changing of the needs, the social work is designed and substance required to change to some degree. However, what is important is that while things that must change, but there are others that should not change. So, there must be a clear distinction and recognition of what must be changed and what must be maintained as we work on the definition.

Putting together a global standard with the word consensus, the revision would not be an easy work. Maybe, it will be even more difficult than starting from a scratch. The reason why I make this statement is that after adoption, the definition will have to be translated into local laws and code of ethics of different country. It has to be deep rooted in each society. And international definition of social work has so much influence on the actual practice of social work in different countries. Therefore, in return that will have to be functional in the context of local law and social environment. There will be a lot of difficulties and probably impasse as we promote the implementation of the definition. I think, we should avoid taking too easy an approach in defining the definition.

I would like to emphasize that we need to refrain from changing the definition easily. And if we are to change it, we will have to do it based on strong evidence. The question is whether or not to revise or not. But I think what is important is that we conduct the discussion that will be instrumental, that will be supporting the further advancement of the social work in the world and each respective society. This work of changing the definition or the revision must be as such that it promotes the further advancement of the social work in the world. Revision without grounds or reason will invite risk or deterioration of the social work.

What is social work? The process of revision must provide an answer to this question, the pursuit of global standard may allow us to find a solution. We should

not over emphasize the unique inherent situation of each country. And we should not be adamant about having its own regional definition. Of course, there could be multilevel of definitions. But it will not be a result of putting together different regional definitions. But, I think, we should pursue the ultimate definition of the global standard. So I think the process would be very important.

There has been series of discussions. And based on that, I would like to talk about what is needed from the perspective of definition. There are three, first is that whether it can advance to be a global standard common to the entire world. And, I think, there are two perspectives here. That is that the practice of social work could be diverse. We may not be able to have a full coverage of that. But, maybe, we should be looking for the commonalities or the common threads, the maximum denominator if you will.

Also, if we are going to look for common threads or commonalities in addition, we should look at the essence, which is essential to the very nature of the social work. And we must incorporate that into our definition. I think those are the two perspectives that we need to remind ourselves as we argue or debate about the global standard.

And the next is the revision should contribute to the further advancement of this concept of social work. Again, we are engaged in the discussion for possible revision. And whether the sentence that begins with the social work profession – I think it is worthy to discuss whether the sentence should start with the social work profession.

What is the subject? There are great diverse people who are involved in the social work. How can we incorporate those diversity in our discussion? And another subject is that the relationship between the individual, the community, society, and how are we going to understand the relationship of the two? I think those would be very essential elements in social work. Social justice, human rights, democracy, how are we going to reconcile as it relates to the uniqueness of the social work. The theoretical advancement of social work, I think, must contribute to the advancement of these concepts.

The third point is that through the revision of work or the revision itself, we must contribute to the actual practice of social work. It must not be just a conceptual or theoretical advancement. But the very process of the revision must be positive or must have a positive impact on the practice of social work. And there has been some work done by JASW, which I would like to introduce.

At the Academic Society of Social Work in Japan about a year ago, Takahashi Shigehiro, the President, took the leadership in establishing special committee. As an academic organization, how can we contribute to the review of the definition? We have to discuss these in this committee, which was established one year ago. During this one year within the academic circle, we did many things. And at the beginning of this month in Okayama Prefecture, there was an annual conference. And there was a discussion on the meaning of the definition of the social work. There was a symposium. Mr. Akimoto, the President of APASWE came to give us a keynote address. On the academic level, there had been discussions, which are getting more lively about the review of the definition.

On the day of the symposium – as a preparation for the symposium, experienced social workers formed a focus group.

As you can see here in the medical health, there are social workers taking care of the elderly. Another is the social workers with the children and families. In this respective field, what kind of meaning does this definition have on this topic, social workers were gathered together. And they formed service of focal groups to collect information. And then the social workers gathered there. Those with the experience of more than three years, they are 17 of them, and these 17 social workers gave their opinions on the definition.

Now what kind of research subjects? To what extent are you aware of the definition in daily practice of social work? And minor topics are listed here. And what kind of practice do you think you have put the following into actions. Those are the detailed themes we established. This international definition, in what way has it taken roots in daily practice? And these are the constituents of the international definition.

Some social workers said that they were happy to have the informative results. The major outcomes are listed here on the screen. Various opinions were voiced. And those are typical of the voices heard. Definition is not only a start point, but also the goal for me to practice as a social worker. I revisit the definition to overview my practice and to give it meanings one person said.

Another said, “In my practice, the definition is recognized as comprehensive and continuous one rather than devisable into fragmentary concepts.” That is to say well there are various elements inside. But as a worker, in practice, this person views these elements as a comprehensive continuous whole. Another one said “In

practice, empowerment is always recognized strongly. It means a lot when we explained the value of practice with just walking with the clients to other professions.” This is the opinion of one person. There are challenges. One of them is that social justice, liberation, and social change, the understanding of these terms are incoherent on a social worker level. We can understand on a concept level. But, in practice, we need to put that into practice as well and use it in the practical field as well. And that will lead to the improvement of ability to put theory into practice.

Among the social workers, there is yet the following opinion, “I did not know we have the definition of social work. It seems to be written in difficult language or terms. But, I think, I have always recognized most of these in my daily practice.” That is one opinion we found in this survey. What is the content of this definition by looking at each and every item? Social worker confirmed that what they have been doing is according to the definition.

For the last 10 years, the definition of social work through various media has taken routes in practice. That is the impression I have.

Finally, towards the review and redefinition, what vantage point should we have? We should avoid a groundless review. The review itself should contribute to the progress of the concept of the social work on a global basis. From that view point, there are three major things I want to share with you. One, examining consistency in the components of the definition and actual practice. Definition tends to become abstract. And there can be divergence from practice. There can be a distance between practice and definition. Therefore, be it needs or challenges, we need to identify the local needs and challenges. And there are practices required of each locality based on these challenges and we need to verify the consistency between practice and definition. Otherwise, the definition maybe pie in the sky and cannot be put into practice – cannot be reflected into practice. Therefore, on a daily basis in each country and in each region, there are social work practices, which are required on the ground. And we need to connect these with the definition. And we have to be quite attentive in doing so.

Another point, clarifying the meaning of definition in social work’s daily practice is another point required. As I said earlier, from the review or the survey we did this, second point was clarified. This international definition – where should we position it? Is it going to explain the reality or is it upholding the idea reflecting the ideal philosophy. Depending on the perspective, the review process of the definition may vary. We should not get stuck with the status quo. Rather we

should not pursue only the ideals. We need to reconcile these and reflect that in the definition. And that reconciliation process would be very important.

Finally, the third point. Identifying common constructs of global standard definition, which are beyond the various circumstances around social workers in each country, that is the third point. As a common denominator, of course, each country is different, but the social work practices exist today. There are elements absolutely necessary. And then based on that, we look at different situations of each country in practice. Definition should be simple, and should have the limit and the length. The value of the social work may decline if everything is thrown into one basket. In order for the existence of social work, there are values. We need to theoretically discuss these essential elements.

We have not found yet any direction – a definite direction. But we need to make a step forward in the practice of social work. This concludes my presentation.

Thank you.

21st ASIA-PACIFIC SOCIAL WORK CONFERENCE  
APASWE-JCSW International Symposium

## **Review of International Definition of Social Work**

**Dr. Nobuyuki Iwama (Osaka City University)**

### **1. The Characteristics of Social Work and the Review of its Definition**

It is uneasy work to reach the review of the international definition of social work, as the global standard, achieving a complete consensus of every country and area. This would be much more difficult than to make a new definition.

In this symposium, I would like to emphasize that we need to refrain from changing the definition easily and if we would change it, it is required to do it with strong evidence. I expect that the process of this reviewing itself will contribute to the development of social work.

### **2. The Issues Required in Changing the Definition**

- 1) Would it be **the global standard** definition that could be shared worldwide?
- 2) Is the change of definition able to contribute to **the concept of social work**?
- 3) Is the change able to contribute to **social work practice**?

### **3. The Situation of the "Definition" in Social Work Practice in Japan: Summary of the research**

- 1) The Outline of the Research on Focus Groups

#### Areas:

- a) Social Workers with Medical and Health (Medical Social Workers)
- b) Social Workers with the Elderly(those who work for Community General Support Centers)
- c) Social Workers with the Children and Families(those who work for residential support for children)



Research object: 17 Social workers have practice experience over three years

Period of the research: May and June, 2011

## 2) Contents of the Research

### Main Topic:

How much are you aware of the definition of social work in your practice?

### Main Topics (extract):

In what kind of practice do you think you put the followings into actions?

- Enhancing well-being
- Promoting social change
- Solving problems in human relationships
- Promoting the empowerment and liberation of people
- Utilizing theories of human behavior and social systems
- Intervening at the points where people interact with their environments
- Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.

## 3) Outcomes (extracts): Voice of Social Workers

- 'Definition' is not only a start point but also the goal for me to practice as a social worker. I revisit the definition to overview my practice and to give it meanings.
- In my practice the 'Definition' is recognized as comprehensive and continuous one rather than divisible into fragmentary concepts.
- In practice, 'Empowerment' is always recognized strongly. It means a lot when we explain the value of practice, which is walking with the client, to other professions.
- Understandings of 'Social Justice', 'Liberation' and 'Social Change' are incoherent. Learning the united concepts helps to improve skills in practice.
- I did not know we have the definition of social work. It seems to be written in difficult terms, but I think I have always recognized most of these in my daily practice.
- Careful reading the 'Definition' helps us to refer what we are doing to social work.

#### **4. Toward to obtain the 'Evidence' the Review of the Definition**

- Examining consistency in the components of the 'Definition' and actual 'Practice'
- Clarifying the meanings of 'Definition' in social workers' daily practice
- Identifying common constructs of 'Global Standard' definition, which are beyond the various circumstances around social workers in each country

### **Prof. Mark Henrickson**

Thank you very much Nobu. Dr Bala Raju Nikku is the Founding Director of the Nepal School of Social Work. He has been on the board of APASWE, and recently chaired the nominating committee for the current round of nominees. He was trained in India and is currently working in Nepal.

### **Dr. Bala Raju Nikku**

Thank you Prof. Mark for that kind introductory remarks. Thank you. I am delighted, I am honored. But I am also scared looking at Prof. Shekhar from India, Prof. Wanapa from Thammasat. Our IFSW Secretary General, the newly elected, Prof. Carolyn Noble here, Prof. Hatta. I am scared because I am speaking from my ignorance. I have only seven years of experience. But, I think what I bring today is the story of Nepal from South Asia.

Social work in Nepal is very young. In four years' time, I think the international professional social work is going to be 100 years. You know, why? Abraham Flexner<sup>1</sup> in 1915 asked this question, is social work a profession? And 2015 is coming. That means in four years' time, we are completing 100 years of answer to Abraham Flexner. In Nepal, we are only 14 years. The first department of social work started in 1996. That means we are very young. We are crawling, in fact. We are just infants. But we have to stand – I come here representing Nepal. What we have learnt in these 15 years is, I think, not less. In this era of globalization, the experience will not come only from the years that you spent, but the commitment and the passion that you have. So, that is what I bring in. And, I hope, I will make it clear myself because I have 30 slides and 15 minutes.

What I will do is, I am not trying to kind of negotiate and conflict with the global definition. If you can see insights from Nepal and a proposal for a multilayered approach. In that way, this presentation is a revised edition in which our friends from Indonesia have already been part of it, and Philippines and many other countries. It is kind of a revised edition, which reflects our current thought in

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<sup>1</sup> Abraham Flexner, a well-known champion of reform in medical education, was also a keen observer of the social work profession.

Source : Abraham Flexner, "Is Social Work a Profession?" (paper presented at the National Conference on Charities and Correction, 1915), 581, 584-588, 590 and also see Flexner, A. (1915). Is social work a profession? In Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections (pp. 576-590). Chicago: Hildmann Printing

South Asia and from India and Nepal. And my friends from India can also contribute to this.

With these few words, I have structured my presentation into three major parts. One, why global social work definition project? You know there are many definitions, there are many models in this country, in this world, in this globe, and many parts of our – why we need another definition? In the first place, why there was a global social work definition project? What was the need? That was the question we asked ourselves and myself. Because when I teach my students, if someone is going to ask me, why this 21st century comes in, what happened to the 17th century helping people help themselves? It is very easy. I think that is the core of social work. Why do we need human rights and human social justice as fundamental principles? What is the problem with helping people help themselves? If my students are going to ask, then I have to have some evidence why this global social work definition has come. And I have read literature. And there is a reason behind this. There is logic behind this. And most people including IFSW and IASSW have spent lot of time on this. Many of us have contributed to this.

This global definition is also not perfect. Maybe, we need to look into this definition once again. Maybe, that is the relevance. And then I said, I brought insights from Nepal, very small, landlocked, conflict country, one of the poorest in economic terms, but not in natural resources. We are one of the best maybe in terms Himalayas, the Buddhist, the peace. You name anything, I think we have it in our country. So, natural resource is rich but we are poor. Maybe, there is a problem in the governance there.

So I bring insights from that kind of background. And at the end, most important is, I want to bring a proposal. Anyway, I want to challenge, I want to provoke you whether we can have another definition if at all. Maybe, an APASWE definition or South Asia or Asia-Pacific definition. In addition to the global definition, in addition to the country definition, in addition to the definitions we teach in our classrooms. If that is possible, and if that is needed and if that is feasible, we can do this at the end of this session. And that is my belief. So, I am not scared. Because we have so many stalwarts, so many expertise, so much of practitioners, knowledge here. So, we can make another definition, which is relevant not only to us in this room but worldwide, maybe.

So, that is the intention and interest that I bring in. Look at this beautiful

definition of IFSW and IASSW of 2001<sup>2</sup>: social work global definition, very simple. It is divided into three important sentences. Maybe, I don't need to read it again<sup>3</sup>. But this international definition of social work, profession replaces the IFSW definition in 1982<sup>4</sup> and adopted in the year 2000. Maybe, another definition is going to come.

Why we need to replace this definition of 2000 is the question that I kind of bring it again. We have to ask this why do we need to replace or redefine our definition. Is it social work as a profession is changing? Or our situation, our cultures, our way of thinking, our values in this whole globalization and capitalization and marketization is changing? Or the disasters that we face in our countries, we need to really look into kind of social work that we do with our clients and community people. What is the reason? To me there is no problem with this definition. Maybe, it is missing somewhere, the local relevance, the regional relevance. So, that is what I have to say about this definition.

Is social work a profession? Again, I am asking you the same question at the end of these 100 years of Abraham Flexner. How many of us are really sure that social work is a full-fledged profession in our communities and our countries? In Nepal, no, it's not been recognized. We are struggling. And many other countries that I knew are actually starting; Armenia and many other countries. Maybe, China now after the blockade, now they are opening up. Maybe the Eastern Europe is again, you know, social work is reviving. In certain countries, it is 200 years. In countries like us, it is only 15 years. And many countries are beginning to start this profession and social work education. What we mean by that? That means social work is a profession in few countries in different shades and colors and values. That is why it maybe it is a global profession. But at the same time, there are a lot more local voices.

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<sup>2</sup> The IFSW General Meeting in Montréal, Canada, adopted the present definition in July 2000 replacing the IFSW definition adopted in 1982. At the IASSW-IFSW meeting in Copenhagen in June 2001, both organizations agreed to formally adopt it as the joint international definition. The 2000 IFSW definition was in 2001 adopted as a joined IFSW and IASSW definition.

<sup>3</sup> The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work. ( IFSW and IASSW, 2000 definition). This international definition of the social work profession replaces the IFSW definition adopted in 1982. It is understood that social work in the 21st century is dynamic and evolving, and therefore no definition should be regarded as exhaustive.

<sup>4</sup> The first IFSW definition, which emphasized the role of the profession in social change, was agreed in Brighton, UK, in 1982. This served the profession for many years, but as social work developed in new directions and spread over the world, it was felt there was a need to broaden and deepen the definition

So, it is a profession under threat in some countries because of various reasons, because it asks different questions. Maybe, we also have to face that in our country because we are asking restructuring. We are asking power, we are asking equity in our country because we are rewriting our constitution. We thought this is the right time to ask these questions as social workers in our country. And that is why there is a danger there.

There is a problem with the survival of this profession because there are many other professions that are competing with us, social development, social service, human resource, I can go on like this. We know who are our competitors. So, we need to survive as a profession. That means we need to complete those five attributes, which Abraham Flexner said as a profession we could not meet these. One is that knowledge building. And how do we build this knowledge? Maybe, this is the source. We define what is our profession and we define what is our theories, we define what is our values, and we define what is our code of conduct. Unfortunately, it is not happening in many countries because of various reasons. UK, US model, colonialism whatever you call it, it's not happening in many countries. And we need to realize that.

So, to me, is social work is a profession is still a relevant question to ask myself, especially countries like Nepal. Then, as I said, the purpose of social work is changing: from simple definition ' Helping people to help themselves' to a critical standing on social justice and social action and radical social work and feminist social work, I don't know.

Maybe, the purpose of social work is also changing because our cultures are changing, our needs are changing and our aspirations as social workers. And our clients' needs are changing because of many financial tsunamis and many other natural disasters or many other reasons that we are product of this globalization.

Social work is concerned and involved with interactions between people if that is true even today. And institutions of the society, the justice, the court, the police, the zonal justice, or you name other institution in a particular country that affect the ability of people to accomplish life tasks. Are we really able to help our clients in order to deal with their life-threatening situations? We have very much caseloads. I have heard about some 30-40 caseloads in some countries. How can we really listen to these stories? Because you have to meet the targets at the end of the day, so I have a question there.

Realize aspirations and values and alleviate distress. These interactions between

people and social institutions occur within the context of larger societal good. This is what one of the ideas behind this profession. Maybe, we need to re-look into these definitions because we don't have that kind of luxury, time, support from our institutions. Like Nepal, the social work is not been recognized by our state. So, we don't have social workers officially posted in hospitals, in church, and in police, and in courts.

The idea of this slide is let us ask ourselves what is the purpose of social work in our own countries? Is it social action? Is it social reconstruction? Is it just helping people to help themselves? Is this just a support to the government initiatives? We need to ask with a very purpose of our social work in our own countries. Now, if that is the case, is one global definition possible, 2000 IFSW/IASSW global definition. Maybe, there is rationality. We are saying that we are claiming that we are a global profession. So, we need global values, global standards. I see the point there.

But look at our late Katherine Kendall, the stalwart of social work. She had written in 1950s. This is one of those documents I think. *In each country, social welfare, social service, social work, social development, whatever you name it, it's a dynamic activity*<sup>5</sup>. And she says 'no one definition of social work would be acceptable in all these countries and might be put forward as an international definition'. She said this in 1950s. We are still trying for global definitions. Maybe, we are neglecting the knowledge and wisdom of our seniors. And there are value conflicts. It is written in the literature. You can see that. I have just brought some very few literatures here which we don't have access to literature or online journals in our country.

The social work professions, value orientations of self-reliance, self-determination, and such like have been considerably fostered in certain countries. All of our countries are not self-determining. You know, my life is decided not only by me but my family and my parents, and my teachers. So maybe it is not the case in many countries. And I decide lives of my students because they ask me what is that they should be doing in their next masters. So I give them my suggestion, and they follow it. There is a value conflict in there. How do we do that? And it has been written in 1988 by Hammond.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Kendall 1950, United Nations Study on Social Work Training in the world United Nations (1950). Training for Social Work: An International Survey, 106. Lake Success, N.Y. : United Nations.

<sup>6</sup> Hammond, H.R ( 1988) Social Work Education in Developing Countries: Issues and Problems in Under-graduate Curricula. International Social Work, 32(3),195-210.

Now, does global standards project and definition project has some length? Is someone is funding? Is it relevant? Or we need to kind of prove ourselves again because people are asking social work is a profession. There are many interests behind that. Maybe, many politics behind that.

Finally, it comes to the four issues, I think, when we have this global definition because we want to be relevant globally and locally. Maybe, that is one reason. We want to kind of answer the dominance of western models, if at all there are western models still relevant. We want to be multicultural, bicultural. We want to include the diversity. At the same time, we want to be universally relevant. And how is this possible? Maybe, we are expecting too much from our professions, from our lives, and from our work. At the same time, we want to meet global standards and local standards, a global profession with local relevance. How is this possible? Any answers? Maybe, after this presentation we need those answers, we need those voices. And this is some of the doubts that I have when I teach this definition in the classroom.

Why do we need to review definition? Because there is so much again, you know, logic behind this? Why do we need to review? Maybe this is a self-reflection. This is a point where we can actually reflect ourselves critically, look at our own practices, our own values, our own difference as social workers all over the globe. We have UK model, US model, Latin-American model, African model, Nepalese model, Japanese model, Asia-Pacific model. Look at the diversity. So, we need to really sort it out.

I think this is another positive stand. Prof. Sewpaul<sup>7</sup> from Africa, she says that we need to reflect, we need to be particularist, we need to contest. That is why social definition review project is necessary and it is relevant, and it is timely. That is what she says.

Now, what's happened in Nepal? We divided this global definition into three parts. And we tried to understand what is the rationality behind. And we have asked these questions. I have already presented this, but may be for the sake of friends. Do you know the international definition of social work? Many of my staff including myself said yes because we have read that in the first day history and philosophy of social work class. But why do we use, where do we use? No

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<sup>7</sup> Sewpaul, V. (2007), Challenging East–West value dichotomies and essentialising discourse on culture and social work. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 16: 398–407



questions, no answers there.

So, we use this definition, maybe, sometimes just as a biblical commandments. Do you use this definition? Yes, but not very sure where we use this definition and how. Is it necessary to revise the definition? Majority of the respondent said, yes. But we need changes. The faculty members, they are very critical because they said, you know, maybe is that social work profession always promotes social change. If it is only – look at social work in US after 9/11, what's happening? Are there migrants have rights or social workers can do the same thing that they can do after 9/11? So, these are the some things we need to ask.

The second part of the definition talks about theories. I think it has already been covered. We need to include more theories, maybe relevant theories now, maybe group dynamics, not only human behavior, individual and community perspectives, cultures. Maybe all that need to be there in the second part of the definition.

The third part, I think, most important, the principles of human rights, social justice, are fundamental to social work. How many countries can actually honor human rights? Look at Africa, even US and UK, many of our countries, we have human rights, maybe, on paper not in grounds. We need to really look into this.

So, what about principles like equity, equality, access to resources, access to information, access to justice? Has the present definition fitted to Nepal? Yes, no. Because we need to change. We want to bring in our own perspectives. Access to educational opportunities are very, very low in our country, social work colleges, only there are three. There are more now only in the elite, urban center, only English speaking who can pay, can actually study. So, access to education. How do we reflect these issues? Social work, knowledge building, theory building. How many times we read only the Western and foreigner references in our classrooms? We need to write our own stories and publish. So, there is a problem there. Difference of opinions between educators and practice. All these we have it in our country. This is how it is much more complex and much more difficult to talk about.

What is your opinion about designating human rights and social justice as fundamental principles? As I said, we need to include, maybe gay rights, minority right. Nepal is the first country where a gay parliamentarian is representing. When we have one-third of women out of 600 parliamentarians sitting there. And many of them don't even have formal qualifications. In that way, we are doing very much advance, but then again we are lacking in many other fronts.

What other aspects you would like you know include? These are the things they said. We would like to add how social work methods can deliver and meet the needs of the individuals, communities, and societies in 21st century? How do we do that?

So, to us the global definition is a very romantic, very literary, if I have to say that. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental, yes. But maybe we need to operationalize this. Social work profession uses principles like human rights, social justice as vital tools or avenues, spaces to create positive social change in a country like Nepal. This is what I want to teach when my students ask. So, this is the kind of clarity, this is the kind of explanatory, this is the kind of evidence-based statements I would like to see in our definitions.

Do some elements of the definition have to be elaborated? Yes. As I said, we are taking about indigenization and internationalization, it is the crux of 21st social work. We want to do that at the same time. We don't want to kind of wait 75 years looking at our Indian friends here and reinvent the wheel the again. For us, indigenization and internationalization are two sides of the same coin. But how do we do that? This is kind of struggle that we are going through. As a conclusion, these are five points that we came up with, the majority voice was the definition. It sounded like more prescriptive, indicating how things should be done rather than how things are. So, we want to kind of bring in these elements if we have to have an Asia-Pacific definition.

*Social Work is a unique profession that prepare people to help themselves by learning new skills. Humanity, Social Justice and Social Change are the main principles !*

*'Samajik karya aauta yesto byabasayayik kriyakalap ho jasle manisharulai aafno samasya aafi samadhan garna seep pradan garcha. Manavta, samajik naaya ra samajik pariwartan samajik karya ko mul dharharu hun'.*

This is the Nepalese version of Nepalese definition. Social work is a unique profession that empowers people to help themselves. It is not the social worker who will be doing through learning new skills, giving access to information, giving access to resources. For us, humanity, social justice, and social change are the fundamental principles. Now, it's a proposal. I will finish in, one minute, maybe.

How can we do this? Can we have a multi-layer approach when we talk about definitions? Maybe, we should have a not a global definition, but a glocal definition, which is relevant globally and locally. How do we do this?

Professional social workers are committed to uphold indigenous, your own aboriginal Māori, you know, values. In my case Rai, Magar, Limbu, those ethnic groups. International professional values, so that my students can be internationally valid and relevant, can get jobs, and fight with others. And ethics thereby create social value for their work with different stakeholders of their society. This is the kind of, maybe, a hint when we talk about, you know, we need to build our own theory, which is relevant to Asia-Pacific. How do we do this? Again, maybe many of our practitioners without a social work degree use theories. And they use middle range theories according to their convenience. But there is a lot there that we can grab from them and put into theoretical models. So, this is what we are trying to do in our country.

Finally, maybe, if you want to have a social work definition, which is relevant for our own countries, our region, maybe it is collectivism, not autonomy. Not many of us are in autonomic. I can't do things that I like because my life is, as I said, my director – there is a hierarchy, we have to agree. I see this hierarchy even in Japanese culture. Collaboration, it is not the conflict but it is collaborative conflict, maybe. It is not independence. We are not independent. We can't – it's not a liberal as much as we would like to. So collaboration is the key. It is the interdependence. It is there in the title, and it is there in our culture. It is there in our, maybe, practice. So it's a journey of discovery. Let us discover together.

We have listened to Philippines, New Zealand, Japanese, Nepal. And I am sure each one of you can come here and tell your stories. It's a discovery for us because it's 200 years of colonialism that we are talking about. Let us explore new ideas, challenge that established UK, US models if I have to say, searching for solutions beyond the boundaries of conventional development, case work, group work, I think, it's enough. Now we have to talk about more than that. And human rights if it is the central pillar of our work.

Let us focus on intensive process of experimentation, it's not bad. We might fight, but you know at least we bring some new colors to this social work profession. Questioning and learning, I think we should do that. So, if that is the case, let us see these frames of institutional context. What is our purpose in our social work in our own countries? Why people want to become social workers when there are other jobs, well-paid jobs? What is our professional base at this stage? And what

kind of frameworks that we should promote when it comes to practice?

So with this, I thank you very much. Each one of us contributing to this knowledge. And I thank Prof. Akimoto for taking this leadership and Japanese College of Social Work for bringing me here to share my ideas with you all today.

Thank you very much.

**Discussion:**

**Prof. Mark Henrickson:**

Thank you very much Nikku, forgiving the interpreters such a work out. We have heard a number of things today that, I hope, have convinced us that this is not in any way a boring subject, but in fact, an essential one for social workers.

There have been common elements to each of these three presentations. And I would like to invite the presenters to engage with each other for a few minutes to see if there are questions of clarification or other questions you would like to ask of each other. And then, we will open it up to the entire audience to raise issues, questions, and concerns. And if there are none, I have two pages of questions that I would like to raise. So don't be worried in case there is silence.

**Prof. Mary Lou Alcid:**

My concern has to do with the perception that principles like social justice as abstract. Like I come from a country, which has such big disparity between rich and poor. So, take the case of farmers. You have farmers without who do not till land. And so, there is agrarian reform.

So it's like, okay, farmers are very poor, so it's not like you respond by simply providing services, skills, employment generating activities in between farming activities. But, it's also questioning the kind of economic system, which would breed, for instance, landlessness or keep the ownership of land in the hands of a few rich people. So, therefore in that situation, social justice becomes something real to farmers.

And if you are a social worker concerned with the situation let's say of the farmers as a sector, then social justice becomes something real, concrete, and not abstract.

In the past, I used to work with rural communities. So, social workers in government settings would say, “Okay, we don’t have anything to do with the peasant problems because there is the department for that, the Department of Agrarian Reform.”

So, social workers are supposed to simply provide services like additional income-generating activities, maybe, skills training but nothing else. So, nothing to do with the question of asset reform or land redistribution.

So, over the years, this was found to be inadequate. And so, your analysis shifts from simply looking at the farmer in need of services to improve his or her situation, you now question the macroeconomic system. And the principle of social justice comes into the picture now.

**Prof. Mark Henrickson:**

So, would you like to frame that as a question to one our other panelist?

**Prof. Mary Lou Alcid:**

Yes to Iwama.:

**Prof. Nobuyuki Iwama:**

In revising the definition of social work, of course, we used to have the western influence. But now we would like to take the initiative in sending out messages from Asia Pacific. And in doing so, new values or new essence of social work could be discovered. I think that’s the question or that’s the challenge.

Going beyond this conventional definition, and beyond that, maybe, there are renewed values or something more essential to the social work. Can we discover that? Can we really capture that, what do you think? That is my question. What do you think of those ideas?

**Prof. Mark Henrickson:**

I think the question goes the issue that you are raising about the implementation or the operationalization as Nikku was talking of concepts like social justice and even human rights, which is an equally vague concept when we talk about it in the abstract. How do we make those real? How do we make those practice?

**Dr. Bala Raju Nikku:**

Referring to the – why these words must have come into this global definition. I would rather look in to – from 17th century to 21st century people are talking about rights and rights-based kind of development, right to development, right to aid, right to live. Now, maybe, that is what the inspiration behind social justice and human rights are fundamental to social work. But the question is, in many of our countries, these rights are actually not realized. They are there, but we are not able to realize them because of various reasons of conflict, internal conflict, punitive or whatever.

So how do we deal with this then? As social worker, this is what I teach. But when we can't really realize, when we can't really make use of this in practice, there is a dilemma. There is frustration. How do we do this? Shall we remove it from the definition or do something else?

**Prof. Mary Lou Alcid:**

Human rights are not the new concept. The universal declaration of human rights was adopted in 1940s, right after World War II. And I think this was meant to provide some standards on the way people treat or nations should treat each other.

So, regardless of age, for instance, or economic disparity in economic status or even gender, then we look at each other as co-equals. So, there should not be any form of hierarchy that would privilege one set of people to do whatever it wants with impunity against other sector. So, it is supposed to provide some kind of normative standards with which we relate with each other as individuals and as nations.

**Prof. Mark Henrickson:**

I would like to challenge you a little bit on that. I look around this room, and I see a group of very privileged people. We can be here to have these kinds of discussions. And we talk about a quality a great deal, and we talk about trying to eliminate disparity. But I wonder if one of the challenges that social work faces is that, in fact, we need clients in order to define ourselves. We need social inequality and social injustice in order to exist.

**Dr. Bala Raju Nikku:**

It's like patients. We need patients, so that doctors can survive. We need thieves so that police can survive.

**Prof. Mary Lou Alcid:**

No. I disagree vehemently.

**Prof. Mark Henrickson:**

Go for it – being provocative.

**Prof. Mary Lou Alcid:**

I became a social worker because I was concerned. I was upset about the social conditions in my country in the 70s. And that was before martial law was imposed. And I wanted to work for the elimination of social work as a profession. Meaning, I am working for that time when there is no need for a profession that would attend to the social issues or needs of other sectors. So, this would mean that communities on their own or nations on their own become welfare oriented. So, we create communities of care, structures of care, so that the need for a professional group of workers, like social workers, becomes a necessary. So, I go for the elimination of all unjust structures and conditions.

**Prof. Mark Henrickson:**

Including social workers, presumably.

**Prof. Mary Lou Alcid:**

Yes. So, we don't have to burden ourselves any more. The communities now take it upon themselves. Or nation states, or maybe there will not be any nation states in the near future.

**Prof. Mark Henrickson:**

How many people here would like to be unemployed?

**Prof. Mary Lou Alcid:**

We will find other source of employment.

## Comments from the Floor:

### **Prof. Mark Henrickson**

We have people with microphones that are ready to go around the room. Are there people here who would like to ask questions? I hope there are, I hope we have been provocative.

### **Prof. Kensaku Ohashi:**

My name is Ohashi. Thank you very much for your reports and presentations. I have request, at the same time I want to ask questions. Discussions on the definition, if we remain in being abstract that wouldn't – we cannot go on a long way. What is the function of social work? And depending on the function, what are the challenges and problems? Unless we discuss that we cannot adequately discuss definition.

Social work, what kind of purpose, for what objective, and with what philosophy should we proceed with the social work? Secondly, what are the actual problems on a daily lives and social problems. The vantage point of the analysis of these problems. What should be the perspectives and framework for analyzing these challenges? How can we utilize the existing knowledge of the sciences? That's the second point. The third point, against this backdrop, what are the policies for the problem solving? On an individual level, on the regional level, and national level, what kind of policy for problem solving should be established? That's the third question. On an individual level, there are needs by the people who require the services. And there is the judgment on the part of the experts for the possible needs. There should be an agreement between these two. There should be an informed consent in establishing the policy.

Number four, against this backdrop what kind of intervention program should we have for practice. This intervention program is so important. This program, with which we intervened, was it effective or not? We need to evaluate the outcome. Those are the five functions that we need to clear. And then, what level should we discuss social justice. Is it only abstract level?

What is the social justice in coming up with the services created for each individual



needs. There are social problems, individual needs. It is not the level of whether the western philosophy is good or Asian value should be upheld.

Unless we come back to these basic five questions, we remain talking across purposes. So, we need to clear each point one by one. Otherwise, when we establish the relief assistance policy, those in the western countries and in Asia, there should be difference. Even within Asia Pacific, there are differences between countries in Nepal and the Philippines. When it comes to the individual level, there can be more differences. So, abstract discussions on social justice may not serve our purposes so much for social work. Probably, we should change the way to discuss this matter.

**Prof. Mark Henrickson:**

Thank you. One of you would like to – or all of you would like to take that.

**Prof. Nobuyuki Iwama :**

It's a very difficult theme to discuss as I said in my presentation. Review and revise the definition means that we have to go back to what is social work. So, the review and the word definition and the practice. How can we connect this two without that work? We cannot have meaningful review process going forward as has been mentioned. We need to establish the framework for discussions. And then, accumulating discussions in that manner may lead to the revision of the international definition. And that is the direction to go.

**Prof. Mark Henrickson :**

I suspect you were looking for something a little more practical and applied. That is the theme that I heard in your question. Do we also want to raise that question?

**Prof. Bala Raju Nikku :**

Maybe about policies, all five points are relevant, but I don't have answers. When it comes to policies and the role of social works in Nepal, for example, I see myself. For example, recently there is a huge kind of corruption with the international adoption of children because fertility rates are coming down in many countries, and they need children. And we have poverty, we can't feed out our children, we want to give away our children. That is the story.

But when we study this, the international adoptions and the whole process, the

politics behind that, what we found as social workers, the policies are not in the best interest of the children.

It's true that many of our children are got caught in the conflict and they became orphans. Many of them are paper orphans. They are made orphans on paper. Because, at least, their mother is surviving or uncle is surviving or someone else is surviving. But then, they made orphans on paper because they can be then sent away to the foreign countries in the name of international adoption.

So, what I am trying to say here is social workers, I think, policy is very important. But unfortunately, countries like us, the discussion on policies happens only after the policies are implemented. Not before that. That's the problem.

So, once the policy has been implemented, then we see that, then we actually then start asking questions. So, maybe, the answer is, as social workers, we should be watchdogs and look at the policy what is coming up, who is bringing what kind of policies. And then participate even before a policy comes into the picture, comes into the ground. But we are not doing, I guess. At least in Nepal, we are lagging behind.

**Prof. Mary Lou Alcid :**

My response is framed by my own personal experience and analysis of what social work is and it should be. I would take as an example in addition to the present example, like I said it earlier. The matter of violence against women, for instance. So, for a very long time, wife battering used to be in the private sphere. It's still is considered by many as a private issue between husband and wife. But then the women's movement decided that no, it's not a private issue, it's a public issue. And it's something that policy should respond to. So, we also draw inspiration or you can find some basis in the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

There is a provision there which says that women have their right to live in an environment free from violence. Therefore, you pressure government. So, workers are not limited to simply providing shelter counseling to women who are battered by their husbands and in need of social services.

So, a social worker who is critical meaning she or he is not limited to simply accepting the status quo. But would rather look at why wife battering happens regardless of the social class of a woman. And find some basis in the attitude, let's

say, of people, and maybe in the patriarchal structures in society. And then, go combine working with individuals and policy and legislative advocacy.

So, this is one example whereby individual problems are actually linked with society or you see the macro connection between what is going on at the individual level, and the systemic and macro level basis of such a problem.

Now, social work is practiced in different ways. So, I used to think that I will choose community organizing social action in favor over, let's say, casework. But now, I realized I cannot choose. I should not even choose between the three conventional methods. But we can use all of them all together.

And so, in our college, we referred to this as the integrative approach because we cannot keep on serving people, helping people to help themselves. This will tire us out. And this will produce jobs for us now and in the next generations. But then, we get tired, and we come to a point where we question why is this going on? And what is the systemic or structural basis of such problems? And what can be done at the policy level or even should we change that political, economic, or social system? Should we go into education, so that people's attitudes are changed according to a set of norms? We work at the micro up to the macro levels.

**Prof. Mark Henrickson :**

Let me point out that, at this point, we do not see ourselves as the table of experts here. We are only here because this is where the machines are. So, we very much would like to hear from you.

**Mr. Hiroshi Uno :**

My name is Uno. I am from Japan. To start with, social work is universal or upholds universal value. I think there is a consensus on that particular point. On a regional level, why should we have regional level definition? Because social work is practiced in each country. And then, each country has unique religion and situation, the level of economic development, social system. They differ from one country to another. The same method, if applied universally, will not produce results. I think that's the starting point.

I will give you a typical example. On the 11th of March, Japan was hit by this great East Japan earthquake and 100,000 people have been evacuated since, have not returned home yet. Not only that, even at their own homes, without external

systems, hundreds and thousands of people are living under such conditions. Social worker visit them and interview them and try to help them.

When the social workers ask these questions, these people answer we are surviving. So, please go to the less privileged ones, those who are in more dire needs. However, these people are the actual people who are in most dire needs. But the culture of Japan is such, especially in the northern part of Japan are trying to be considerate to others. Rather than appealing their difficulties, they try to be considerate for other people under such circumstances.

Well, there should be a difference in response to these people if you compare this against the cultures who try to assert themselves.

In Nepal, depending on the stage of economic and social development, the social workers with the highest skills there are things these social workers can do. And there are things they cannot do even with the highest of the skills.

All social workers work for the betterment of the society to improve the situations of the clients. But then, what can we do at that particular level. And each country must put into practice as Dr. Akimoto said there should be a review process. It's a bottom-up approach.

I think there is an overlapping of discussions with the Ohashi-san's discussions. Universal value, yes there is. There is no contestation against that. However, on the ground in the actual society when we try to put the universal value into practice, there are challenges. In each country, each social worker has to verify that. Then from that bottom-up approach, challenges unique to Asia may emerge.

Today, the discussion has indeed brought many challenges. We have had discussions much. I think, it's the way we try to consolidate this to start from the universal aspects or are you going to go bottom-up from the field. I think, you can go from both directions, and perhaps, try to consolidate from the two sides.

**Prof. Mark Henrickson**

We are coming towards the end of our time. So, I think, we have time for one more specific question here. And, I hope, this conversation will continue. We don't want to keep you from your lunches.

**Male Speaker:**

Thank you. I am just entering into the social work community here. And it is very interesting to experience this debate.

**Prof. Mark Henrickson:**

This is our washing.

**Male Speaker :**

I think my problem is that the debate on the definition of social work that the concept tries to do everything. It tries to embrace many things. And I feel it is too many. So, from residual work into transformational, you want to be a revolutionary leader as well. You want to be a transformer. You want to address that specific social illness.

So, I think, that if you want to do everything – if it becomes too broad, it becomes meaningless. I don't necessarily have an answer or proposal out of that. But I think that realizing a problem to it is one step. So, I think my issue it is being perhaps too broad and too ambitious. And there is pretty much it is. Thank you.

**Conclusion:**

**Prof. Mark Henrickson:**

Thank you. In my country, we have an expression, perhaps, we should decide what it is that we are knitting and stick to our knitting. I want to thank you all for your attention today. And I, particularly, want to thank the preparation that the panelists did. And I acknowledge professor Akimoto's initiative in pulling this symposium together.

What we take from this discussion we will then present at an international forum next year in Stockholm, Sweden. So, this discussion does not end here but becomes part of a continuing international dialogue. From what I heard today, there are some common threads that we need to take with us.

All of our presenters spoke of a layered definition - a definition that has many different layers, adding the Asia-Pacific regional definition to the global definition or perhaps global principles.

All of our presenters and the point has certainly been made by some of the questioners from the floor, spoke of the importance of theory and practice and the interrelationship between the theory and practice. So, that one informs the other, so that each informs the other.

All of our presenters also spoke of how important it is to operationalize the theories that we talk about when we use concepts like human rights, social justice, and empowerment, and balancing the personal and the social and so forth.

And also, the point has been made by each of our presenters that this may also be not only a prescriptive definition but an aspirational definition that we can use to assess our practice in the work that we do as social workers. Will those be fair summaries, at least -- anything I left out there? I know each of you has something urgent as common themes, right?

I think those are the things that I will certainly convey to Prof. Akimoto as part of this conference's response. I thank you very much for your kind attention this day. And, I hope, that we will continue to have these debates because they form the core of who we are as social workers.

Thank you all very much.



# The Development of Social Work—Towards the 3rd Stage

## Where are we now?

Tatsuru Akimoto  
Social Work Research Institute  
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### To become a global profession

Social work was born in Europe (Stage I) and grew up in North America (Stage II). The IASSW/IFSW International Definition of Social Work and two other fundamental documents are the ultimate achievement of the social work community in recent years around the world. They are treasures by the sheer dint of our predecessors' efforts over a few hundred years, or more than a hundred years since the dawn of the social work profession.

The next problem now arises. Social work wants to be of the world (Stage III), especially in the tide of globalization. It wants to name itself a global profession.

This desire cannot be realized by expanding the present field of social work or its definition to all corners of the planet. This is because the present field of social work and its definition are products based on the reality and life where they were born and grew up. If they want to become global, they must be based on the reality and life of the whole world--including places where the present field and its definition were not born or grew up. What is necessary is not dissemination but absorption—absorption of the reality and life of societies outside Europe and North America. In other words, without input from outside these regions, social work and its definition can never become those of the world. Asia, Africa, and Latin America have learned much from Europe and North America till today—and will continue learning—but have been asked for their contribution in order to make social work in the world progress to the next stage. Nothing would be different from the general story of globalization regarding other fields and phenomena in society if the story of social work is merely one of a dissemination from the center to the peripherals—the invasion and intrusion of superior values into “developing” parts of the world. (cf. Ohno, 2000)

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<sup>8</sup> This Epilogue has been written not by the President of APASWE but a university professor.



## Empirical verification of “the culture is different”

At the inauguration of APASWE International Definition of Social Work Review Project, two responses had been predicted: “This is Western” (=“Our cultures, values, and traditions are different.”) and “This is one of the developed countries.” Regarding the first point, the following were listed as examples in the invitational announcement of the project document as comments that were frequently heard. (APASWE, 2010)

- a. Is “social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being” appropriate as aims and activities of social work?
- b. Is the dichotomic way of thinking, e.g. people vs. environment, acceptable?
- c. Is the individualism or the individual-centered way of thinking, including “to develop their full potential”, suitable?
- d. Aren’t stability in society, harmony in human relations, respect for others, an emphasis on unique traditions and culture, an emphasis on responsibility, and the importance of family, kin, and community core elements for social work? (cf. Footnote 2 of Global Standards)
- e. How about inserting a non-English word, e.g. “kyôsei” (interdependent living, living together or coexistence; cf. symbiosis) [Each non-English country/region inserts a word from its own language.] in the definition?
- f. Aren’t there any objections to designating human rights and social justice as the fundamental principles of social work?
- g. Between the lines, Western democracy, Christianity, and modernism can be read.
- h. The element of spirituality is missing.

In the APASWE Regional Workshop (4 November 2010; See the “Introduction” to this report), attended by representatives of 11 countries from the Asia and Pacific Region, almost all participants referred to “Western bias” and/or “the differences in culture, values, and traditions” and showed discomfort with the present definition,

as predicted. However, they did not further go into the content of “the differences in culture” (hereinafter used as a representative to simplify the discussion). Which parts are different and how? An instinctive, spontaneous reaction against “Western” is useless. What was expected was a discussion beyond the level of the list above.

At the level of the list above, it is not clear as to where the incompatibilities have arisen from true cultural differences. (a) One example is strong family and community ties—up to what point has the gap come from differences in the level of industrialization or where has it come from a true difference of culture. In European and North American countries, too, the family bonds among three generations was once much stronger than today. This is apparent in literature. (b) Such notions as democracy, which are now generally deemed Western, might have been rooted in non-Western regions in the world once we trace them back to former times, or vice versa. (Sen, 2006) Evaluation depends on the time span and could be even reversed 180 degrees. Or culture and its traits are mixed or modified all through time and have become new or common ones. (c) Culture and its traits may be modified when transferred to other societies, but at the same time, may modify the culture itself in those societies which receive such transference. For example, culture in an Eastern society, which used to be very different from that of the West, has now become westernized. Western culture-ridden things carry a sense of intimacy to a non-Western society to be accepted. See pop-culture among youth. (d) Beyond anything, such key concepts as human rights, social justice, and democracy have not been defined. Their content is not clear.

Thus, the project organizer solicited from participants a discussion not only at the conceptual level but also at the empirical level from the very beginning of the project and whenever they had such events as a workshop (4 November 2010) or a symposium (16 July 2011). (See ad flyers for each occasion). A collection of cases was expected which would not fit to the “Western” social work model and/or the International Definition in their daily practice and research and the inductive generalization and conceptualization. In one society, Alensky’s approach may not fit. In another society, a case worker must visit a client’s home with bananas in hand and be served tea. If not, social work practice cannot function smoothly.

#### What was discussed and not discussed

The following were three responses, which were not predicted in the list of examples in the original Project Outline. (Akimoto, 2011)

- (a) The emphasis on social development and the relation with states (or governments): The former has been always emphasized in this Region since the birth (1970s) of the ARASWE (Asian Region Association of Social Work Education), the predecessor of the APASWE. The latter was referred by some countries with or without the relation to the former, and uniquely by China. This emphasis may, however, have something to do with the level of industrialization or the type of political regime rather than a cultural difference.
- (b) The insistence to insert such terms as social reform, social action, self-determination, individuals-families-organizations-communities, micro-mezzo-macro, social functioning, social recourses, capacity building, participation, equality, rights of the minority and indigenous. All of these are familiar words and phrases or concepts which have been frequently used in the discourse of present Western social work. This insistence comes from differences in thoughts and preference, or of weight and emphasis speakers posit, rather than a difference in culture. The discussion on these words and phrases could be easily communicable within a Western region in the framework of the present definition. The result, however, would be the insertion of a word, phrase, or sentence at most.
- (c) The proposal of a multi-definition model: This was a demand beyond the prediction of the project organizer. Even if the substance of the culture becomes clarified, it is impossible to add it to the international definition. The demand to insert the content of “our culture” would be met with a refusal by people of other cultures. The insertion of general terms of “the difference in culture” or “the respect for diversity” would be the best possibility. These phrases have been often heard in Western social work, too, and thus would fall into the category of (b) above. A definition containing the substance of a culture could be effective only in that cultural domain. The definition cannot help becoming multi-layered. Some comments were given such as “Let’s make an APASWE definition or national or even local definitions.”

### The Professional Model

The second point which was predicted at the inception of the project (p.46)—“this definition is one of ‘developed countries’,” that is, “the professional model”—has virtually failed to interest anyone except Mark Henrickson (his inserted “summary” at the beginning) and Bala Raju Nikku (his part of presentations) in this report. The IASSW/IFSW definition has given the definition of the social work profession or professional social work under the title of a Definition of Social Work, starting with the sentence, “The social work profession promotes···.” . A footnote to the

Global Standards states that social work and professional social work are identical. Few project participants raised a question on the equation. Social work leaders in “developing countries” are the same. They are busy conforming their realities to the international definition.

However, in many societies in the world—in the past and even today—there are no, or few if any, professional social workers. Imagine societies where 90 percent of workforce is in primary industries. Occupations have not been differentiated much yet. There may not be many workers counted under the classification of professional occupations, or there may even not be the job classification of social work itself. Their labor market would be very different from that of a post industrial society. Imagine societies where only 40-60 percent of children finish elementary school. Only a few percent of youth go to college and far fewer to master level programs. There are no ways to expect a sufficient number of MSW or even BSW graduates, on one hand. On the other, there are huge numbers of difficulties and needs in people’s lives as well as social problems in those societies—just as in societies with many professional social workers. Someone or some components of the societies must have been taking care of those problems and their sufferers; otherwise, the societies could not sustain themselves.

As far as we equalize social work with professional social work, our choice would be (a) to leave the “difficulties and needs in people’s life” and “social problems”, and their sufferers, outside the territory of social work, or (b) to prepare a huge number of professional social workers—train them immediately within own countries or to import “international social workers” from other countries. Professional social workers who are educated in societies with low rates of children in schools and youth in colleges as mentioned above are “elites” in number and social class in those societies. It is difficult to imagine that many professional social work graduates would work in these fields. Cries of “social work imperialism” or “colonialism” would be immediately heard if we import “professional social workers” from other countries. (c) The IASSW and APASWE, which consist of schools whose missions are to train professional social workers, would start an argument about paraprofessionals. However, the logical conclusion of the equation of social work=professional social work would be paraprofessional social work ≠ social work. And they, the “paraprofessional” workers, must be put under professional social workers. (d) Another possible choice is to change the definition of social work. The viewpoint of people’s lives and social problems calls for social work, its practice and intervention. It is not questioned whether it is practiced by a professional or a non-professional, or as an occupation—the presumption of profession—for money or not, but whether or not it is high in quality.

Abandoning the definition of “social work=professional social work,” and defining social work itself, the difficulties and needs of people’s lives and social problems, and their sufferers, in societies with no professional social workers could benefit from social work. Social work could serve for those problems and their sufferers, placing them within its scope and territory.

### A proposal from two research projects

It won’t nearly be in time for the Stockholm Conference, but the following two research projects should be initiated, if we are serious.

1. “Western” Social Work Mismatch Research: Empirical research to find gaps and conflicts between what we have learned—including the present International Definition—and what we have encountered during our daily practice and research. We have studied from and been trained by our professors, most of whom studied and were trained in Western countries, using their textbooks and/or their translated versions, in curricula copied from the West. Cases of gaps and conflicts should be compiled and the results should be inductively generalized and conceptualized—where are there gaps and how, how are those gaps related to the “difference in culture”, are there any intervening variables, etc., etc.?

2. Functional Alternative Research. Observe and record who has been taking care of such difficulties and needs in people’s daily lives and social problems in a society with no or few professional social workers as those which professional social workers have been taking care of in societies with many professional social workers. How has each society without professional social workers managed those problems? How do its responses differ from or are they identical with those by professional social workers? Start not from the viewpoint of professional social workers but from the viewpoint of people’s lives and needs and social problems.

Is it necessary to revise the present IASSW/IFSW definition or not? If necessary, which part must be revised and “why and how?” (APASWE, 2010) Revision seems to be necessary although the story would be different if you believe that to maintain the present definition as it is does not benefit or bring positive effects to some parts of the world and, conversely, does not function negatively for other parts of the world.

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# APPENDIX

## BUDDHISM WITH SOCIAL WORK IN VIETNAM

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Nowadays, there are a lot of definitions of social work. Two noticeable definitions are:

- Definition of National Association of Social Workers – USA (NASW - 1970): "Social Work is a major to help individuals, groups or communities improve or restore their social functions and make suitable condition to get these targets."
- Definition of IFSW General Meeting, 25-27 July 2000 Montréal, Québec, Canada: "The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance their well-being. Utilizing theories of human behaviors and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work."

From these definitions, we can show objectives of Social Work:

- Empower people, improve their capacity of difficulty dealing.
- Help people find out and collect support sources through process of conversion, linking, coordination and advocacy.
- Mobilize social organizations and systems to help them improve their capacity of need satisfaction to each individual.
- Mobilize relationships between individuals with environment to make positive effect on human spiritual lives.
- Mobilize relationships between organizations, agencies, and social associations in order to make effect on policies related to social welfare.

In order to get these objectives (cosmopolitan feature), each country needs to have their own ways (national identities) so Social Work can get its real objectives. Firstly, each community's, country's way in Social Work activities depends on this



community's, country's culture. Especially, effect of Social Work not only depends on social workers but also on vulnerable individuals or groups whom Social Work serve. The foundation of Social Work is compassion of people, but Social Work also bases on social view, values system, lifestyle, ethnic psychological identities of this community taken form on cultural background of their ethnic.

In Vietnam, Buddhism almost links with national history, which is the same as Catholicism with the histories of European ethnics, as Muslim with the histories of Arabia or Middle Asia, so Buddhist law is easy to be accepted by Vietnamese. Therefore, Vietnamese society and culture strongly affected by Buddhism for a long time, in addition to philosophy sense, exists reality sense. It contributes to shape the point of view, social values system, lifestyle, psychological identities of Vietnamese. Hence, in Vietnam, Buddhism has a great effect on social worker and vulnerable people who are beneficiaries of this activity.

Buddhism was founded by people to serve people. Buddhism considers people as the root of their foundation. Buddhism satisfies noble and profound needs of people and help people suffer and overcome stress, risks, lost in their lives. Moreover, it help them connect to mankind, too, brings out purposes of life.

Buddhism doesn't spread fear to people through philosophy: "The good brings about the good, the bad brings about the bad", "Every action has its reaction", "We reap as we sow". Every ascetic of people doesn't come from outside but from action of people at the moment or the previous incarnation.

Buddhism is a saving religion to help people overcome samsara of ocean of misery. In their pain, people are strong enough to control it. The will of misery overcoming is a spiritual capacity, innermost strength, continuous effort of positive mental work and every action to rescue themselves and others. People need will to overcome their obstacles. "You shouldn't live negatively in fear and worry or look forward to a power to save you. Be patient, continuous trying until you can save yourself."

According to Buddhism, to help Social Work (firstly is a charity activity) get its purposes, social workers have to cultivate and develop their "four infinite mind":

1. Affection (Mettà): Affection means love, good-nature. This is the great love to every living beings, including foes, insect,...
2. Compassion (Karumà): Compassion is the vibration, feeling sorry for other pains and wanting them to escape from their misery.
3. Happiness (Medità): Happiness is the pleasure to see other being happy while compassion is the feeling sorry for other pains.
4. Abandonment (Upekkhà): Abandonment is critical thinking, not feeling love

or hate, happy or sad, resent; also means leaving them out, being content and peaceful in soul.

In a multi-ethnics, multi-religions and multi-cultures community, philosophy of “for infinite mind” becomes useful and meaningful in adjusting human behavior in society. In order to exist, exchange, integrate and respect each other, people have to be sympathy, wisdom and tolerant. Upon selflessness, people can reject their selfishness, intolerant, envy. Tolerance brings contrary and disharmony things closer to study and is the source to resolve disharmony, inequality in society.

Buddhism in Vietnam has been solving currently urgent matters such as poor people, homeless people,... Every night there are a lot of people have to sleep under bridge, in the market, mental illness people on the streets and many poor children can't go to school or have to leave school early because they can't afford school fee... Buddhism takes part in the process to solve these facts. In addition to taking responsibility for actions, Buddhism contributes to design many programs such as: digging wells for poor people in remote areas; founding and funding scholarship for poor pupils, students in all background, not distinguishing their races, religions; mobilizing donators to donate medicine, clothes,... to poor people and lonely elderly.

Social Work is specific actions, Buddhism practically helps victims of poverty, illnesses, unhappiness,... overcome difficult situations, reinforce their will, make the good condition for people to integrate into community and have a good life, a chance to study and work as normal people through activities such as: taking care of homeless elderly, orphans, street children, children with disabilities, supporting poor people, or victims of war, dioxin, market mechanism, HIV/AIDS...

With various activities, Social Work requires joint people to have selflessness and sacrifice. Social workers have to get a voluntary will, don't compare advantages and disadvantages of their actions. Moreover, Social Work requires many people to join in, not particular person. Every people have to work together. Social Work can be understand as a pure ethic activity which is full of merciful thought of Buddhism and is eternally moral code of Vietnamese. With its philosophies and practical actions, Vietnamese Buddhism intends to be more and more mundane in participation with social organizations to resolve problems of Social Work in Vietnam. Comparing with Buddhism philosophies and Social Work objectives, we can recognize a considerably identical part, thence we can design a new approach in Social Work in Vietnam in order to improve this activity's effect in Vietnamese culture.

Some decades ago, mankind welcomed great technological science achievements

applied in solving practical problems. At the first decades of the 21st century, we wonder about science although limitation of nature conquering incessantly widens. It seems that we are sunk in conflicts between races, neighbors, husband and wife,... The world becomes more and more insecure, gap between richness and poverty becomes more and more long. When people just run after unreal value of substance, consider it as the highest value in life, their minds will be chaotic for their aspires of processing and coming into for things. Their chaos inside becomes chaos in society. Therefore, we need something beyond their minds: The voice of religion is in the mind world. Every true religion always improves human spirit life, helps people are inclined to the good and brings peace to the life.

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## The Report from Sri Lanka



# ජාතික සමාජ සංවර්ධන ආයතනය தேசிய சமூக அபிவிருத்தி நிறுவனம் NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



මගේ අංකය/ எனது இலக்கம்; /My No

මගේ අංකය/ உமது இலக்கம்; /Your No

### INTERNATIONAL DEFINITION OF SOCIAL WORK A REVIEW – From Sri Lanka

We, at the National Institute of Social Development,(NISD) Colombo, Sri Lanka owe it to Prof. Tatsuru Akimoto, Vice President (President APASWE) for motivating us to review and report on the International definition of social work when he paid a courtesy call at our Institute.

Following his words of encouragement we, at the NISD Sri Lanka decided to concentrate on the International Definition of Social Work and the Global Agenda on Social Work and Social Development at the World Social Work Day celebrations.

The celebrations took the form of a Symposium wherein key Professional Social workers and Professional Social Work Educators participated Initially an open discussion was undertaken to identify and shortlist issues that needed to be discussed further The participants were separated into three groups and each worked on the issues identified earlier in the day to come up with comments and definitions. Finally at a plenary session the three definitions were combined to arrive at the definition given below

The final version of the re-definition endorsed by all participants is as follows:-

**“ the social work profession promotes social change, help to improve human relationship within cultural context of that society and the empowerment of people to enhance well-being. It utilizes evidence- based knowledge derived from research and practice. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work to promote peace and harmony. “**

Thank you.

A. Ranaweera

Director, Sri Lanka School of Social Work, National Institute of Social Development,  
President of Sri Lanka Professional Association of Social Workers.

25<sup>th</sup> April 2011

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# PROPOSAL OF THE FEDERAL COUNCIL OF SOCIAL WORK (CFESS) OF BRAZIL FOR THE DEFINITION OF SOCIAL WORK

Hong Kong, June 10th, 2010

Federal Council of Social Work • 'Critical Attitude to Advance in the Struggle' Management



The Federal Council of Social Work (CFESS), Brazilian organization recognized by the Federal Law number 8662/1993, was created in 1957 and today has around 90,000 social workers. In the process of review about the definition of Social Work, we are going to present a contribution to the discussion, understanding that a world definition should be wide in order to comprehend the differences and particularities of the countries.

**DEFINITION** The social assistant or social worker acts in the social relations context with the individuals, groups, families, community and social movements, developing actions that strengthen their autonomy, participation and citizenship exercise aiming to a change in their conditions of life. The principles of defense of human rights and social justice are fundamental elements for the social work in order to overcome the social inequality and the situations of violence, oppression, poverty, hunger and unemployment.

**COMMENT** The formation of the social worker is based on principles that respect the differences and strengthen the potentialities of the subjects with whom the professional works, without any kind of discrimination. For doing so, the social worker must have an ethical attitude, theoretical competence and technical habilitation to develop his/her competences and attributions articulated to a set of values, theories and practices of human rights defense.

**VALUES** The development of the social work takes into consideration the ideals of democracy, and the human rights motivate and legitimate its actions. It has, as values, the respect of equality, freedom, the inequality confrontation; participation; equity; the elimination of all kinds of prejudice; the respect for cultural diversity, ethnicity, thought, sexual orientation, theoretical and methodological movements and the defense of a society free of wars, violence and oppression. In the professional work, these values are used in the strengthening of the democratic institutions; in the strengthening of the social movements; in the defense of economic policies for growth and income redistribution; in the proposition of broad and universal social rights; in ensuring the qualified professional formation. The subjacent values to social work are present in the professional codes of ethics in national and international level.

**THEORY** The methodology of the social work has a support of a group of theoretical and empirical knowledge resulting of investigation and socialization of experiences, including specific knowledge inherent to particular local contexts, analyzed in a full perspective. To understand the complexity of social relations and the conditions of life of the users with whom the professional work, the social work incorporates social and economical theories that helps it analyze and make intervention in complex situations with individuals, groups, families and communities.

**PRACTICE** The social work deals with barriers, inequalities and injustices present in the society. It acts in situations of crisis and emergency. It works in the elaboration and execution of policies and social projects; orients individuals and groups; plans, organizes and manages social benefits; advisor organs, enterprises and social movements; conducts research and socio-economic studies for access to benefits and social services. In order to do so, the professional has to be proactive, with a solid ethical background, able to inform about social rights and the ways to access them. The social worker acts as advisor in administrative and judicial processes, conducting evaluations, document analyses, technical studies, data collection and research. The professional also elaborates findings, advices, reports and study cases. His/her intervention includes the management of organizations, community services and involvement in political and social actions to influence the social policy and the economic development. The social work intervention is universal, but the priorities of its exercise vary from country to country and from time to time, according to cultural, historical, social and economic conditions.

Federal Council of Social Work  
'Critical Attitude to Advance in the Struggle'  
Management



## A Definition Proposal from African Regional Association

Vishanthie Sewpaul, President

The Social Work profession promotes social change as well as social stability, harmony and social cohesion; and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance biopsychosocial and spiritual wellbeing. Utilising theories of the human and social sciences and tacit knowledge systems evolved within localized communities, and by adopting a simultaneous focus on both the individual and the collective, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of both human rights and collective human responsibilities; respect for various forms of diversities, including the traditions, cultures, ideologies, beliefs and religions of groups and communities (insofar as such diversities do not violate the fundamental rights of people); sustainable development; interdependence; reciprocity and social justice are fundamental to social work.

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Asian and Pacific Association for Social Work Education/ International Federation of Social Workers (AP)

21<sup>st</sup> Asia- Pacific Social Work Conference

International Symposium  
International Definition of Social Work Review  
—A Voice from Asia and the Pacific—

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