

# CHECK IT OUT! APASWE

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## *From Laos*

### **Social Work Education in Laos**



The concept of social work, in the sense of provision of charity, has been practiced in Laos for a long period. In the past, the concept of social work has been called charity (Paxasongkor in Lao word). It refers to social services such as, caring, healing, supporting and helping each other when someone faces the sickness, poor, difficulty, problem and being a victim. In particular, social work is practiced through two ways. The first practice is formal social work that is carried out, or supported by government, international organizations and international non-government organizations for those people who are victims of war, accidents, disasters and other issues, such as disease and human trafficking. To respond to these challenges, many social organizations were established from central (ministry) to local authorities (province, district and village), these included the Lao Front for National Construction (established on 13/8/1950), Lao Youth Union (established on 14/4/1955), Lao Women Union (established on 20/7/1955), Lao Trade Union (1/2/1956), Social Welfare Department, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (established on 2/1/1993) and so forth. Another practice is informal social work (community work) through traditional festivals, ceremonies, charitable events and other practices. It has become the appropriate practice among Lao people in particular who are living in rural communities. However, the major concept of social work practice was considered as para social work, charitable, social services and social

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supports. Before 2005, there are no centres, schools, colleges, institutes, and universities that trained professional social workers in the whole country.

In 2005, Associate Professor Phout Simmalavong, PhD who acted as a Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS), National University of Laos (NUOL), drafted the Bachelor of Arts in Sociology Program in the Faculty. However, this program did not get much of a response and feedback from students and stakeholders (labour markets), mainly due to a lack of understanding about sociology and its purposes. Thus, Mr. Saychai Syladeth, along with his colleagues at the FSS, tried to develop the **Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Social Development Program**, called **BSSD** (5 years program). The BSSD was consisted of three main areas/ units including Sociology, Social Work and Social Development studies. This program was approved by the Minister of Ministry of Education, Lao PDR on January 11, 2006. The BSSD program has become the first higher degree program aiming to train sociologists, social workers and social development workers in Lao PDR. It has already produced more than 240 undergraduate students, who are now working in the field of social development, social welfare, social work, poverty reduction and so forth through different agencies in Lao PDR. However, based on the feedback, comment and the need of the program administrators, students, partners and stakeholders, the BSSD program is quite broad. Thus, the BSSD was upgraded and approved by the president of NUOL to be the

**Department of Social Work and Development** (DSWD) on May 15, 2010. In 2011, the Bachelor of Arts in Social Work and Social Services and the Bachelor of Arts in Rural and Community Development were established under the DSWD. Presently, there are more than 600 undergraduate students who are now enrolling and studying in this department. After their graduation, students can work with governmental organizations, international organizations (IOs), international non-government organizations (INGOs) and other agencies that are working in the field of social work, social development in Laos. In summary, The concept of social work in Laos is not new context but studying social work is very new concept and challenges.



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