Chapter 1

INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL WORK

I n this chapter, we introduce the concept of social work, especially from the global perspective. A general understanding of how social work has evolved, and continues to evolve, and has spread globally is central to assessing the current and future roles of social work as a global profession. We then introduce our definition and understanding of international social work, for it is that aspect of social work, and the international field within which it operates, that is the topic of this text.

SOCIAL WORK

The topic of social work will require no introduction to the majority of readers, but before moving to consider social work as a global profession and our definition of international social work, it may be useful to say a few things about social work generally in this context. We are concerned when colleagues in a developing country seriously contemplate dispensing with the term *social work* because locally it is widely misunderstood. Sometimes it is said that social work is viewed in a specific context as virtually synonymous with, to give a few examples, charitable work, one-to-one intervention by highly qualified professionals using a therapeutic approach, the welfare state, and emerging urban concerns. Clearly these views are erroneous, given the nature and scope of social work throughout its history; however, the apparent prevalence in some contexts of such views suggests that the social work profession has not been as successful as it might have been in projecting an acceptable image across the developing world. A perceived tendency to distinguish social work from, for example, policy concerns, community and social development, and community-based responses to welfare needs suggests that a very narrow understanding of social work is more prevalent than we would like to see. Furthermore, we should perhaps acknowledge that, while

many of us would regard the breadth of social work as one of its strengths, it is very likely that that same breadth makes it difficult for many outside observers to, as Hartman (1994, p. 14) puts it, distinguish a common thread that typifies the core of social work. Hartman (p. 13) writes,

> Social work includes a broad and varied array of activities and is practiced with different size systems and in a variety of arenas. There is scant agreement in the field on the world-view, epistemology, or even on the principles or shape of practice. Volumes have been published on the different models (Turner 1986; Dorfman, 1988) and some have concluded that the only common thread that runs through all of social work is a shared value stance. (NASW, 1981)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this chapter is to provide a broad introduction to social work and to discuss the concept of international social work. After studying this chapter, readers should be able to reflect on

- widely agreed definitions of social work, unique features of social work in some countries, origin of professional social work in the West and its expansion through colonization, and indigenous social work in developing countries;
- some recent trends and critical issues in social work that are of relevance to international social work;
- global social work organizations; and
- the definition and scope of international social work.

The 1990s saw the publication of several texts that provided an overview of social work around the world by presenting chapters on social work in various specific countries. (See, e.g., Hokenstad, Khinduka, & Midgley, 1992; Mayadas, Watts, & Elliott, 1997.) These texts make very interesting reading, highlighting major differences in, to use D. Elliott's analysis (1997, p. 441), the ways in which social work is "socially constructed" in various parts of the world. As one reflects on the reported differences in the predominant forms that social work has adopted in various regions and countries, one may well wonder whether this diversity can meaningfully be seen as different expressions of one and the same profession. It is said, for example, that "the individual paradigm is strongly represented in American social work" (p. 441); that in China, the focus is on the mobilization of the masses to address social problems (Chow, 1997); that in Latin America, social work presents a strong emphasis on social justice and social action (Kendall,

2000, pp. 107–108); and that in Africa, there is an increasing emphasis on social development as defined by, for example, the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) (Healy, 2001, p. 102). In contrast, the rebirth of social work in Eastern Europe since 1990 has seen a strong emphasis on social reconstruction or the building of civil society (Constable & Mehta, 1994). In this century, however, there is some evidence suggesting that these regional differences in social work are at least modifying to some degree. This is partly because social work is slowly becoming a more global profession rather than one dominated by social work's roots in the West (see Lyons, Hokenstadt, Pawar, Huegler, & Hall, 2012; Lyons, Manion, & Carlsen, 2006; Weiss & Welbourne, 2007).

While it has been common in the literature to highlight some dominant forms adopted by social work in specific countries, a closer analysis reveals that, in virtually all countries, there exists a range of sometimes competing and sometimes complementary forms of social work—a range that is commonly expanding as social work agencies and practitioners venture into new fields of practice as an ever-widening range of social problems is recognized. All such developments, however, add to the difficulty, even for social workers, of defining social work and of non–social workers perceiving a common thread running through the diverse approaches that constitute contemporary social work globally.

At the international level, social work has striven, since at least the 1970s, to define itself as a global profession and to agree internationally on a common code of ethics. The foreword to the international code developed by the IFSW (International Federation of Social Workers) and adopted at its general meeting in Puerto Rico in 1976 states,

> Social work originates variously from humanitarian, religious, and democratic ideals and philosophies and has universal application to meet human needs arising from personal-societal interactions and to develop human potential. Professional social workers are dedicated to service for the welfare and self-fulfillment of human beings; to the development and disciplined use of scientific knowledge regarding human and societal behavior; to the development of resources to meet individual, group, national and international needs and aspirations; and to the achievement of social justice. (quoted in Alexander, 1982, p. 47)

At its general meeting in 2004, the IFSW and IASSW (International Association of Schools of Social Work) approved the following definition of social work:

> The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance

well-being. Utilizing 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 & IASSW, 2004)

Given that professional social work has been guided by developments in the United States more than anywhere else, it is appropriate to consider here a definition of social work in the United States: "Social work is the applied science of helping people achieve an effective level of psychosocial functioning and effecting societal changes to enhance the well-being of all people" (Barker, 1999, p. 433). However, we should recognize that while the profession needs to have, and has, a definition accepted globally, social work must be everywhere culturally relevant, thereby reflecting various faces or emphases.

At the same time, it is important that the profession be able to present to the outside world an understanding of its core nature, and of the relevance of that core nature to the fields of work on which the international community is focused and with which the developing countries are concerned. However, it is also important that the profession remain flexible and be able to adapt itself to changing conditions and needs either as the world changes or as the profession moves into new environments. It would indeed be amazing, and reflect poorly on the profession, if social work did not present many different faces globally, given the wide range of national and local conditions to which it is called on to respond. Nor does the presenting diversity represent a source of division within the profession. The only concern is that the diverse nature of social work sometimes results in non–social workers failing to appreciate the full nature of social work, and perceiving social work, whether positively or negatively, in terms of only one of its many faces. Given the diversity found within social work globally, it is important that the profession avoid any imperialist tendencies, exemplified by, for example, Western countries seeking to provide leadership or guidance to other countries or to the global profession without taking the local context into account and operating through partnerships. We are now at the stage in social work's development where all regions have much to learn from each other.

THE GLOBAL SPREAD AND ORGANIZATION OF SOCIAL WORK

The history of social work reveals its links with social welfare and social development, with other professions such as medicine, and with the charitable movement that emerged in the nineteenth century. This history has been explored by a

range of writers (e.g., Kendall, 2000; Payne, 2005) and requires in this context little more than a summary of the major points. However, it should be appreciated that at least as important as past history are the recent developments in social work. The IASSW reported in 2010 a 20 percent increase in the number of schools since 2000, to a total of 2,500, with most of the increase being in Asia and Central Europe (Barretta-Herman, Parada, & Leung, 2010). Social work's continuing expansion in developing countries, emerging economies, and transitional economies is likely to breathe new life into the profession, if it is not already doing so.

Professional Social Work's Western Origins

It is generally agreed that social work grew out of the urban destitution that characterized post–Industrial Revolution England and the government's response to this situation through relief for the poor. As Midgley (1981, p. 17) puts it,

> As the rural poor were drawn into and concentrated in the industrialising cities during the nineteenth century, the problem of urban destitution became more acute and conventional public poor relief provisions were strained; social work attempted to provide an alternative which would lessen the burden of public assistance borne by taxpayers, be more humane and seek to rehabilitate the destitute.

A large number of charitable organizations emerged in the United Kingdom and continental Europe, and subsequently in the United States and elsewhere (e.g., Australia), and these had an enormous influence on the profession's development. Their emergence led in particular to the profession's focus on social casework.

The conditions in the newly emerging cities gave rise also to the settlement movement, designed to bring the middle classes into contact with those in poor urban areas and, through the cross-class contacts that occurred and the recreational and educational activities that were arranged, to "inculcate moral values and reform the habits of slum dwellers," as Midgley (1981, p. 22) describes the goals. This settlement work can be seen as one important set of roots for the profession's embrace of community work, for it advocated community-based responses to social problems and social reforms. Leighninger and Midgley (1997, p. 10) describe this settlement movement as it emerged in the United States, showing how it led the emerging profession to focus on the causes of social problems and explore responses to them at both a government policy and a community level.

Leighninger and Midgley (1997, p. 11) provide a succinct summary of the impact of this early history on the social work profession:

> Individualist approaches, social reform movements, and the growth of public social services have all played a role in social work's development. The profession's leaders were able to amalgamate individually focused treatment, organized group pursuits, community activism, social reform, and other activities into a loosely defined practice methodology which formed the basis of social work's professional identity.

This shows why casework, community work, and group work were all important to this early development.

In the following decades, the fledgling profession was to broaden considerably in response to other developments in its environment, especially in the United Kingdom and United States. For example, developments in the field of law and order resulted in a focus on young offenders and the establishment of a probation service in which social work would play a leading role. Similarly, developments in the health field led to the emergence of hospital social work and later a strong emphasis on psychiatric social work. Indeed, the medical model had a significant impact on social work in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and psychiatric social work, according to Midgley (1981, p. 29), was boosted by the frequent use of social workers in work with shell-shocked patients during World War I.

The development of social work education closely reflected the above historical roots. It began usually with in-service training for various areas of work, established initially by either private societies or government departments, depending on where the majority of workers were employed. Then over the years, these training courses were moved into the educational institutions, particularly universities. The curricula taught initially reflected the prevailing practice contexts; however, eventually, they came to incorporate the breadth of social work activities that emerged, including new bodies of knowledge and new practice methodologies.

We have referred so far mainly to developments in the United Kingdom and United States, and these two countries certainly led in the emergence of professional social work. The situation on the European continent, as Rowlings (1997) points out, was and is highly varied and often in marked contrast to that of the United Kingdom and United States. Rowlings (p. 114) comments,

> Europe incorporates multiple and varied structures through which social work and social welfare services are delivered. These reflect very different views on

the role of the state in the direct or indirect provision of welfare and on the responsibility of the family, and more particularly of women, for the survival and well-being of dependent family members.

The writer goes on to contrast north and south Europe, there being a long-established tradition of state delivery of welfare services in the north, mostly through local government structures, whereas in much of southern Europe, there was no tradition of active state involvement in welfare. However, whatever the local tradition historically, a mixed welfare system has now emerged or is emerging in most of Europe, influenced most recently by the social policies of the European Union and its efforts to unify social work to allow mobility of workers across the region, although in places this policy is controversial.

These differing welfare structures across Europe have resulted in significant differences in social work, including in its definition. Rowlings explains that in France, for example, *social work* is a collective term covering eight or nine occupational groups usually regarded elsewhere as paraprofessional groupings. By contrast, in Germany, the term "has the narrower meaning of individualized case-work by workers operating from local community-based offices, hospitals, clinics, or voluntary organizations" (p. 116). This author thus points out that the parameters of social work vary across Europe. For example, in Sweden, it does not include work with older people, but in many other countries it does. Similarly, she notes that in the United Kingdom, "income support (or social assistance) is provided by civil servants employed in a national social security system," whereas in continental Western Europe, "qualified social workers assess and administer the benefits system" (p. 117).

Social work in Europe, while varied, does contain indigenous roots that reflect the peculiar culture and social structure of each state. By contrast, the new industrialized countries, founded by European states as colonies, tended to inherit their social work structures along with the colonial social welfare system. For example, the United Kingdom exported its welfare system and its charitable organizations to Australia, and training courses were established to provide in-service training for the staff of these departments and organizations. The social work profession, as Ife (1997, p. 383) notes, also received significant impetus from the medical field with "a perceived need for trained hospital almoners." In addition, the ongoing development of social work was much influenced by developments in the United Kingdom but particularly the United States, as many social work leaders went to these countries for advanced education in social work. Indeed, these ties of Australian social work to the United Kingdom and United States have been lamented by some observers, as having held back the emergence of an indigenous profession within this and other former colonies. While most industrialized

Western countries eventually broke free of their colonial heritage to a large degree, and began to forge their own indigenous approach to social work, they could also not avoid altogether the influence of their roots and the basic systems inherited from particularly the United Kingdom and United States, nor of the ongoing developments in these countries.

The Expansion of Social Work Through Colonization

Social work accompanied colonialism essentially to meet the needs and aspirations of the colonial powers, rather than to allow social work to make a contribution to these countries' development. The colonial powers believed that they were bringing these territories into the modern civilized world, and such social welfare services as were established reflected this objective. This objective, together with the fact that those who administered these services were social workers and others recruited from the home country, resulted in the imposition on these lands of a usually rudimentary Western welfare system staffed, or at least administered, largely by Westerners. For the most part, the emphasis was on health, education, and law and order, especially in urban areas, but often confined to the support and protection of those classes whose roles were important to the colonial system, with the needs of many others ignored except where Christian or humanitarian motivated services reached out, more often than not to civilize and Christianize rather than meet welfare, let alone development, needs (see Hoogvelt, 2001, p. 20).

In a number of colonies, social welfare and community development training courses were introduced as more and more local people were recruited to staff the developing social services. To some extent, these early training courses formed a basis for the establishment of modern social work, although it is also true that when modern social work per se was introduced, usually after independence had been obtained, it represented to some degree a new import from the West with American schools and training models often used as the models for these developments (Midgley, 1981, pp. 56ff.). As Midgley points out, the UN also took a strong interest in the establishment of professional social work in developing countries in the 1950s and 1960s, as too did a number of social work professionals from the Western world who initiated many new developments. Inevitably the schools of social work established in this period had to draw heavily on expatriates as teachers, who invariably taught according to the models and curricula with which they were familiar. Midgley (p. 60) comments,

To promote "modern" social work, western social work experts used as models the approaches to social work education which had developed in their own countries. Motivated by the demands of modernization, they designed curricula

which replicated the content of western social work training, urged that social work courses be established in universities and recommended the adoption of western professional standards.

Although Midgley argues that even those countries that were not colonized were affected by colonialism, the reality is that a number of developing countries, including many that were later designated by the UN as the *least developed countries* (LDCs), did not establish either state-run social services or modern social work, despite the presence in most of these countries of some international agencies providing a range of services through largely expatriate staff. The absence of the colonial powers from these countries, as well as their extremely slow development process, are presumably reasons why most of these countries still lack professional social work, in terms of modern social work education and associations of social workers. While colonialism involved imposing a Western stamp on early social work developments in the developing world, it at least laid some foundations for modern social welfare and social work developments. It is a matter of judgment whether this Western stamp was overall negative or positive. On the one hand, it resulted in what were often perceived to be inappropriate forms of social work education and practice; on the other, in many of those countries without any direct colonial influence, social work had not developed roots at all, despite the existence of environments that required initiatives along social work lines. The one situation cried out for reform, while the other situation awaited the introduction of appropriate social work systems.

The above discussion suggests that the origins of modern social work were everywhere very similar. This in fact is not the full story. Whether in response to local circumstances or, more likely, reflecting the priorities of influential parties, social work emerged in the various countries with somewhat distinctive priorities. In India, for example, industrial social work has thrived from an early stage (Bose, 1992, p. 75).

Regarding such developments, Pawar (1999) has noted that social work programs possessing a labor market specialization tend to produce two cadres of personnel with opposing interests. On the one hand, there are the labor welfare and personnel management graduates who identify with management; on the other, there are the social workers who focus on the labor force.

Regarding Egypt, Abo-El-Nasr (1997, p. 206) notes that "the keynote of the early practice of social work in Egypt was in two fields: community development projects in rural areas and schools in urban areas." This author sees social work "as an adjunct or auxiliary to the achievement of the primary organizational goals of education, medicine, and production." Egypt is thus also another of the few countries where industrial social work has flourished.

In a case study of social work in the Philippines, Midgley (1981, p. 58) points out that there the Department of Social Welfare was the major employer of social workers, and that it "was concerned chiefly . . . 'with the welfare of the handicapped, the unwanted and the unloved, like the orphans and waifs who either ran away from home or were turned out by their parents.'" Hence "child care was among the first responsibilities assumed by public welfare services in the Philippines." Midgley goes on to explain that social work in the Philippines adopted casework methods as its major thrust, was very urban oriented, and thus in these early stages lacked relevance to the (developmental and rural) needs of the Philippines.

Thus a closer study of the emergence of social work in the developing world indicates that, while the influences of colonialism and of the Western world generally were commonly of great importance, the precise nature of the fledgling profession in the various countries or regions was not identical, in part because their sociocultural and political economy contexts were different. It further indicates that these early priorities in the functions and practice of social work have usually had an ongoing influence on the profession's image and subsequent development in the various countries. (For examples of this diversity, see Hokenstad, Khinduka, & Midgley, 1992; Mayadas, Watts, & Elliott, 1997; and Section 5 of Lyons et al., 2012, for the most recent review of social work globally discussed region by region.)

The Focus on Indigenous Social Work in Developing Countries

In recent years, there has been a debate within social work circles as to the relevance of globalization, Westernization, and indigenization within social work in developing countries. Some argue that efforts to define social work as a global profession can undermine the importance of making social work everywhere relevant to its local context. Some argue that Western social work is engaged in a form of neoimperialism likely to be detrimental to newly emerging social work profiles, although others dispute this. Probably the dominant view is that global and local are both important levels, and can and should proceed together (see, e.g., the special issue of *International Social Work*, vol. 53, no. 5, and papers to the Joint World Conference on Social Work and Social Development in Hong Kong, both from 2010).

Reading reports on social work around the world today reveals a consensus between writers on a number of points. First, it is clear that organized professional social work exists to varying degrees in the majority of countries (many LDCs being the exception), and that the various national social work structures recognize each other as sharing much in common and as being part of a global profession.

Second, social work everywhere shares the same ethical underpinnings, as revealed not only in joint ethical statements but also in shared concerns (see Healy, 2007). Third, there is a strong sense that "social workers are coping with similar social problems in many if not most countries" (Healy, 2001, p. 100), and the programs and discussions at international social work conferences drive home this point. Fourth, social work almost everywhere in the developing world shares a sense of possessing a low status among the professions, seemingly due to common images of what social work is and does—images that often, unfortunately, contain a degree of accuracy regarding social work in that country, although not globally. Finally, there is a widely held fear in many developed countries that social work is in several specific types of danger, especially those of merging with the bureaucracy, of moving extensively into private practice, of becoming the servant of government through its role in the trend to contract services out, and of weakening, along with the so-called demise of the welfare state and formal welfare structures as part of the application of neoliberal ideology (see Hutton, 2003; Pierson, 1998) and, most recently, concern about rising debt levels in Western countries. Among some in the developing world, there is even doubt as to modern Western social work's relevance. As Tsui and Yan (2010, p. 308) write of the Asian scene, "Culturally, the liberal Judeo-Christian capitalist foundation of their profession has led many to doubt its relevance." Others, however, dispute this (e.g., Yunong & Xiong, 2008).

While there is agreement that social work around the world shares much in common, some writers also recognize the existence of significant differences. At one level, these differences are those that could be anticipated within any global profession—differences from country to country in emphases, in the strength of the profession, and in the details of professional education and practice, reflecting in large part the sociocultural/economic differences in prevailing environments as well as historical factors. At another and far more significant level are the differences that reflect the profession's specific regional, national, and local responses to changing need profiles, changing resource issues and necessitating adjustments in prevailing methodologies, and so on. These changes, as they occur in particular places, can begin to alter the face of the profession quite markedly; however, such changes tend to occur slowly and initially only within small sections of, or even on the margins of, the overall profession.

It is clear that in Latin America, for example, social work has been influenced in places, and to some degree overall, by liberation theology adopted by sections of the Catholic Church and the *conscientization* (consciousness-raising) focus of Paulo Freire (1972), resulting in a strong social justice and social action focus and a commitment to revolutionary change (Kendall, 2000, pp. 107–108). In many parts of Africa, as a second example, social work has been strongly influenced by recent social development thinking, and social workers have been

actively promoting a social development perspective within the profession (see Healy, 2001, p. 102; *Journal of Social Development in Africa*). Patel, Midgley, and Mupedziswa (2010, Abstract) have written: "Although social development is widely endorsed as an approach to social work in the Southern and East Africa region, developmental social work and social welfare is evolving unevenly in the region." As a third example, in parts of India, there has in recent times been a strong focus on rural social work, involving the recruitment of rural students to study in new rural-oriented schools of social work and to go on to practice rural social work. Another example is the People's Republic of China, where the introduction of professional social work from the West was resisted until the late 1980s. Today the Chinese government has a social work development strategy, and the Chinese Association of Social Work Education guides the evolvement of a rapidly growing number of social work programs. Several papers presented at the 2010 Joint World Conference in Hong Kong testified to the significance of these developments and its indigenous nature. Indeed, in most regions, the need for culturally sensitive social work education and practice is increasingly recognized by those who are involved at grassroots levels. In regard to Asia overall, Lyons (2010b, Abstract) writes,

> Professional imperialism in a diluted form still persists with different degrees, but there are also signs of indigenization efforts, though a lot more needs to be done. The need and scope for social work expansion on the one hand and a lack of well-developed professional bodies and standards on the other appear to be important concerns. (See also Lyons, 2010a.)

Finally, the birth or rebirth of social work in Eastern Europe in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War (1989), and the collapse of communist and socialist regimes that followed, has seen a strong emphasis on social reconstruction or, as some express it, the building of civil society (the network of organizations that mediate between the people and state political and economic structures). This has often been seen as an essential first step to many other necessary developments (see Constable & Mehta, 1994). However, in all of the above examples, except for the last one perhaps, these distinctive characteristics exist alongside a set of mainstream social work characteristics that have not changed greatly over recent decades. While they are significant and interesting developments, they remain to varying degrees marginal.

In such examples, social work is changing, albeit often slowly, as a result of a critical examination of its roles in the light of recent developments. While change has, to some extent, been endemic to social work since the outset, these recent changes are quite radical and could result in major changes to the overall

profession in the long term. Whether these changes will result in a broadening of the profession under common professional auspices, or a splitting of the profession into various schools such as the clinical and social development approaches, only time will tell. We believe, however, that these new emphases are timely if social work is to retain its integrity, be true to its value base, and play a worthwhile role in the major challenges confronting the contemporary world. To a very large degree, those people driving such changes are doing what Midgley (1981, p. 157) said was required to modify the welfare approach, which included wrong priorities and inappropriate structures introduced from the West: "Solutions to these problems can be found only if social workers attempt to identify and rectify inappropriate forms of social work education and practice in their own countries." Gradually, solutions are being found, usually by expanding the breadth of social work, although it is probably true to say that the process is still in its early stages.

An article that exemplifies many of the above points in the African context is that of Osei-Hwedie (1993). This writer is concerned about the gap between Western theory, especially social science theory, and social work practice in Africa. He suggests that the indigenization of social work in Africa "must start from within, determine what our problems and requirements are, what resources and skills are available to us and what processes and procedures we can borrow from others" (p. 22). He argues that it may be necessary to redefine social work "in the context of social development and social development concerns" (p. 23). He continues, using a line of argument that can be applied in much of the developing world:

> Increasing social work effectiveness in Africa means perfecting the professional expertise, and establishing greater legitimacy and societal acceptability. The struggle to define social work and charter its course also involves the issue of control. It is a struggle about who defines and controls the profession and therefore assigns its socioeconomic status. By necessity whoever defines the field must also set the agenda. A major problem is that the social work agenda is set by other people, especially politicians, and that to a large extent, social work training is dictated by the nature of employment, in almost all cases, as offered by government and nongovernment organizations. Once again, indigenization of the field must resolve the question of who sets the agenda, and remove the content of practice from the political to the professional arena.

Finally, Osei-Hwedie (p. 27) charts the difficult road ahead for social work:

> The profession must . . . locate the basis of the profession and its rationale; develop a process which enables refined knowledge and skills to emerge out of

practice; define social work and its mission to capture the African world view; clarify the domain and expertise of social work; and identify the knowledge, philosophy and value bases of the profession.

The processes either of adapting inherited Western social work knowledge and skills to local situations, or of devising an indigenous form of social work from scratch drawing on external and local expertise, are by no means easy for anyone, and especially for social work leaders in the poorer developing countries. This is an area with which the global profession should be prepared to assist. In the meantime, there are now many examples in all regions of collaboration, both between Western and developing countries and between developing countries. In relation to the first situation, Pawar (1999) has suggested 10 steps for developing indigenous social work education:

Acceptance by social work educators of the fact that they are teaching a Western social work model

Questioning of the model and the local relevance of the various subjects and specializations

Identifying what is and is not relevant and why

Identifying the various factors, conditions, and circumstances that result in aspects of the model being irrelevant

Discovering solutions, perceptions, and coping strategies that exist within local culture, traditions, and practices

Documenting these and incorporating them into classroom teaching and field education

Undertaking a micro level series of exercises that will facilitate the development of indigenous curricula

Documenting and disseminating effective social work practices

Revising subject curricula to incorporate the above

Organizing curriculum-development workshops at the school level, involving educators, practitioners, and students; later at interschool levels

Given the focus of this text on the developing world, we have referred only to the indigenization of social work in developing countries, seemingly implying that this trend has no relevance for Western industrialized countries. Such, however, is

not the case. Although it is not appropriate to detail these developments here, it should be noted that social work in several Western countries has identified the importance of developing forms of indigenous social work in relation to various local situations. One example is in the field of social work among indigenous minorities, where work has been proceeding in at least Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States. (The 2010 special issue of the journal *International Social Work*, vol. 53, no. 5, is relevant to this discussion. See also Gray, Coates, & Yellow Bird, 2008.)

Recent Trends in Social Work of Relevance to International Social Work

It can be said that, over its long history, social work has evolved to serve three major areas of practice.

The first area sees social work as an arm of the welfare state. Within this area, the state effectively dictates the specific fields of practice on which the profession focuses, and the majority of social workers are either employed directly by the state or by agencies that are funded, and therefore effectively controlled, by the state. This area of practice includes the following specific fields of work: work with juvenile delinquents and adult criminals through, for example, probation and parole work and working within correctional institutions; family welfare services; work in the child protection and child adoption fields; and work in the fields of social security, family assistance, and similar welfare and assistance schemes. There are strong elements of social control and protection in this general area.

The second area sees social work as committed to enhancing the social functioning or well-being of individuals and families by working directly with clients experiencing problems. This area of practice has had several offshoots, including clinical social work, family therapy and marriage guidance, medical and psychiatric social work, and work within the so-called psychotherapies. In this area of social work, workers are very much serving individual people who become their clients, epitomized in its extreme form by private practice. However, it also covers practice in state and private institutional settings, such as, for example, hospitals.

The third area of social work sees the profession as seeking to contribute to the building of healthy, cohesive, and enabling communities and societies, and by this process promoting the well-being of people. The fields of practice in this area range from community development to macro social policy formulation, and can today be summarized perhaps as social development: the basic goals are always

related to improving the environments or societies within which people develop and live. Here social work is to some degree the servant of the people within selected contexts, including communities and population groupings such as ethnic groups, regions, and nations, but it also reflects the profession's mission to contribute to the building of a better world at various levels. The majority of social workers employed in this area work for the agencies of civil society, although some will work for the state, especially in the fields of social administration, social policy, and state-devised community development or social development programs, but with goals similar to the goals of those working within civil society.

Throughout the history of social work, questions have periodically arisen about the validity of these three areas and the nature of the balance between them. Let us consider how such questions have been answered in recent times. We shall see that the criticisms leveled at the profession, most frequently from within its own ranks, are of three types. There are first those who criticize the balance within the profession between the three areas specified above, however these areas are delineated. Second, there are those who criticize the profession for effectively neglecting certain fields of practice altogether, and the fields referred to lie mainly within the third area outlined—the area which can be referred to as social development. Finally, there are those who criticize the profession for ignoring selected population sectors altogether, which means that all three areas of practice delineated above are not applied to any significant degree to designated population groupings. Let us consider these three types of criticisms in more detail.

The Question of Balance Between the Three Areas of Practice

The criticism that the profession is unbalanced in the selection of the areas of education and practice on which it focuses takes different forms in different countries, reflecting the fact that the actual balance between the three areas varies significantly from country to country. The United States is a nation where some believe that social work has focused excessively on the area of micro practice with individuals and families, using a largely clinical model in its practice across this area. In 1990, Specht (p. 345) warned, "As things currently stand, there is good reason to expect that the profession will be entirely engulfed by psychotherapy within the next 20 years, and social work's function in the public social services will become negligible." In conclusion, Specht writes, "The central point of this article is that the psychotherapies have diverted social work from its original vision, a vision of the perfectibility of society, the building of the 'city beautiful,' the 'new society,' and the 'new frontier.'"

Writing about social work in the United Kingdom, R. Harris (1990, pp. 204–205) criticizes what he regards as an unacceptable imbalance, albeit a different

imbalance to that perceived by Specht as applying to social work in the United States. Harris writes in a critical tone,

> In the United Kingdom the debate about "what is social work?" has for many years been a central existential concern. It is variously answered. My own view is that it is in essence a state-funded activity concerned to deal individually with a range of "hard cases" in relation to which the routine application of the rules and law and policy are wanting: social work enforces rights which have not been elsewhere enforced and duties which the social worker's clientele have abrogated: social work is, therefore, a state-centred, not a client-centred enterprise.

Finally, writing out of the African context, Kaseke (1990, p. 19) reflects a common African view that social work has been too preoccupied on that continent with state welfare and remedial approaches and too little with the social development field. He writes,

> Social development has evolved out of the frustration of social workers operating within the framework of the remedial approach. Their impressive intervention skills at the micro level have not helped to provide a permanent solution to problems which continue to resurface in dimensions much beyond the capacity of social workers with their current operational parameters.

Mupedziswa (1992, p. 29) shares this view. He writes,

> The problems raised in this paper [unemployment, refugees, AIDS, ecology, and structural adjustment programs] are major challenges for the social work profession. There is need for the social work profession to adopt what Ankrah . . . has termed a "futuristic orientation", that is to anticipate what human needs are likely to be and what conditions will ensure that these are met, if social work hopes to get on top of the situation. The profession just must become more aggressive, and more adventurous, if it is to be taken seriously and indeed if it is to become more relevant.

Most writers on social work across Africa discuss the variety of influences on and emerging forms of the profession, alongside many attempts at indigenization (see Asamoah, 1997), and go on to conclude that the indigenization process must be taken further and that social work must become more responsive to the major problems confronting the continent by adopting a largely developmental approach. (See, e.g., Osei-Hwedie, 1993.)

The Neglect of Certain Fields of Practice and Certain Population Groupings

The second criticism of contemporary social work that is frequently encountered is that it tends to ignore or neglect certain vital issues or areas of need. Lobo and Mayadas (1997) describe the emerging model of social work within the field of work with refugees and displaced persons as a major challenge for international social work, while implying that this field is not significantly addressed by the profession. Back in 1982, and these views are probably still accurate, Sanders wrote that "the refugee problem and the unprecedented involuntary movement of people across national borders is a challenge to the conscience of the international community and the social work profession." Another issue that Sanders (1985, 1988) and others often wrote and spoke about was peace, emphasizing that peace and social development issues were closely related and should constitute social work concerns.

Other writers have lamented social work's effective neglect of extreme poverty in developing countries, notwithstanding a number of state-sponsored poverty alleviation programs in several countries and a growing emphasis generally on poverty reduction strategies. Gore (1988, p. 3) writes of the situation in India, "It is often said in criticism of social work in India that the professional social workers address themselves to the consequences of poverty—such as destitution, lack of shelter, broken family, delinquency—rather than to poverty itself."

This is a fairly common view across the developing world. In developing countries, writers tend to refer to all major development-related needs, including poverty, as in practice effectively lying outside the usual scope of social work practice. They lament, for example, the neglect of rural areas, child labor, street children, migrant workers, illiteracy among and discrimination against women, and other fields. Usually, the reasons stated or implied include that the state welfare system has not ventured into these areas and that aid agencies will not readily fund projects in such areas. Other reasons, however, relate to the urban and middle-class nature of the social work profession and the tendency of its graduates to choose other more acceptable, easier, or more comfortable fields of practice over these neglected ones. Social work in some developing countries is also criticized as neglecting the field of social policy, while the extent of social work's involvement across the whole field of global social policy leaves much to be desired. Finally, it is clear that the social work profession has been slow to respond significantly to the recognized importance of the ecological dimension and the populations now being, and likely to be soon, affected by climate change (see Coates, 2003).

Allied to the criticized tendency of social work to avoid selected issues or fields is the criticism that it effectively turns its back on certain populations—usually

populations that constitute unpopular minority groups within a state. The criticism is made, for example, of social work's role among indigenous minorities in most countries, among the Gypsy or Roma population of Europe, among asylum seekers and illegal migrants in some countries, and among certain castes in India. Frequently, the view is put that the only way to rectify this situation is for schools of social work to adopt a policy of positive discrimination, selecting students from such backgrounds and incorporating relevant material in the curriculum. While admirable in some senses, there are also dangers in such a policy, especially that of relegating a massive set of problems to a handful of graduates from a specific background. Of course, one can explain an absence of social work services in certain contexts as simply reflecting a lack of employment opportunities and funding, but we believe the reasons to be more complex than this and have much to do with perceptions of mainstream social work in some countries, within and outside the profession.

Factors That Influence the Choice of the Three Areas of Practice and the Balance Between Them

Complexity of Factors

We have discussed this topic largely as if it were a matter of worker preference as to where social workers practice, and that their choices tend to reflect attitudes within the profession as much as personal preferences. The question of what determines social work deployment patterns is in reality quite complex. It involves the backgrounds and motivations of those who apply for and are accepted into schools of social work, and that population today in developing countries is usually a biased one favoring well-educated, urban middle-class persons. It involves the values, curriculum, staff profile, and other factors pertaining to the social work schools, for specific types of schools and curricula attract specific types of students and in turn influence the employment preferences of graduates. It involves the employment market, for most persons will not choose to study particular emphases of a profession if the employment opportunities do not exist. It involves community attitudes prevailing among government personnel who make decisions about education, and among education administrators, education funding bodies, and parents of potential students, as well as in the range of government and non-government welfare services. If community values and attitudes are strongly against certain fields of practice or certain potential target populations, it is unlikely that courses, staff, or students will embrace those fields of practice to any significant degree. In such situations, it is often left to a handful of individuals or agencies to pioneer social work practice in unpopular areas, with the hope that they might eventually demonstrate the efficacy and necessity of such work.

Local Issues, Needs, and Contexts

A major difficulty may seem to be that most of those commentators who criticize the balance within or coverage of social work are not recommending that any areas or fields be dropped. They are usually not against what most social workers do but would like to see the scope of their reach expanded. Indeed, those who analyze the situation closely are disinclined to focus excessively on the differences between the areas of practice because they are aware of the large and necessary degree of overlap. For example, those who support a strong social development focus commonly do not exclude casework from such a focus, and certainly embrace both state-based and civil society–based intervention programs. The problem that then emerges is that of constantly expanding the areas or fields of practice, within an already overloaded curriculum and possibly an overstretched profession.

However, while few may wish to move social work out of any fields of activity, it is important in every profession to allow an assessment of the prevailing situation to determine issues like the balance between various areas of practice. It is clearly unacceptable that social work in Africa, to take but one example, should focus excessively on either the area of casework or that of social control measures initiated by governments. While both areas of practice have their place and generate skills that have wider applicability, social work in Africa should focus predominantly on addressing those needs that afflict the great majority of the population and cause widespread suffering, such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, and low levels of social development. Hence the call for a social development focus in many African countries and elsewhere would seem a completely logical decision for social work to make in that context.

The Need for a Comprehensive and Integrated Response

An alternative to expanding the scope of social work may be seen to be the development of new professions, such as social development workers, conflict and trauma counselors, and peace workers engaged in community reconciliation. We would, however, argue strongly against such a response. The reality is that need is holistic, and that persons, families, communities, regions, and even states must to a large degree be perceived as integrated wholes. The range of needs will vary, and specialist intervention will often be necessary, but it will always be important that there are those professionals who are able to see, understand, and assess the wider picture, and then work to ensure that the overall response to the overall situation is both comprehensive and integrated. This is indeed one of the major lessons to emerge from social work generally and social development work to date.

Let us take an example. If one works in a country that has been through a period of conflict, it is very obvious that workers are confronted with a range of interacting needs including, for example, needs to achieve reconciliation between parties to the conflict, to reintegrate returning displaced persons, to assist those who have been traumatized by events, to help communities to reestablish and work together, to build income-generation opportunities while distributing aid as necessary, to reconstruct society from the state institutions down to the local level, and to assist individuals with personal needs ranging from medical to marital problems. While, inevitably, some agencies and workers will be focusing on but one of these areas, there is the need for workers who can appreciate the larger picture; develop and implement a comprehensive set of policies and programs; deploy, support, and coordinate specialist workers; and generally ensure that developments in any one area will complement those in other areas so that people's well-being as a whole and the future development of the country are ensured.

Levels of Deployment of Social Workers

This perception of the need for a comprehensive and integrated approach to situations of poverty and displacement, postconflict situations, and social development generally immediately suggests the importance of workers operating at different levels. A critical problem for social work in many contexts internationally, we believe, is its focus largely on the one level—that of the university graduate professional social worker. In some countries, we see the employment of welfare workers at a level below graduate social workers, and social administrators and supervisors at a level above, but usually with clear demarcations between roles and levels. The difficulties encountered with the one graduate level model are several: the education is expensive for all parties; in developing countries, it results in relatively small graduate numbers, though now increasing significantly in some countries; graduates expect to be paid well and to enjoy relatively good working conditions; and graduate profiles reflect the education level, being commonly predominantly urban middle class.

The work situation, by contrast with the prevailing model, suggests the need for at least three levels of worker, and hence of training. Any efforts to alleviate poverty, tackle local-level development, engage with large populations of displaced persons, or embark on postconflict reconstruction will require very large numbers of workers able and willing to work in frontline operations with often difficult work environments. The training of these personnel can be, however, relatively short and limited to selected work roles, provided that adequate supervision is made available. A second level required is that of workers who can devise and

implement local programs; train, supervise, and support frontline workers; and interact with broader levels of society as necessary. Numbers at this level will need to be considerable, although much less than the numbers of frontline workers, while the complexity of the work calls for a basic university education. Finally, there is a need for workers with advanced training able to work effectively at the macro policy and planning levels, relate local programs to the broader societal situation, participate in the education of the second level of workers, prepare materials for use in the field, and otherwise facilitate a comprehensive and integrated approach to presenting situations.

We can refer to the three levels outlined in various ways. They can be seen as the local, intermediate, and central levels of operation; or the three levels of graduates can be described as social work assistants, social workers, and senior social workers; or alternatively, they can be regarded as paraprofessionals, professionals, and senior professionals. The terminology is not as important as is the acceptance of the three basic levels to implementing a comprehensive strategy in responding to presenting national and international needs. We would also argue that it is important that the three levels are all levels within the profession of social work with articulation from one level to the next well provided for, and that the training and numbers trained at each level reflect prevailing requirements at the three levels. It should be noted that we are not alone in reaching this conclusion. For example, Constable and Mehta (1994, p. 117), in concluding a study of social work education in Eastern Europe, argue the overall need for four levels—namely, in their terms, paraprofessional auxiliary level, first diploma level, second diploma level, and doctoral level. It has been pointed out to us by social workers in Hong Kong that they have long used a clearly delineated three-tier system, while a de facto three-tier system can be seen as operating in many Western countries, whether or not workers at all levels and the profession consciously endorse this situation. (This topic is developed further in Chapter 16.)

In conclusion, it seems to us that social work has the responsibility and the potential to respond to the various situations of need that have dominated the international scene in recent times. Furthermore, we would strongly support the focus of social work simultaneously on the three areas that can be described as supporting the welfare state, providing casework services to community members in need of such, and engaging in social development as we have defined it (see Chapter 2). However, the balance between these three areas should vary from country to country, reflecting the balance between presenting needs and commonly agreed-on responses to meeting those needs. Clearly, therefore, schools of social work internationally should be encouraged to reflect all three areas in the curriculum offered to students (although individual schools may reflect the three areas in different ways, perhaps complementing each other).

Furthermore, the need for social workers to contribute at the three levels, which we might refer to as local, intermediate, and central, necessitates the basic division of the profession into the three levels of assistant social workers, social workers, and senior social workers, with levels of entry to the profession and education and training offered reflecting these three levels of work in the field. In addition, the numerical balance between the three levels of recruitment and education will reflect the socioeconomic and development realities and need profiles prevailing in any country or region. We reach these conclusions from our examination of international social work. We cannot see how social work can make a significant response to the several aspects of international social work canvassed in this text unless these changes to the prevailing situation in the profession are made. Moreover, we believe that the profession is capable of undergoing change and agree with Kendall (2000, p. 107) when she writes, "It appears to be true that social work, perhaps more than any of the professions, is necessarily responsive to the social, political, economic and cultural conditions of the countries in which it is practiced."

The "Professionalization" of Social Work

A core problem concerning the "professionalization" of social work in the developing country context was set out by Midgley as early as 1981. He wrote,

> Because schools of social work in the United States and Britain were established at universities, it was recommended that social work training in the Third World should be introduced at the same level. In some countries, where there is a surplus of graduates, university trained social workers are employed as field workers but in many others, where a university education holds the prospect of rapid promotion, graduates are not eager to begin their careers at field level positions and are especially anxious to avoid a posting in the rural areas. Frequently, graduates are given responsibility for administration for which they have not been trained properly and, at the same time, inadequate training facilities for field level workers are provided. (p. 153)

It is clear that social work in the West has deliberately taken on the mantle of a profession, especially in terms of the level of education required for practice, and Midgley is emphasizing the inappropriateness of these education levels for at least some developing countries. It is important, however, to consider the degree of professionalism in the light of the roles of social work. Here there are two major considerations. One is that social workers exercise a significant degree of control or influence over people's lives and well-being, and the principle of accountability or responsible behavior would necessitate that all social workers be trained to the

highest level possible. And as professional education in the Western world has become a province of the universities, it is appropriate that social work education be located there and its levels monitored closely. The second consideration is related to the key role of social work in integrating a variety of welfare or development inputs. If social workers are to be expected to give full consideration to social, economic, political, technological, ecological, cultural, legal, and other factors, while often coordinating a range of inputs in any situation, the level of education needs to be at least at the level of these other disciplines, and possibly for a slightly longer period of education than some disciplines. Once again, therefore, the logic implies a tertiary level of preparation.

We would certainly want to argue that social work has a responsibility to be as professional as possible, given that doing so does conform with the important principle of accountability and ensure that all practice has the potential to raise levels of well-being to the highest possible in a given environment. However, professionalism in social work does not necessitate a certain level of training for all workers, or certain levels of salary and work conditions for that matter. The objective, and indeed obligation, is to provide a service at the highest level possible in a given context. While that level will inevitably vary to some degree, the existence of global guidelines established by the IFSW (IASSW & IFSW, 2004) is very important. The nine standards being developed cover the social work school's core purpose or mission, program objectives and outcomes, program curricula including field work, core curricula, professional staff, student body, structure, administration, governance and resources, cultural and ethnic diversity and gender inclusiveness, and social values and ethical codes of conduct. However, we might argue that, above all other considerations, countries' resource levels should never preclude social work altogether or specific levels of social work practice, as appears currently to occur. Rather, social work should be geared to the resources available, with external supports in the case of many LDCs. We shall return to the question in Chapter 16.

The Global Organization of Social Work

As the global organization of social work will enter into our discussions at several points, it will be helpful to present a brief overview of this. The three main international social work organizations were all in effect founded in the late 1920s, all emerging out of an international conference on social work in Paris in 1928. The International Conference on Social Work, the predecessor of the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), and the International Permanent Secretariat of Social Workers, the predecessor of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), were both founded in 1928, and the International Association of Schools

of Social Work (IASSW) in 1929. These three international organizations continue to be the key global organizations uniting social work internationally, although each has over the years evolved distinctive roles. Other international organizations have been field-specific in nature (e.g., in the fields of aging and child welfare), but we do no more than note their existence in this context, important though they are. We should also note that our three global organizations developed regional associations that have often played key roles within the regions, while individual schools, social workers, and NGOs are usually united at state level within national associations.

A brief history of the three global organizations—IASSW, IFSW, and ICSW—can be found in Healy (1995b, pp. 1505–1506; 2001, pp. 48–62). We shall provide only an introduction to each of the three organizations. (For outlines of their current organization and roles, see the respective websites.)

International Association of Schools of Social Work—IASSW

The IASSW began with 46 founding members from 10 countries in 1929, growing by 1939 to 75 member schools from 18 countries. After a temporary setback resulting from World War II, the association continued to expand, to organize international conferences and seminars to facilitate interchange, and to develop general standards for social work education. It established an independent secretariat in 1971, led initially by the highly respected Katherine Kendall as the first secretary-general. This office was maintained until the late 1990s when the financial situation necessitated a change to a voluntary secretariat. The IASSW newsletters, the World Census Project, multi-country collaborative projects, publications, and conferences represent major links between schools of social work in developed and developing countries, assisting the former to reflect global realities in their curricula, and the latter to grow stronger and promote social work in their respective countries.

International Federation of Social Workers—IFSW

The predecessor of the IFSW, the International Permanent Secretariat of Social Workers, was founded in Paris in 1928 by social workers from several European countries and the United States. Dissolved during World War II, the organization was reformed in the 1950s, emerging eventually as the IFSW in 1956. The primary aim of the IFSW was to promote social work as a profession with professional standards and ethics. The International Code of Ethics was initially adopted in 1976, to be later revised. Another important goal was interchange between social workers around the globe, and the IFSW's regular conferences were organized largely to this end. The association has also represented social work's views on

major world issues through position papers, advocacy, action projects, and its consultative status to the UN.

International Council on Social Welfare—ICSW

The ICSW began its life in 1928 as the International Conference on Social Work, becoming the ICSW in 1966. It is essentially an international council composed of national social welfare councils together with some international associations. Healy (2001, p. 59) reports that "there are currently 51 national committees and 31 other national associations," with 14 international organizations also being members. The ICSW embraces "practitioners from various disciplines and lay people interested in social welfare." In 1982, the organization expanded its full name to International Council on Social Welfare: A World Organization Promoting Social Development, thus beginning to identify more closely with the development movement.

All three organizations are active at the UN level, promote and engage in global social welfare and social development agendas, interact with each other and with a range of other global associations, and generally facilitate their membership's active and professional contribution to international affairs. At the same time, each seeks to assist its membership and to promote social work and social welfare at regional, national, and local levels. Together, they publish the journal *International Social Work*.

In addition, there are two more international organizations that are relevant to the profession and of interest to students of international social work. These are the International Consortium for Social Development (ICSD) and the Commonwealth Organization for Social Work (COSW) (see websites).

The ICSD was started in the 1970s by a group of social work educators to respond to pressing human concerns from an international, multidisciplinary perspective. It has members in dozens of countries and branches in Europe and the Asia-Pacific region, with branches in other regions currently being developed. The organization seeks to develop conceptual frameworks and effective intervention strategies geared to influencing local, national, and international systems. It organizes an international symposium every two years and publishes the journal *Social Development Issues*. ICSD serves as a clearinghouse for information on international social development and fosters collaboration with a variety of international bodies. Further information may be obtained from its website (www.iucisd.org) (see Healy, 1995b, p. 1506).

The Commonwealth Organization for Social Work had its beginnings in the early 1990s at the IFSW conference in Sri Lanka. It is an emerging organization open to citizens, including of course social workers, from Commonwealth countries

(the Commonwealth is an association of 53 independent sovereign countries committed to the Declaration of Commonwealth Principles agreed to in Singapore in 1971 and reaffirmed in the Harare Declaration of 1991) who are interested in supporting social work and social development. It is based in London with an honorary secretary-general. COSW's main objectives are to promote and support communication and collaboration between social workers and social work associations in commonwealth countries, and to uphold and promote the code of ethics of the IFSW. The organization has the potential to contribute significantly to international social work's development.

However, it must be acknowledged that all five organizations seek to carry out their diverse and important roles with very limited resources, both financial and in terms of full-time personnel. International work is rendered expensive by the costs of travel and of maintaining effective communication links globally. Moreover, the difficulties inherent in consolidating a diversity of international views into a cohesive and meaningful statement or position paper for presentation in a variety of contexts should not be underestimated. Despite these inherent limitations, the work of these five global organizations has been and continues to be highly commendable, often in large part due to the dedicated contributions of a relatively small number of committed individuals. However, we might also note that the three main global social work organizations represent probably fewer than half of the world's nations, reflecting the still limited spread of social work globally.

From the perspective of international social work, the IASSW and IFSW in particular must be seen as carrying significant responsibility for the ongoing development of this field of practice. In particular, they should be able to assist developed and developing countries in their struggle to promote social work education and practice, to speak with governments, to assist in developing curricula, to facilitate visits to these countries by experienced practitioners and educators, to assist with the securing of appropriate social work literature, and to ensure that personnel within these countries are linked into global social work networks. Much activity along these lines has occurred in the past, but much more remains to be done, and it is to be hoped that the IASSW and IFSW will prove increasingly able to rise to the challenge.

(For a further discussion of the global organization of social work, see Healy & Link, 2012, Section V.)

INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL WORK

Accepting that social work is an international unified profession with a common core, let us turn to a consideration of international social work. In the above

discussion of social work, we have implied that social work possesses all of the elements of a global profession, despite its inherent diversity. This is argued by Midgley (1995b, p. 1494), by D. Elliott (1997) after considering social work practice in 17 countries, by Healy (2001) after considering social work education around the world, and by Kendall (2000) after considering the organization of social work as an international profession. (See also Hugman, 2010; Midgley, 2001.) In this text, the focus in defining international social work is not on social work as a global profession but rather on the roles of the profession in the international field.

The Definition of International Social Work

In her text on international social work, Healy (2001, p. 7) defined *international social work* as follows:

International social work is defined as international professional practice and the capacity for international action by the social work profession and its members. International action has four dimensions: internationally related domestic practice and advocacy, professional exchange, international practice, and international policy development and advocacy.

Let us consider this definition. Healy commences by stating that international social work is social work practiced internationally, as distinct from locally and nationally. The assumption is that there are situations that are global in nature, thus requiring a global approach. In our understanding of international social work, however, we shall include practice pertaining to global concerns but taking place at national and local levels within countries. In the light of these global needs, Healy asserts that social work has the capacity to take international action—an assertion that we also set out to affirm in this text. Healy then lists four dimensions of international action, each of which is important.

The first dimension reflects an appreciation that, in an era of globalization, much if not all domestic practice requires an international perspective. We accept the importance of this dimension. Healy's second dimension, professional exchange, suggests that an international profession requires an international structure that encourages its members around the world to engage in mutual exchange at various levels and facilitates this process. Without this, a profession internationally is no more than a collection of national structures and outlooks. In our view of this professional exchange aspect of international social work, part of its importance is the extent to which social work in the developed industrial world can learn from innovations in the developing world. (See Chapter 15.) The third dimension,

international practice, is the key focus of this text. It implies a need and a capacity for social work to engage in a range of actions at the international level, reflecting the same values, goals, and practice methods that apply at other levels. Finally, Healy includes the policy dimension, or the need for social work to advocate for the development and effective implementation of policies protecting the rights and enhancing the well-being of all peoples of the world. Some writers have focused exclusively on this policy dimension (e.g., Deacon, 1997; Yeates & Holden, 2009). (On social work's role in international development, see NASW, 2005; Payne & Askeland, 2008.)

One aspect of international social work that we find missing from Healy's definition is the goal of the profession to see itself established around the world. The current reality is that social work is virtually nonexistent in all of the poorest countries of the world (the UN's least developed countries, or LDCs, of which there are some 49) and is in an embryonic stage in many other developing countries. It is not professional ambition that leads to our desire to see a strong social work profession in all countries. Rather, it is our vision of the roles that social work can play, and should be playing, in the least or lesser developed countries, and our concern as we discuss international social work is that it does not represent a form of neoimperialism, with the Western branches of the profession spearheading its emergence as a truly international profession.

Drawing on Healy's and other definitions, and our own understanding of international social work, Hugman's (2010, p. 631) definition addresses this concern to some degree: "International social work is concerned with the broader processes and realities of globalization (in its various understandings) as they affect human well-being and how social work interfaces with 'glocal' realities to enhance the quality of life." Hugman (pp. 632–633) goes on to identify five elements in the concept of international social work: (1) practice in a country outside its own; (2) working with service users who have crossed borders; (3) working with international organizations; (4) exchanges or collaboration between countries; and (5) the impact of the global market economy on people's well-being.

While we appreciate these definitions of international social work, we shall define it a little differently to be in keeping with the purpose of this text:

International social work is the promotion of social work education and practice globally and locally, with the purpose of building a truly integrated international profession that reflects social work's capacity to respond appropriately and effectively, in education and practice terms, to the various global challenges that are having a significant impact on the well-being of large sections of the world's population. This global and local promotion of social work education

and practice is based on an integrated-perspectives approach that synthesizes global, human rights, ecological, and social development perspectives of international situations and responses to them.

There are several important aspects of this definition. The definition commences with the importance of action: International social work consists essentially of active promotion by the profession at various levels of the profession's involvement in global challenges. The link between education and practice is important in all professions, and international social work requires a much stronger focus within social work education curricula than it has received to date (Healy, 2001, Chap. 11) if its scope is to expand. The emphasis on an integrated profession reflects the ever-present danger of the West imposing on other countries its basic understanding of the nature and roles of social work. We have already seen significant departures from Western social work traditions in Latin America (Queiro-Tajalli, 1997) and in Africa and Asia (Kendall, 2000; Mayadas et al., 1997), as well as concerns about professional development trends in the United States (Specht, 1990), the United Kingdom (R. Harris, 1990), and elsewhere. It is important to accept the necessary diversity across the profession within an integrated overall acceptance of the essential nature of social work. The key emphasis of the definition is that social work should engage in responses to the significant global challenges that are consistent with the essential nature of social work and in responses that are effective within the context of these global challenges. These responses are informed by the integrated-perspectives approach outlined in Chapter 2. Finally, the social work focus in participating in the international response to global challenges is driven by a concern for individual and collective well-being, reflecting the core values and goals of the profession as well as our integrated-perspectives approach.

Some important features of the definition are as follows:

- Action to address social work education and practice at global and local levels
- Links between education and international practice
- Integration of diverse practices rather than domination by one country or culture
- An integrated-perspectives approach to practice—that is, a synthesis of global, human rights, ecological, and social development perspectives
- Individual and collective well-being

In using the term *international social work*, there is always a danger that some will interpret it as applying only to one specific level of intervention, namely, the

international. However, as is commonly stressed, the focus in any context needs to be on all levels, from the local or domestic to the global or international. Whether the concern is with conflict, poverty, displacement, ecological degradation, or development in any of its dimensions (economic, political, social, cultural, or legal), the local, regional, national, and international levels will be significant, and our exploration of international social work practice will reflect this same range of levels.

The focus of this text is on international social work responding to global challenges and the social realities within the developing world, while appreciating that international social work has also many applications within the so-called developed world. Indeed, the use of the terms *developed country* and *developing country*, while widespread in the literature, is in fact ambiguous. It is far better to think in terms of degrees of development along a pathway that possesses no preordained destination, or perhaps, more precisely, we should think in terms of a greater range of categories of countries defined in terms of their level and type of development (see World Bank, 1997, p. 265).

(See also Healy, 2008; for a comprehensive review of the literature on the definition of international social work, see Healy, 2012.)

The Scope of International Social Work in Terms of Its Response to Global Concerns

In this text, there is frequent reference to different fields of international concern and activity, reflecting an international tendency to use this language. For example, we have the fields of poverty and its alleviation, development, natural disasters and responding to them, health concerns, and so on. Much of the organization within the international community and the literature is along these lines. However, social work and the various helping professions, in addition to focusing on fields as defined, frequently also focus on specific populations, either within fields, cutting across fields, or seeing the fields as factors affecting the specific population. Examples include women in poverty, street children, indigenous minorities, sufferers of HIV/AIDS, and so on. Whatever the specific focus of any agency or body of literature, it is important to appreciate that the various fields are highly interactive and need to be appreciated as such. For example, the fields of poverty, conflict, and ecological degradation are often closely related in cause-and-effect terms—that is, both poverty and conflict can contribute to ecological degradation, while poverty and ecological degradation can contribute to conflict, and so on. In addition, poverty is closely linked to various aspects of development and to concerns such as food security and migration. Hence, appreciating the context in which any specific population lives requires understanding the ways in

which several fields interact as they impinge on the specific population in question. Finally, in responding to specific fields or populations, there is the question of the level of the response. Responses can usually be found at at least three levels: international, national, and local; however, the fourth level of *regions* could also be included. For example, in relation to some particular aspect of development, or some particular situation of conflict, responses may come from the UN (international), the European Union or African Union (regional), various governments (national), and local organizations and movements (local).

Our understanding of international social work is that its potential relevance covers virtually all of the fields of activity that concern the international community, a wide range of specific populations within each field (or cutting across fields), and all levels at which intervention is necessary and possible. In this text, we have selected a few fields and a few specific populations on which to focus, not only because of their importance, which is undeniable, but as examples, and have confined our discussion largely to the local level, without negating the importance of the other levels both per se and as areas of activity for social workers. We focus on the local level partly because of its neglect by social work in many developing country contexts, and partly because it represents in most cases the field work on which social work at the other levels, and on which policy and advocacy work and so on, should be based. Local work represents both our right to speak out and engage in policy and planning activities, and the source of the knowledge and experience on which, to a large degree, we base our work at the other levels. (For a discussion on international social work in the US context, see Estes 2008, 2010; on international social work generally, see also Haug, 2005; Healy & Link, 2012; Lavelette, Ferguson, Littlechild, Lyons, & Parada, 2007; Lyons, 1999; Lyons et al., 2006; Lyons et al., 2012; Mohan, 2008.)

CONCLUSION

Social work has emerged as a very broad profession, both within individual countries and in a global comparative sense. While its Western and colonial origins have left their imprint on the profession, we can still see social work evolving in a range of very different contexts with highly varied emphases. In this chapter, however, our focus is limited to the international scene, and in two particular ways. First, there is the question of social work's potential to contribute to the alleviation of the major social problems and areas of need that preoccupy large sections of the international community. Second, and closely related to the first, is the potential of social work to contribute to confronting these global needs as they are experienced in the least developed countries and areas of the world. We

agree with many other commentators that social work does have the potential to contribute much in these interrelated areas, and we shall go on in this text to suggest how that goal might be achieved, both generally and in relation to specific fields of work.

SUMMARY

- The understanding of social work, and its application of knowledge and skills, varies greatly across the globe. Despite such variation, the IFSW social work definition is accepted by many countries and can be adopted by many other countries. However, what is commonly accepted by all is its value base and commitment to social change.
- Formal social work education originated, and developed, as a full-fledged profession in the West. Later it spread to many countries, including former colonies. By and large, this Western social work education pattern prevails in most parts of the world, though each country has added its own unique features to its education and practice model. There is a need to indigenize social work education in accordance with the varied country contexts.
- Social work education, practice, and professional organizations vary significantly in terms of the balance between the three areas of practice, namely, supporting the welfare state, providing casework services, and engaging in social development. Several complex factors influence the balance between these practice areas, which is often a source of criticism of the profession that raises several critical issues. A comprehensive and integrated response is needed at both local and global levels.
- International social work organizations have a significant responsibility and can play crucial roles in further developing social work as a global profession.
- International social work needs to be understood in terms of education and practice and of interdependence between the two, resulting in diversity that is nonetheless held together by the four integrated perspectives geared essentially to the promotion of individual and collective well-being.

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

- Compare and contrast the IFSW's and Barker's (1999) social work definitions.
- Summarize the main points you have noted while studying the origins of social work in the West, expansion of the profession into former colonies, and indigenization of social work.
- Does the suggested division of social work into three main areas make sense according to your experience?

- Why do you think there is an imbalance in the practice of the three areas in different national contexts, and what kind of issues does it raise for the profession?
- As an exercise, visit the websites of international social work organizations; study their aims, objectives, and current activities; and discuss these with peers.
- Compare and contrast the two definitions of international social work, one by Healy (2001) and another by the authors of this text.
- Discuss recent trends and key issues in international social work practice.

POSSIBLE AREAS FOR RESEARCH PROJECTS

- Carry out an analysis of varied conceptions of international social work and of how professional social workers and other relevant professionals perceive international social work.
- Examine the impact of Western social work models and the extent of indigenization of social work in selected developing countries.
- Study the factors that enhance and hamper indigenization of social work education and practice within a particular place.
- Examine the factors that have influenced the choice of areas of practice locally and explore strategies for developing a good balance in practice.
- Develop case studies on selected professional social work organizations.

FURTHER READING

Healy, L. (2008). *International social work: Professional action in an interdependent world* (2nd ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.

Hugman, R. (2010). *Understanding international social work: A critical analysis.* Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lyons, K., Hokenstadt, T., Pawar, M., Huegler, N., & Hall, N. (Eds.). (2012). *The Sage handbook of international social work.* London: Sage.