

Educating for the Global Agenda: Internationally relevant conceptual frameworks and knowledge for social work education

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Abstract

In this article, we discuss the capacity of social work educational programs to prepare graduates to contribute to the human, social and environmental challenges outlined in the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development. The educational sector must play a lead role through training and research. Using examples from Kenya and the United States, we argue more curriculum emphasis on such areas as social and economic development, human rights, and social integration is required. The article concludes with recommendations for strengthening curriculum and dialogue on the globally relevant concepts identified in the Global Agenda.

Keywords

Global Agenda, globally relevant concepts, human rights, Kenya, MDGs, social integration, social work curriculum, USA

Introduction

On 26 March 2012, the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development was formally presented to officials of the United Nations and launched to members of the profession of social work. This document lays out an ambitious agenda for social work to contribute to the major human, social and environmental challenges facing the world. In this article, we will discuss the capacity of social work educational programs to prepare graduates to contribute to the agenda, based on prior experience with major United Nations initiatives. If the Global Agenda is to be successful, the educational sector must play a lead role through training and research. We argue that

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this will require more curriculum emphasis on such areas as social and economic development, human rights, and social integration. Examples are drawn from the United States and Kenya, although we hope that our discussion will be relevant to most readers of the journal. We conclude with recommendations for strengthening curriculum and dialogue on the globally relevant concepts identified in the Global Agenda.

Background on the Global Agenda

The Global Agenda was developed jointly by the three main international bodies representing social work and social development: the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), and the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW). Over several years of deliberation, the agenda was refined through consultations with members around the world; a draft was shared at the International Conference held in Hong Kong in 2010, and the final document completed in early 2012. The intent of the Agenda is to raise social work's presence in global policy-making and its contributions on the ground in achieving results. It makes wide-ranging commitments to efforts in four key areas: 'promoting social and economic equalities; promoting the dignity and worth of peoples; working toward environmental sustainability; and strengthening the recognition of the importance of human relationships' (IASW, IFSW, ICSW, 2012; Jones and Truell, 2012). The time frame is short – 2012–2016 – and the commitments are not stated in quantitatively measurable targets. There is, however, considerable specificity of the arenas for emphasis, providing a 'platform' for examining the adequacy of social work curriculum to meet the challenges laid out. To demonstrate the gaps between current realities and the global agenda, we will discuss several examples, drawn from Kenya and the United States. We have selected work on the Millennium Development Goals and the post-2015 agenda, human rights, and social integration as our examples. These appear as major commitments in the Global Agenda under 'promoting social and economic equalities, promoting the dignity and worth of persons', and 'strengthening the recognition of the importance of human relationships', respectively. Although the article does not address the theme of environmental sustainability with specific examples, we will comment on its growing importance to the development agenda. There is every indication that environment and sustainable development will be emphasized in the post-2015 agenda (IFSW, 2013; UN, 2013).

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and social work education

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are a set of eight goals and specific targets adopted by the United Nations in 2000 as part of the much more expansive Millennium Declaration; they have been used as a blueprint for global development and improved human well-being, as widely agreed by member states and development institutions. The limitations of the MDGs have been criticized in numerous circles. They were labeled half-hearted and inadequate by Amnesty International (2009), criticized by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for providing a 'technocratic' approach to development and failing to align more explicitly with economic and social rights (UN, 2008), and attacked by Correll as 'sad and minimalist' (2008: 453). The goals capture only a small part of the ground-breaking commitments of the 1995 Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development (Correll, 2008). Nonetheless, achievement of the goals by the target date of 2015 would improve the lives of many living in poverty throughout the world. Even critics note that the adoption of measurable targets has encouraged more accountability for

national and global progress. The goals are also relevant for social work. As Hugman (2010) notes, 'they [the MDGs] provided a basis for considering important issues for international social work' and call on social workers to 'utilize a full range of roles and tasks' in response (pp. 70–71). Yet as we near the end of the MDG cycle, many social workers in both developed and developing nations remain poorly informed of the details of the MDGs, their promise and applicability to the profession.¹

Kenya provides a useful case example and one that is mirrored throughout East Africa. In spite of country specific targets, many people in East Africa do not know what MDGs are all about. There are no systems in place that sensitize people on MDGs and their role in the society. Institutions of higher learning in Kenya have not put emphasis on MDGs as a benchmark for global development and MDGs are excluded from curriculum for many courses at university level (Wamala et al., 2012a). The findings of a recent study on the role of social work in the realization of the MDGs revealed limited knowledge of the MDGs among social workers in Kenya. Only 10.9 percent of the social workers interviewed indicated that they knew the MDGs 'in detail'; 56.4 percent were aware of the MDGs, and the remainder were either only slightly aware or had never heard of the MDGs (Wairire et al., 2013). Among Kenyan social work students, the findings were similar. A little over 30 percent were either only 'slightly aware' or unaware of the MDGs, 53 percent said they were 'aware' and only 14.4 percent knew the MDGs in detail (Wairire et al., 2013). Thus, the majority of Kenyan social workers and social work students fall short of the level of knowledge needed to make a major impact in meeting the MDG targets.

Yet, a critical analysis of the MDGs reveals that social work can make tangible contributions to facilitate their implementation. Analysis of the MDG experience may also suggest a path for the post-MDG agenda.

MDG Goal 1 is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger with a special focus on reducing by half the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015. Factors including rapid population increase, unemployment, ethnic tensions and tribalism, climate change and HIV/AIDS make it very unlikely that Kenya will achieve this goal. Throughout much of the world, the global fiscal crisis reversed progress on fighting poverty. Professional social workers could be more active by giving people hope of overcoming their unfavorable circumstances and by engaging in poverty reduction initiatives. This may be done at the policy level and the grassroots level as well.

Goals 3, 4, 5, and 6 aim to improve health outcomes and gender equality. Specifically, the goals are to promote gender equality and empowerment of women, to reduce both child mortality and maternal mortality, and to combat HIV/AIDS and malaria. Each of these goals is hindered by traditional practices and beliefs, creating important roles for social workers.

Empowering women is an effective way to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable. Enrolment of Kenyan girls in schools has not improved significantly particularly in the rural areas and those who enroll do not complete due to other factors, including expensive sanitary wear that makes them drop out of school. Of the 30 million children not in school in Africa, most are girls (*African Renewal*, 2012). Religious and socio-cultural practices and beliefs perpetuate biases and abuses against women, making realization of MDG 3 challenging. Social workers can promote awareness of the need to uphold the dignity of women and can play significant roles in social mobilization, sensitization, lobbying and advocacy for gender mainstreaming, building coalitions and mobilizing support for new policies, law reform, and implementation. These roles fit with social work values and traditional commitments.

Kenya has made progress in reducing the mortality rate of children under 5 (Goal 4), reducing the rate from 100 per 1000 live births in 1990 to 72 in 2008 (Kenya MDG Status Report: Government of the Republic of Kenya, 2010). However, the target is to reduce the rate by two-thirds by 2015, requiring reaching a level of 34 in the next three years. Even less progress has been made in

reducing maternal mortality and morbidity (Goal 5). With a maternal mortality ratio of 530, a Kenyan woman has a one in 38 chance of dying as a result of pregnancy related causes (UNICEF, 2012). Child and maternal mortality are partially the result of poor access to quality health facilities, but poverty and socio-cultural factors are also important, creating obvious roles for social work intervention. These include addressing harmful socio-cultural practices by strengthening and supporting behavior change and encouraging male involvement in seeking health care for young children and for their wives in childbirth, and encouraging improved health and hygienic practices at the community level. Advocacy for resource mobilization and improved policies are areas where social workers can use their knowledge of community conditions to promote change.

More has been written in the social work literature about engagement with HIV/AIDS work in diverse countries. Kenya has made marked progress, with rates of new infection dropping significantly. Sustaining this progress and increasing resources for treatment of those infected is key. The major social work roles in this are informative, preventive and rehabilitative, for patients, relatives, and the larger community.

The implementation of Goal 2, to achieve universal primary education, provides lessons for the post-2015 agenda. In 2002, the Kenyan government introduced free primary education throughout the country. This led to a notable increase in student enrollment. However, serious challenges remain. Resources to build and equip extra infrastructure were not adequate. This, coupled with inadequate number of teachers to cater for the increased student populations, is still an obstacle to realization of access to education. It is sad to note that some pupils are still sitting under trees to learn science when such courses should be taught in standard scientific laboratories. Cultural practices and beliefs, including gender bias, also continue to undermine this MDG. In this context, professional social workers can play important roles by showing respect and appreciation for communities, while encouraging them to adopt new practices such as sending their daughters to school. Throughout much of the developing world, significant progress has been made 'on paper' in achieving Goal 2. The result, however, has often been overcrowded schools with large classes, lack of learning materials, and poorly trained teachers. Helen Clark of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) indicated that the quality of teaching is so inconsistent that 'some of those children are not benefitting from school' (IFSW, 2013). An obvious item for the post-2015 agenda is to move beyond quantitative targets toward improved school quality to ensure that learning occurs.

Another critique of the MDGs is that they focus on developing countries, even though goals on gender equality could be universally relevant and poverty reduction and infant mortality remain challenges in the United States. Goal 8 is the exception, as it calls for developing a global partnership for development, including fair systems for global trade, debt and aid, and facilitation of access to essential drugs and other new technologies. It grew out of the statement in the Millennium Declaration that identified a 'collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level' (UN, 2000). This responsibility belongs to all, but the heaviest responsibilities are on the richer countries. Given the widespread recognition of the failures of MDG Goal 8 to attract attention from policy-makers, we feel comfortable in asserting that few social work educators in the United States are familiar enough with Goal 8 to address it in the curriculum (UN, 2013); the result is that graduating social workers are ill prepared to join the global movement for more equitable policies and structures. Overall, movement on Goal 8 has been weak (Correll, 2012); the Global Agenda calls for continued work toward a 'people-focused global economy' (p. 3).

Whereas there are clear-cut roles for social work and Millennium Development Goals in Kenya, and to some extent in the United States, there is nothing to show that the existing social work curriculum adequately prepares social work students to address those goals upon

the completion of training. The Agenda calls on social work education to prepare graduates to 'facilitate sustainable social development outcomes'. The US standards for social work curriculum do not address sustainability and do not mention a developmental approach (CSWE, 2008). There is no official encouragement for educators in the US to familiarize themselves with the MDG process and the shaping of the post-2015 agenda or to educate students on these critical global issues. Social work training curriculum in many training institutions in Kenya is not revised on a regular basis and where this has been done, it is not on areas related directly to the MDGs. Some of the students who undertake social work studies at certificate and diploma levels do not necessarily pursue social work training at degree level. This indicates a serious gap in terms of equipping social work manpower with requisite skills for the realization of MDGs in the country and by extension the East African region. There is therefore, a dire need for social work curriculum to be reviewed regularly in order to produce social work manpower that not only understands the changing areas of social work concern as necessitated by global trends but also prepares graduates to handle such issues adequately.

More training in interdisciplinary work is equally important as the emerging reality of interdependency of social work on other professions and disciplines for holistic handling of MDGs is recognized. The Global Agenda frequently mentions working with the United Nations system, international organizations and others, but does not specifically address the need for skill in working across disciplines.

Human rights

Under the broad goal of ensuring dignity and worth of the person, the Global Agenda commits to work on universal implementation of human rights instruments. Social work has a long history of involvement in human rights (Healy, 2008) and an enduring philosophical and ethical commitment to human rights principles that is now reflected in all major global social work documents (Ife, 2007; Staub-Bernasconi, 2012; Wronka, 2008). Over the past decade, social work education has made strides to ensure that students are familiar with human rights frameworks. Available literature authored by social work scholars has increased substantially, specialized educational tracks have been initiated, such as the Berlin Master of Social Work in Social Work as a Human Rights Profession, and human rights is included in the most recent curriculum policy statement of the US Council on Social Work Education, the body that accredits social work programs in the United States. Competency #5, one of ten to be achieved by all baccalaureate and masters social work students, states that graduates must be able to 'Advance human rights and social and economic justice' (CSWE, 2008). More specifically, they must be knowledgeable about strategies to promote human rights and must 'understand the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination; advocate for human rights and social and economic justice; and engage in practices that advance social and economic justice'.

Developing curriculum to address human rights is still a work in progress and many social work educators are unsure of how to proceed. The US author's experience in teaching MSW students is that many have never read the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and when they do, they are surprised to see reference to social services as a human right. As they delve deeper into other treaties, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), they discover language to frame their work with women and children and in some cases, find new and challenging thoughts about the way to approach issues such as adoption and domestic violence. They wrestle with the implications of Article 5 in CEDAW on the clash of traditional cultural beliefs and practices and gender equality. Some begin to see how they can apply principles from these treaties, even though CEDAW and CRC have not been ratified in the US.

For teaching to be effective and competence achieved, curriculum needs to tie human rights to issues in students' own country and practice. US educators must first challenge widely held perceptions that the US is a leader in human rights. Students need to examine the US as a reluctant participant in the international human rights regime, through its failure to ratify essential treaties in the areas of economic and social rights that are of most interest to social work. Perhaps more importantly, curriculum should address current human rights issues in the US, such as treatment of women in the welfare system, children in the judicial and correctional systems, continuing issues with LGBT and minority group rights, racial profiling, prison conditions, child labor in agriculture, racial bias in the foster care system, and new threats to protection of immigrant women from violence (Hertel and Libal, 2011; Human Rights Watch, 2012).

Human rights have not been fully recognized or realized in Kenya from the colonial era to the present. Prior to the 1990s, human rights were openly violated by the colonial and post-independence administrations and the political establishment. Individuals were not expected to question or point an accusing finger at the political establishment which was largely responsible for governance and general administration of the country. The state silenced any dissenting voices through well established draconian laws that ensured severe punishment including detention without trial for dissenting voices. This had negative effects on academic freedom in institutions of higher learning since academic programs were expected to toe the line of government thinking and not to create a community of thinkers and researchers capable of questioning matters that affect the general populace such as their basic fundamental freedoms and governance. Emerging scholars critical of existing injustices by the state were detained or fled the country while those who remained behind lacked academic freedom and the will to develop and promote academic programs that directly championed human rights. The voice of social work was equally affected in the process. In addition, some rights, such as rights for gay and lesbian populations, are seen as culturally dissonant by many and openly rejected.

A critical analysis of this scenario suggests that university graduates, trained for the skilled market of a developing nation emerging from the yoke of colonialism may not have had adequate exposure to human rights and therefore are not prepared to apply the same in their careers. Yet, necessity creates a need and persistent denial of that need paves way for an inner struggle to get it no matter the consequences. This contributed to the emergence of individuals from the academy, young university students and members of the clergy who gradually but firmly engaged in loud and silent protests against the violation of human rights by the political establishment. The international community also played a significant role by providing tangible support to human rights crusaders with resounding success as the state started changing its stance. Key outcomes of this include the repeal of the constitution in 1990 to allow multiparty politics and the formation of the Kenya Human Rights Commission to champion human rights in the country. More recently, the enactment of a new constitution (Government of the Republic of Kenya, 2010) is a clear outcome of the struggle for human rights across the socio-political realms of the Kenyan society. This constitution has established clear provisions for human rights and some machinery for the enhancement of human rights in Kenya.

Whereas human rights in the Kenyan situation has for long been conceptualized from the political point of view, social work looks at it as a phenomenon that must be in operation within all spheres under which an individual operates. This includes the state, the family, communities or even group settings. Existing social work curriculum at the moment does not have academic units that overtly and clearly demonstrate sound grasp of human rights and a passion to enhance the same in practice. Most of the units still focus on the predominant theme of developmental social work perceived to be more crucial for different communities in a Third World nation like Kenya.

There is serious need to inculcate an aspect of human rights in virtually every course unit within the social work program at university level.

A major challenge though revolves around the social cultural setting within which social work is practiced in Kenya. Some human rights issues are still hard to propagate, for example, gay rights. There is a very strong resistance to this with the argument that homosexuality, lesbianism and related practices are not part of African culture and that those who engage in it have done so as a result of negative Western influence. The issue is very sensitive such that many academics, students and social work practitioners would rather keep off the theme than antagonize themselves with an issue that conflicts with established moral fabric. This poses yet another challenge with regard to ethical dilemmas for social work training and practice in Kenya and the extent to which the social worker can engage and spearhead issues that are not acceptable in the social cultural setting that he or she operates in. It further reflects that country specific strategies that consider and incorporate people's culture may need to be conceptualized in order for the Global Agenda for social work and social development which entails human rights in all its fullness to be a reality.

At a minimum, the Global Agenda suggests that social workers should be familiar with human rights language and with the avenues available through the international human rights machinery for advancing rights and justice. Many social work activities can be reframed as human rights practice, a form of mainstreaming and adopting globally relevant concepts suggested in this article.

Social integration

The Global Agenda identifies work on social integration and cohesion as important areas for social work contribution. This is an area that the profession has largely neglected, although social integration is one of the three pillars of the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action on Social Development (UN, 1995). In some countries, violence and conflict dramatically demonstrate the need for increased social integration, while in others, social exclusion is more subtle but nonetheless present.

Between 1991 and 2007/2008, Kenya experienced severe ethnic violence fuelled by politicians in the quest for power regardless of the dignity and sanctity of lives in the regions they represented. Ethnicity and tribalism are realities in Kenya which often make Kenyans elect their leaders on tribal platforms thus undermining issue based politics. The post-election violence that followed the 2007 general elections left more than 1300 people dead and displaced over 600,000 others in different parts of the country particularly in the Rift Valley, Nyanza, Nairobi and some parts of Central and Coast provinces. It was traumatic for the society, and has led to government action on a plan for National Cohesion and Integration (Government of the Republic of Kenya, 2011).

A major reality that came out during this time is the fact that social workers in a country like Kenya cannot operate in isolation of law enforcement agencies. They themselves must abide by the law in their practice and encourage their clients to do the same. However, if the law enforcement agencies fail to enforce the law or apply it favorably to some and unfavorably to others in the same situation, then social justice is grossly violated, yet social workers are primary agents for the promotion of social justice in society. This, if not carefully handled, marks the beginning of antagonism between social workers and state machineries in their areas of operation.

Much of social work response in the clashes was largely practical help providing victims with safety camps and materials such as blankets, medical kits and cooking utensils. Medical services for the injured and counseling services to the victims experiencing trauma were either facilitated or provided directly by the social workers. They also initiated resettlement programs that mainly focused on peace and reconciliation activities between the warring communities through their

community leaders, elders and others such as clan heads and church leaders. The major challenge here was how to make the inputs by social workers more sustainable since the tribal factor had been exploited by politicians for so long and was deeply rooted in the minds of the local people. Detribalizing the mind was not easy yet it was a stronghold and gateway for political conflicts for the victims of the clashes (Wairire, 2008).

Through the various NGOs that joined hands to rescue the victims of the bloody clashes, social workers actively played social advocacy roles compelling the government to urgently use the means within its disposal and end the clashes. Most importantly, they highlighted the plight of internally displaced persons and pleaded for meaningful response to stop abuse and provide welfare amenities in their camps.

All these roles are noble and relevant for the situation that the victims of the clashes were in. However, some social workers felt they could not directly criticize the government in the regions where the government had a strong political support base, although they knew the government had played a role in causing havoc to the victims of the clashes. On the other hand, those whose tribesmen bore the brunt of the clashes were deeply aggrieved and hence condemned the government more harshly. De-linking oneself from strongly identifying with a particular political party, system or even ideology appear to be very challenging for social workers in the Kenyan context where political affiliations are not so much ideologically based but region centered (Wairire, 2008).

A major challenge experienced by the social work educators (one of the authors personally experienced this in his own class) during the ethnic/election violence and thereafter was heightened animosity between the students from the ethnic groups involved in the clashes. Whereas this was not verbally expressed against each other in class, the sentiments were raised and clearly expressed as we engaged in discussions to help understand how we can prevent such occurrences in future. Many students easily forgot the principles of human rights, the dignity and worth of individuals, the values of individual well-being, integration and inclusion. To them, all these were insignificant when their families, relatives and/or communities had been made to suffer by other communities whom they could easily identify in the same class.²

The foregoing therefore attests to the fact that social work curriculum in place is not sound enough to help the learners and sometimes even the social work educators to identify issues that can easily destroy human relations and dignity of individuals in the society. As such there is a need to include curriculum content that can enable both the learner and the educator to identify and reflect on such issues and empower them with practical skills that can persuade them to prioritize dignity of individuals no matter the situation. Staff exchanges between social work academics from different countries may immensely diffuse tensions in such situations owing to their neutrality. This therefore implies that some aspects of the Global Agenda may be enhanced through academic partnerships between different universities. The Association of Schools of Social Work in Africa and the International Association of Schools of Social Work along with other likeminded organizations may therefore play a significant role in facilitating such partnerships.

In the United States, although recent violence has not reached the level of the Kenyan example, there are numerous societal divides that threaten social integration and require attention in the social work curriculum. Serious tensions remain over the extent to which policies should be inclusive toward gays and lesbians; classroom discussions become strained or even avoided as religious beliefs are sometimes involved. Divisive anti-immigrant sentiment has increased as the economy has worsened. Harsh laws have been adopted in several states that may lead to increased deportations and family separations; if the provisions of these laws that are currently blocked by court decisions are allowed to go into effect, they are likely to make it impossible for social workers to both obey the law and the social work Code of Ethics. An example is the law adopted by the state of Alabama that would require schools to document the immigration status of students – a clear

threat to families that may lead to further isolation and deprivation of education for young children. The same law criminalizes efforts to assist undocumented immigrants. In another example, reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was delayed for more than a year over objections to inclusions of undocumented migrants and gays and lesbians. One version passed in the US House of Representatives would have rolled back protections against domestic violence for immigrant women (Human Rights Watch, 2012). Ultimately, compromise was reached and a new version of the VAWA was passed and signed by the President (Henderson, 2013). Suspicion and hostility toward persons of Hispanic and Middle Eastern descent have increased, due to both anti-immigrant attitudes and worries about possible terrorism. These developments pose threats to social integration in the US and to community harmony. There are 25 million non-citizens in the US and it is estimated that close to 11 million of them are unauthorized. Yet, they are often in mixed families, with some US citizen children. It is imperative for the social work curriculum to educate students in the realities of migration, including its legal, social and psychological aspects, and on principles of social integration. Social workers can be helpful in reducing tensions and promoting inter-community dialogue and healing, as well as the obvious advocacy roles for humane public policies. Lessons can be learned from colleagues in other countries who have dealt with even more challenging consequences of exclusion.

The post-2015 development agenda

As the assessment of MDG progress continues, attention within the United Nations, member governments, and civil society has turned to defining the post-2015 agenda that will replace the MDGs. An agenda building process is well underway and has involved numerous in-person and online consultations. There have been opportunities for academics and civil society to participate in addition to business and governments. The agenda is likely to be based in part on 'a thorough, broad based and inclusive review of the MDGs' to identify areas that need improvement, but it will also address more recently recognized development challenges and draw more heavily from the Millennium Declaration (UNDP, 2012: 1). According to Helen Clark, it will also prioritize the Rio+20 Conference and its outcome document, giving strong emphasis to sustainability and the environment (IFSW, 2013). Work has already begun on newer initiatives, such as the Global Social Protection Floor initiative, a worldwide effort to develop national programs for social security. The ICSW has been extensively involved in this effort to date, and the IASSW team at the United Nations has worked on the global petition drive. The Social Protection initiative was spurred by recognition of the limitations of progress on MDG Goal 1 and the severe impact of the global fiscal crisis in increasing income insecurity and inequality in rich and poor countries alike (UN, 2011). This project will continue post-2015.

The High Level Panel of Eminent Persons, the lead group for the post-2015 process, issued a major report on 31 May 2013 (UN, 2013). The group called for five 'transformational shifts' as the base for future work. These are: 1) ending extreme poverty and ensuring universal human rights; 2) putting sustainability at the core of development; 3) transforming economies for job creation and inclusive growth; 4) emphasizing peace and good governance; and 5) forging 'new global partnership' including governments, civil society, business, academia, and people living in poverty (UN, 2013). The panel's call for a 'single, universal post-2015 agenda' reflected widespread recognition of the shortcomings of the MDGs in engaging the industrialized nations and the failure to address Goal 8 in any meaningful way (Correll, 2012; UN, 2013). The report did indicate that measurable goals will be developed for the new phase of UN work. The preliminary work on post-2015 had already identified sustainability, global inequalities and human rights as cross-cutting issues for the new agenda; all are of central interest to social work and are reflected in the

profession's Global Agenda. There will be opportunities for those with sufficient knowledge and preparation to continue to have an impact on the 2015 process and on the work ahead on the new priorities. Social work, therefore, needs to scale up its efforts in order to be included as a significant player.

In part, social work educators can prepare by looking simultaneously at national initiatives and the global processes. In Kenya, for example, the Kenya Vision 2030, which aims at transforming Kenya into a middle income country, has strong provisions for social protection enshrined within its social pillar and will serve as a blueprint for national development (Government of the Republic of Kenya, 2007, 2011). The social pillar is based on transformation in eight social sector areas, namely: education and training, health, water and sanitation, environment, housing and urbanization, gender, youth, sports and culture, and promoting equity and poverty reduction. This reveals a complementary role with the provisions of Millennium Development Goals. In addition, the social pillar has special provisions for marginalized communities and people with disabilities. These protections are underscored in the Constitution that guarantees all Kenyans Economic, Social and Cultural rights (Government of the Republic of Kenya, 2010) and in Kenya's endorsement of a number of key international instruments and plans of action. All these are clear indicators that the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development has significant relevance in Kenya.

Recommendations for social work education

In the context of social work education, at least in the US and Kenya, a lot more must be done in order for the Global Agenda to be realized. Current global and local standards for the social work curriculum do not require or even recommend coverage of the international instruments specified in the Global Agenda (CSWE, 2008; IASSW/IFSW, 2004). This implies that many social workers in the social welfare sector and social development departments have had little exposure to such instruments and their overall goals. For the Global Agenda to be actualized, existing curricula must be revised to provide students with extensive exposure to changing global realities. This further implies that institutions of higher learning in Kenya must accommodate and be ready to facilitate such changes. Considering that the commitments for action to actualize the Global Agenda have clear time lines, social work academics and practitioners alike must engage in concerted efforts to persuade universities with social work training institutions to hasten the process of curriculum change, perhaps finding shortcuts around the often tedious and time-consuming bureaucratic processes. In the US, scaling up will require revising the competencies identified in the educational standards to increase attention to human rights and add sustainable development and social integration. Increased emphasis on the physical environment is needed to overcome what Coates and Gray (2012) referred to as social work's well-documented 'reluctance to engage in environmental issues and the environmental movement' (p. 232).

The Global Agenda provides a roadmap for developing curricula and teaching international social work, or more appropriately, social work relevant to global realities. In combination with the Global Standards for the Education and Training of the Social Work Profession (IASSW/IFSW, 2004), social work now has valuable guidelines for moving education forward in the 21st century. An advantage of the Agenda is that it is relevant to all countries. For example, the European Union has developed the 'Europe 2020 Strategy' that focuses on 'employment, poverty reduction and social inclusion' and sets a 'European target to reduce the number of people living at risk of poverty and social exclusion by at least 20 million by the year 2020' (Haekkerup, 2012: 2–3). A recently completed International Labor Organization report shows that the risk of social unrest has risen in 40 percent of countries as a result of the fiscal crisis and resulting austerity measures; the increase was highest in European countries, followed by the Middle East (2011). Poverty in the

United States now affects 46 million people, the largest number in 52 years (US Bureau of the Census, 2011). The foci on inequalities and on social cohesion in the Agenda therefore have fairly universal relevance.

Implementing the Global Agenda means social work education must mainstream globally relevant concepts and link them to local realities. As the example of the MDGs showed, although now in year 14, social work education around the world has not responded vigorously to the challenges presented by even these very limited targets. The profession clearly needs a more rapid response to changing conditions in order to make a difference locally and as a global partner. What will make it possible to educate for these commitments between now and 2016?

One simple recommendation is literally to bring the Global Agenda into the classroom and ensure that all students read the document. The themes identified in the Agenda should be central in social work education and work undertaken to flesh them out with related practice skills. The reference list of the Agenda cites a number of the major social policy documents issued by the United Nations and its member agencies over the past decade. Another recommendation is for educators everywhere to familiarize themselves with these documents, especially those in areas close to their teaching and research specialties, and to assign selections for student reading. An advantage is that many UN materials are available in multiple languages and accessible free on the internet. Building on the idea of the US competency approach, educators might work toward defining standards of minimum global literacy for social work to be achieved by all students. The agenda suggests starting points for this exercise.

Social work programs can develop field education sites that link to the priorities in the Agenda: projects in social integration and conflict management; disaster prevention, mitigation and response efforts; work with migrants and refugees; organizing for environmental quality; poverty alleviation projects; anti-trafficking campaigns, and interventions and inter-professional collaborations in the fields of education and health. A component of field education, reinforced in the classroom, should be to enhance students' capacity to bring their 'on-the-ground' experiences to the policy-making process, including giving voice to the needs and priorities of those without access. This is a potential strength for social work input in shaping the global post-2015 agenda. Student and practitioner experiences and insights should also be shared with the IASSW, ICSW and IFSW teams of representatives at the UN, who can also feed back to educators the policy priorities under debate. Although challenging to implement, this exchange can both improve social work education and result in better representation of social work ideas in policy processes.

Social work educators are also scholars and increased research and conceptual work on the major themes of the agenda will further both education and policy input. Work on these globally relevant concepts can spur cross-national dialogue to work jointly on issues and exchange experience. As noted in an earlier article, themes such as social development, human rights, social protection and social integration can 'serve as internationally relevant and useful conceptual channels for mutual work on problems that concern all of us' (Asamoah et al., 1997: 399).

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Notes

1. In several places, the authors state that many social workers, including educators in both the US and Kenya, lack sufficient knowledge about the MDGs. We base these assertions on previous literature discussing minimal coverage of global issues in US education; the US curriculum standards that fail to

require any global content with the exception of human rights (CSWE, 2008); lack of standards for global aspects of education in the Global Standards for Education and Training of the Social Work Profession (IASSW/IFSW, 2004); recent multi-disciplinary studies conducted among faculty and students in Kenya and Uganda (Wamala et al., 2012a, 2012b); a recent publication of survey research on MDG realization and social work in Kenya (Wairire et al., 2013) and our own experience teaching in US and Kenyan universities.

2. The author notes that on a personal search about the realities dawning on me in my own class, I found myself weak and almost helpless because I felt with those who were mourning the loss of their loved ones yet other students blamed the victims for being beneficiaries of land that had been favorably given to them by the regime of the first president, Jomo Kenyatta and who forgot the original inhabitants of the areas that the displaced had been driven away from. I felt sad I did not have the adequate skills to reconcile the thoughts of our own students to transcend the mental brainwash that politicians had succeeded in instilling in the minds of young Kenyans.

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