



Social Work in developing countries, as distinct from social services, is shrouded in controversy, misunderstanding and confusion in relation to its meaning, character and the role it plays in the society.

Today's social workers, who are specifically trained to provide social work services to individuals, groups of persons and communities, can act as role models, wherever they are employed, as they have the special training and experience to assist those who have difficulties in adjusting to their social environments because of poverty, illness, personal and family conflicts, and be instrumental in the formulation of welfare policies and pre-

and caught up with the socio-economic trends of the modern world. Social work training now adopts an integrated approach, combining the main three methods of casework, group work and community organisation and development, in the training programs of students to finally produce generalist social workers who are capable of working in any setting, such as public assistance, child and family welfare services, public health and medical services, schools, prisons, probation services and rural development, to name a few. With the additional knowledge of sociology, psychology and psychiatry now imparted, the new social workers become well-rounded workers to fit into any setting of social welfare with a high

established Association of professional social workers, to educate the masses by holding meetings and discussion groups throughout the country, making announcements through the media (print, radio and TV) and explaining the role of social workers in alleviating numerous socially handicapped persons such as those subject to domestic violence, crime and delinquency, child abuse, neglected or children with problems, unplanned parenthood, drugs and alcohol abuse and family break-ups, and arrange formal discussions with the Heads of the Social Welfare Ministries and Departments to press their claims for their recognition as well as the association they represent, and to create and provide employment to trained



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Social Work in developing countries including Sri Lanka

ventive assistance programs of the government.

There is, however, confusion in the community now over social services and social work as it has become rather difficult for the community to draw a line between the two. This requires attention of the Professional Association of Social Workers in those countries. If there are not such associations already functioning, it is vital to form associations to carry out the functions they are legitimately expected to perform.

Social services is the provision of services to the needy or the deprived persons to meet the basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter and other services geared towards this end by providing financial and/or material aid, whereas social work focuses on the strengths and weaknesses of an individual in distress and crying for assistance, and provide him/her support to sort out the problems and get back to normalcy in order to realize and work on his/her potentials and become a self-reliant, self-confident and productive person in the community.

From times immemorial, social services were first provided by humanitarians, religious groups and voluntary welfare agencies to help the needy, the aged, the sick, but with the advent of the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century, there arose social dislocation from a more stabilized family and community system based on laissez-faire principles, causing more complex social problems which were accentuated by rapid social and technological changes over the last few decades. State intervention in social welfare has now become a world phenomenon. Virtually, today every country has a department of social welfare or a ministry to frame policies and social welfare programs.

It was really in the twentieth century when social work emerged as a profession with full-time paid-workers; establishment of Schools of Social Work, later under the wings of universities, to train them; and formation of professional associations of social workers, both nationally and internationally, with periodic communication and collaboration between them to put social work on a sounder and standard footing, and make social work more recognized throughout the world.

Programs of social services have expanded and so are the workers who provide the services - both professional and non-professional - though the former is still in a minority in most departments and institutions providing human services such as public assistance, child and family welfare services, public health and medical services, prisons, probation services, education and rural development, to cite a few. Trained social workers can, in fact, work in supervisory and managerial or administrative positions in these institutions to uplift the standard of work provided by non-social workers and provide general guidance to the administrators.

The profession of social work has moved

degree of confidence, and be able to make appropriate referrals to resources in the community and explain how to access them. They could also be gainfully employed to counsel victims of disasters caused by floods and landslides, tsunamis and fires etc.

Opportunities for social workers to specialize in such areas as mental illnesses or psychiatry, school work, teachers of social work, and research, should be made available after they earn their basic degrees in social work.

Though the growth of Schools of Social Work and passing out of trained social workers are noteworthy, the term "social worker" does not uniformly connote professional status in various countries. This is the situation Sri Lanka is facing today.

The oft-repeated statement that social work is still not accepted as a profession in some developing countries is not far from the truth. Social work is still in its infancy in most of these countries, and Sri Lanka is no exception. Social work as a field of study and practice is not well understood by the community, the administrators of Departments of Social Welfare or the politicians who invariably head the Ministries.

In almost all developed countries, the designation of social worker can be used only by those who have obtained a basic degree in social work and become a member of the professional association of social workers of the country or they are licensed to work as a social worker. Those who do not possess either of them are generally known as community welfare workers or by similar designations pertaining to the work they are performing.

To break this impasse, it is up to the social workers to take these issues up, through a formally

social workers with appropriate salary structures. It should indeed be a consensus agenda to make it a success.

Recognition of social work as a profession will not come as a matter of course, and there is a pressing need to follow a rigorous and consistent follow-up action to impress the community, heads of Ministries of Social Welfare and Departments that trained social workers go through a 3-year basic degree course in theory and practice of social work to acquire a spe-

cialized knowledge in handling delicate human problems and finding a solution to them in consultation with the clients, and bring a high degree of skill to his work in order to modify the social conditions of his clients and the community, and participate in the formulation and implementation of social welfare policies and programs of assistance proposed by the government.



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