The Role of
Social Work
in Poverty Reduction and the Realisation of
Millennium Development Goals
in Uganda

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

APPEAR	Austrian Partnership Programme in Higher Education and Research for Development
ASSWA	Association of Schools of Social Work in Africa
AU	African Union
B.SWSA	Bachelor of Social Work and Social Administration
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CDFU	Communication for Development Foundation Uganda
CEDAW	Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DSW	Doctorate in Social Work
EAC	East African Community
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FIDA	Federation of Women Lawyers
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GoU	Government of Uganda
HDI	Human Development Index
HEI	Higher Education Institution

HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
IASSW	International Association of Schools of Social Work
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
IFSW	International Federation of Social Workers
IGAs	Income-Generating Activities
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
KI	Key Informant
KIDDP	Karamoja Integrated Disarmament and Development Programme
LC	Local Council
MDAs	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MoGLSD	Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development
MP	Member of Parliament
MSW	Master of Social Work
NAADS	National Agricultural Advisory Services
NASWU	National Association of Social Workers in Uganda
NDP	National Development Plan
NEMA	National Environmental Management Authority
NFA	National Forestry Authority
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NHP	National Health Policy

NPA	National Planning Authority
NUMAT	Northern Uganda Malaria, AIDS and Tuberculosis Programme
NUSAF	Northern Uganda Social Action Fund
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
PEAP	Poverty Eradication Action Plan
PMA	Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture
PMTCT	Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission
PRDP	Peace, Recovery and Development Programme
PROSOWO	Promotion of Professional Social Work towards Social Development and Poverty Reduction in East Africa
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
SACCOS	Savings and Credit Cooperative Society
SAGE	Social Assistance Grant for Empowerment
SDIP	Social Development Sector Investment Plan
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
SWSA	Social Work and Social Administration
UBOS	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
UCU	Uganda Christian University
UN	United Nations
NCHE	National Council for Higher Education
UNCST	Uganda National Council for Science and Technology
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHS	Uganda National Household Survey
UPE	Universal Primary Education

USE	Universal Secondary Education
UWESO	Uganda Women's Effort to Save Orphans
VHT	Village Health Team

Executive Summary

This publication presents the findings of the study on 'The Role of Social Work in Poverty Reduction and Realisation of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Uganda'. The study was undertaken as part of a three-year project on the 'Promotion of Professional Social Work towards Social Development and Poverty Reduction in East Africa' (PROSOWO), under the auspices of the Austrian Partnership Programme in Higher Education and Research for Development (APPEAR). The specific objectives were to identify key programmes undertaken to reduce poverty so as to achieve social development, and assess the extent to which professional social workers are engaged in such programmes, their specific roles and responsibilities as well as the approaches and methods used. Further, the study aimed to assess the adequacy of the social work curriculum in preparing social workers to address issues of poverty and social development in the context of MDGs. Issues of gender and contextualisation (culturally relevant social work) were also explored. Field research was undertaken in selected districts of Kampala, Wakiso, Iganga, Bugiri, Mbarara, Gulu and Nwoya between September and December 2011. Quantitative and qualitative methods were employed to collect data from social work practitioners, employers, clients, educators, students and policy makers.

Social work, poverty reduction, and Millennium Development Goals

There is increasing recognition of the primary role of social work in promoting social development. This role is very critical in situations of persistent poverty since poverty has a crippling effect on the functioning and well-being of individuals in society. In view of this, social work has a critical role to play in Uganda in contributing to efforts towards poverty eradication and the promotion of social development. From the review of literature, there is no doubt that many plans, programmes and strategies have been put in place to address poverty and realise social development in Uganda. Some progress has been achieved in this regard, with the percentage of people living on less than one dollar a day dropping from 35% in 2000 to 24.5% in 2011 (UBOS, 2011), which translates to 7.5 million Ugandans. And yet from this study, poverty is still ranked the number one problem impacting on the welfare of societal members. The majority (84%) of the social work practitioners mentioned poverty as the key problem presented by their clients; with 44% estimating poverty levels among their clients as "very high".

Other common problems presented to social workers included disease (particularly HIV/AIDS) and domestic violence. Less than a half (45%) of the agencies (employers) and 47% of the social work practitioners estimated their contribution to poverty reduction as high.

The majority of social workers (73%) had a general knowledge of the MDGs but only 27.5% knew them in detail. The highest contribution to the MDGs reported by social work practitioners was in the areas of health (53%), gender equality (51%), and building global partnerships for development (53%). Social worker contributions to the MDG1 were

identified in the combination of reducing both hunger and poverty (66%), while in the health-related MDGs, the highest concentration was reported in HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (54%) and lowest in the reduction of child mortality (12%).

With regard to gender equality and women empowerment, most practitioners (52%) indicated that they were involved in the promotion of equal rights for men and women.

With regard to building global partnerships for development, the dominant area reported was networking with local and international agencies (94%). Overall, there was relatively less involvement of social workers in education (40%) and environmental protection (30%).

Social work practice

Most of the social workers (70%) were employed in the non-governmental sector, with only 15% in government ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs). The health sector employed a relatively higher percentage (31.4%) of qualified social workers, followed by community development (28.6%) and education (19.3%). Food security, gender and environmental protection least employed qualified social workers (7.1%, 2.1% and 0.7% respectively). Agencies serving children (32.1%) employed relatively many trained social workers. Gulu district tended to employ more qualified social workers than other districts, including Kampala, the capital city. The most prominent target groups were children (32%) and whole communities (25%) while the least targeted were the elderly (1%). For example, more than half of the agencies visited in Gulu district, targeted children. Community development interventions were more prominent in Mbarara (western region), Iganga and Bugiri (eastern region). Community level

interventions were the most prominent (60%), with only 26% of the agencies reporting individual/family level interventions.

Regarding the overall social work approach, most agencies (66.5%) were involved in the provision of direct services at the micro and meso levels, but the majority (56%) indicated use of the "developmental approach" compared to the remedial/correctional/therapeutic approaches (26%). Generalist practice combining developmental and remedial interventions was cited by 16.5% of the social work practitioners. In terms of intervention methods, community organisation featured more prominently (32.5%) in line with the meso level of interventions. Indirect macro level interventions (research, advocacy and social action) were limited. Most practitioners described their roles as education (80.5%) and other forms of empowerment (74%). Less than a fifth (17%) of the practitioners primarily engaged in activities to address the immediate needs of their clients. The social development approach to social work was positively perceived and preferred by practitioners and employers and they exhibited a good knowledge of its empowering qualities at the individual, community and institutional levels. Nonetheless, respondents identified its major limitation in practice as lying in the tendency of agencies to specialise – each handling one aspect of development.

The findings indicate positive feelings about the profession with almost all (99%) of the practitioners feeling satisfied undertaking their social work activities. However, 57.5% of the respondents felt that social work was fairly under-estimated and not given its due recognition in Uganda. Part of the problem lies in the limited visibility and engagement of the National Association of Social Workers (NASWU) in advocacy, policy development and active participation in the

welfare system in the country. Only 53% of the social work practitioners were aware of NASWU, with a paltry 10.2% reporting membership. On a positive note, 92.6% of the social workers were willing to become members.

The major challenge facing the social work profession, as highlighted from the study, lies in the failure by the government to recognise the role of social work in the whole domain of social development/service delivery—including social policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Other challenges include: lack of a legal framework for the regulation of practice and high unemployment of the social work graduates.

Social work education and training

Social work education operates within the overall framework for higher education provided under the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act (2001). The National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) has the overall mandate for establishing standards and regulations for tertiary education and to ensure that quality and relevant education is delivered. While the history of social work education is rooted in the colonial era, the training opportunities have expanded over the years, with about 20 universities currently offering a Bachelor of Social Work programme. The quality of social work education is partly determined by the qualification of the educators. In this regard, 56% of the educators interviewed had relevant training in social work (33% Master of Social Work, 17% Bachelor of Social Work, and 6% with PhD in Social Work). A relatively big proportion of social work educators (44%) had qualified in other disciplines and not social work.

The underlying approach to the curriculum in all participating higher education institutions was generalist

social work. Whilst generalist social work is a more practical undertaking, sometimes this blurs the practice of social work as it is difficult to pinpoint where a social worker is strongest. Social development is widely perceived as a cross-cutting issue throughout the curriculum (56%). Regarding the alignment of the curriculum to global social work standards, only 11% of the educators expressed the view that the social work curriculum in their institutions is aligned comprehensively to international standards while more than a half (56%) indicated that the curriculum only partially integrates these standards. A third of the educators were not aware of the said standards. Fieldwork is almost universally adopted as part of the social work curriculum. It is evident, however, that in private-for-profit institutions, the percentage of students who undertake fieldwork is significantly less than their counterparts in public and religious-founded institutions. Twenty-three (23) out of 213 students (9.8%), the majority of them from private-for-profit institutions, did not do fieldwork as part of their training. Social work educators in the private-for-profit institutions revealed that these institutions find it costly to adhere to the requirements of fieldwork, particularly supervision by the academic staff. Contrary to popular assumption, most students reported doing their fieldwork in rural areas (60%). NGOs offered the most fieldwork placements (57%) compared to government agencies (36%) and CBOs.

The study revealed a heavy reliance on materials produced outside Africa, with 61% of educators stating that it is such materials that dominated their sources of information. Only 39% of the educators reported using materials published in Uganda. Similarly, close to 70% of all students reported that the reference materials they use have their source in

Britain and other European, American and other developed countries. The over-reliance on foreign publications raises questions about the relevance of materials used for social work education and the extent of indigenisation of social work.

In terms of coverage of poverty and other MDGs, the majority of the educators (89%) described the curriculum in their respective institutions as explicitly referring to national poverty reduction and development strategies, with 78% of educators asserting that graduates of their social work programmes are equipped with skills to respond to issues of poverty. All MDGs received some attention within the social work curriculum, but there was emphasis on eradication of poverty and promotion of gender equality. Most students were aware of the MDGs (48%), but of these, slightly over a tenth (11%) noted that they knew them in detail. Besides poverty reduction, other MDGs that attracted fairer responses in terms of self-assessed student competences, included gender equality and women empowerment (14.6%); and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (13%). Environmental protection and global partnerships for development were the least rated.

With regard to research, over 60% of educators reported that their units conduct research that is relevant to social work and social development but slightly less than a third (31%) indicated a high level of engagement in research by the educators. Conversely, almost all students reported undertaking research as part of social work training. The per cent was lower in private-for-profit institutions.

The practitioners generally provided a positive feedback regarding the social work training and education. The more highly rated aspects were associated with diversity in the

scope of social problems covered, contextualisation of training for work in local communities, and gender and development. However, there was a moderate rating of the curriculum with regards to poverty issues. Close to a third of the respondents observed that issues of poverty were only slightly addressed in their training. Strengthening of fieldwork was identified as one of the areas that are essential for producing effective social workers.

Contextualisation of social work

Contextualisation of social work is important for effective service delivery and sustainable social development. Clients shared their common problems as including income poverty, which affected their ability to have access to the basic services such as food, health, education and water. Similarly, child labour was reported particularly in rural and peri-urban areas. Other problems included poor infrastructure and unreliable transport to markets and other service centres. When asked where they would go or whom they would turn to in case of a hardship or challenge, clients commonly cited the local councils (LCs) and other local leaders as well as informal networks such as friends and family. There was no outright reference to social work or social work agency as a source where help is sought for day-to-day challenges. This is associated with the fact that social work is generally a latent profession in Uganda despite its contribution to development. Those who had an idea of social work linked it to humanitarian work. Several respondents claimed that social workers can be found in "places of worship, hospitals, and in the villages". Regarding what they missed in their experienced support by social workers, many of the responses related to inadequate

assistance rather than the professional manner in which the intervention was conducted.

With regard to culturally relevant practice, most social work practitioners held the view that culture has a moderate (33%) to high effect (33%) on social development. Eighteen per cent (18%) said culture had a very high effect; 10% said it had a low effect; while 6% believed that culture had no effect at all on social development. However, when practitioners were asked if lack of appreciation of culture (by social workers) impacted their practice, 35% stated that it had a low effect while 27% said it had no effect on their role in social development. There were reported gaps in coverage of cultural issues in social work education, with more than a third of the practitioners (36%) noting that the training had not adequately prepared them to work in diverse cultural settings. In all study areas, respondents gave important insights into the knowledge systems that are imperative to enable culturally relevant and contextualised social work intervention.

A number of suggestions were made regarding appropriate interventions to address the particular needs and challenges of people living in rural areas. The most recurring suggestions included: involvement of the local people through bottom–up approaches; scaling up mobilisation and sensitisation of the local communities through use of innovative approaches; scaling up advocacy and lobbying; collaboration and coordination; cultural sensitivity; and taking service centres to the rural areas.

Perspectives on gender, poverty and social development

There was a shared understanding of the concept of gender among respondents as going beyond the biological aspects of maleness and femaleness to refer to the socially ascribed

roles and expectations from men and women. A common interpretation of gender equality was in regard to equal access to opportunities and resources. Whilst gender equality was positively perceived among the educators, policy makers, social work practitioners and social welfare agency representatives (employers), there were some dissenting voices among the social work clients, particularly the male respondents in Kampala, who claimed that gender equality is instead resulting in marginalisation of men as well as marriage breakups. However, there was universal acknowledgement of a strong relationship between gender, poverty and social development.

A scrutiny of the curricula from the participating institutions indicates a satisfactory level of integration of gender issues in the social work education as a cross-cutting issue, and in a few instances as an independent course. The majority of students (87%) acknowledged that gender issues were integrated in their social work curriculum, although only 15% of these students felt they had the competence to contribute effectively to gender equality and women empowerment as part of the overall achievement of the MDGs and social development. It was reiterated that social work has a role to play in accelerating gender equality and women empowerment in Uganda, particularly through *conscientisation* and empowerment of vulnerable groups among other possible roles.

Strengthening the role of social work in social development

Based on the findings of this study, the following suggestions are made in order to enhance the role of social work in poverty reduction, social development and the realisation of the MDGs.

At the policy level, there is a need to establish a legal framework for social work training and practice in order to increase professionalism and professional identity. In the recent past, there are ongoing efforts to revitalise and strengthen the professional body for social workers. These efforts need to be enhanced in order for the association to play a critical role in mobilisation, motivation, monitoring, networking and enforcing standards and ethical behaviour in professional practice.

At the training level, deliberate efforts towards more indigenisation of social work should be made in teaching institutions through strengthening local social research and generation of local publications, strengthening field practice teaching, and initiation of social projects attached to institutions where social work education and practice can constantly interface. Another critical area is the need to initiate avenues and mechanisms for continuous professional training.

At the practice level, key areas for strengthening include culturally relevant/sensitive practice, multidisciplinary approaches to intervention and increasing social work role in research, policy influence/development and advocacy, among others.

Chapter One

Introduction

Introduction

The study on 'The Role of Social Work in Poverty Reduction and Realisation of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in East Africa' was part of a bigger project to promote professional social work towards social development and poverty reduction in East Africa (PROSOWO). The project is being undertaken by five (5) schools of social work in East Africa and Austria, namely, Makerere University (Department of Social Work and Social Administration - Uganda), University of Nairobi (Kenya), Institute of Social Work (Tanzania), National University of Rwanda, and Carinthia University of Applied Sciences (Austria). The three-year project is funded by the Austrian Development Cooperation through the Austrian Partnership Programme for Higher Education and Research (APPEAR). This report presents the findings of an empirical study conducted between September and December 2011.

Study background

Socio-economic context

Uganda's mid-year population in 2011 was projected at 32.9 million of which 51% are female and 49% are male; with a population growth rate of 3.2% per annum (Uganda Bureau

of Statistics - UBOS, 2011). Eighty-five per cent (85%) of the population lives in rural areas and is solely dependent on subsistence agriculture. The country has recorded impressive economic growth rates since the early 1990's with an average growth rate of over 6% per annum (Government of Uganda - GoU, 2007). Despite this growth, Uganda is still ranked among the poorest countries in the world with a Human Development Index (HDI) of only 0.422 (UNDP, 2010). Inequality is very high, with a Gini-coefficient of 0.41 (GoU, 2010). Disparities are reflected in terms of gender, regional and the rural-urban divide. For example, about 94% of poor people live in rural areas (Ssewanyana and Kasirye, 2010); while the northern and eastern regions have the highest number of poor people in the country (UBOS, 2010a). Besides income poverty, the country continues to face a number of other socio-economic challenges, including conflict, HIV/AIDS, grossly inadequate social services in general and social protection systems in particular, all of which impact on the country's development.

Uganda's current development agenda is guided by the National Development Plan (NDP) 2010/11-2014/5, which replaced the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) that offered a unified planning approach; incorporating both the social and economic development components of the economy. The NDP was formulated within the overall global framework of the MDGs that provide a benchmark on the country's progress in terms of social development. Uganda has made some progress in achieving some targets of the MDGs, particularly in promoting gender equality and empowering women, and access to safe water. However, for many other targets such as maternal and child health, progress has been slow while for others such as halting the spread of HIV/AIDS there has been a reversal in trends (GoU, 2010b).

Social work in Uganda

Social work has an important role to play in addressing some of these contemporary social problems; and to proactively engage in the development process alongside other disciplines. Social work training in Uganda began with the establishment of Nsamizi Training Institute for Social Development in 1952 – at that time referred to as the Local Government and Community Development Centre. Its mandate was to train and prepare clerical officers in the social sector for the colonial government. The institute awarded diplomas and certificates in social work and/or social development. Prior to that, those who wished to study social work or acquire such training had to go to Britain and other European or American countries. The graduates would then be employed by the colonial government. This situation changed with the starting of the Department of Social Work and Social Administration (SWSA) at Makerere University[1] in 1963 to provide pre-service and in-service training in social welfare, community development and social administration. In 1969, the Department started the degree programme in SWSA. Until the late 1980s, Makerere was the only university in the country. With the liberalisation of the educational sector, there has been enormous increase in the number of universities to the current 31 – 5 public and 26 private universities. By the year 2010, 21 HEI were offering a Bachelors degree in Social Work. Since the profession was first introduced in Uganda, a number of changes have taken place both within the socio-economic and political contexts. This has had great implications for social work education and practice in the country.

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[1] Makerere University was founded in 1922 and is the oldest Higher Education Institution (HEI) in the East African region.

The PROSOWO project

In a joint workshop held in Nairobi in 2010, a proposal was developed to promote professional social work towards social development and poverty reduction in East Africa, under the auspices of the Austrian Partnership Programme in Higher Education and Research (APPEAR). Partner institutions include Carinthia University of Applied Sciences (Austria), Makerere University (Uganda), University of Nairobi (Kenya), Institute of Social Work (Tanzania) and National University of Rwanda (Rwanda). The project's objectives include the following:

i.   To strengthen the capacity of higher social work education institutions in the region through research, curriculum development and joint publications

ii.   To develop sustainable academic partnerships and networks in Africa and with Austria in social work training and research

iii.   To conduct research on the role of social work in poverty reduction and the realisation of the MDGs

iv.   To develop a more relevant social work curriculum in alignment with national poverty reduction plans and social development strategies

v.   To facilitate the process of drafting a discussion paper on regulating the social work profession in the respective countries

Study purpose, objectives and key questions

Study purpose

This study is the first comprehensive documentation undertaken about social work in Uganda. Accordingly, the purpose of the study together with those conducted in partner

countries is to document the status and role of social work in poverty reduction and the realisation of the MDGs; inform the review of the curriculum in the participating institutions as well as to input into the initial steps towards the regulation of the social work profession in the region. It also aims to fast-track the process of making available local literature on social work for use in academic and practice spheres.

Objectives of the study

The broad objective of the study was to explore and assess the role of professional social work in poverty reduction and the realisation of the MDGs in Uganda. The specific objectives were:

i. To identify key programmes undertaken to reduce poverty and achieve social development and the extent to which professional social workers are engaged in such programmes

ii. To explore the nature of social work and the specific roles and tasks undertaken by social workers in addressing poverty and the realisation of the MDGs

iii. To assess the adequacy of the social work curriculum in preparing social workers to address issues of poverty and the MDGs in the country

Key research questions

In view of the above objectives, the study had three strands, namely: (i) social work education and training (curriculum), (ii) social work practice, and (iii) gender, culture, and the policy environment for social work - with each having a set of key issues that were investigated.

Social work education and training

•   How well does the social work curriculum in Uganda prepare graduates to handle issues of poverty and social development?

•   What specific knowledge and skills are social workers equipped with?

•   Given what social workers eventually engage in at various levels (policy, programme, service levels) what should be covered in the curriculum but currently is missing or inadequately addressed?

•   To what extent is gender mainstreamed in the curriculum?

Social work practice

•   In what ways is professional social work practice contributing to poverty reduction in Uganda?

•   To what extent are social workers engaged in social development programmes? What specific services and tasks are they engaged in? Who is doing the social work role? Do social development agencies employ professional social workers?

Gender, culture and the policy environment for social work

•   What are the strengths and gaps in policy and legal environment for social work education and practice? What can be done to ensure that there is an enabling environment for social work education and practice?

•   How are the cross-cutting issues of gender, and culturally relevant practice as well as rural-urban differentials reflected in service delivery and outcomes?

•   What socio-cultural and political factors confront social workers and how are these impacting practice?

Conceptual framework

To understand the role of social work in poverty reduction and the realisation of the MDGs, six key conceptual aspects were considered important, namely: poverty, social development, the MDGs, professional social work, gender equality and culturally relevant/sensitive practice. The last two are considered as cross-cutting issues and are taken into account at every stage of the project.

Poverty

Poverty has a crippling effect on individuals' functioning, capabilities and well-being and this in turn keeps them in a vicious cycle of poverty. Hence, assisting people to come out of poverty is one of the critical roles of social work, particularly in the African context. The primary understanding of poverty is the inability of an individual to meet basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, healthcare and education. However, it is also widely understood that human poverty goes beyond the lack of material needs to include issues of exclusion and isolation, powerlessness, low self-dignity and generally an absence of some basic capabilities for acceptable level of functioning in society (UNDP, 1997; Sen, 1999).

Uganda has put in place policies, strategies and programmes for poverty reduction, for example, the PEAP served as the first poverty reduction strategic paper. Most recently in 2010, the GoU launched its NDP 2010/11-2014/15 as part of a long-term strategic vision for development and transformation of the country. Whereas there has been some progress made in poverty reduction, it is also true that in absolute terms, the number of people living in poverty remains very high as indicated in the previous sections. High unemployment rates, lack of access to productive resources such as land, credit,

market and information limits the productive capacity of the poor. Inadequate access to basic services such as education and healthcare constrains opportunities for the poor. This is exacerbated by increasing inequalities between the rich and the poor. The poor remain excluded from the development process and even with a number of well-intentioned poverty reduction programmes, the poor may not actively and meaningfully participate and benefit from these programmes. Part of the problem might be the lack of effective mobilisation at community level as well as a general sense of powerlessness among the population, which would need to be dealt with in order to increase people's ability to participate meaningfully in development and overcome poverty. Therefore, the role that social work is playing or can play in poverty reduction needs to be systematically examined.

Social development

Social development seeks empowering rather than remedial solutions that originally defined social work as a profession. Although it is not a new concept in social work, new debates on social development positioned it as an approach, which addresses social issues such as poverty in a comprehensive and integrated manner. By adopting a social development approach, social work recognises its core contribution in addressing social issues from a human rights perspective; targeting vulnerable groups such as women within a broader gender context (PROSOWO, 2010).

Key indicators of social development include levels of income, employment, educational attainment, access to healthcare and the health status of the population, and availability and access to social protection for vulnerable groups, among others.   Social development occurs variously

through human capital formation and mobilisation, asset accumulation and investment, employment creation and micro-enterprise in poor communities. This has implications on the specific roles social workers can play, alongside other professionals, to contribute to social development. In recent years, there have been renewed calls to bolster social work's focus on social development through emphasis on developmental social work (both at curriculum and practice levels (cf: Kabadaki, 1995; Midgley, 1995; Mupedziswa, 2001; Hochfeld *et al.*, 2009). In addition to social work roles of mobilisation, education and empowerment, there is a need to appraise the specific contribution social work is making towards the promotion and protection of human rights and social justice as key elements of social development.

Millennium Development Goals

MDGs came into effect in the year 2000 when 189 countries signed the United Nations Millennium Declaration, which commits all member States to the realisation of specified targets by 2015. The eight goals and their specific targets[2] provide a framework for poverty reduction and fostering of development at the global and national levels. Various programmes have been implemented in line with the MDGs in Uganda. For example, in the education sector, Universal Primary Education (UPE) and most recently Universal Secondary Education (USE) have been implemented to increase enrolment and ensure equity in access to education. Other interventions in the areas of healthcare, gender equality and women empowerment are being undertaken in an attempt to realise the MDGs and move the country towards a middle-

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[2] For detailed goals, targets and indicators see: http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/ Host.aspx?Content=indicators/officiallist.htm.

income country (GoU, 2010). An appraisal of the current status of the MDGs, with the particular focus on the social aspects, is crucial for identifying specific roles that social work is playing or should play more actively in order to effectively contribute to the realisation of these goals. While there are general challenges such as inadequate financing, there are also specific challenges that might point to a need for a more active engagement of social workers as a professional group. Such areas of intervention need to be identified within specific MDGs targets and strategies for social work contribution laid in more specific terms. A critical aspect in appraising the role of social work in the MDGs is to ensure that they are reflected in the social work curricula.

Gender equality

The concept of gender is almost universally understood as referring to the socially constructed differences between men and women; or the culturally determined roles that define men and women (cf. Midgley, 1995; Parpart *et al.*, 2000; World Bank, 2001). It is these socially constructed positions and roles and the consequent characteristics imposed on women and men that should be taken into account in development, in general, and poverty reduction programmes, in particular. Women and men, girls and boys are affected differently by poverty and other social ills in society. At the same time, their access to opportunities and participation in the process of development differ.

The United Nations declaration of 1975 as the International Women's Year and 1976-1985 as the Decade for Women strengthened the visibility of gender and development on the society agenda. Following this, a number of international[3]

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[3]   United Nations Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 1979 and its optional protocol (1999); The Convention against Torture and Inhuman Treatment (1984); Beijing Declaration (1995); Education for All Declaration (2000); the United Nations Millennium Declaration (2000) (Millennium Development Goals), among others

and regional[4] instruments and commitments have been made to which Uganda is party. Gender equality is also enshrined in Uganda's constitution which, among others, demands equal treatment of men and women but also makes provision for affirmative action to empower women as the more disadvantaged gender. A national policy on gender equality was adopted in 1997 (amended in 2007) and a National Action Plan on Women developed in 1999 to provide a framework for gender-responsive development.

Despite the legal, policy and strategic interventions to promote gender equality, there are persistent levels of inequality and in most cases, women are disproportionately disadvantaged. Chronic poverty, ill health, illiteracy, limited access to and control of productive assets exacerbate women's vulnerable position and condition. All these call for renewed efforts to mainstream gender at all levels of planning and programme interventions.

Professional social work

Social work has a professional mandate to enhance the functioning of individuals and groups in society so that people's well-being is assured. Social work as a profession has existed in East Africa and in Uganda in particular for over half a century and institutions such as Makerere University started training social workers at university level as far back as the late 1960s. Over the years, many changes have taken place both in the political and socio-economic arena that necessitate the review of the role of social work. To meaningfully appraise

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[4] 1981 African Charter on Human and People's Rights; the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa – Maputo Protocol (2003) and The AU Heads of State Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality (2004) , The Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Gender Policy and Strategy (2004);. African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation (1990); The East African Community (EAC) Treaty (2000); The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) Gender Policy (2002), among others.

this role, there is a need to explore the current status of social work education in the country. Education and training is important because it is the preparatory phase for social work practice. The extent to which professional social workers execute their mandates and roles in society is principally dependent on the adequacy and relevancy of the preparation they receive in terms of training and education.

Social workers intervene at different levels in society and perform varied roles–some residual while others developmental. Exploring the current nature of practice of social work will help delineate its contribution or lack of it to social development and the realisation of the MDGs. Other key elements in understanding the status of professional social work will include benchmarking the legal and policy environment in which social work is practised as well as organisational and other non-organisational factors that impact on social work and influence its contribution to social development.

Culturally relevant social work

Social work practice does not occur in a vacuum but is influenced by the socio-cultural context as well as the political environment in which it operates. As noted by Franklin (1990, cited in Gray, *et al.*, 1996), professions are shaped by the social and political realities of their time and by the societies of which they are a part. In view of this, it is important for the profession to be aware of these contexts and develop practice models and strategies that are not only relevant but acceptable to the communities. While the values of social work are global in nature, this very nature of social work might result in various problematic dilemmas in practice and in local contexts, which might create tension. There is, hence, a recognition of the need to indigenise or localise social work

theory and practice models without necessarily losing the universal values and professional ethical standards.

Organisation of the report

This report is organised in nine chapters. Chapter One provides the background/ context for the study and the conceptual framework. Chapter Two highlights the methodological approach to the study, indicating the study areas, participants and their selection, data collection methods, data processing and analysis techniques. Chapter Three provides the key profiles of participants in order to set the stage for presentation and discussion of findings. The findings of the study are presented in the subsequent five chapters in an integrative manner to address the key research questions. Chapter Four provides an overview of poverty, social development and the MDGs and how social work is represented in the respective sectors and sub-sectors, particularly the MDGs. The current nature and specific roles of social work in poverty reduction and social development are discussed in Chapter Five. In Chapter Six, reflections on social work education and training are presented with a focus on the curriculum and its alignment to social development issues. The views of educators, practitioners and students in the participating institutions are discussed in-depth. Chapter Seven mainly presents social work clients experience of social work and their problems, priorities and coping strategies. Issues of indigenisation and rural social work are also discussed. Chapter Eight covers findings related to the cross-cutting theme of gender and social development. Chapter Nine provides a summary and discusses a way forward in enhancing the role of social work in social development and the realisation of the MDGs.

Chapter Two

Study Approach and Methodology

Introduction

This chapter explains the approach and methods used in executing this study. It presents, among others, the research design, the study population, geographical coverage, selection of study participants, data collection methods and tools used, data processing and analysis. Key ethical issues are also highlighted.

Research design

The study adopted a cross-sectional design, utilising both qualitative and quantitative methods. The quantitative methods were used to establish the magnitude and relationships between different variables and the nature of social work in Uganda whilst the qualitative-exploratory aspects were essential due to very limited information documented on the role of social work in Uganda. The broad quantitative aspects that this study investigated included:

- Distribution of social workers in key poverty reduction programmes in the public and private (not for profit) sectors,
- Gender disaggregated data on poverty, social development indicators and social work employment,
- Rural-urban differences in terms of social work employment and other related variables, and

- Ratio of social work positions, for example, child protection, probation, community development officers, among others, occupied by qualified social workers.

Alongside the quantitative components, the following qualitative aspects were explored:

- The different policies and programmes undertaken to tackle poverty and achieve social development.
- Perspectives on roles of social work towards poverty reduction and social development from employers of the social workers as well as the clients.
- Perceived strengths and gaps in the existing social work curricula as shared by current students, social work practitioners, educators and employers.

Study population

The study population comprised social work practitioners, employers, social welfare policy makers, educators, clients at a grassroots level, and current students of social work in selected HEIs. Each of these groups was considered critical in appraising not just the social work curricula and practice but the current contribution of the profession to social development and the MDG realisation. Final year students were targeted, given the fact that they are the immediate beneficiaries of the most recent social work curricula and they also have an opportunity to test the theories, models and skills acquired during their periodic fieldwork placements.

Study areas

This was a national study covering a total of 207 social welfare agencies in the four defined dominant geographical regions of Uganda, namely: central, western, eastern and northern. The initial districts selected were Kampala, Iganga, Gulu and

Mbarara. In Iganga and Gulu, it became necessary to extend to a neighbouring district in order to get a representative number of agencies from the particular region. Hence, Bugiri and Nwoya were added to districts where respondents were selected. Key factors that informed the selection of study sites were: (a) ensuring a balance in urban/rural divide, and (b) availability of programmes and interventions that focus on elimination of poverty or attainment of the MDGs. While initially it had been planned to select two communities in each district representing both a rural and urban area, with the exception of clients Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), it was not practically possible since almost all the agency offices were located in the main urban centres, town councils and municipalities of the respective districts. The rural populations are served mainly through outreach activities. A proxy indicator to gauge the rural-urban distribution of social work services and professionals in the analysis is, therefore, the district where the agency is located.

Study sample and selection procedures

Social welfare agencies

A list of key agencies engaged in poverty reduction, social development and working towards the attainment of the MDGs in the selected districts was obtained from the Directorate of Community Development[5] and/or the NGO Forum in each district. Purposive sampling was done to select both the State and non-State agencies. Although not very systematically done, researchers made a conscious effort to select agencies

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[5]   This government department is responsible for overseeing the activities of community-based organisations and also collaborates with the NGOs in the district.

from key thematic areas aligned to the MDGs, that is, poverty, hunger, education, child health, maternal health, HIV/AIDS, and gender.

Practitioners and employers

In each selected organisation, a minimum of two respondents were selected, namely: a social work practitioner and any other staff of the agency at managerial level, to represent the employer. In total, 200 social work practitioners and 207 agency representatives participated. The difference in the agency number represents umbrella organisations or departments at the district level where no social work practitioner could be identified.

Table 1:   Study regions, districts and respondents

Region	District	Social work practitioner	Agency representative	
		Questionnaire	Questionnaire	Interview
Central	Kampala	56	39	24
Eastern	Iganga	24	23	4
	Bugiri	20	9	13
Northern	Gulu	47	28	16
	Nwoya	5	4	4
Western	Mbarara	48	37	6
Total		**200**	**140**	**67**

Source: *Field data*

Higher education institutions, educators and students

HEIs in Uganda (in this context) are all those post-secondary institutions that award qualifications in social work. A range of institutions were selected to represent public universities, private not-for-profit (faith-based) and private for-profit institutions. The criterion for selection was the length of

time the institution had been in existence. Both the older and relatively new institutions were included in the sample in order to compare curricula and other variables. In each institution, two categories of respondents were selected, namely: the social work educators and final year social work students (see Table 2).

Table 2:   Higher education institutions, educators and students

Type	Institution & year of foundation	Educators	Students
Public	Makerere University (1922) Kyambogo University (2003) Nsamizi Institute of Social Development (1952)	2 2 2	60 29 23
Faith-founded	Uganda Christian University (1997) Bugema University (1988)	3 2	26 16
Private for-profit	St. Lawrence University (2007) Kampala International University (2001) Makerere Institute of Social Development (2002)	3 3 1	11 24 24
Total		**18**	**213**

Source: *Field data*

The students covered in this study were all in their final year of study, and were present in class at the time of the visit

(which had been arranged in advance). For the educators, a random selection was made from the cluster of faculty directly engaged in the social work programme as full time staff. The course coordinators or heads of the social work units in the respective institutions were purposively selected.

Social work clients

Social work clients participated through focus group discussions. In each region, 2 groups were arranged – one comprising males and another female clients. In total 8 FGDs were conducted. The FGDs were conducted at the district level in two communities representing the rural and urban or peri-urban locations. The clients were mobilised through agencies that served them. The choice of the agencies from where the clients were selected, whilst targeting those agencies involved in direct service delivery, was random and depended on the availability and readiness of the agency to mobilise the clients. The community development departments in each district played a pivotal role in guiding the selection of the agencies. All FGDs were conducted in the participants' commonly spoken language including Luganda, Lusoga, Runyankore and Acholi for central, eastern, western and northern regions, respectively.

National level key informants

Key informants were purposively selected from relevant agencies at the national level to represent the views of the policy-makers. Respondents were selected from the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MoGLSD); the National Planning Authority (NPA), the MDG Secretariat, the National NGO Forum, the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) and the National Association of Social Workers in Uganda (NASWU).

Data collection: methods, tools and techniques

Both secondary and primary data were collected utilising various methods and tools.

Primary data

Primary data was collected through personal interviews (using structured questionnaires and interview guides) and FGDs.

Personal structured interviews and questionnaires

Different sets of structured questionnaires/interview schedules were designed and administered to different categories of respondents in personal interviews. For each category, the questionnaire was standardised, with both pre-coded and open-ended questions relating to key research objectives in order to allow for comparability of responses[6]. For the practitioners, the technique adopted was face-to-face interviewing while for the students, the questionnaire was self-administered. This was preferred because it was easier to get students in a group situation, give general instructions and distribute questionnaires for completion. The questionnaires were designed to address particular thematic areas in relation to the study objectives, namely: social work and poverty reduction, MDGs, social development, gender, culturally sensitive practice, and the social work training (including the adequacy and relevance of the curriculum, and fieldwork).

Personal unstructured interviews

The interview guide had a set of open-ended questions to guide collection of data from key actors on the contribution of social work to social development, the competencies and the gaps in social work both at training and practice levels. The

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[6]   The research tools were standardised for all the participating countries to allow for comparability of variables and findings.

interviews were held with agency representatives (employers of social workers), policy-makers (at the national level) and social work educators.

Focus group discussions

FGDs with clients were conducted using a discussion guide to gather data on client experiences of social work services. The outcomes of the discussions were crucial in gauging the extent to which social work as a profession is felt at the grassroots and its appropriateness in addressing diverse social problems. Tape-recording was done for all the discussions (with prior permission of the participants) alongside note-taking in order to guard against loss of data.

Secondary data

Using a desk review checklist, a number of existing documents were reviewed to provide secondary data on the planning and policy context in which the training and practice of social work occurs. The findings from the desk review informed the discussion of findings. The exhaustive list of all the sources consulted is shown in the References.

Data management and reporting

Data processing

Editing was conducted on an ongoing basis starting from the field and after data collection. During data collection, ongoing editing allowed the researchers to identify areas for clarifying during subsequent interviews, particularly for qualitative data. For quantitative data, particular emphasis was laid on completeness and consistency in the responses given for related questions. At the end of fieldwork, the senior researchers re-edited all the questionnaires as a quality

assurance measure before entry. Quantitative data was entered directly into Statistical Package for the Social Scientist (SPSS Version 19). The statistical data set was then cleaned in order to remove errors made during the data entry. For qualitative data, verbatim transcribing was done (to the extent possible) for all audio-recorded interviews and discussions. In all cases, interviewers were employed to transcribe the records. Senior researchers made a random transcription of some recordings in order to ensure that the process was being accurately done.

Data analysis

Quantitative data

Quantitative data were analysed using the SPSS version 19 software. Bivariate analysis was done to bring out relationships between different variables such as the type of organisation (public/private), locality, sex of respondents, and institution attended (in case of social work professionals). This was especially helpful in bringing out the gender as well as the rural-urban differentials with regard to different aspects of professional social work, and its current role in poverty reduction and the MDG realisation.

Qualitative data analysis

Thematic analysis was undertaken for data collected through FGDs and qualitative interviews. A coding scheme was developed in line with the conceptual framework, theoretical assumptions and corresponding research questions. Emerging themes and sub-themes were identified based on their level of recurrence within the data collected and in line with the key research questions. A conscious effort was made to identify the latent content in the transcribed material beyond the

verbalised responses. For this purpose, in some cases, the critical words were left in their original language.

Research clearance and other ethical issues

Official permission (ethical clearance) to conduct the research was granted by the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST). Letters of introduction were obtained from the President's Office through the UNCST, to the Resident District Commissioners in the respective research sites, who in turn endorsed the research to be conducted in the respective districts.

All other ethical standards (informed consent, confidentiality, objectivity in reporting, ethical publishing practices etc.) were adhered to before, during and after the execution of the study. Particularly, the identifying characteristics of respondents, such as names, were not included in the data sets in order to protect their identities and conform to confidentiality of information and opinions.

Quality assurance

The entire process, right from the methodology to final report writing, was managed through teamwork and involved peer review at the national and regional levels. All the members of the consortium contributed to and reviewed each set of tools to ensure thoroughness, relevance and clarity in terms of the information it intended to collect. The questionnaires were pretested at the regional level (in Kenya) and on the basis of the pretest, they were refined by the research team before being administered to the respondents at the national level. The national team comprised of senior researchers from the Department of Social Work and Social Administration who directly got involved in field data collection and supervision

of research assistants. Prior to data collection, the research team underwent intensive training to orient them to the study objectives and the data collection tools. Collected data was edited before and after entry by the research team. Similarly, this report has undergone a series of reviews to ensure accuracy and clarity of the content.

Study limitations

This study attempted to explore key issues to highlight the contribution of social work towards social development, poverty reduction and the realisation of the MDGs. It covered a wide scope in terms of content and as well used mixed methods of data collection from different study participants. However, like any other research project, it faced some limitations, but which did not compromise the quality of data collected.

For example, in terms of the sample, the study did not include all the HEIs offering a social work programme and hence, the analysis of the curricula is limited to the participating institutions. Similarly, it would have been ideal to get information on the entire faculty in the respective social work schools or departments; but due to limited time and gaps in information at the institutional level, this was not possible.

Practitioners selected were also based on the formal social welfare agencies and yet there might be other social workers making significant contribution to poverty reduction and social development but working outside the formal agencies.

Chapter Three

Profiles of Agencies and Study Participants

Introduction

This chapter presents the profiles of agencies and study participants in order to put the subsequent presentation and discussion of findings into proper context. The agencies where respondents were selected are briefly characterised and in the following section, socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented.

Profile of social welfare agencies

Table 3 shows the agency category, key sector, locality and district where the agency was located.

The majority of the organisations that employ social workers were located in the urban areas (93%). This location did not, however, preclude agencies and social workers serving the rural areas. Social workers travelled to the catchment areas of their urban-based offices to take services to rural areas in all the studied districts. In some cases, the researchers did not find the social work practitioners because they had gone to work in the rural areas.

Table 3:   Agency category, sector, locality and district

Characteristic	Frequency (n=200)	Percentage (%)
Category of organisation		
Government department	30	15.0
Non-governmental organisation (NGO)	141	70.5
Community-based organisation (CBO)	20	10.0
Private (Commercial)	8	4.0
Other (e.g. UN agency)	1	0.5
Key sector		
Education	29	14.5
Health	55	27.5
Food security	13	6.5
Community development	73	36.5
Gender	4	2.0
Other	26	13.0
Locality of the organisation		
Rural	14	7.0
Urban	186	93.0
District		
Bugiri	20	10.0
Gulu	47	23.5
Iganga	24	12.0
Kampala	56	28.0
Mbarara	48	24.0
Nwoya	5	2.5

Source: *Field data using the social work practitioner questionnaire*

Profiles of social work practitioners, employers and students

Background characteristics such as age, sex, educational qualification, and type of institution can have a significant influence on the way social work is practised and the subsequent contribution it makes to social development. This section highlights the background characteristics of the social work practitioners, employers and the social work students who participated in the study.

Social work practitioners

A total of 200 social work practitioners were interviewed. Table 4 summarises their characteristics in terms of sex, age, and academic qualifications. The majority (53.5%) of the social work practitioners were male. Most practitioners were in the young and middle ages with 6.5% being above 50 years of age. Seventy-one per cent (71%) of social work practitioners had some training in social work, with 52% having their highest qualification in social work. The majority had attained a first degree in social work. However, there was a sizeable percentage (29%) that was practising social work but with qualifications in other disciplines. Examples of 'other' qualifications included: masters, undergraduate or postgraduate qualifications in disciplines like: guidance and counselling, education, development studies, adult education, laboratory technology, nursing, peace and conflict resolution, hair-dressing, public health, and other social sciences like sociology and public administration. Some practitioners had specialisations like a diploma in HIV management and care.

Table 4:   Socio-demographic characteristics of social work practitioners

Characteristic	Frequency (n=200)	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male	107	53.5
Female	93	46.5
Age (years)		
Below 30	91	45.5
30-50	96	48.0
Above 50	13	6.5
Highest professional educational level attained		
Certificate in social work	5	2.5
Diploma in social work	24	12
Bachelors degree in social work	68	34.0
Masters in social work	7	3.5
Other	96	48.0
Other social work qualification (if highest qualification is not in social work)		
Certificate in social work	13	35.1
Diploma in social work	11	29.7
Bachelors degree in social work	12	32.4
Masters in social work	1	2.7

Characteristic	Frequency (n=200)	Percentage (%)
Institution where highest professional qualification was obtained		
National public institution (Uganda)	130	65.0
National private institution (Uganda)	51	25.5
Institution in another African country	5	2.5
Institution outside of Africa	14	7.0
Year of completion of highest level above		
Before 1960	1	0.5
1960-1969	1	0.5
1970-1979	3	1.5
1980-1989	10	5.0
1990-1999	18	9.0
2000-2009	126	63.0
After 2009	41	20.5

Source: *Field data*

The largest percentage (65%) of trained practitioners had obtained their training from a national public institution. Public universities are the oldest in training social workers and have been recruiting the largest numbers of students in their programmes since beginning of the 21st century. However, the proliferation of private universities, most of which teach social work[7], may soon overtake the Makerere University

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[7] By 2010, there were 31 universities in Uganda out of which 21 were teaching social work (www.unche.or.ug/index.php/institutions.htm).

outputs of social work graduates. Other countries within Africa where some practitioners obtained their qualifications include Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. European countries and also North America trained 10 of the 14 practitioners who trained outside of Africa. In terms of age, the majority of the social workers were relatively young with 45.5% below the age of 30. Most completed their training between 2000 and 2009.

Social work employers

Just like the social work practitioners, the majority (74%) of the 140 employers or immediate supervisors of the social workers were men. Of these, 67% had obtained their highest education in another discipline other than social work. Among the 45 employers with some social work training, 60% had a first degree in social work; 16% had a Masters degree in social work while only one had a doctorate in the same discipline. Ten of the employers were diploma holders. Again, like the practitioners, the majority (67.9%) of the employers had been trained in a national public university; 19.3% in a national private university; 10% in an institution outside of Africa while 2.9% were trained in another African university. Europe and the USA were the leading regions in the training of the studied employers. The mean number of years worked by the employers was 5.7 years, while the median was 5 years with a standard deviation of 4.7 years.

Social work students

The study also sought the views of final year social work students as key beneficiaries of the social work training programme. Table 5 highlights the sex, ownership of institution, and the programme undertaken by the participating students.

Table 5:   Characteristics of social work students

Characteristic	Frequency	Percent
Sex		
Male	93	43.7
Female	120	56.3
Student sample by ownership of institution		
Public/government	109	51.2
Private-NGO/religious	41	19.2
Private-commercial	63	29.6
Programme undertaken		
Diploma in social work	47	22.1
Bachelor's degree in social work	166	77.9
Total	**213**	**100.0**

Source: *Field data*

More than a half (56%) of the students were female and the majority were selected from public/government-owned institutions. In terms of the social work programme undertaken, 78% of the participating students were pursuing a Bachelors degree in social work, with only 22% undertaking a diploma programme in social work. This is due to the fact that the two public institutions where most students were registered, that is, Makerere and Kyambogo universities do not offer a diploma programme. The Masters programme was excluded from the sample because it is only currently offered in one university.

Chapter Four

Social Work, Poverty and Millennium Development Goals

Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of policies and programmes to reduce poverty and achieve social development and the MDGs in Uganda. The goals examined are the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, equity in education, improving maternal and child health, combating HIV/AIDs and other diseases, gender equality and empowerment of women, ensuring environmental sustainability and developing global partnerships for development. The contribution of social work practitioners and the agencies where they are employed to poverty reduction, social development and specific MDGs is also examined. Firstly, an analysis of the conceptualisation of poverty and social development as gathered from the current study is given.

Conceptualisation of poverty

Qualitative data in this study clarifies the different manifestations of poverty in the communities especially as implied in the definition and/or description of poverty elicited from various participants. There was general agreement that poverty was the inability to meet one's basic needs such as food, clothing, housing, hygiene, and basic services like

medical care and education. This inability to meet basic needs or deprivation could occur at individual, household, community and national levels. Some of the descriptions of poverty by social work clients are reflected in the responses below:

> A poor person cannot provide for the basic needs or does not have any one to run to and get help. Sometimes you may have someone but this person is not able to help you. This is equally poverty. *(Male FGD participant, Bugiri district)*

> A poor person is despised by friends and may not be invited for social functions such as burial. *(Male FGD participant, Gulu district)*

There were also non-material descriptions of poverty including those of spiritual aspects that were mentioned by both the practitioners and the clients. For example, some associated poverty with lack of reverence for God. This poverty was reported to be graver than simply lack of money.

> Poverty is something about the minds and the attitudes. It is something not tangible. Actually, there is something we call spiritual poverty. Spiritual poverty in the sense that somebody has given up in life, has no hope; cannot do anything about the situation. *(Employer, UWESO, Kampala)*

> Poverty is when you …don't have peace of mind and cannot influence anything around you. …Poverty is when one does not know God, has no love and does not have friends. *(Male FGD participant, Mbarara district)*

The reference to lack of friends (in the clients response) brings out issues of isolation and lack of participation in community life by the poor. In addition, poverty was characterised as a

state of the mind. This mindset makes some people perceive their social and economic status as not easily changeable.

Some social work practitioners attached a time element to the poverty problem. They described poverty as an inability to meet basic needs "in a required time"; living in a deprived state for "extended periods of time", and inability to "sustain one's lifestyle". This dimension of poverty also portrays the relative nature of poverty at individual or family level.

Further analysis of the participants' responses shows differences in poverty perceptions by gender and locality. Most of the female groups defined poverty as lack of access to essential provisions such as food, clothing, health and education. The women groups particularly mentioned widowhood and lack of children in their definition of poverty; interpreting these are some predisposing factors as well as categorisations of poor people. What was peculiar to men was their linkage of poverty to family break-up arising out of the inability to provide for one's household. It was also the men who associated poverty with laziness. What was, however, common amongst all the groups is the association of poverty with lack of money and employment opportunities.

Similarly, there were some differences in the way poverty is perceived or manifested by locality. Most respondents in the urban communities, such as Kampala, associated poverty with difficulty in accessing housing, unemployment, and inability to own land or build their own homes. Conversely, the majority of rural groups identified poverty with lack of land for farming. On the whole, all respondents associated poverty with inability to meet the basic individual and household needs.

Perceived magnitude of poverty

The study findings indicate that poverty is still very high among the population, notwithstanding the official statistics that show marked reductions in poverty. According to the majority of the social work practitioners (84%) met in this study, the leading problem faced by their clients was poverty and unemployment, while slightly less than a tenth (9%) mentioned HIV and related diseases and 9% mentioned domestic violence. Other problems commonly reported to social workers included relationship problems (conflicts) in families and communities, as well as gender-based violence; ignorance and illiteracy, poor services, as well as problems arising out of individual practices such as use of illicit drugs and prostitution. It is apparent that these problems are a manifestation or symptom of poverty, a consequence of poverty or a cause of poverty at different levels of social organisation.

With regard to the magnitude of poverty among their target population, the majority of social work practitioners, 44% and 43% considered it to be "high" and "very high", respectively; giving an aggregate of a majority of 87%.

Figure 1:   Practitioners' estimation of poverty levels among clients
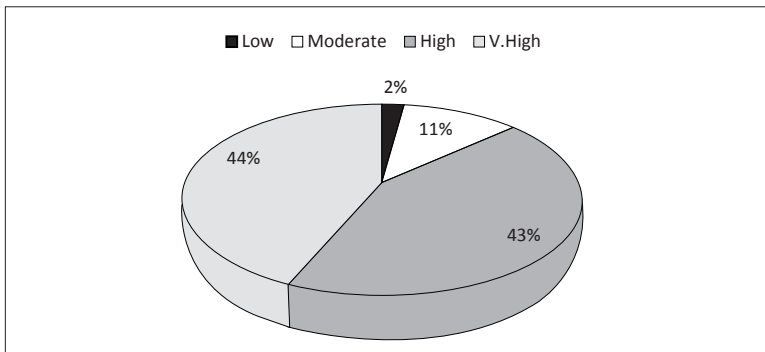
As shown in Figure 1 a few social work practitioners considered poverty to be "moderate" and "low" among the target population they serve. On the basis of these results, it is evidently clear that a significant proportion of the population is still locked up in poverty.

The causes of poverty as perceived by a cross-section of respondents included unemployment, disease, insecurity and marginalisation. Unemployment is compounded by high levels of illiteracy, poor skills and low social capital. The respondents, particularly employers, argued that illiteracy breeds ignorance of the available opportunities and ways of harnessing the available resources. Lack of functional knowledge and skills can keep people poor. It was further noted that there was poor mobilisation of groups into social networks to mobilise or solicit for resources. In addition, the high prevalence of preventable diseases like malaria, HIV/ AIDS, tuberculosis, and sexually transmitted infections made people spend a lot of money on illness management instead of investing in productive ventures. Insecurity such as that which existed in northern Uganda for almost 20 years was also identified as a major cause of poverty in the region.

Poverty was also seen as a function of marginalisation/ exclusion. Being sidelined in the use of existing societal opportunities and participation in education, formal employment, and politics can make some people poor. Powerlessness and inability to influence policy by the deprived people was characterised as a function of poverty. This in turn leads to failure of the benefits and resources to reach the targeted population. Gender inequality and injustices at household levels were also seen as aspects of marginalisation.

Generally the perceptions and consequent manifestation of poverty in this study do not differ much from those already

documented in national surveys, particularly the Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment (GoU, 2000) in which poor people identified both material and non-material aspects of poverty and deprivation. What is clear, particularly from the views of the social work clients, is that poor people understand their undesirable situations and they are able to point to the root causes. Therefore, it is critically important to actively engage them at all levels of policy, programming and implementation of poverty reduction strategies in order to achieve sustainable social development.

Conceptualisation of social development

In social work literature, the concept of social development is prominently referred to as the developmental perspective in social work (Midgley, 1995). It is a broader interdisciplinary field that involves a process of planned social change designed to promote the well-being of the population as a whole in conjunction with a dynamic process of economic development (ibid.). Social work practitioners, educators and key informants described the social development approach as a holistic approach to problem analysis and interventions that address the total person in their complexity. One social worker succinctly described social development as:

> ...you look at one's economic life, you look at someone's education level, health, … you have a programme which covers all the types of development that can improve both the lives of the individual with not only looking at the economic livelihood but also addressing other types of development. *(Educator, Bugema University)*

Social development does not address symptoms but "*a cobweb of causes*" *(Practitioner, Mulago Hospital and Complex,*

Kampala). It is concerned with improved individual and community knowledge and skills. The approach is concerned with empowerment and capacity-building, identifying and harnessing strengths of systems, building systems and institutions to handle problems and deliver services.

Other study participants described social development as a belief in investing in the people; and the need to make laws and policies that protect the people. The approach was described as further involving an analysis of how economic gains have benefited the people in terms of standards of living, that is, in education, health, security, politics/freedom of expression, nutrition, and entire quality of life of the individual.

There was universal agreement among employers of social workers that social development is the best approach that focuses on empowerment and capacity-building. It is in line with this thinking that development cannot be achieved by giving people money and other handouts such as clothing but services and resources including loans for the attainment of individual and community self-reliance. Community organisation activities, whereby people are encouraged to form groups purposely to tap into opportunities and services like the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS), are a dimension of social development.

> The issue of handouts should be stopped save for a few specific categories of the population; the very vulnerable like the elderly with no one to support them, the sick with no one to help them. But this should also be on a short-term basis. I think with time, if we go for the sustainable approach of empowering by giving knowledge and skill and tools, the practice of giving handouts should completely be phased out. *(Employer, UWESO Kampala)*

The above view was common among many employers who participated in this study. Thus, to reduce poverty and achieve social development, the focus should be on capacity-building, how to save and financial literacy; avoid handouts except in emergencies; create an enabling environment by checking inflation, focus on issues of children, youths and affirmative action.

Participants in this study perceived social development as the right approach to reducing poverty as it empowers people by giving them knowledge and skills as well as opportunities to engage in gainful employment. It was more likely to lead to sustainable development of different systems. Many employers related this approach to a common proverb of "give me a hook/net and I will fish"; versus "give me fish and I will come back again for fish". The person empowered with the tool and knowledge is more self reliant than that one given a handout. Likewise, for poverty reduction, people need to be given tools and skills.

Related with the above, some of the employers suggested that the skills given to beneficiaries need to be relevant for production of goods and services that other people need. However, the use of the social development approach requires a committed political leadership as well as effective community participation. It was asserted that communities can be assisted to systematically identify and discuss their problems, decide on courses of action, and mobilise resources and act upon their situations. Social development encourages participation, community mobilisation and use of community-generated resources rather than depending on externally-generated resources. Social development puts to the fore people's attitudes, self-perception and development ideas. The approach "has an element of ownership in it thus

leading to sustainability" *(Employer, Catholic Relief Services, Gulu)*.

Social workers stimulate community thinking about needs and how to improve the quality of life. One employer illustrated the approach thus:

> Social workers are sources of knowledge; they are teachers. They teach health, they teach gender; they teach nutrition even if they are not nutritionists, but they know the power of good feeding …Things like that form the basis of the social development model. *(Employer, Send a Cow Uganda, Kampala)*

According to various respondents, the social development approach permits a social worker to work with different clientele systems (the individual, family, group, community, entire society and institutions). It also allows one to play different roles such as that of the enabler, educator, therapist, advocate, and mediator. A social worker can also do research, policy development, and empowerment. Employers expressed much preference for this approach to the extent that one of them described its goodness as *akahooho* (Runyankore word for 'scent') and a redeeming model. It is apparent that social development may involve counselling and confrontational techniques as tools for empowerment.

Although the social development approach was acceptable to most respondents, there were also reservations about its applicability. As earlier noted, it was reported that its utility is threatened by the tendency of agencies to specialise, each handling one aspect of development. This delays development as not all actors move at the same pace in the same geographical area. The extract below illustrates the point.

> We have been to communities where children do not attend
> school because of malaria and yet for us we work in the
> education sector. Therefore, we say we are going to liaise
> with government and other partners to provide mosquito
> nets. But then, how long does that take? – six months or
> more! How many children will have dropped out or have
> been absent from school? *(Employer, Save the Children,*
> *Gulu District)*

To attain social development assumes joint planning,
acquisition of resources, implementation capacities and
partnering in the entire helping process.

National policies and programmes for poverty reduction and achievement of MDGs

The National Development Plan (NDP – 2010/11-2014/15)
provides the overall development planning framework and
serves as the current Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)
for Uganda. The NDP was launched in 2010 and succeeded
the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP). The overall
objective of the NDP is to move Uganda towards a modern,
industrialised and knowledge-based economy. It advocates
development in all dimensions of the economy. The NDP has
eight objectives, namely: (a) Increasing household incomes
and promoting equity; (b) Enhancing the availability and
quality of gainful employment; (c) Improving stock and
quality of economic infrastructure; (d) Increasing access to
quality social services; (e) Promoting science, technology,
innovation and Information, Communication Technology
(ICT) to enhance competitiveness; (f) Enhancing human
capital development; (g) Strengthening good governance,
defense and security and; (h) Promoting sustainable use of the

environment and natural resources (GoU, 2010c). The plan comprises various programmes including among others:

a.   Agricultural development programmes such as the Plan for the Modernisation of Agriculture (PMA) which provides the framework for agriculture and rural development for transforming Uganda's agriculture from a subsistence-based to a commercial oriented sector;

b.   Savings and Credit Cooperative Societies (SACCOS), and the *Bonna Bagagawale* (Prosperity for All) programme;

c.   Education policies and programmes such as UPE and USE and programmes on vocational education;

d.   Health policy, including reproductive health programmes, HIV/AIDS programmes, Northern Uganda Malaria, AIDS and Tuberculosis (NUMAT) programmes, water and sanitation programmes;

e.   Monetary policies- on taxation, and management of inflation;

f.   Foreign direct investment policy, including trade promotion policy;

g.   Social protection and social security policies including the Orphans and Vulnerable Children's (OVC) policy and the Social Assistance Grant for Empowerment (SAGE) under which a monthly stipend is provided to the aged in selected districts as a pilot programme;

h.   Equal Opportunity Policy, 2007 which seeks to promote equality and social justice as a precursor for social development; and

i.   Environmental programmes run through the National Forestry Authority (NFA) and National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA);

Other cross-cutting programmes meant to transform the economy include Northern Uganda Social Action Fund

(NUSAF), and Peace, Recovery and Development Programme (PRDP) which are specific programmes to deal with the war-ravaged Northern and North-eastern regions.

Different stakeholders operating at the global, national and local levels play a big role in poverty reduction. At the global level, governments, bilateral and multilateral agencies influence both the policy, funding and direct implementation of poverty reduction programmes. At the national level, the central government, through the different ministries, departments and agencies, provides the environment for poverty reduction through policy formulation and overall programme monitoring. Together with the government, is the general public, which, according to respondents, should hold the implementers accountable for the services they provide. Respondents also acknowledged the role played by the family. It was acknowledged that most of the poverty reduction initiatives occur at the household level and especially in the absence of widespread formal social security; families shoulder the highest burden of meeting their own needs and those of their dependants.

Other stakeholders in poverty reduction and social development include the civil society organisations (CSOs) and the private sector. CSOs such as the NGOs, CBOs and cooperatives as well as self-help groups were identified as key partners in advancing the course of the attainment of social development; while the role played by the private sector was acknowledged by some respondents especially for being innovative and job creators. The media was also identified as a key player in social development; in as far as raising awareness about different poverty reduction programmes is concerned. Lastly, the academia was noted for anchoring policy on empirical evidence.

A scrutiny of these many policies and programmes shows that they are directly interlinked with the MDGs and they have the potential to promote social development. They also provide many opportunities for social work intervention in almost all the sectors.

Social work contribution to poverty reduction and other MDGs

The self-assessed extent to which agencies and practitioners contribute to poverty reduction and achievement of other MDGs was examined.

General contribution

Less than a half of the agencies and individual practitioners alike reported a high level of contribution to poverty reduction as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 (a): Agency's contribution to poverty reduction
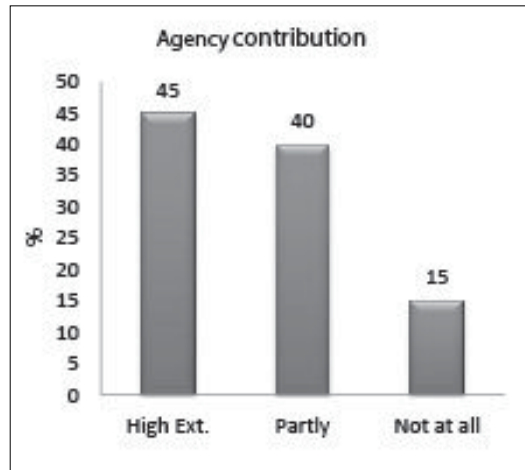
Source: Field data

Figure 2 (b): Practitioner's contribution to poverty reduction
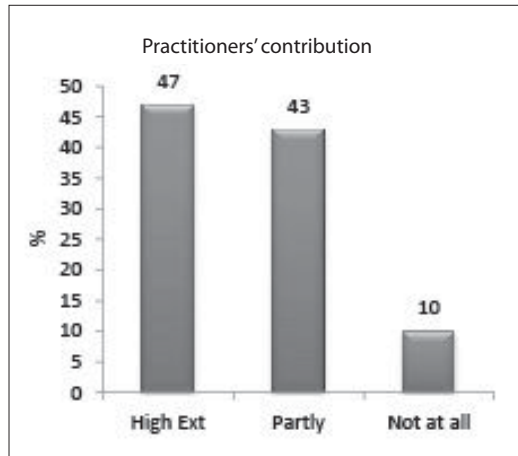
Source: Field data

Given the fact that poverty is the main problem mentioned by the clients as affecting them the most, the level of commitment by agencies is marginal. It is worth noting that the individual practitioner's contribution to poverty reduction is highly dependent on the agency policy and programme focus. Hence, the starting point to enhancing the role of social work to poverty reduction is to influence agency policy and programming so that the bulk of interventions are geared towards long-term achievement of social development.

Using a Likert Scale, social work practitioners estimated their contribution to poverty reduction and social development. Across the board, social workers positively assessed their contribution to poverty reduction (see Table 6).

As the table shows, many social workers (64%) focused their efforts on approaches and strategies which were theoretically considered effective in fighting poverty. Less than a half of

the social workers were reportedly involved in doing some research at the agency level.

Table 6:   Social workers' self-assessment of their contribution to poverty reduction

Contribution to poverty reduction	Self assessment (n=200)				Total
	Not at all (%)	Not sure (%)	To a great extent (%)	To a slight extent (%)	(%)
My current work has a direct focus on poverty reduction.	3.5	1.0	64	31.5	100%
I use a developmental approach in all my service interventions.	2.0	3.5	66	28.5	100%
The service I offer has a felt impact on the broader society.	3.0	3.0	66.5	27.5	100%
My current service integrates both social and economic development goals of the target population.	0.5	2.5	73.5	23.5	100%

Contribution to poverty reduction	Self assessment (n=200)				Total
Promoting and or protecting social and individual rights is part and parcel of my current work.	4.5	5.5	67.0	23.0	100%
Me and the social agency I work for are engaged in social research.	19.0	4.0	47.5	29.5	100%
Gender issues are mainstreamed in the interventions I undertake.	5.0	3.0	66.0	26.0	100%

Source: *Field data*

Contribution to MDGs

Most social workers (45.5%) were generally aware of the MDGs while slightly over a quarter (27.5%) knew them in detail. Five per cent did not know the MDGs while 22% knew them slightly. Among the employers, about 79% were aware of MDGs; 19.3% were slightly aware of them and 2.9% did not know anything about the MDGs. 88% of the social workers and 91% of the employers were also familiar with the programmes undertaken towards the achievement of the MDGs. Agencies' and practitioners' contribution to other aspects of social development and the MDGs such as education, health,

gender equality and empowerment of women, environmental sustainability, and global partnerships for development are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3:   Agency and practitioners' level of contribution to other MDGs
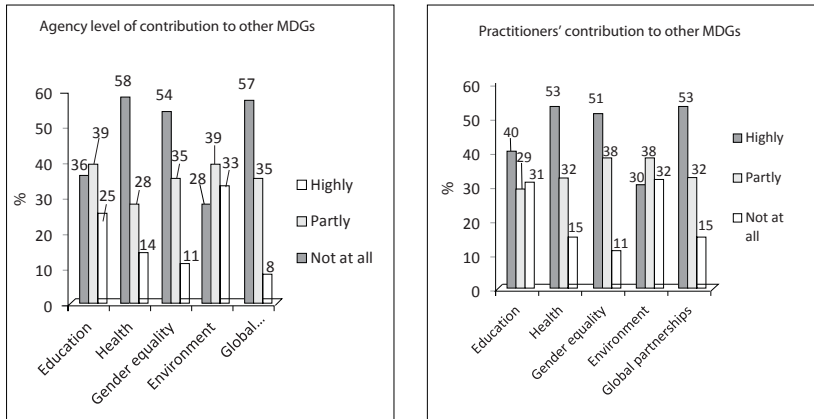
Source: Field data

The highest contribution by both employers and social work practitioners was recorded in the areas of health, gender equality and building global partnerships for development with more than a half of the respondents stating that they highly contribute to these areas. Conversely, there was relatively less emphasis on education, and environmental protection. The similar pattern in the responses of employers and practitioners is rather striking and serves to corroborate the levels of contribution to the different components of the MDGs. It is also evident that the contribution to each MDG by the social development actors is rather marginal.

The particular areas of employer and practitioner involvement in implementing programmes and projects related to specific MDGs were also explored. In the analysis,

goals four, five and six (reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, and combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases) are combined.

Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger

Although the impact of intervention in the lives of the people seems to be only moderate, it is clear that there are some interventions to this effect. When asked what aspects of the MGD1 they were involved in, 63% of the employers and 66% of practitioners reported involvement in both the reduction of poverty and hunger while 34% and 29% of employers and practitioners, respectively, stated only poverty eradication as their concrete area of involvement.

Figure 4:   Areas of contribution to MDG 1
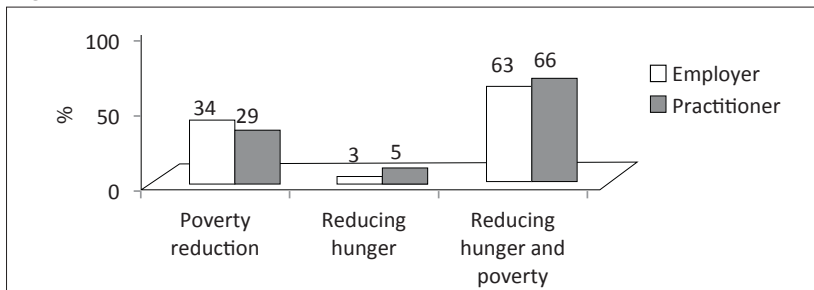
Source: *Field data*

As can be observed, interventions to reduce poverty and hunger go hand-in-hand since these two problems reinforce each other. It is, therefore, positive that agencies involved in social development have taken on this nature of integrated programming. Agencies that mentioned reduction of hunger *per se* are especially linked to relief services which contribute less to long-term social development. Some of the specific tasks by the social workers included:

- Championing the design and implementation of appropriate poverty reduction interventions and building skills of other professions to support poverty reduction;
- Research into appropriate effective models that can reduce poverty especially among the rural poor;
- Policy analysis to distil appropriate responses to poverty and the least effective ones;
- Working with development partners to influence appropriate resource allocation; and
- Promotion of a culture of saving among the communities by, for example, facilitating the formation of savings and credit societies.

Study respondents concurred on the importance of good infrastructure, including roads and communication technologies such as mobile telephone as very critical in linking farmers to markets and thereby contributing towards poverty reduction. In addition, youth (skills development for youth) and women empowerment programmes were all reported to be vehicles through which poverty reduction can be achieved. According to various study participants, both the government and private sectors play this significant role, with support from the development partners.

Education

The most prominent area of involvement in the education sector (up to 62% of the respondents) was support for UPE through provision of scholastic materials and community sensitisation regarding the importance of sending children to school. It was reported that some social workers are engaged in changing the attitudes of parents through sensitising them

on their roles and responsibilities in UPE implementation. The extract below best highlights the issues addressed.

> You can imagine that a parent would … not send that child to school because he or she thinks that it is government responsibility. And we are still fighting that, struggling to change that type of attitude. Provision of scholastic materials which government does not provide has led to a lot of drop-out of children from school. *(Social worker, Build Africa Uganda, Kampala)*

Respondents noted several other challenges which they cannot address unless the government increases resources to the education sector that can go a long way in improving the quality of education.

Promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women

With regards to promotion of gender equality, many employers (47%) and practitioners (52%) mentioned the promotion of equal rights as the area to which they are making a contribution. The second highest area of involvement was the promotion of equal opportunities and capacity-building for women.

Figure 5:   Concrete area of contribution to gender equality
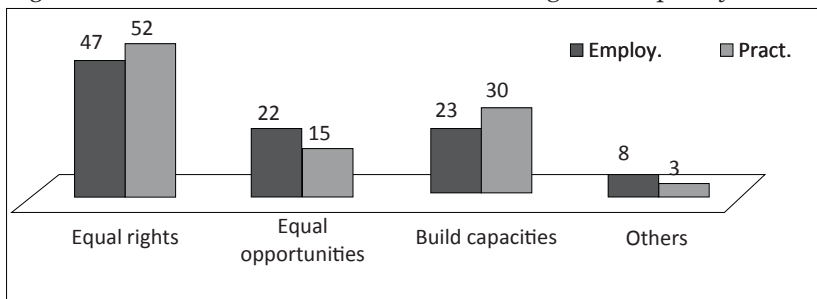
Source: *Field data*

Promotion of women's equality and empowerment is being operationalised through specific programmes and policies such as affirmative action in admission to public universities and political posts at all levels of governments, including parliament. This programme is mainly actualised through the Equal Opportunity Policy, which emphasises gender mainstreaming in all sectors of service delivery and provision (GoU, 2007).

Health-related goals

These have three related MDGs: reduction of child mortality, maternal mortality and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. The results indicate that most of the interventions are in the area of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, with 50% of employers and 54% of practitioners citing this as their specific area of involvement.

Figure 6:   Areas of contribution to the health-related MDGs
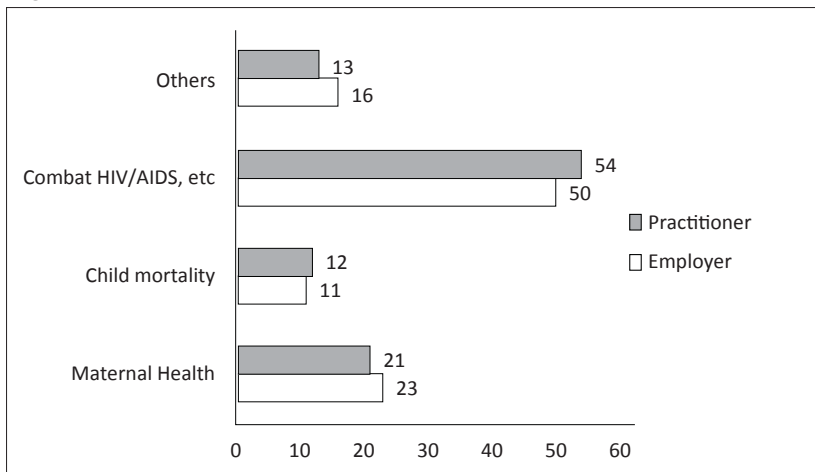
Source: *Field data*

HIV/AIDs has attracted immense response from many stakeholders since the 1990s, explaining the visibility of social work in this particular MDG. Unfortunately, Uganda still experiences very high levels of child and maternal mortality but these have been largely left to the health sector to deal with, and usually at the clinical level. A multi-sectoral approach involving all stakeholders is needed to realise improvements. Social work has a significant role to play in this area especially through advocacy for more resource allocation to the sector as well as community organising.

Ensuring environmental sustainability

Environmental sustainability received the lowest attention by agencies and subsequently social work practitioners. But the few who reported some contribution were mainly involved in the protection of the natural environmental resources and improvement of sanitation, respectively, as indicated in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Area of contribution in environmental protection
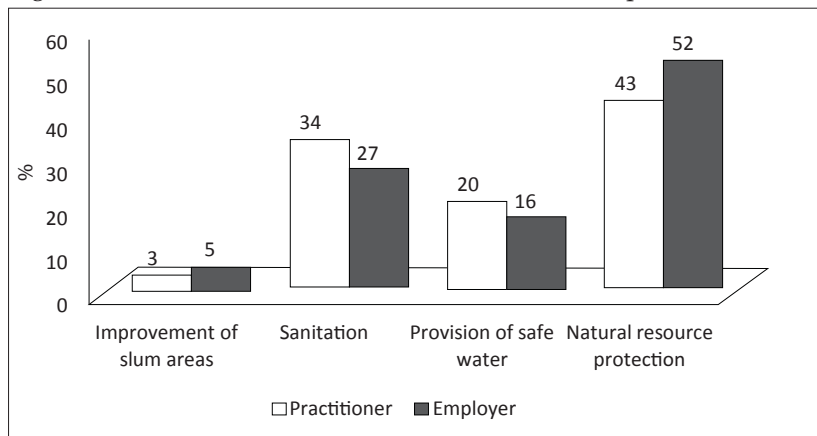
Source: *Field data*

Protection of the environment and natural conservation consist of activities such as tree planting, waste management and other conservation measures which are common within government policies. In general, addressing this goal has been attempted through many laws, policies, institutions and standards to guide the management of natural resources. For instance, the National Environmental Management Policy (1994) and the 1995 National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA) Statute instituted NEMA as the body with the oversight role in the promotion and protection of the environment. The Ministry of Local Government has also attempted to mainstream environmental and natural resources into the performance measures for all levels of government, although the implementation is still low (GoU, 2010 b).

Global partnerships for development

Regarding this MDG, the most prominent form of contribution is through networking with international agencies, cited by 93% of employers and 94% of practitioners. This is attributed to the fact that most CSOs, as well as government organisations depend on global networks for funding, capacity-building, consultancy and volunteering services. Exposure is also a component in this global partnership and includes issues such as field trips and other official visits to agencies involved in similar sectors for the purpose of lesson-drawing.

Figure 8: Contribution to developing global partnerships for development
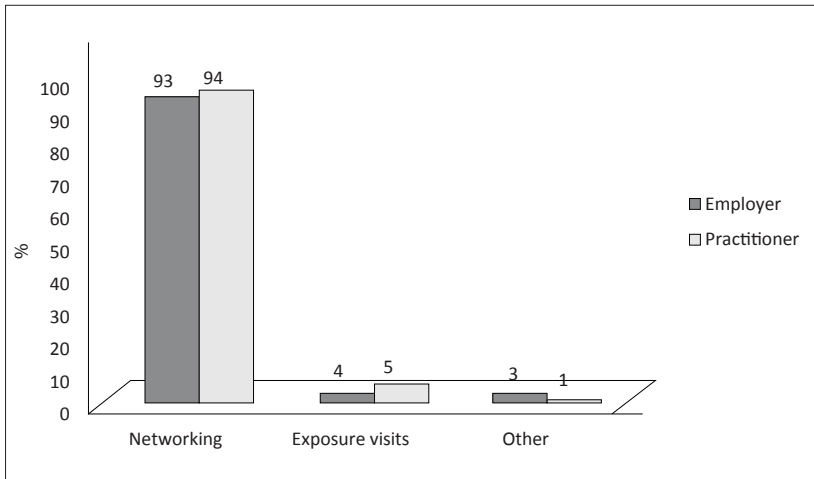
Source: Field data

At the State level, the global partnership is visible through the Official Development Assistance (ODA). It was learnt from an authoritative policy maker that the government position on ODA has been set out in the Partnership Principles between the government of Uganda and its development partners since 2003. Uganda is also a signatory to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008).

Social work practitioners, employers and other key informants agreed that the development partners are playing a significant role in the country's recovery, growth and poverty reduction efforts. Their views are also supported in official government documents. For example, according to the NDP (GoU, 2010c), between the years 2003-2007, 43 different development partners disbursed aid to Uganda. These included 29 bilateral development partners and 14

multilateral development partners. As noted earlier, the partnerships at agency level, especially for CBOs and NGOs are mainly in funding and capacity-building.

Activities undertaken by social workers for poverty reduction and social development

Social workers directly addressed many of the factors associated with poverty at the individual, household, and community levels. Two observations were made regarding how social work practitioners tackled poverty: a) Each organisation tackled one or a few factors associated with poverty; b) the social work practitioners played several unique roles in poverty alleviation programmes including the following (details are provided in Appendix 2):

i.   *Encouraging and supporting individuals and households to start income-generating activities (IGAs)*: This activity targeted the underlying problem of lack of employment or under-employment, and the resultant lack of incomes or low incomes. This strategy targeted entire communities and also vulnerable groups like women, youths, the elderly, refugees, and orphans and other vulnerable children (OVC). Some of the IGAs introduced and taken up by individuals, households and social groups included animal husbandry of piggery, chicken, goats, as well as starting small-scale businesses.

ii.   *Support of child /student education at primary and secondary education*: This enables children who otherwise would not get an opportunity to live decent lives in the future. This strategy also reduces on the burden of care and expenditures of poor families, thus freeing the limited resources to meet their basic needs.

iii.   *Resource mobilisation and provision:* This involved two distinct approaches, namely: remedial approach and

the more developmental approach. The former involves giving relief assistance in form of food, accommodation and medical care to some social groups such as refugees. The latter involves some agencies providing grants, improved seeds, and animals. Other agencies encouraged people to save and access microfinance loans for investment in productive ventures.

iv.   *Brokering role*: Social workers play a brokering role by linking people to resources and technical services such as those of extension workers within their communities and outside. Linking farmers to markets makes social workers assume other roles of community organisers and empowerment agents.

v.   *Capacity-building:* This addresses the underlying problem of limited practical knowledge and skills in production processes, as well as powerlessness. It largely involves training and providing information to entire communities and vulnerable social groups such as farmers, women, orphans and vulnerable children, youths, the elderly and community leaders.

vi.   *Community organisation and counselling:* This involves mobilising people with the same problem or concern to form groups purposely for pooling ideas, resources and power together for problem-solving and development. Groups were perceived a potent force for pulling people out of poverty as they would support each other and get linked to government programmes and non-governmental organisations more easily than if they worked alone.

vii.   *Promotion of positive attitudes and work ethics among community members*: The major technique used was discouraging certain practices such as thriftiness in spending and instead encouraging savings and hard

work. In other words, social workers inculcated work ethics in the communities for poverty reduction. They also handle domestic violence, gender inequalities and injustices which disintegrate families – making it difficult for individuals to commit themselves to production for self-sufficiency.

viii.   *Prevention and promotion of good health:* Social workers largely reported providing education on health issues to communities and specific groups of youths on HIV/AIDS. Social workers also worked on other preventive health programmes like those for prevention of blindness, water and sanitation as well as HIV control. Social workers sensitised people about existing services and opportunities (such as reproductive health services) and encouraged the people to use the services. Social workers also encourage people to create their own services on a self-help basis. This implies another role of community organisers.

ix.   *Advocacy and mediation*: These are roles that respond to poverty as a function of abuse of rights, marginalisation and exclusion. Social workers mediate to secure resources and opportunities for marginalised groups such as poor women, persons with disability and persons living with HIV/AIDS.

x.   *Research and advice on policy*: This role was undertaken by social workers working largely in consultancy firms and the research department of parliament. The latter had an edge over advising on policy to members of parliament since they are near each other socially and physically. Less than 10% of the social workers were engaged in this role.

Priority roles and interventions for poverty reduction

The most effective activities reported by social workers in reducing poverty at the household and community levels include resource mobilisation, capacity-building, community organisation, counselling, and supporting child education (see Table 7).

Table 7:   Priority interventions for poverty reduction

Role played by social workers	Individual level (%)	Household level (%)	Community level (%)	Total (%)
Resource mobilisation/ promotion of IGAs	27.9	17.7	52.2	32.6
Capacity-building	29.1	29	18.2	25.4
Community organisation and counselling	18.9	28.6	31.5	26.3
Health promotion	7	8.8	2.92	6.2
Research and advice on policy	3.1	7.5	1.4	4.0
Monitoring/ follow-up	2.4	3.2	0	1.9
Support to child education	10	4	2.2	5.4
Brokering role	1.6	1.9	1.5	1.7
Advocacy and mediation	2.4	5.6	0.72	2.9

Source: *Field data using social work practitioner questionnaire*

Some social workers indicated that they could not tell the most effective interventions due to limited evaluative research on the work of the agencies involved in poverty reduction programmes. Nonetheless, three key roles were suggested regarding ways in which social workers should intervene to reduce poverty in the rural areas. These related to enhancement of local participation, use of indigenous knowledge and empowerment of the most vulnerable groups.

Promoting local participation and bottom-up programming

Social workers should address the needs and problems of the people as identified by the people themselves. It should be the community to tell what they can do best.

> Use the asset base approach to community development whereby you do not take a written sheet to the community but take a blank one. Find the assets in the community; what they do best, use that… and it will give you great results. As the World Bank put it last year, Africans are their own consultants in poverty. If you have never been poor, how can you be a consultant on poverty? *(Employer, Family Life Network, Kampala)*

In other words, the rural people are the ones who experience the poverty; they are also the ones with possible solutions to their unmet needs and challenges. The social worker just needs to take a listening ear to rural communities and hear what they say and design interventions based on the people's viewpoints. Interventions should be shaped by the articulated needs of the rural people. This presupposes planning from the bottom and not from the top by both the government and NGOs.

Use of indigenous knowledge and methods

The employers emphasised the need to pick good attributes from people's cultures and traditions relating to different aspects of life such as health, food management, production technology, approaches to mediation and problem-solving and marrying them with modern practices. One respondent from an NGO best articulates the argument:

> Culture should be helping people to improve their livelihood, to strengthen their bonds and help them look at aspects that are good in terms of improving their livelihoods. *(Employer, CDFU, Kampala)*

It was argued that social workers need to dialogue with the rural people in order to identify the good and bad cultural norms, traditions and practices and how to modify the bad ones. For this to work out effectively, social workers need to work with community leaders who are the custodians of culture. It is the leaders who influence their people to sustain good practices and get rid of the retrogressive ones.

> The African family is built on two pillars; culture and religion. Our culture is our religion and our religion is our culture. The white man came and separated the two and that is why we got an identity crisis … Religious leaders are highly respected in communities because it is these that people go to voluntarily each week without pay. *(Employer, Family Life Network, Kampala)*

Social workers need to know the community leadership and use it to access and influence the people. Knowledge of cultural practices such as that done to cleanse former abductees such as *mato oput* is a very important form of reconciliation.

> Knowledge of traditional ways of solving some indigenous problems… Most local problems in this area are solved by slaughtering a goat, cow or chicken and throwing the carcass towards the impending danger… *(Employer, Caritas, Gulu)*

Social workers were also urged to understand the cultural environment of the rural people and apply it in programme implementation:

> Like opening land, it is regarded as a men's job and thus men are targeted. Also when constructing animal shades, the society takes this to be men's work, and so we target men. *(Employer, Heifer International, Gulu district)*

Employers universally emphasised that social workers need to be sensitive to the cultural beliefs, values and language as well as the timing of activities. Social workers need to know the roles of different people in the communities and households so that they target their interventions appropriately.

Empowerment and capacity-building for the most vulnerable groups

Employers also observed that the poorest of the poor may not freely attend community meetings and when they attend they fear to make contributions; which renders them even more powerless. Therefore, programmes tend to exclude the poorest groups. Social workers need to identify such people and build their confidence through sensitising them on their rights so that they are better targeted.

Summary

From the foregoing sections, it is clear that poverty in its multi-faceted forms remains the most pressing problem affecting the population and consequently the most frequently presented problem that social workers have to deal with. There is a

shared understanding and interpretation of the concept of poverty among clients, social workers and the agencies; with all the categories pointing out the material and non-material aspects of poverty. At the same time, there is a convergence of views on social development as a holistic approach to poverty eradication and problem-solving within society. Social workers are directly contributing to poverty reduction particularly through individual, group and community empowerment. The highest social work contribution to the realisation of the MDGs is in the areas of health, particularly in addressing issues of HIV/AIDS and other diseases. Social work practitioners are also more visibly contributing to promotion of gender equality through engaging in interventions that empower women and other vulnerable groups. Conversely, there is less direct social work involvement in education and environmental protection. Relevant policies, plans and programmes are in place to address poverty and lead to the achievement of other MDGs. These provide opportunities for a developmental social work intervention at every level of society if conscious and deliberate steps are taken by the government to enlist more social work involvement.

Chapter Five

The Nature of Social Work Practice

Introduction

This chapter presents findings on social work practice in Uganda. It specifically describes where social workers are employed, the approaches and methods adopted, their specific roles in poverty reduction and the realisation of the MDGs, their identification with the profession, and their recommendations of what needs to be done to enhance the general visibility of the profession and its contribution to social development in the country.

Human service agencies employing social workers

Most of the social work practitioners (70%) were employed in the non-governmental sector - both national and international. Just 15% of the practitioners were employed in the governmental departments; 10% in CBOs and 0.5% in commercial/private agencies (see Figure 9). The CBOs are civil society self-help agencies which are usually started by local people to meet various needs of their members and those of the communities. These tend to be smaller than NGOs in terms of activities, the targeted population, and geographical coverage as well as resources. In Uganda, the CBOs register with the local governments, and are monitored by the community development departments which are supposed to be managed by social workers. Being indigenous

and localised, these structures are increasingly being sub-contracted by local and international NGOs to implement their plans. On the other hand, NGOs register with the NGO Board at the national level.

Figure 9:   Key sector and agency category where social worker was employed
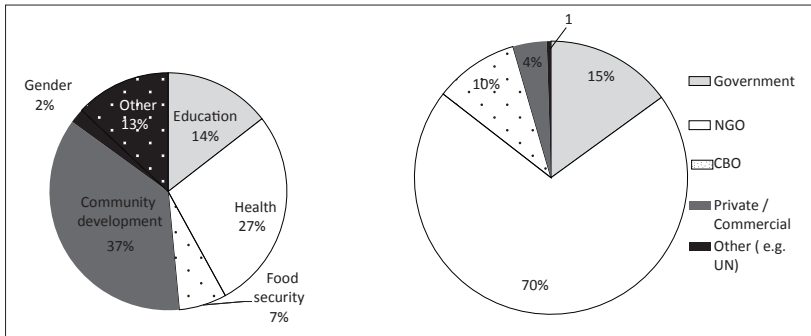
Source: *Field data*

The key sectors in which the social workers were engaged were largely community development (37%), health (27%) and education (14%). With regard to the involvement of agencies in specific sectors, NGOs were active in all service delivery sectors while the government featured more in gender and community development (see Table 8).

Table 8:   Agency categories by the sectors in which social work practitioners were employed

Agency category	Key social service sector (%)						Total
	Education (n=29)	Health (n=55)	Food security (n=13)	Community development (n=73)	Gender (n=4)	Other (e.g. environment) (n=26)	(N=200)
Government	6.9	10.9	7.7	20.5	25.0	19.2	15.0
NGO	79.3	78.2	61.5	64.4	75.0	65.4	70.5
CBO	10.3	7.3	15.4	12.3	-	7.7	10.0
Private / Commercial	3.4	3.6	7.7	2.7	-	7.7	4.0
Other	-	-	7.7	-	-	-	0.5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: *Field data – social work practitioner questionnaire*

Gender and community development are departments of the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MoGLSD); a government department and a patron ministry of the social work profession. Results show that there were relatively few social work activities in other sectors managed by government. CBOs were more active in agricultural and community development sectors; while commercial agencies were found to be more involved in the agricultural food security service sectors. United Nations agencies were more active in the food security sector. Gender and environmental management was the least mentioned by the agencies. This finding, however, needs to be treated with caution since gender and environmental protection are ideally addressed as cross-cutting issues.

Population targeted by human service agencies

There were great variations in the population targeted by the studied agencies. Some organisations targeted children, while others targeted youths, adults, or entire communities. About a third (32.1%) of the agencies in all the districts targeted children followed by those that targeted all the people in the community (see Figure 10).

Figure 10:   Agency's major target population
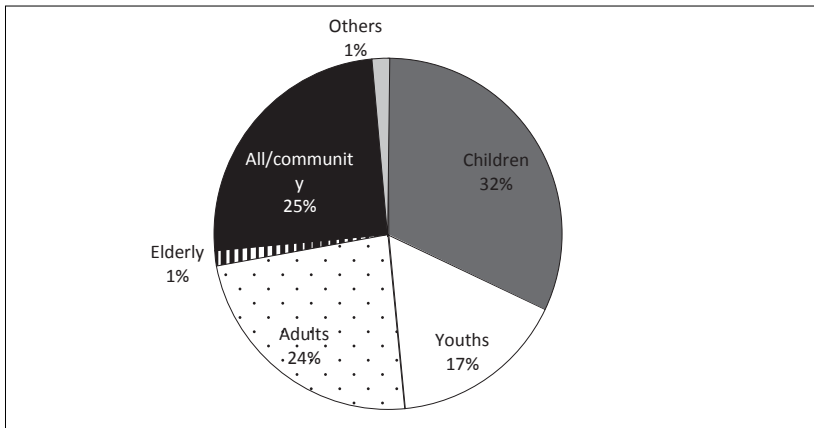
Source: *Field data*

As per the study findings, the elderly were the least targeted by the organisations in the whole country. The needs of the elderly in Uganda have not attracted much attention to have specific social work interventions. This may be attributed to the fact that they constitute a small proportion of the population. Therefore, their services have remained under-developed.

Table 9:   Major target population within districts

District	Major population group targeted by agency (%)						Total
	Children	Youths	Adults	Elderly	All/community	Others	
Bugiri (n=9)	-	-	44.4	-	55.6	-	100%
Gulu (n=28)	53.6	21.4	14.3	-	10.7	-	100%
Iganga (n=23)	26.1	4.3	52.2	4.3	8.7	4.3	100%
Kampala (n=39)	33.3	28.2	15.4	2.6	20.5	-	100%
Mbarara (n=37)	27.0	10.8	13.5	-	45.9	2.7	100%
Nwoya (n=4)	25.0	25.0	50.0	-	-	-	100%
Total (n=140)	32.1	16.4	23.6	1.4	25.0	1.4	100%

Source: *Field data using employer questionnaire*

Children were largely targeted (53.6%) by the agencies in Gulu District in northern Uganda; while adults were largely targeted in the eastern districts of Iganga and Bugiri. Community development projects were focused on more by the eastern district of Bugiri as well as Mbarara district in western Uganda. The youths were largely targeted in Kampala district and the northern districts of Gulu and Nwoya. The focus of interventions reflects the environmental/contextual factors and the existent needs in each region. Gulu district's concern over child welfare arises out of the great impacts of the 20-year long war, which led to the abduction of many children by the rebels of the Lord's Resistance Army. Many of the girls returned with babies who could not easily be accepted by the communities because of the atrocities the children had been forced to exert on their own people. War and displacement also created a lot of trauma which had to be addressed after

the war as people were being resettled (Spitzer and Twikirize, 2013).

Kampala district mainly targets youths because of the unemployment and under-employment problems, HIV/AIDS, prostitution and illicit drug use. Homelessness manifested in the high numbers of street children also constitutes a big problem in big urban areas like Kampala. Geographical locations which had been relatively peaceful such as Mbarara and the eastern districts of Iganga and Bugiri (Busoga region) were engaged more in community development programmes.

Level of social work intervention

The majority (60%) of the agencies where social workers were employed intervened at the community level; followed by interventions at individual and family level (mentioned by 26.4% of the employers). Macro-level interventions were reported by only 10.7% of the employers.

Table 10:   Level of intervention by agencies in the studied districts

Level of intervention	District						Total
	Bugiri (n=9)	Gulu (n=28)	Iganga (n=23)	Kampala (n=39)	Mbarara (n=37)	Nwoya (n=4	(n=140)
Individual/ family	-	39.3	17.4	15.4	40.5	25.0	26.4
Community	100	57.1	58.3	53.8	48.6	50.0	60.0
Macro/ national	-	-	4.3	30.8	2.7	25.0	10.7
Other	-	3.6	-	-	8.1	-	2.9
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100.0%

Source: *Field data*

The eastern districts of Bugiri and Iganga tended to rely more on the community level interventions while Kampala used relatively more macro-level interventions than any other district. Many agencies in Gulu and Mbarara used the individual approaches and family therapy than Kampala and the eastern districts. This variation in intervention levels in the districts accrues from the nature of problems, levels of training, and proximity to the policy making institutions in Kampala.

Figure 11:   Level of intervention by target group
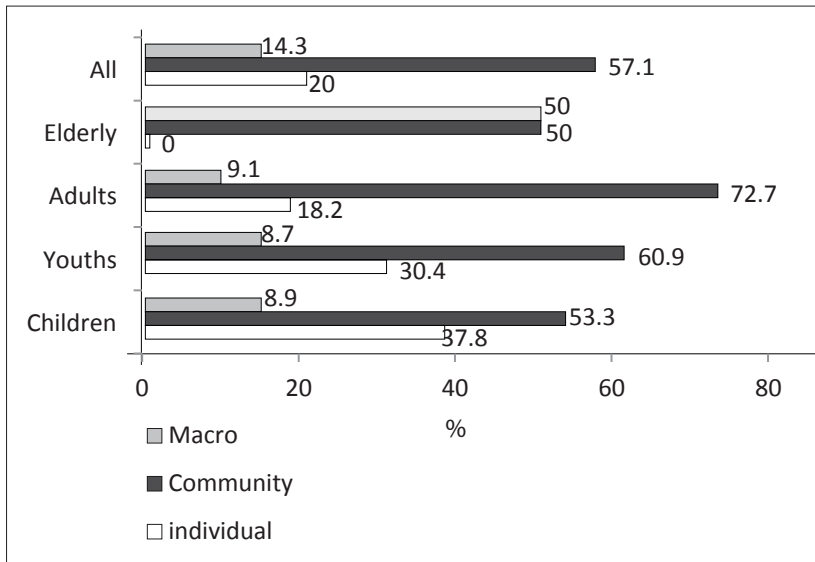
Source: *Field data*

There were also slight variations in the level of intervention by target groups, with individual level interventions most common among agencies that targeted children. 37.8% of those who worked with children provided case work services (working with individual children and their families); while

53.3% reached out to the children through community level interventions; and 8.9% provided macro-level indirect services such as advocacy, research, institutional development and advising on policy. Conversely, 20% of the social workers who worked with all the people at the community level provided case work services to individuals while 57.1% provided community-based services to all. The findings demonstrate the use of generalist social work methods for social development.

Proportion of qualified social workers in agencies

In most agencies (59%), qualified social workers constituted between 1-20% of the workforce. About 16% employed above 50% qualified social workers, while 10% did not employ any trained social worker. Figure 12 shows the proportion of social workers employed by government, NGOs and CBOs.

Figure 12:   Estimated proportion of qualified social workers in agency labour force
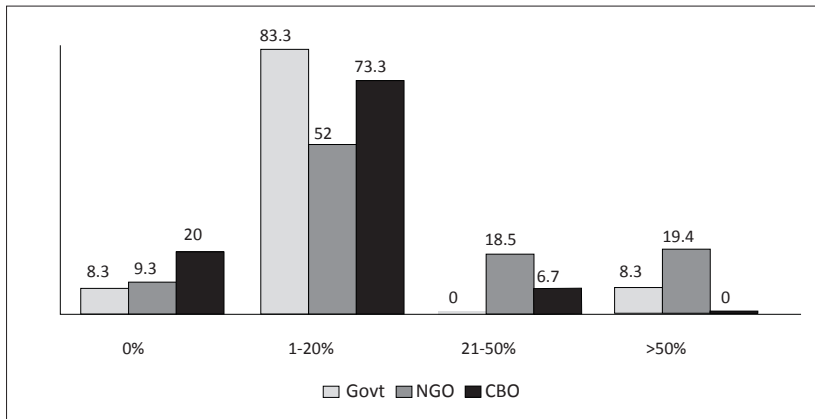
Source: *Field data*

NGOs employed the largest proportion of trained social workers, with 19.4% of the NGOs estimating that trained social

workers constituted over 50% of the labour force. This is due to the fact that the NGO sector manages the bulk of social welfare services in the country compared to the government.

The health sector employed a relatively higher percentage (31.4%) of qualified social workers, followed by community development (28.6%); and education (19.3%) sectors. Food security, gender and environmental protection least employed qualified social workers. Agencies serving children (32.1%) employed relatively many more trained social workers followed by community development programmes (25%) and agencies targeting adults (23.6%). Other significant findings are the existence of some child-focused agencies without any trained social workers. This may be attributed to failure by the government to gazette programmes and agencies that should be required to employ trained social workers. The findings also show that services for the elderly are not as well developed as services for other age groups.

A cross-tabulation of districts by the estimated proportion of qualified social workers showed a significant relationship (x^2=47.609; p-value =0.000). Details of the distribution of qualified social workers employed in each district are shown in Table 11.

Table 11:   Estimated proportion of qualified social workers in the studied districts

District	Estimated per cent of qualified social workers				
	0%	1-20%	21-50%	Above 50%	Total
Bugiri (n=9)	11.1	88.9	-	-	100%
Gulu (n=28)	3.6	35.7	14.3	46.4	100%
Iganga (n=23)	26.1	65.2	8.7	-	100%
Kampala (n=39)	7.7	69.2	12.8	10.3	100%
Mbarara (n=37)	5.4	62.2	24.3	8.1	100%
Nwoya (n=4)	25.0	-	25.0	50.0	100%
Total	10.0	59.3	15.0	15.7	100%

Source: *Field data using employer questionnaire*

Gulu district tended to employ more qualified social workers than other districts, including Kampala, the capital city of Uganda; which is attributed to the civil strife that engulfed the northern region for over two decades. At the time of this study, northern Uganda was going through a period of rehabilitation and resettlement of many children and formerly displaced persons and rebels to their homes. These required a lot of social work services and other social services and infrastructural development.

It is important to note that almost all social workers (92.1%) employed in all the different categories of agencies worked in multi-disciplinary teams. In government departments, 100% worked in multi-disciplinary teams. Similarly, 91.7% in NGOs, 93.3% in CBOs and 80.0% in private agencies worked in multi-disciplinary teams. This is a positive approach to poverty reduction and social development as no single discipline can claim to handle the multi-dimensionality of poverty and development.

Developmental and remedial social work: approaches used by practitioners

For social work to contribute effectively towards social development and the achievement of the MDGs, it has to transcend its remedial character. This has to be reflected in the general focus of interventions as well as the skills and methods applied. Developmental social work emphasises client strengths and the importance of empowerment. It requires that clients are provided with tangible social investments that enhance their capabilities and facilitate their participation in community life and the productive economy (Midgley and Conley, 2010). As shown in Figure 13, the social work practitioners who participated in this study gave a range of their agencies' interventions and the general approach underlying their practice.

Figure 13: Major focus of interventions and overall approach adopted
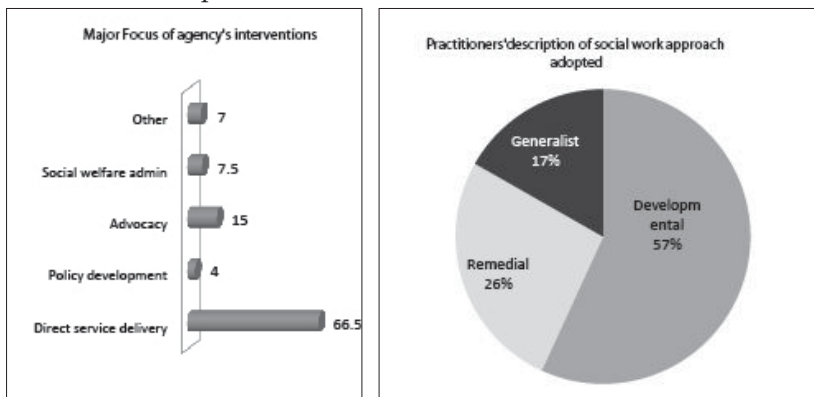
Source: Field data

Most agencies (66.5%) were involved in the provision of direct services at the micro and meso levels. This meant

provision of face-to-face services that directly benefited the service applicants. Overall, the developmental approach was indicated to be the most prominent. The generalist approach which underlies most social work training in Uganda was not explicitly referred to (only 17%) though it is applied in practice. Remedial approaches were mostly used with individual/family client systems (57.1%) while developmental approaches were used largely at community and national levels (64.7% and 59.4%, respectively - data not shown). Just 20% of the social work practitioners indicated that they used a developmental approach with individual clients and families. The specific practice roles and work methods by social workers are indicated in Figure 14.

Figure 14:   Specific roles and methods used by social workers
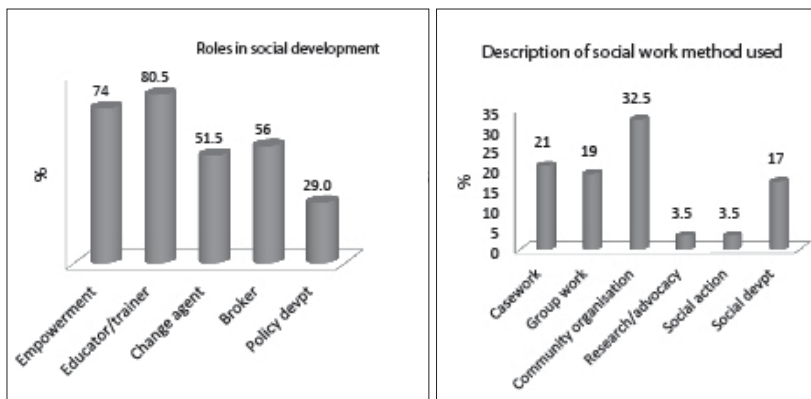
Source: *Field data*

In line with the social development perspective, most practitioners described their roles as educational (80.5%) and empowerment (74%). These and all the others are inter-related and are expected to contribute to long-term positive

changes in the lives of individuals, communities and society as a whole.

The key finding (Figure 14) is the use of community-based social work methods to solve problems and meet needs of people of different categories while the use of indirect macro-level interventions was quite limited. Community organisation and social group work featured more prominently in line with the focus on meso-level interventions. These were followed by social development (broader societal interventions such as social action, advocacy, research, and social welfare administration). Individual casework was used by slightly over a fifth of the practitioners (21%).

The majority (63.5%) of social work practitioners described the overall purpose of their day-to-day activities in terms of making long-term improvements in the socio-economic situations of their clients. Seventeen per cent indicated that their interventions focused on addressing the immediate needs of their clients; while 16% focused on interventions that prevented clients from falling into poverty and other undesirable situations such as sickness.

From the foregoing sections it is clear that social workers in Uganda use a multiplicity of approaches and methods in playing a very significant role in social development. The predominance of community development interventions attest to the fact that social work in Uganda is indeed not just a reactive profession, but rather it is proactively engaged in the overall process of social development. At the same time, it has not relegated its responsibility to address individual needs of the most vulnerable groups which explains the noticeable presence of casework in social work practice.

Professional identity

For social work to fulfil its mandate in poverty reduction and the enhancement of social welfare, the professional identity is important. How social workers define themselves and what they feel about being a social worker influences their commitment to fulfilling their obligations. The findings indicate quite positive feelings and attitudes about the profession as shown in Table 12.

Table 12:   Feelings about being a social worker

Feelings/attitudes being a social worker	Frequency	Percentage
I am proud to be a social worker.	46	23.1
As a social worker I feel able to contribute meaningfully to my country's development.	77	38.7
I gain personal satisfaction through my professional activities.	51	25.6
I feel happy with my job even though the payment is not adequate.	24	11.6
I would rather opt to work in another field.	2	1.0
Total	**200**	**100**

Source: *Field data*

It can be observed that only two practitioners were dissatisfied with being a social worker; desiring to quit had they alternative avenues. The majority (99%) felt satisfied undertaking their social work activities and thought they had a contribution

to make to the development of their country. This is quite a positive finding to base the organisation of the professional association and re-organisation of the curriculum.

However, regarding the public opinion of their profession, most respondents (57.5%) felt that social work was fairly under-estimated. This was especially in regard to the government's minimal and almost invisible role in acknowledgement of social work contribution and the trend in recent years where the historical roles of social work in the government departments of community development, probation and social welfare are being filled with personnel from other related disciplines. Only 17.5% of the practitioners stated that the profession was adequately recognised in Uganda. Twelve per cent thought that social work was highly appreciated and yet an equal percentage reported that social work was not recognised at all.

Professional identity was also examined by asking social work practitioners whether they knew the existence of the National Association of Social Workers, (NASWU) whether they were members, and their sense of identification with the profession (see Figure 15).

Figure 15: Awareness, membership and willingness to join professional association
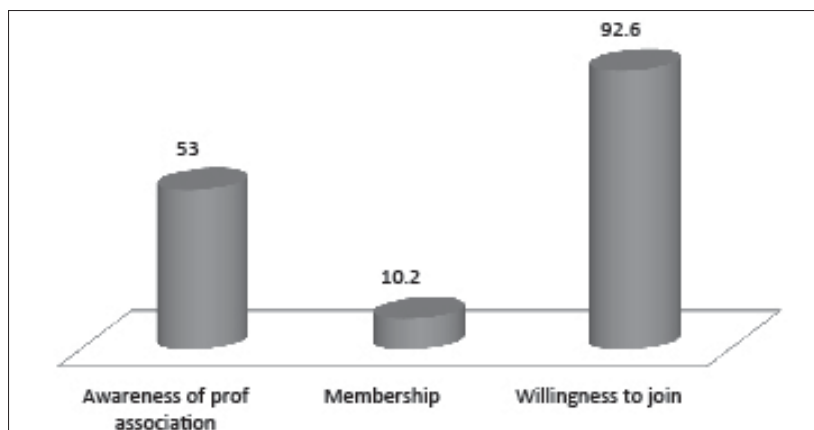
Source: *Field data*

Only over a half of the social workers (53%) were aware of the national association of social workers in Uganda while only a minimal number of 10% were members. This has an impact on the professional identity discussed above and the extent of the visibility of the profession. The high number of those who were willing to join the association is a positive indicator of the potential to strengthen the association and thereby contribute towards professionalism in social work.

Challenges facing the social work profession

A number of challenges were identified by the social workers and also the policy makers interviewed:

1.   *Lack of a legal framework:* Currently there is no law establishing social work as a profession responsible for meeting the social welfare needs of the people. The profession has no council to regulate training and practice in the country. The National Association of

Social Workers in Uganda, which is the professional association of social workers, recognises that the lack of a legal framework to regulate social work as a profession is one of the biggest challenges to the development of professional social work practice in Uganda. While opportunities for social work training have increased since the 1990s; resulting from the liberalisation of university education, there has not been a corresponding change with regard to professionalisation of the occupation, through legislation. Universities are producing more social work graduates, but because of the absence of a legal and regulatory framework for social work practice, these graduates are not identified as social workers, even when the work they do reflects the cardinal social work objectives of helping individuals and communities. In this regard, the President of NASWU had this to say:

> At the moment there are people going for training but we do not know whether these people coming as social workers are capable of making a difference outside of school. So we feel that this legal framework is right now extremely urgent and as a national association, we are willing to work on this. *(President, NASWU, Kampala)*

Lack of a legal framework arises out of social work's lack of organisation. It was observed that the profession was not as organised as others like law, medicine, nursing or architecture and accountancy and this negatively impacted on the visibility of its contribution to social development.

2.   *High unemployment of the social work graduates:* There are over 20 universities offering programmes in social work and yet many graduates spend as many as 3 years searching for jobs.

> While we used to be 40 students in a social work class 20 years ago when I was studying social work at Makerere University, I understand that now a class has over 100 students. The number of social work graduates has grown so much [creating a great demand for our young graduates]. (President, NASWU, Kampala)

Limited employment opportunities also imply that the resources spent on training social workers are not being optimally used and yet the problems that require social work intervention in the country are quite enormous. Qualified social workers end up taking on the first job opportunity that presents itself even when it does not require such specialist training. This affects the contribution of the social work profession to social development as well as its visibility in the development arena.

3. *Lack of appreciation of the role of social work:* The role of social work is less understood. This is partly explained by the fact that the profession is yet to indicate to society their areas of specialisation and how to engage communities for development. The profession is, therefore, not visible in government departments and hence, the failure to attract resources and support from government.

4. *Diminishing community cultural systems and values of mutual help on which social workers can build community interventions:* Examples of these are: sharing agricultural inputs such as seeds, sharing labour for opening land, weeding, planting, harvesting, building houses and opening up feeder roads to ensure that all the sections that touch one's land or plot are dug up. These and other attitudes are making the role of community organisation for development increasingly difficult.

Summary

This chapter has shown that most social work practice takes place in the NGO setting, with only 15% of the practitioners employed by the government. The health sector and the community development sector employ most of the social workers; which re-affirms the revelation about the more prominent role of social work in poverty reduction and the promotion of better health. There is an uneven distribution of social workers across parts of the country and within different target populations, with more social work presence in northern Uganda and among agencies that serve children. Given the magnitude of poverty and deprivation in this region and also the fact that children are disproportionately affected by poverty, it can be concluded that the current distribution of social workers is in line with priority areas and target groups albeit unconsciously since there exists no regulation of the practice.

Overall, there is adoption of a developmental approach to social work with most practitioners using empowerment techniques such as education and promotion of income-generating activities to address client issues at the community level. There is under-representation of macro-level practice in terms of research, policy advocacy and social action to address institutional and broader structural issues that perpetuate poverty and inequality. Social workers positively identify with their profession although they acknowledge the fact that its contribution is not adequately recognised in the country.

Chapter Six

Social Work Education and Training

Introduction

A well-trained social welfare workforce is essential for the creation of an effective system of social services that can potentially contribute towards progress in social development, and specifically towards achieving the MDGs. This chapter focuses on social work education and training in Uganda. It examines the legal and regulatory environment for social work education and practice, and provides an overview of social work training and curriculum in different institutions. The chapter also highlights the perceptions of social work educators, practitioners, and students on the curriculum. An analysis of fieldwork practice as an essential component of the curriculum is provided. Areas for the improvement of the social work curriculum are identified.

Policy and legal environment for social work education

Social work education in Uganda is provided in the context of post-secondary institutions. The Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act (2001) provides the regulatory framework for higher education in Uganda. This Act created the Uganda National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), the institution that has the overall mandate for establishing standards and regulations for tertiary education in Uganda.

The NCHE was established to regulate higher education, and to guide the establishment of institutions of higher learning as well as ensure that quality and relevant education is delivered. Accordingly, the NCHE has direct influence with regard to determining the content for social work training. This mandate is derived from the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act; Section 5 (i) which requires the NCHE to: "ensure minimum standards for courses of study." It is against this background, that the NCHE has the responsibility to accredit courses taught in the various universities. In accordance to this mandate, in 2007, the NCHE developed the basic standards of social sciences education in higher institutions of learning. Within these, there are specific guidelines on the content for social work education and training to which all institutions are expected to align their curriculum.

At the practice level, social work remains unregulated and there is no legislation to support its establishment and *modus operandi*. This status quo casts a shadow on the professional status of social work in Uganda. The lack of licensing of social work professionals has had implications on the recognition of social workers and their role in social development in Uganda. While social workers make a key contribution to the well-being of individuals, families, communities and agencies through service delivery, their contribution may not be construed as social work, because of the lack of a specific law.

There exists a loose association of social workers – the National Association of Social Workers, which attempts to bring practitioners together. Although formed in the early 1970s, the NASWU has remained weak and is not visible among social workers. According to the NASWU constitution,

the overall aim of the association is to promote and facilitate social welfare and social development in Uganda. Among its specific objectives, the NASWU intends to:

i.   Promote the welfare and development of individuals, groups, families, communities, organisations and the nation;

ii.   Enhance the welfare and economic development of social workers;

iii.   Ensure social workers in Uganda have required training and skills;

iv.   Contribute to development of a law governing the social work profession;

v.   Ensure proper licensing of qualified social workers;

vi.   Ensure social workers observe a professional code of conduct;

vii.   Advance social work knowledge and practice through research, publication and knowledge sharing;

viii.   Network with related professional bodies nationally and internationally so as to further the mission, aims and objectives of NASWU.

The realisation of the above objectives would lead to the professionalisation of social work. At the time of this study, the association lacked structures and resources necessary to mobilise for the professionalisation of social work in Uganda. In addition, the strategies and activities adopted by the NASWU to realise its objectives are not well articulated. In its current state, the association lacks the membership strength to enable it to pursue its objectives. Many practitioners who were interviewed in the study were not aware of its existence. In other contexts, professional social work associations have evolved into strong and formidable associations with the

mandate to register, regulate membership behaviour, and discipline errant members where appropriate.

Despite the absence of a specific social work practice law, the social development sector has a number of laws and policies, which have implications for social work practice. These include: the Children Act, the Equal Opportunities Act, the Education Act, the National Gender Policy, the National Health Policy, and the Population Policy, among others. These guide social work practitioners in their work with vulnerable populations. Moreover, the Social Development Sector Investment Plan (SDIP) recognises the role of community development workers to mobilise communities for national development. However, this SDIP is silent on the qualifications of the community development workers. As a result, anybody with varied human and social science qualifications can be employed in this area.

Social work training

The history of higher education in Uganda dates back to 1922 when the British colonial administration established Makerere Technical College to train civil servants, after revelations by the Phelps-Stokes Commission that educational policies of missionaries and the colonial government were inadequate (Nakanyike and Nansozi, 2003 cited in Mugabi, 2009). Social work training was initiated in Uganda in 1952, with the establishment of Nsamizi Institute of Social Development. In 1969, the Department of Social Work and Social Administration was established at Makerere University. The two institutions had the monopoly of teaching social work until the late 1980s when university education was liberalised. Since 1988, the number of universities has grown to 31 (both public and private - secular and religious affiliated), largely due to excess

demand for higher education. Social work training is one of the popular courses among universities, with almost each new university adopting it as an academic programme. The reasons for this popularity have not been investigated or understood.

Scope of the social work curriculum

The NCHE published basic standards for social work education in 2007 (NCHE, 2007). A number of outcomes for social work training were listed by NCHE as follows:

a.   Linking people to needed services available;

b.   Mediating conflicts at individual, family and community levels;

c.   Providing technical information to client systems for problem-solving;

d.   Promoting advocacy services for the disadvantaged;

e.   Enabling individuals and families to resolve or cope with the psycho-social problems they have internalised from their stressful circumstances;

f.   Offering counselling services to individuals and families faced with interpersonal and intra-personal problems.

A reflection on the professional competencies expected of a social work graduate as stipulated by the NCHE shows that the orientation of these standards focuses on remedial as opposed to developmental social work.

This study sought to establish the views of social work educators and students about the underlying approach to the curriculum. The educators from all participating institutions largely expressed the view that social work training and education in Uganda prepares students for generalist practice. Among educators 72% indicated that the current social work curriculum adopts a generalist approach. Whereas

social development is a component of the curriculum in all institutions, it was not widely considered by educators as the underlying approach. Only 11% of educators reported that their institutions had adopted it as the underlying approach to social work education. Social development was widely perceived as a cross-cutting approach throughout the curriculum (56% of educators). However, it has to be understood that these perceptions were mainly individual and not institutional. Educators from the same institutions sometimes expressed different perceptions on how social development is taught in their respective institutions.

Figure 16:   Educators' description of the underlying approach to the curriculum
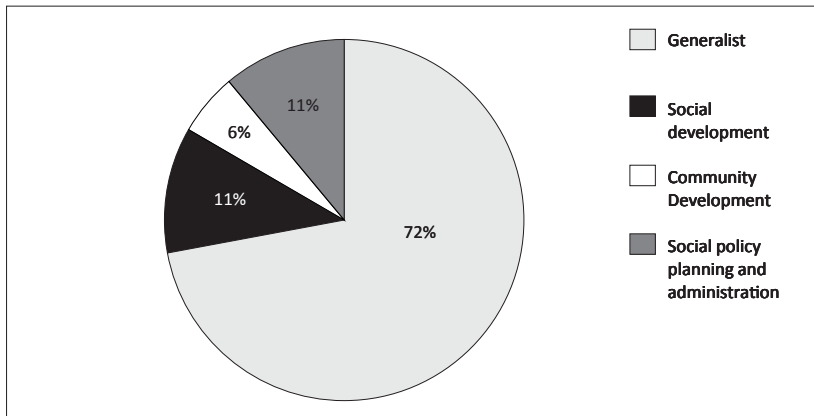
Source: Field data

An analysis of the courses offered by different universities showed that there were attempts by some institutions to adopt a curriculum which integrates social and community development into generalist social work. For example, the curriculum at Makerere University had courses such as foundations of social development, poverty and social inequality, social policy

analysis, community-based intervention strategies, education policy planning and management, health and healthcare policy, gender and social welfare policy, project planning and management, developmental social work, civil society organisations and social development – all of which showed attempts at adoption of an integrated curriculum.

Regarding the relevance of the curriculum to attainment of the MDGs, there was universal agreement among all educators that their respective curricula had relevant components to the stipulated targets. However, there were differences in priority given to the specific MDGs.

Figure 17:   Educators' perceptions on which MDGs are currently prioritised in the curriculum
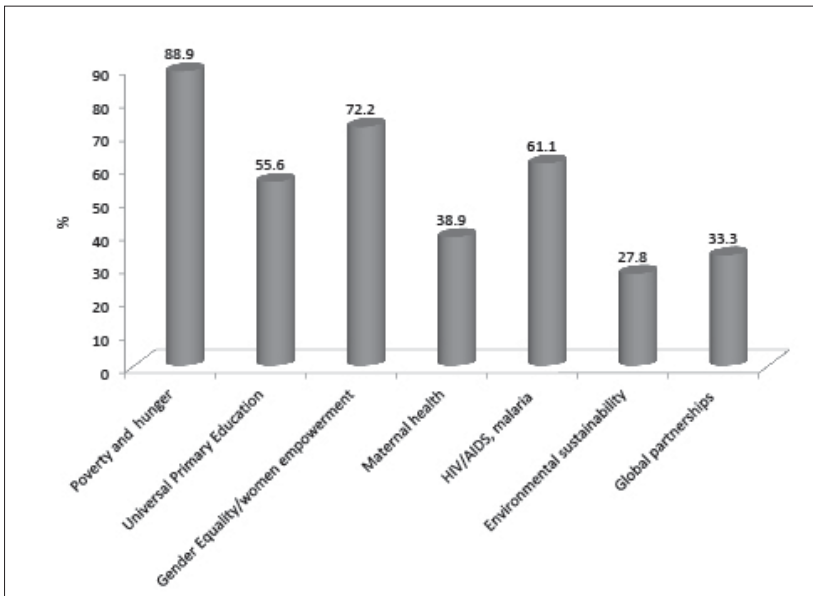
Source: *Field data*

All MDGs received some attention within the social work curriculum. However, as seen in Figure 17, there was

emphasis on eradication of poverty and promotion of gender equality. Universities had courses that explicitly address some of the above MDGs. For example, Makerere University had courses that addressed poverty, education and gender. Uganda Christian University also had a course that addressed gender. Most educators reiterated the view that the social work curriculum was sensitive to the diverse needs of male and female clients.

The NCHE basic standards stipulate that universities should align their social work curricula to the minimum standards set by the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW). These are commonly referred to as the 'global standards for the education and training of social work profession (IASSW and IFSW, 2004). Educators were asked whether the curricula adhered to these standards. The results indicate moderate integration, with situations where educators were not even aware of the global standards.

Figure 18:   Level of alignment of curriculum to global standards
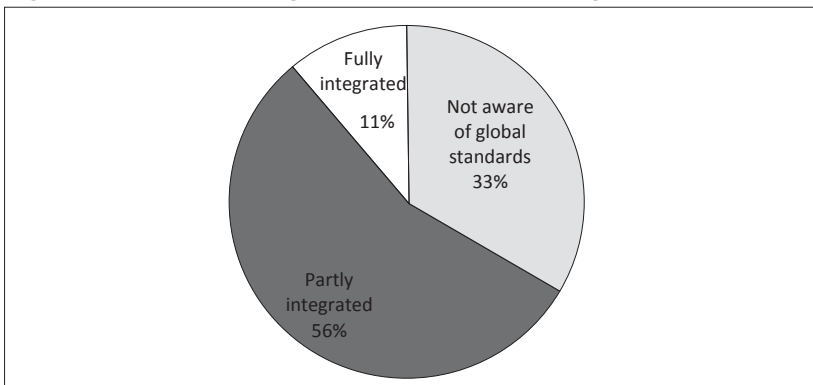
Only 11% expressed the view that the social work curriculum in their institutions was aligned comprehensively to

international standards while more than a half (56%) indicated that the curriculum only partially integrated these standards. A third of the educators expressed ignorance of global social work education standards. The latter category might be explained by the presence of non-trained social work educators in some HEIs or the inadequate continuous professional education and training for the social work educators which might render the curriculum content static and not dynamic. This gap needs to be filled if social work training is to be relevant at both the local and international levels and if professionalism is to be enhanced.

General perceptions of educators about the social work curriculum

Two views emerged from the educators regarding the social work curriculum. Firstly, that social work education in Uganda is diverse, with each institution delivering a unique content to the learners. Secondly, that the curriculum content is simply derived from Makerere University, which is perceived as the leader in terms of curriculum development.

Among those who considered the curriculum diversity, while acknowledging the strength in diversity, there was a belief that lack of an apex body to provide guidance and regulate the curriculum poses a challenge to meeting minimum standards.

> There is no proper coordination. We do not know what people are doing. We do not know about the curriculum. For example, what is UCU[8] Mukono teaching? *(Educator, Bugema University)*

There was concern about the capacity of the NCHE to provide guidance to social work education. Educators expressed

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8   Uganda Christian University

discontent with the minimum standards imposed by the NCHE for accreditation. Some universities complained that the NCHE had compelled them to delete courses, which the former considered essential for their curriculum, as a precondition for accreditation.

> We are not really happy with the minimum standards that the NCHE gave us. They dictated on what we should offer and we finally left out some courses which we are convinced were very important for social work education. If we had an association (of educators) then this body would have agreed on the core courses. *(Educator, Bugema University)*

Bugema University suspended a course on gender and development from its Bachelors degree programme, leaving it only on the diploma programmes, in order to adhere to the NCHE requirements. Educators in another institution acknowledged to have copied the curriculum of Makerere University without any regard for other considerations such as the need to reflect the mission and unique objectives of that particular university.

The above gaps notwithstanding, all educators, except one, expressed positive views regarding the adequacy of the curriculum to prepare students to effectively address poverty-related issues. Relevant course content was given as a reason for this view. Some educators indicated that their social work education programme had relevant content with regard to addressing poverty and related challenges. For example, at Bugema, the courses taught had content such as social development, developmental social work, poverty, gender and development, which are intended to enable students to appreciate poverty-related components. At Makerere Institute of Social Development, the educators

indicated that students are equipped with knowledge and skills for solving social problems of which poverty is a part. The social work education programme at Nsamizi integrates theory and practice, enabling students to develop practical skills, which are relevant to addressing poverty. Students are placed in groups, which are then assigned to communities, where they work together with the local people to identify problems and practical solutions. This approach, which has been adopted by the institute for fieldwork practicum, was considered relevant to equipping trainees with competencies to enable them to respond to poverty and related challenges.

Social work educators were asked to assess the extent to which the curriculum of their respective institutions equipped students with skills and competencies in key strategic areas related to social development. The findings are presented in Table 13.

Overall, the majority of the educators (89%) believed that the social work curriculum in their respective institutions explicitly referred to national poverty reduction and development strategies. A review of the curriculum content revealed that some universities had full courses on poverty and inequality. In addition, 78% of educators asserted that graduates of their social work programmes had the skills to respond to issues of poverty among the population while 76% agreed with the notion that their graduates possess skills for integrating social and economic development goals.

Further to the widely held view that the social work curriculum adopted a generalist approach, findings reveal confidence among educators regarding the ability of the curriculum to equip learners with skills relevant to social development and poverty eradication. A modest assessment was observed in aspects of academic partnerships and networking for mutual learning and further curriculum development.

Table 13:   Educators' perceptions on the extent to which the curriculum equips students with skills and competences in key output areas for social development (%)

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly agree
Curriculum explicitly refers to national poverty reduction and development strategies.	-	11.1	-	55.6	33.3
Graduates are adequately equipped to address issues of poverty amongst their target population.	5.6	11.1	5.6	44.4	33.3
Graduates have skills and competencies in integrating social and economic development.	11.8	-	11.8	64.7	11.8
Social work curriculum adequately prepares graduates to contribute to the achievement of the UN MDGS alongside other professionals.	-	5.6	5.6	61.1	27.8
One of the key roles, our graduates can play effectively is the protection and promotion of individual and social rights.	-	5.6	5.6	50	38.9
Our graduates are adequately equipped with knowledge and skills of integrating gender issues at all levels of practice.	-	16.7	5.6	61.1	16.7

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly agree
The theories and models that we teach in the current social work curriculum enable our graduates to work in diverse cultural settings and engage in culturally relevant practice.	-	-	16.6	27.8	55.6
Our graduates are adequately equipped with knowledge and skills to handle the challenges and needs of rural areas.	-	11.1	5.6	44.4	38.9
Our institution is involved in academic discourses and collaborating with other schools for the mutual exchange of staff, students and literature.	22.2	27.8	11.1	16.7	22.2

Source: *Field data*

Key qualifications of social work educators

The basic qualification for social work educators would ideally be a degree in social work. The majority of social work educators had a qualification or training in social work. Those with social work training had either a Bachelors degree in Social Work and Social Administration (BSWSA), Masters of Social Work (MSW) or a Doctorate in Social Work (DSW). However, a significant proportion of social work educators (44%) had qualified in other areas.

Figure 19:   Highest qualification attained by social work educators
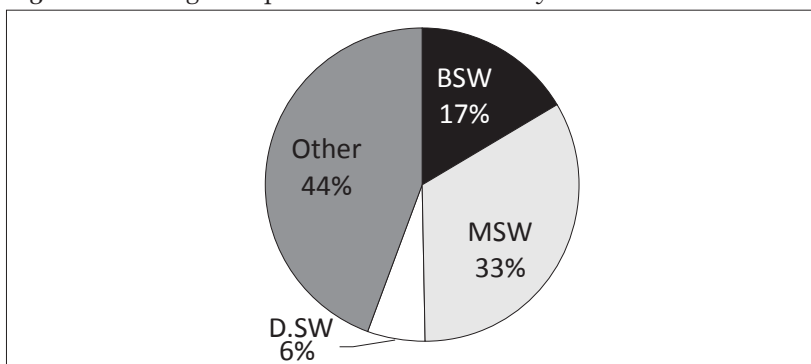
Source: Field data

Staff from the oldest HEIs tended to be qualified in social work compared to those in recently established institutions. Table 14 shows the distribution of highest attained qualification of staff at institutions that participated in this study.

Table 14:   Highest qualification of educator by HEI (%)

Highest qualification	Higher Education Institution								
	Bugema	KIU	Kyambogo	Makerere	MISD	Nsamizi	St. Lawrence	UCU	Total
BSW	-	33.3	-	-	100	50	-	-	16.7
MSW	-	-	100	50	-	50	-	66.7	33.3
D.SW/(PhD)	-	-	-	50	-	-	-	-	5.6
Any other	100	66.7	-	-	-	-	100	33.3	44.4

Source: Field data

All staff from the oldest HEIs namely Makerere University and Nsamizi Institute of Social Development had qualified in social work. Educators interviewed at Kyambogo University which is a public HEI and Makerere Institute for Social Development, which trains social workers at diploma and certificate levels, had relevant social work qualifications though at lower levels. The newer universities were more likely to have social work educators without a formal academic qualification in social work. At Bugema and St. Lawrence universities, none of the interviewed educators had social work qualifications. Social work educators in these institutions had qualifications in diverse areas including sociology, gender studies, demography, economics, educational policy planning and management. In one of the religious founded private universities, the head of the social work department had 2 advanced degrees (Masters), in education and social sciences. The justification for recruitment of such individuals as social work educators lay in the eclectic nature of social work. It was argued that aside from the core theory and practice courses of social work, other courses can be handled by people qualified in other disciplines. This, however, introduces a weakness in the training of social workers since the said educators would not have the adequate underlying contextual knowledge that links particular courses to social work theory and practice skills. There was a low level of attainment of advanced qualifications in social work. Only 5.5% of the educators who were interviewed had attained a doctorate. Further, there was concern that educators who were qualifying for PhD had tended to do so in non-social work disciplines.

A half of the educators attained their qualifications from national public institutions. All educators with a Bachelors

degree in social work attained their education in Uganda, with the majority (67%) graduating from public institutions. All educators with non-social work qualifications attained their degrees from a Ugandan HEI, with the majority (75%) from public institutions. This theoretically provides an opportunity for contextual learning. The majority (67%) of educators with advanced degrees at the Masters level attained them from institutions outside Uganda. This is linked to the limited opportunities for advanced social work training at graduate and doctoral levels.

6.3.4   Materials and methods used in teaching

Social work education in Ugandan universities relies heavily on materials produced outside Africa. The low level of scholarship and publication among social work academia has rendered the teaching staff dependent on knowledge generated elsewhere.

Table 15:   Source of teaching materials (Educators' responses)

Source of materials			
	High	Low	Moderate
Country-specific materials	38.9	33.3	27.8
Materials from other African countries	11.1	22.2	66.7
Materials from outside Africa	61.1	22.2	16.7

Source: *Field data*

As seen in Table 15, there is a high level of use of materials published outside Africa. Sixty-one per cent of the educators mainly relied on materials from outside Africa. Only 39% reported reliance on materials that were published in

Uganda. Most of this material is grey literature found in policy documents and organisational reports and does not necessarily refer to social work theory or practice models. The over-reliance on foreign publications affirms the low level of publication in Uganda with regard to social work. It also raises questions about the relevance of materials used for social work education.

Contribution to research and policy development

The study investigated the engagement of social work educators in research. Overall, 61% of educators reported that their units conducted research that is relevant to social work and social development. There were differences in perceptions regarding the level of staff engagement in research. Of the educators, 38% reported that staff were moderately engaged in research; while 31% indicated that there was a high level of engagement in research. A third of the educators reported that staff were not engaged in research at all. Generally, there was acknowledgement of a modest level of staff engagement in research. Diploma awarding institutions least engaged in research. Similarly, educators at Kyambogo, St. Lawrence University, and Kampala International University reported that the research component of their social work programme was not developed. The main reasons for the low engagement in research included lack of funding for research by the HEI and the heavy teaching workload for the educators.

Different responses were given concerning the determination of the research agenda in institutions of higher learning. The most frequent response was that the research agenda was determined by the department or institution (27%). Others reported that the research agenda was based on problems faced by communities or the nation (18%). Donors

were also identified as providing the research agenda for social work (18%). Conversely, 27% of educators did not know what determined the research agenda in their institutions. Nine per cent indicated that the research agenda was based on the individual's research interest. From the foregoing, it is clear that the HEIs did not have clear criteria of determining their research agenda.

The role of social work educators in policy development is mainly linked to policy-related research and training. Overall, educators had a low level of appreciation of their participation in policy and social planning.

Figure 20:   Educators' contribution to policy development
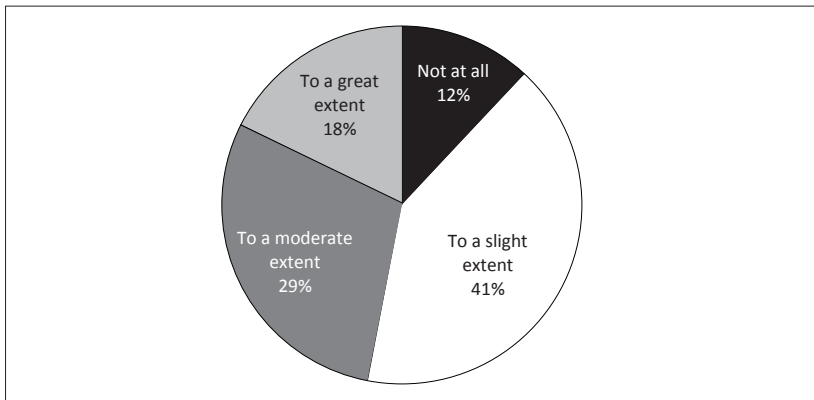
Source: *Field data*

Only 18% of the educators expressed the view that social work educators participate greatly in policy development and social planning. The majority of educators (41%) believed that social work educators played a minimal role in policy development. The low perception of educators' participation in policy development and social planning may be related to the limited coordination of research in the respective schools/departments of social work rather than a lack of participation.

For example, social work educators from Makerere University have on several occasions been contracted by government ministries and agencies as consultants and resource persons to lead policy development processes. For example in 2011, the social work department at Makerere University was contracted to develop the national strategic plan of interventions for orphans and vulnerable children. In the same year, staff from this department led the process of reviewing the national strategic plan for HIV and they had also been involved in the development of the national HIV prevention strategy.

Perceptions of practitioners about the social work training

The adequacy of social work education and training in preparing practitioners for practice realities was assessed by finding out the current practitioners perceptions on the curriculum.

The issues examined related especially to aspects that were key to social development in general and poverty reduction in particular. In addition, ability to relate and work with local communities as well as integration of gender in practice were assessed. Table 16 shows a retrospective assessment of some aspects of the curriculum by the practitioners.

Table 16:   Practitioners' perceptions about social work training

Description	Not sure	Not at all	To a slight extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent
My social work education and training prepared me to address diverse social problems.	0.8%	0.8%	10.3%	29.4%	58.7%
Poverty as a social problem was adequately covered in my social work curriculum/ education.	0.8%	1.6%	27.0%	34.1%	36.5%
The training I got prepared me to work and relate to local communities and their conditions.	-	3.2%	6.3%	15.1%	75.4%
The training I got prepared me to appreciate and appropriately integrate gender issues in my social work interventions.	-	7.9%	11.1%	29.4%	51.6%

Source: *Field data*

The practitioners generally had positive perceptions about social work training and education. The more highly rated aspects were associated with diversity in the scope of social problems covered, contextualisation of training for work in local communities, and gender and development. There was, however, a moderate rating of the curriculum with regard to poverty issues. Close to a third of the practitioners noted that issues of poverty were covered in the curriculum only to a slight extent. There was also concern that social work

training in Uganda is rather theoretical and fails to address the practical problems within society. Practitioners noted that much of what was taught at the university did not equip trainees with knowledge and skills to respond to real life situations. Fieldwork training which should provide an opportunity for students to learn practical skills was also considered to be not well coordinated. As a result, students ended up working with agencies which did not provide them with the opportunity to apply the theory they had learned in the classroom. Accordingly, practitioners identified strengthening of internships as one of the areas deemed essential for producing effective social workers. Integration of practical interfaces within the curriculum was identified as necessary for making the training more relevant and effective. Practitioners also questioned the field placement exercise and advised that students needed to be placed in agencies where they could learn and also be properly supervised.

Experiences and perceptions of students about the social work curriculum

In order to corroborate information gathered from the educators and the secondary review of the curricula as well as documenting the students' grasp of the type of social work education they were receiving, the study sought the views of students regarding different aspects of the social work curriculum.

Students' description of the curriculum

Students described the overall approach to social work education as generalist, social development/community development, clinical social work or social administration. The description of the curricula is cross-tabulated by the institution's ownership in order to gauge any differences

in the curricula offered by the public and private HEIs in Uganda. Table 17 summarises the responses.

Most students (38.5%) rightly described the curriculum as generalist. This has been a deliberate initiative by social work institutions in Uganda in order to train practitioners who can handle diverse social problems. Specialist social work practice is generally not common in the country. Whilst generalist social work is a more practical undertaking, given the multiplicity of problems that social work clients face, sometimes this blurs the role of social work since it becomes difficult to pin-point where a social worker is strongest, that is, their territory. This could have led to the public perception that what a social worker does, other people trained in different disciplines or even individuals of good will can do it as well.

Table 17:   Students' description of the curriculum by institution category

Description of social work programme:	Ownership of institution			Total
	Public	Private-NGO/religious	Private-commercial	
Clinical/therapeutic	7.3%	2.4%	1.6%	4.7%
Community development	26.6%	7.3%	15.9%	19.7%
Social welfare administration	18.3%	19.5%	15.9%	17.8%
Generalist social work	28.4%	51.2%	47.6%	38.5%
Social development	19.3%	14.6%	17.5%	17.8%
Not sure		2.4%	1.6%	.9%
Other		2.4%		.5%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: *Field data*

The study findings revealed some differences in the description of the curriculum by ownership of the institution. While students from private institutions outrightly described the curriculum as generalist, less than a third from public institutions described it the same way. In the latter case, another popular description was community development. There were also slight differences in the description of the curriculum between the diploma and the B.SWSA students as indicated in Table 18.

Table 18:   Students' description of curriculum by academic programme

Social work programme can be described as	Social work programme undertaken		Total
	Diploma in social work	**Bachelor's degree in social work**	
Clinical/therapeutic social work	2.1%	5.4%	4.7%
Community development	25.5%	18.1%	19.7%
Social welfare administration	17.0%	18.1%	17.8%
Generalist social work	40.4%	38.0%	38.5%
Social development	14.9%	18.7%	17.8%
Not sure	-	1.2%	.9%
Other	-	.6%	.5%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: *Field data*

The description of the programme/curriculum as generalist (40.4%), or community development (25.5%) was more

prominent among diploma level students than Bachelors degree programme students. Conversely, there was a mix of descriptions of the curriculum at Bachelor's level but still with generalist social work featuring more prominently (38.5%). Others ranged from community development, administration and clinical social work.

Reference materials

As part of the indigenisation process, it is important that the materials used in teaching and learning refer to the local context. This enhances understanding and application of knowledge as the learners can easily relate to the text and interpret it. The question on the source of reference materials was also put to the students in order to corroborate the educators' responses. Results from students were similar to the educators'; with close to 70% of all students reporting that the reference materials they used originated from Europe, America and other developed countries, as shown in Table 19.

The trend with regard to use of externally-generated materials was found to be the same in all types of institutions – a challenge to the process of indigenisation of social work in Uganda and Africa at large. Students recognised that most reference materials originated from contexts other than their own and in their recommendations they strongly highlighted the need for locally-generated materials.

Table 19:   Source of reference materials in different institutions

Reference materials Public	Ownership of institution			
	Public	**Private-NGO/ religious**	**Private- commercial**	**Total**
Local publications	21.1%	7.3%	15.9%	16.9%
Textbooks from other African countries	4.6%	9.8%	9.5%	7.0%
Textbooks from Europe and other developed countries	70.6%	80.5%	57.1%	68.5%
Other e.g. India	3.7%	2.4%	17.5%	7.5%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: *Field data*

Research as part of the curriculum

Research is considered a crucial component of any education programme. Ability to conduct independent research enhances an individual's investigative and analytical skills and it is also important in the problem-solving process. Further, research is part of the minimum standards for social work training. In this regard, the study sought to unravel the extent to which social work students conducted research as part of their training programme. The results were largely positive but with slight variations between the public and private institutions, as shown in Table 20.

Almost all students reported undertaking research as part of social work training. The percentage was lower in private

for-profit institutions due to high costs of conducting research and limited capacity of educators in these institutions to supervise research. This brings to the fore the need to strengthen the regulation of social work education in order to ensure that minimum standards for training are adhered to irrespective of the ownership of the institution.

With regard to the nature of research problems commonly investigated, over a half of the students, particularly from the public and religious-based institutions, mentioned community development issues. Conversely, the majority of students from private–commercial institutions mentioned problems of specific vulnerable groups such as street children and orphans. Research based on individual behaviour was not pronounced, which is partly attributed to the low emphasis on clinical or psychiatric social work in Uganda. Equally of concern is the fact that very few students undertook policy-related studies, which further points to gaps in policy analysis or the way it is taught in the social work curriculum. Given the fact that most of the problems social workers deal with are structural in nature, policy analysis needs to be a core component in the training of social workers.

Table 20:   Students' research projects as part of the curriculum

Classification (ownership) of HEI				
	Public/ government	**Private-NGO/ religious**	**Private-commercial**	**Total/ Average**
Undertook research course/unit as part of social work curriculum				
Yes	95.4%	95.1%	82.5%	91.5%
No	4.6%	4.9%	17.5%	8.5%
What best describes the orientation of research problems?				
Individual behaviour problems	14.3%	7.3%	8.0%	11.2%
Problems of specific vulnerable groups	16.2%	29.3%	38.0%	24.5%
Community development issues	59.0%	51.2%	36.0%	51.5%
Policy and planning issues	3.8%	7.3%	6.0%	5.1%
Programme/ project evaluation	6.7%	2.4%	8.0%	6.1%
Other		2.4%	4.0%	1.5%

Source: *Field data*

Fieldwork

Social work education is supposed to be conducted through classroom-based instruction and fieldwork placement in social welfare agencies. The latter is intended to help students apply the acquired theoretical social work knowledge, skills and values in practice. Fieldwork placement provides students with a series of supervised assignments and tasks selected to complement classroom-based instruction. The study sought to confirm if indeed all social work students undertook fieldwork as part of their training, and which agencies and locality offered most of their field placements. All these have implications for skills acquisition for competent practice. Placement in the rural areas should acquaint students with the realities of people at the grassroots who, in Uganda's context, are the most exposed to poverty and other vulnerabilities that social workers need to address. It should also prepare students to be willing and ready to practice social work within those settings after their graduation. Figure 21 summarises the students' responses.

Figure 21:   Whether students undertook fieldwork and placement locality
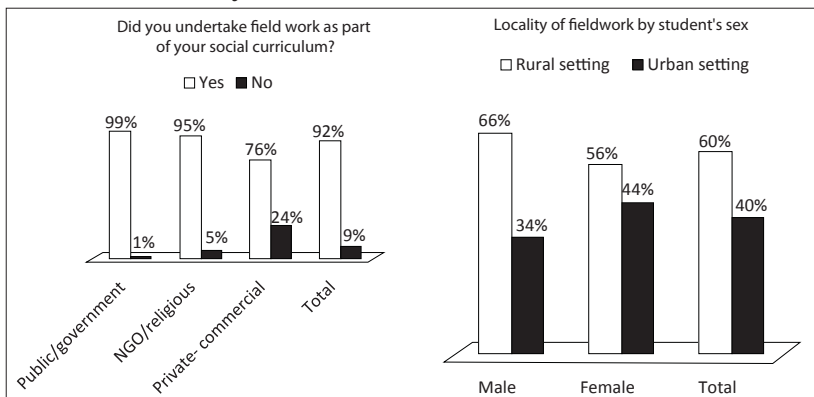
Source: *Field data*

Fieldwork was almost universally adopted as part of the social work curriculum. It was evident, however, that in private for–profit institutions, the percentage of students who undertook fieldwork was significantly less than their counterparts in public and religious-founded institutions. A total of 23 out of 213 students (9.8%), the majority of them from private for-profit institutions did not do fieldwork as part of their training. This may imply a relationship between the institution where one attained one's social work qualification and how adequately one is prepared for professional practice

The study findings revealed that social work educators in the private for-profit institutions find it costly to adhere to the requirements of fieldwork, particularly supervision by the academic staff. Another explanation refers to the composition of students wherein private for-profit HEI admit students from neighbouring countries. This makes it difficult for supervised fieldwork once the students go back to their respective countries. Thirdly, until recently, students in public institutions would get a subsidy or allowance for meeting their personal expenses during field placement. Their counterparts in the private institutions have to meet the whole cost of field placement on their own. The would-be fieldwork subsidy at the for-profit institutions forms part of the profit for the proprietors of these institutions. All these explanations notwithstanding, not paying adequate attention to fieldwork constitutes a serious omission in the training curriculum of social workers.

Contrary to the popular assumption, most students did their fieldwork in rural areas (60%) but by this they could possibly refer to their districts of origin but within urban-based agencies. This finding rhymes with the finding in the same study in terms of practice, where the majority of

professional social workers were found in Gulu district, generally considered rural, and not in the capital city. This is a positive trend for social work and social development in the country. In terms of gender, male students were more likely to work in the rural areas than female students.

The study also examined the category of agencies that offered most field placement opportunities. This was considered crucial for future considerations in strengthening field practice education through, for example, accreditation of agencies and supervisors. It was also important since the type of agency may determine the level of interventions and the capacity to supervise the students.

Figure 22:   Agency category and service orientation during fieldwork
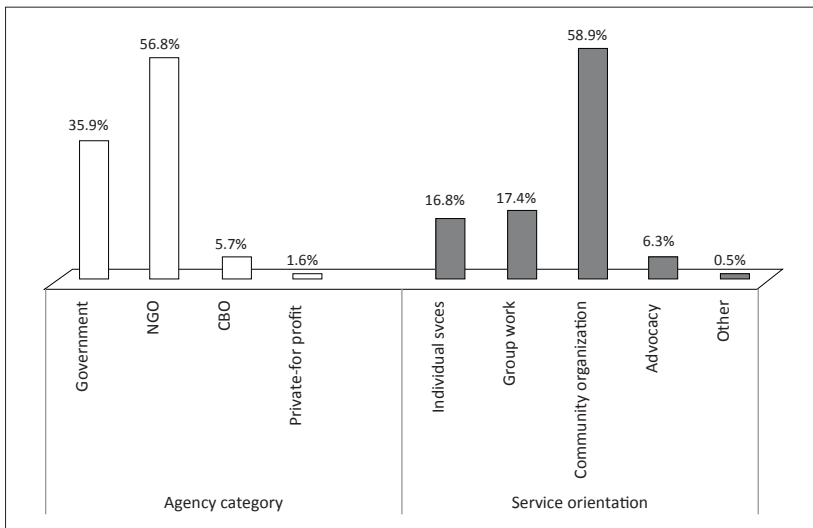
Source: *Field data*

NGOs offered most placements, which was also reflected in the agencies where most social workers were employed. This is attributed to the fact that in Uganda, it is the NGOs

that are most actively engaged in community development. With regard to service orientation, most fieldwork was done in community development services. Conversely, casework as a field for placement was not so prominent. This was also reflected in social work practice where the majority of practitioners were engaged in community development, with a relatively less presence in casework.

Employment aspirations of social work students

In order to achieve balanced social development, social work practice needs to permeate through all levels of society and especially fill the need at the grassroots. Whilst it is true that poverty affects both rural and urban populations in Uganda, the majority of people affected by poverty and exclusion are found in the rural areas; which is also in line with the general distribution of the population.

Social work also needs to be practised at the individual clinical, community and policy levels, if it is to contribute meaningfully to social development. For a long time, university graduates have been reluctant to work in the rural remote areas because of the limited social and economic amenities. Figure 23 shows students' employment aspirations by the nature of practice and preferred locality. The responses are cross-tabulated by the sex of the students.

Figure 23:   Students' employment aspirations by concentration of practice and locality
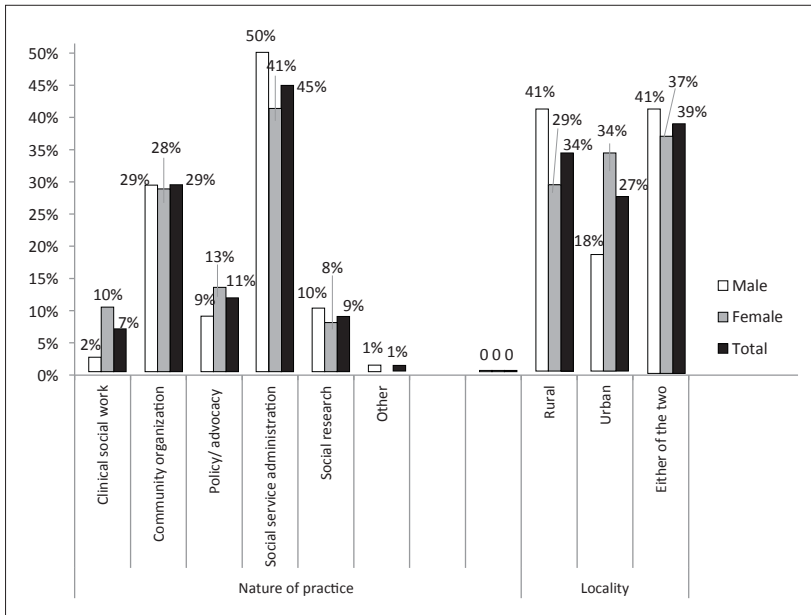
Source: Field data

Social work education in Uganda has essentially two strands, namely: social work (which prepares students for direct service delivery) and social administration (which is intended to prepare graduates for management of social welfare services). Interestingly, the findings indicate that the latter has become more attractive, with close to a half (45%) of all student respondents aspiring for employment in administrative positions. More males (50%) than females (41%) expressed this aspiration. Another area of interest was found to be community organisation or community development where almost a third (29%) of students aspired to work. The percentage of students aspiring to go into clinical practice was significantly lower (7%), but it is also

significant to note that the percentage of females aspiring for this nature of practice was five times higher than that of males (2%). Policy and advocacy as well as social research similarly attracted fewer responses. This has implications for the contribution of social work to social development since much of what is required in Uganda's context is structural and institutional transformation for social change.

More than a third of the students (33.4%) indicated readiness to take up employment in the rural areas. This is probably being enhanced by decentralisation and very high levels of unemployment in the urban areas. More males (41%) than females (29%) were ready to work in the rural areas or in either locality.

Students' awareness of Millennium Development Goals

In order to gauge the depth of coverage and emphasis put on the MDGs in the social work curriculum as well as assess the extent to which future practitioners were equipped with knowledge and skills to contribute to the realisation of the MDGs, the degree of students' awareness of the MDGs was investigated (see Figure 24).

Figure 24: Are you aware of the UN Millennium Development Goals?
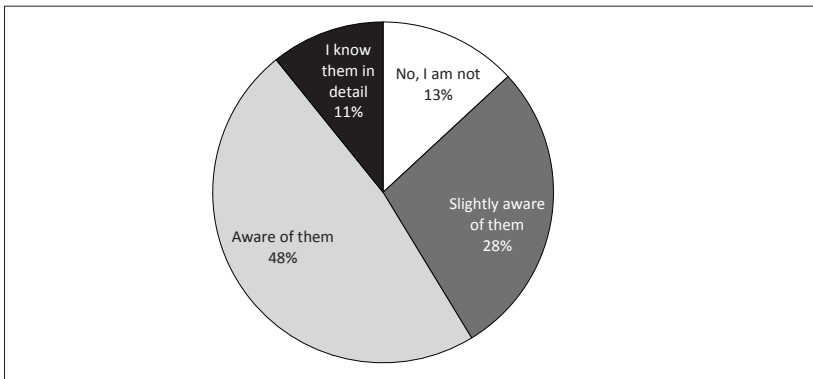
Source: *Field data*

Close to a half of the students were aware of the MDGs with slightly over a tenth reportedly knowing them in detail. 28% of the students were slightly aware of the MDGs – implying that most probably they did not cover them as part of their course content. Considering that the students interviewed in this study were in their final year, expected to go to the field soon and contribute towards the realisation of these MDGs, this points to a gap in training in contemporary social issues. On the MDGs that students felt most competent to contribute to, the majority stated poverty reduction. This might imply that it is the most common issue covered in the curriculum or it could be a rhetoric response considering the extent of the problem in Uganda (see Table 21).

Table 21:   Specific MDGs that students felt competent to contribute to

MDG	Frequency	Percentage
Poverty reduction	93	43.7
Education	18	8.5
Gender equality and empowering women	31	14.6
Maternal and child health	24	11.3
Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases	27	12.7
Environmental protection and sustainability	6	2.8
Global partnership for development	14	6.6
Total	213	100.0

Source: *Field data*

Besides poverty reduction, other MDGs that attracted fairer responses included gender equality and women empowerment (14.6%) as well as combating HIV/AIDS,

malaria and other diseases (13%). Environmental protection and global partnerships for development were the least rated. The social work curricula in Uganda have hitherto not paid much attention to these issues. At the global level, environmental social work is being promoted as part and parcel of the global agenda in order to enable social workers to holistically contribute to sustainable social development (Dominelli, 2012).

Students' assessment of the curriculum in respect of key aspects of social development

For social work to positively contribute to social development it must tackle issues of poverty and deprivation; and hence practitioners should have diverse skills to address problems faced by the population. The integration of social and economic goals in social work interventions is crucial and so are issues of individual and social rights, gender equality, sensitivity to and integration of positive aspects of culture. The extent to which the curriculum has addressed these and other aspects of social development was assessed through students' perspectives as the recipients of the training. Table 22 summarises their responses.

There was a generally high rating for most aspects of social development in the curriculum. Consistent with the earlier finding on students' awareness of the MDGs, this component was the least rated in terms of coverage in the curriculum. One could argue that aspects of the MDGs are not separate entities from all other aspects of social development such as poverty reduction and gender equality. However, since MDGs provide an international development framework, it is crucial that students of social work are intently equipped with the knowledge and skills to work within this framework and any other contemporary issues that relate to the process

of social development. Fieldwork was appreciated by almost all students as a crucial component of the curriculum, which provides a great opportunity to strengthen its organisational aspects so that students can gain even better from it.

Table 22:   Extent to which the curriculum addressed various aspects of social development (in %)

Description	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly agree
Issues of poverty and poverty reduction were adequately covered in the social work curriculum.	4.2	9.4	5.2	52.6	28.6
I have acquired adequate knowledge, skills and competences in integrating social and economic development goals through my social work training.	2.3	4.4	1.9	54.5	37.1
The social work training has equipped me with adequate knowledge about the MDGs.	2.3	13.1	9.4	52.6	22.5
The social work training has adequately prepared me to contribute to the realisation of the MDGs alongside other professionals.	2.8	8.9	12.2	51.2	24.9
One of the key issues that was effectively integrated in the curriculum was the protection and promotion of individual and social rights.	2.8	6.6	8.5	41.8	40.4
Gender issues were integrated in my social work curriculum.	1.9	4.7	6.1	49.3	38.0

Description	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly agree
I have been adequately equipped with knowledge and skills of integrating gender issues in all levels of practice.	1.9	8.0	9.4	52.1	28.6
Most of the theories and models that I learnt in social work are relevant to addressing local problems and needs in my country.	1.9	4.7	1.9	31.9	59.6
The social work education/training has made me more culturally aware and I can effectively work in diverse cultural settings.	1.9	2.8	3.8	48.8	42.7
Most of the curriculum content leaned towards remedial/therapeutic/individual social work methods and models.	1.9	3.8	12.7	52.6	29.1
Most of the curriculum content leaned towards developmental issues such as poverty reduction.	0.9	8.0	8.5	49.3	33.3
The way in which fieldwork was organised during the course of my programme helped me to gain a deeper understanding of development needs in my community.	1.4	4.7	3.3	31.9	58.7
The way in which fieldwork was organised during the course of my programme helped me to gain knowledge and skills on how to address individual problems of my clients.	1.4	3.8	2.3	27.2	63.8

Source: *Field data*

Summary

Social work education programmes have expanded over the past two decades with currently 20 higher education institutions running a Bachelors degree programme in social work. The overarching curriculum focus is generalist social work, which aims to equip individuals with skills that are easily applicable in different practice settings.

Although the history of social work education is rooted in the colonial era –with a focus on remedial forms of social work, the current curriculum focus can be described as developmental social work. Social development is widely perceived as a cross-cutting issue in the curriculum although not necessarily as the underlying approach.

Social work practitioners and students provided positive feedback on the adequacy of social work education in preparing them to address diverse social problems. There is a glaring gap with regards to graduate training opportunities and also a dire need for generation and use of locally produced teaching and learning materials to further strengthen the contextualisation of social work education and practice.

Chapter Seven

Contextualisation of Social Work

Introduction

This chapter covers key issues that help to understand the context in which social work is practised. Contextualisation of social work is important for effective service delivery and sustainable social development. In this regard, a number of aspects were considered namely; clients' experience of social work, the desired social changes, including desired areas of intervention, problems and challenges of social work clients as well as their coping strategies. The issue of cultural sensitivity in social work practice is also examined.

Clients' experience of social work

The experience of social work by clients is first seen in their understanding of social work and the role of social workers. From the study findings, it was clear that some of the clients did not know social work as a profession or what social workers actually do; although a few clients appeared to have a clear understanding of the profession through experience. In one women FGD in Gulu, in a group of 8 women only one reported knowledge of the profession:

> I am aware of social workers. I know them and they go to the field to do work. I know that social workers are involved in community mobilisation and organisation. I also know that the social workers organise people in groups in communities

> but I don't know what they do with these people after organising them in groups. *(Women's FGD, Gulu district)*

Study findings further revealed some of the clients linking social work to implementing and monitoring development programmes initiated by government; while others defined social work in terms of the target group; as professionals who work with local people.

> Most social workers monitor government programmes in areas where they are posted. They follow up money that has been sent in their areas. They help in the implementation of programmes like NAADS. *(Men's FGD participant, Kampala)*

> … a social worker is that kind of person who works with common/local people; like a community development officer who goes to the community, identifying their problems, guiding them on methods of overcoming the problems and linking them to relevant resources. *(Women's FGD, Bugiri district)*

A few other clients linked social work to humanitarian work and, accordingly they characterised social workers as being *bantu ba bantu,* which literally means a humane person. From the clients' perspectives, social workers are those professionals who work with the grassroots populations and vulnerable groups:

> A social worker is a person who assists people such as those with HIV/AIDS. They counsel people about HIV/AIDS and talk to them about behaviours. They also help to educate people about issues of poverty and how to alleviate it. They also advise people on health and sanitation issues and help them not to be proud. *(Women's FGD, Kampala)*

> Social workers are those people who move in communities talking to people and asking them about their situations and getting their perspective on how they can be helped … deliver services to the unprivileged communities and do rehabilitation work. They take the concerns of the commoners to other authorities. *(Men's FGD, Kampala)*

Several clients noted that social workers can be found in "worship places, hospitals, in the villages". What is clear from the clients' perspectives is that social work is rightly understood as a helping profession and as a grassroots practice. The different views revealed the eclectic nature of social work. Therefore, the definition and conceptualisation of social work fall within the broad roles played by social workers, namely: educator/trainer, advocate, broker, counsellor and researcher. These roles make social workers transcend all disciplines and all levels - from the grassroots to the top political level.

Most services used by clients related to health, education, agriculture and family and personal issues. Health-related services commonly mentioned included HIV/AIDS counselling and sensitisation; while with regard to education, child education support was the common service associated with social work. On family-related aspects, one respondent from Mbarara district observed: "*they teach us how to look after our families. They inspire us that what we have (the families) is invaluable.*"

When respondents were asked to state in which manner the service(s) accessed helped in solving their problem(s), various responses were received ranging from behaviour change at the individual level to improvements in economic well-being:

> The training I got [from Anaka Foundation] helped me to change my life and I am now able to counsel young girls that they should not involve themselves in sex and marriage before finishing school and they should go for testing, at least three times, with their potential spouses before marriage. *(Women's FGD, Gulu district)*

> I went crying with depression to a social worker. When I met the social worker, he calmed me down, took me through a process of counselling. We made appointments for revisits and I fulfilled the appointments. Now I feel normal. *(Women's FGD, Kampala)*

Respondents rightly observed that much as the social workers were helping, they could not solve all problems as one client noted: *"they bring us insecticide-treated nets, but we lack the money to feed the children properly"*. This view underscores the need to strengthen the developmental approach to social work in order to empower people to take charge of the affairs of their lives in a sustainable manner.

Regarding the limitations of the support received from social workers, several clients pointed to inadequate assistance rather than the professional manner in which the intervention was conducted. For example, a client reported that the NGOs did not cover all essentials such as food, clothes, and house rent. Other challenges related to lack of continuity and sustainability of interventions were echoed:

> Lack of sustainability of the services they offered to me is what I missed most. Of course at one point in time, I may need their services again, but I cannot go back to them because they have shifted from my area to another. *(Women FGD, Gulu district)*

> I am not impressed by social workers - they normally come whenever there is problem [emergency situation], and when there is no problem, they are nowhere to be seen. *(Women's FGD, Bugiri district)*

These deficiencies reflect the institutional and individual weaknesses that are often experienced in service delivery and in most cases call for reforms to meet the needs of the clients. There was barely any mention of unprofessional behaviour of the social workers in dispensing services apart from one client in a peri-urban area of Kampala who claimed that he had missed a service after allegedly being discriminated against by the social worker.

Desired social changes in society: priority areas for intervention

Suggestions were made by clients regarding desired social changes in the different sectors of the economy. Broadly, clients appealed for poverty reduction programmes/interventions by the government and other stakeholders. They further expressed the need for industrialisation by putting factories in rural communities to address the needs of the local people. Specifically, access to basic social services was expressed by the clients. Access to good health facilities, safe water sources, improved transport and electricity were emphasised as well as improvements in free education such as Universal Primary Education (UPE). Most clients contended that today's UPE is not free as there are other associated costs involved and hence the need for a truly free education programme.

The need for more investments in agriculture was reiterated if poverty is to be eradicated. The agricultural produce should also be linked to the market - both local and international. With respect to health, respondents want to see more health

facilities constructed and well stocked with drugs. This should be followed by close monitoring and inspection of the hospitals and health facilities to avoid mismanagement of drugs. Members also suggested that there should be proper loan schemes, especially for low income earners. To make it have impact on the poor, they suggested that the loans should be easier to access, and at low interest rates.

Other changes that clients wished to see included channeling help to communities through the local authorities at the village level so that the help targets the right people at the right time. It was argued that this would cut the bureaucracy and top-down approaches which currently do not make the interventions effective. In addition to this, clients suggested that communities should be organised into groups, in form of cooperatives. This also makes development management easier in case of need for mobilisation and sensitisation. Other desired changes in society related to measures to control prostitution, child sexual abuse, child labour and insecurity. Proper sanitation especially in the peri-urban areas was also pointed out. Other issues related to good governance, respect of the dignity of persons by *"avoiding violent eviction of people from land and other property"*, salary enhancement for civil servants to curb corruption, participatory development to take into account the interests of the people concerned, and ensuring peace and security in all parts of the country. Others suggested the removal of street children through appropriate programmes and putting in place a proper social protection system for the elderly to improve their welfare. The government in particular was challenged to create jobs for the youths.

All the desired changes related directly to the improvement of individuals and society's well-being which is the goal of

social development. It should also be noted that most of the suggested changes can be achieved at the community/societal rather than at the individual level; underscoring the need for social work to transcend the individual-centred interventions to promote social and structural change at the institutional and societal levels.

Problems and challenges faced by social work clients

Study findings revealed a myriad of problems and challenges faced by the social work clients in their day-to-day lives with some being youth-specific. Across the board, social work clients cited income poverty as a major problem which affected the ability of the clients to have access to the basic services such as food, health, education, decent housing and water either for themselves or for their immediate family members. This income poverty, according to clients, is associated with unemployment and limited agricultural productivity.

For the rural areas, poor infrastructure and unreliable transport to markets and other service centres were most mentioned by clients. Even where good infrastructure was found such as a health unit, the lack of adequate health personnel and the scarcity of drugs made them rather dysfunctional. In situations where such services were found available, mainly by the private providers, they still remained inaccessible to most clients due to high costs involved and the lack of trained personnel. Other challenges were reported in the educational sector where clients noted the absence of schools in the nearby localities, poor learning environment characterised by a shortage of teachers especially qualified ones and other scholastic materials:

> All parents in this community are disgusted with the UPE... sometimes children's books are not marked and it is equally difficult to opt for private schools because they are too expensive and are the rich-biased. *(Social work client, Mbarara district)*

Challenges encountered by clients in the sector of education were exacerbated by problems in the agricultural sector, which is a source of livelihood. Lack of a reliable market for agricultural produce compounded by poor transport system, were singled out as major challenges clients are faced with in the agricultural sector.

Another rural-biased problem was land-grabbing. According to the FG participants, the vice is perpetrated by the rich; and one respondent summed up the consequences of land grabbing on the poor as follows:

> The person whose land has been grabbed becomes like a refugee in his own country. *(Men's FGD, Gulu district)*

Another problem relating to rural areas is the increasing rate at which the land was losing fertility as one respondent in Mbarara district lamented that *"the land is infertile; and you have to keep on adding manure for it to yield"*. This affects agricultural productivity even at the subsistence level, thus pushing householders deeper into poverty and deprivation.

Problems associated with slums/peri-urban areas were equally numerous. Just as in the rural areas, clients reported problems of poor access to basic services; and limited awareness which exacerbate demand for and access to services, including proper sanitation. Problems of poor environmental sanitation were attributed to indiscriminate disposal of solid waste, unplanned manner of erecting buildings by the rich, which contribute to heavy flooding in low lying areas of the

urban centres where the majority of the urban poor live in slum areas.

The study findings revealed common challenges experienced by social work clients both in rural and peri-urban areas. These include the rising number of orphans, breakdown of marriages, large household sizes, social exclusion and social injustice. The problems of social exclusion and social injustice were particularly linked to the practice by some NGOs of charging registration fees in the process of selecting beneficiaries of their projects.

> Widows are affected most by this kind of injustice. They use their little-hard earned income to pay for entry fee or interview fee and later are left out and the children of the well-to-do are considered instead. *(Women's FGD, Bugiri district)*

Such practices by the social welfare agencies perpetuate a systematic exclusion of the poorest of the poor from development programmes. With regard to financial services, the challenge related to high interest rates that eat into the profit margin and subsequently result in failure to pay the loans back. Several loan beneficiaries decried the crippling effects of the loans where, instead of helping the poor to fight poverty, they end up in a vicious circle of poverty and are locked up in a perpetual deprivation trap.

There were other challenges that were found peculiar to the youth; such as parents being too restrictive, especially in the peri-urban areas. Such parents reportedly control what the youth do, what programme they watch on TV, places they go to and even the language they use. The youth also complained of difficulty in getting gainful employment and the fear of contracting HIV/AIDS.

Coping strategies adopted by social work clients

Clients of social work agencies were found to have developed several coping strategies with everyday life challenges. For example, regarding the difficulty in accessing modern health facilities and medicine, by virtue of geographical inaccessibility or inability to afford services from private facilities, clients used local herbs such as *aloe vera* - a shrub with bitter juice which reportedly treats a variety of ailments.

In respect to limited pieces of land for major agricultural activities or large-scale projects, several farmers tend to diversify their sources of income and they engage in activities that do not need a big chunk of land, such as poultry farming. Regarding direct poverty-related challenges, several clients opted to join groups and associations, especially the Savings and Credit Cooperative Societies (SACCOS) to boost their incomes. Others reported belonging to an association which acts as a buffer in case of a problem. In such an association, when a calamity such as death strikes, members are tasked to provide some items depending on the nature of the problem. For example, in one association in Bugiri district, it was learnt that if a group member loses someone, each member is expected to contribute towards food, food preparation, and materials for burying the dead person.

In big towns such as Kampala, the study found out negative coping strategies adopted for dealing with poverty:

> Many times we just keep in the situation, and we look around for petty jobs to earn some money. In other instances, we think of stealing although it is not a good alternative. *(Men's FGD, Kampala City)*

Developing resilience as well as seeking external help in form of counselling were further coping mechanisms reported by clients:

> To cope with daily challenges, I normally develop a positive attitude towards life and remain careful with the friends I choose. I do not choose the youth with negative attitudes towards life. I also seek guidance and counselling from someone older who knows a lot about life, people who are constructive and can link me to another or even pull me out of my problem. *(Men's FGD, Kampala)*

In addition to developing resilience, several clients pointed to seeking spiritual solutions such as prayer and spiritual counselling for day-to-day challenges.

> Other times we go to the witch-doctors. It is true that they may not help but we have ever tried it at home and it works. We also go to churches and talk to Pastors. The Pastors know how to counsel. For example, when my brother was taken to the Church with painful legs, the Pastor prayed for him and removed a polythene paper from one leg. However, the other leg continued to hurt and the Pastor removed another polythene paper from the other leg. The Pastor assured us that both legs will heal and counselled us to keep going to church. *(Women's FGD, Kampala)*

Regarding where clients would go or whom they referred to in case of hardship or challenge, this varied by the nature of the problem and the type of respondents.

> We would have loved to turn to government through our leaders like the MPs and LCs. Such people would be going around in the communities to see our problems. Unfortunately, these leaders never get time to listen to our

concerns. Even when we tell them, they seem to take our concerns to higher authorities but nothing is ever done. In fact, other self-help groups have been more useful than government. *(Men's FGD, Iganga district)*

The local councils (LCs) and other local leaders were the most common destination of community members in case of domestic, personal and community problems. Other institutions commonly turned to for redress included the police, civil courts and other human rights organisations. Informal networks such as friends and family were also mentioned. A number of clients observed that depending on the problems, they would run to friends, colleagues, relatives and in-laws.

One clear observation in this study is that there was no outright reference to social work or social work agency as a source where help could be sought for day-to-day challenges. This is associated with the fact that social work is generally an invisible profession. While it is practised at all levels of society, its lack of delineated areas of practice and legal provisions for its practice leads the population to seldom associate the help received to social work as a profession.

Culturally relevant social work practice

Social development has to be defined in terms of what the target population considers relevant and acceptable to them. This is interwoven with people's beliefs and value systems. In this regard, a culturally relevant social work practice cannot be under-estimated. As noted by Rankopo and Osei-Hwedie (2011), relevance is rooted in the local social environment. Practitioners and educators alike need to understand the environment in which they operate in order for social work to meaningfully contribute to social change. In this sub-section

attention is turned to practitioners' perspectives, likelihood of adopting indigenous knowledge, and social work interventions in rural areas.

Practitioners' perspectives on the relevance of culture in practice

Most of the practitioners held the view that culture has a moderate to very high effect on social development; while only 6% believed that culture had no effect on social development (see Figure 25).

Figure 25:   Impact of culture on social development and the practice of social work
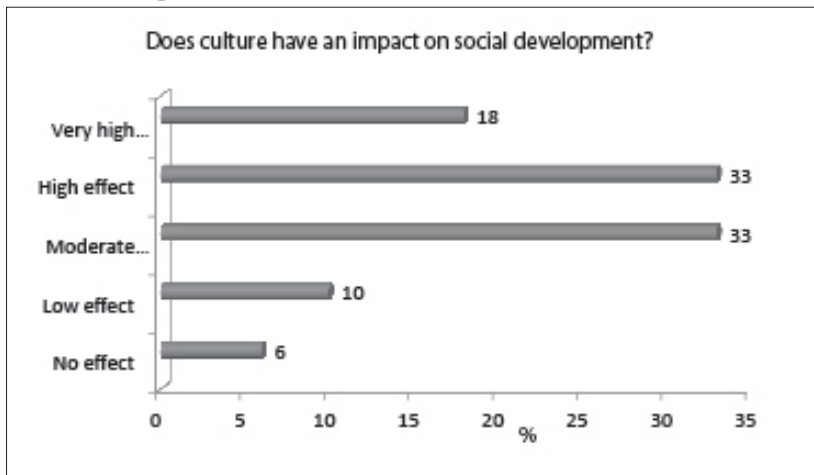
The moderate appreciation of the impact of culture on social development and the practice of social work is attributed to the fact that cultural appreciation/mainstreaming in development programmes in Uganda is very low and this is a great challenge to the indigenisation of social work. The moderate appreciation of culture in practice might also be explained by

inadequate coverage of such issues in the training curriculum. Whereas a sizeable proportion of practitioners reported that the training had adequately prepared them to work in diverse cultural settings, more than a third of them said it had not been adequate (see Figure 26).

Figure 26:   To what extent did social work training prepare practitioners to work in diverse culture settings?
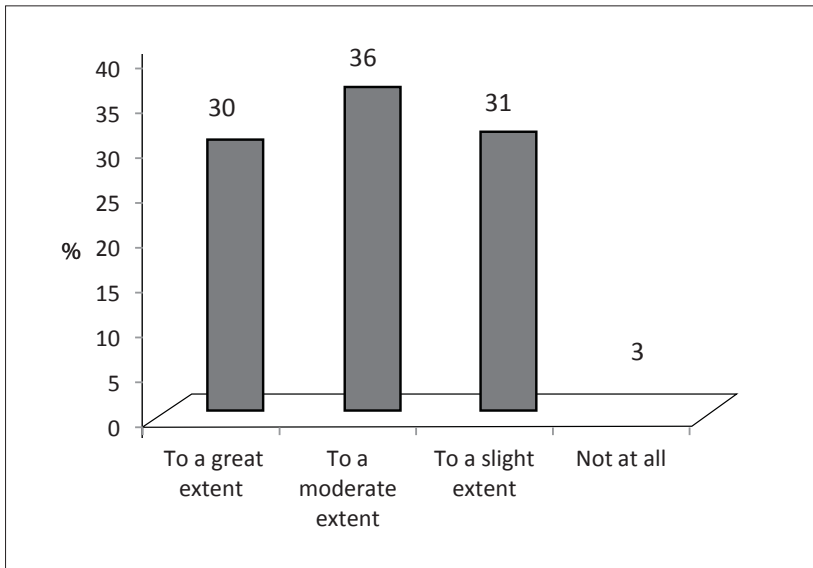
Almost a third (31%) of the practitioners reported that the training had been slightly adequate, while 36% rated the training as moderately adequate. The gaps in training need to be closed in order to effectively influence the mainstreaming of cultural issues during programme implementation. An existing avenue that can further be strengthened is the fieldwork placement. Cultural issues can be deliberately underscored as part of learning when preparing students for field placement. At the institutional/policy level, social workers need to influence their institutional policies to

embrace the prioritisation of cultural issues during programme implementation.

Local knowledge systems that can inform a culturally relevant practice

In all the regions of the country covered, respondents gave important insights into the knowledge that is important to enable culturally relevant social work intervention. Many dimensions of local knowledge were identified. These ranged from knowledge and appreciation of the local values, beliefs and cultural practices to the understanding of the traditional leadership structures as well as such basics as the local language and the different meanings attached to phenomena.

Cultural requirements/obligations

The first and perhaps the most common views given by the respondents were on the knowledge of the cultural requirements of the local community. It was noted that social workers should be knowledgeable on the dos and don'ts of a given community. This requires strong knowledge about the beliefs, values and norms of a given society. This knowledge can determine the relationships between adults, the youth or children, men and women, and foreigners. Knowledge of the dietary requirements and food preparation was cited as an example: In northern Uganda, food is pasted and not fried. Social workers need to know these norms and practices as any intervention contrary to these can face resistance from the local community.

Knowledge of the traditional problem-solving practices was noted to be very important. For example, respondents in an agency in Gulu district reported that frequent motor vehicle accidents at a place called Cerelenu had been minimised when elders slaughtered a goat to appease the spirits of the

dead. Whilst social workers may not believe in these claims, they need to respect the practice or cautiously show the negative ramifications of such practices instead of showing indifference or antagonism.

There were other cultural practices related to processes of reconciliation in case of conflicts; such as *omuvangano* in Busoga region – sharing a meal between formerly conflicting parties, and brothers inheriting the wife of their deceased brother to ensure that the children do not go out and suffer but rather stay in that family and the woman's sexual desires are satisfied within the family lineage.

Other practices such as mulching, terracing, and the use of traditional medicines were reportedly very important.

It was also reported that the appreciation of key people who play traditional social roles such as marital counselling by the *Ssenga* (Luganda word for 'aunt') is very important. Traditionally, the *Ssenga* discusses matters of sexual and reproductive health, marriage and how to care of children. *Ssengas* have been used as agents in disseminating messages about HIV/AIDS. In other communities, it was found that information dissemination can be most effective through music, dance, drama and storytelling rather than modern media.

Knowledge of the traditional and local leadership structures

Knowledge of traditional and local leadership structures is very important in facilitating entry in a community. Getting in touch with such leaders creates an avenue for "soft landing" in a community. In northern Uganda, the local leadership in the form of the *Rwoti* ('Chiefs', *Rwot* - singular) was found to be very important. This can be the paramount chief, clan chief, and others such as *Rwot moo* (Responsible for blessing),

Rwot okoro (Head of women)*, and Rwot kweri* (Head of men)*.* It was noted that these *"rwot*ships*"* and elders are very important in discipline, socialisation and conflict resolution. The religious leaders are equally important and they need to be consulted besides cultural leaders; as one social work practitioner emphatically put it: *"in Africa our culture is our religion and our religion is our culture."* This shows how significant the religious leaders are to African communities. In addition, it was asserted that the knowledge of whether a society is patriarchal or matrilineal and respecting that hierarchy helps to define how interventions should be approached. The knowledge of traditional structures such as the extended family system was considered very important as this can help in identifying family members in situations such as resettlement and re-integration, and dealing with orphans and vulnerable children as well as proper selection of beneficiaries for a specific programme.

Other important issues where indigenous knowledge could be sought included the meaning and interpretation of natural events such as the different seasons of the year, for example, the planting and harvest seasons, as well as marketing patterns and structures. The knowledge of this helps to guide the timing and intensity of interventions.

In summary and as caution to social work practitioners, one respondent asserted: *"if you come and pose with your knowledge, you meet resistance and success will be next to impossible"*. It is, therefore, true to say that being knowledgeable on what is compatible with the community values, beliefs and expectations enhances the success of interventions for social development.

Towards adoption of indigenous knowledge

From the previous section, it was established that indigenous knowledge, through the cultural lens, is very important for the success of any social work intervention. In this study, several organisations were found to be applying or integrating the local knowledge in their programmes.

In their day-to-day activities, most organisations were found to observe and respect cultural practices. This is being done in most organisations by using the community systems such as village elders, local council structures, cultural leaders, religious leaders, and other informal groups as entry points into the community. Where group work was the main approach to social work interventions, some organisations reported relying on the local leaders to select the group members.

> …use community structures for delivering services. We use leaders, churches or educational groups in the community. We use platforms that exist in the communities either to pass on information, to hold community dialogue or gain an understanding of the beliefs and attitudes of the people. We use existing structures but also blend in some of our marketing strategies like radio to ensure that information dissemination is done. *(Employer, Kampala)*

Other organisations reported that they involve the local community in baseline studies, project design, strategic planning and evaluation. The purpose of doing this is to ensure that the traditional and cultural knowledge is not sidelined. In particular, a number of organisations reported being sensitive to the cultural or traditional requirements. For example, one employer indicated that they operated in a community where culture does not allow the youth to be handled together with

adults on some topics such as sexuality, and consequently they dealt with them in separate groups. Another employer reported that the organisation provides avenues for cultural debates through the mass media:

> We have radio programmes where we invite the Paramount Chief of the community to talk on cultural issues. In addition, the project design involves men/women so that their knowledge is built into the programmes. *(Employer, Gulu district)*

In one of the organisations dealing with counselling services, they were applying both the modern and traditional techniques to enhance the success of the process. For example, while dealing with issues of reproduction and sexuality, *Ssenga*s were still targeted as culturally required, but they are trained to observe basic social work ideals such as confidentiality and record keeping. Another organisation used traditional music, dance and drama to communicate about social problems to the community. In eastern Uganda where polygamy is highly recognised and revered, an NGO that deals with HIV/AIDS reported taking this practice into account during service delivery through for example asking the man to come with his wives for testing and post-test services, instead of outrightly judging such a man for practising polygamy. Another NGO which deals with reproductive health issues reported involvement of a herbalist in treating some diseases.

One agency representative in Kampala reported that the agency documents such indigenous knowledge:

> We have a particular programme for indigenous foods, seeds and knowledge. We gather knowledge and also document it. We have an annual newsletter, so we always encourage indigenous knowledge to always come out and it's freely

shared; each time we have a workshop we have a session specifically for someone who has indigenous knowledge to come and share with the rest, so that we pick from those ones and then document it in our annual newsletters. *(Employer, Kampala)*

Policy makers interviewed brought out the need to strengthen decentralised service delivery systems, with a focus on the grassroots in order to make sure that services are responsive to the needs of the people. With regard to promoting indigenous knowledge, one head of a public institution outlined what he believed needed to be done to encourage a culturally sensitive practice:

Number one: we need to review our curriculum. Number two: we need to be part of the network and collaboration; and thirdly, we need to engage in relevant research. Finally, we need to come up with a good way of implementing whatever we have come up with, for example, maybe opening up community centres; maybe having places/centres where the community members may come up for training and consultations. *(National level key informant)*

Other respondents, particularly, the social work educators emphasised the need for adjustment at the training level, including a focus on research and the use of locally generated materials:

The books we use for teaching and references are either from South Africa, West Africa but not from East Africa. Here we have few books published on social work. *(Social work educator, Kampala)*

The social work curriculum needs to focus more on research on the Ugandan situation and social problems. The method

of teaching also needs to change- such as demonstration, group discussion … *(Social work educator, Kampala)*

The type of reference materials in training can have a strong influence on the way social work is understood and practised. At the same time, a strong research element is crucial for proper design and ongoing review of the curriculum to keep the training relevant to the prevailing needs in society.

Summary

The findings indicate that in practice there is an appreciation of a culturally relevant social work practice and some effort is being made to strengthen such approaches. However, much still needs to be accomplished in order to mainstream cultural issues in programming. This can be achieved if social work is granted the attention and support it deserves, especially at policy level.

Chapter Eight

Perspectives on Gender, Poverty and Social Development

Introduction

Gender inequality is both a cause and effect of poverty; and for social development to be realised, efforts have to be made to promote gender equality at the same time. Achievement of gender equality is one of the major goals of the 2000 UN Millennium declaration. Gender equality is also enshrined in Uganda's 1995 Constitution which, among others, demands equal treatment of men and women but also makes provision for affirmative action to empower women as the more disadvantaged category. A national policy on gender equality was adopted in 1997 and amended in 2007 as the Uganda Gender Policy. In addition, a National Action Plan on Women was developed in 1999 to provide a framework for gender-responsive development.

Indicators against which progress in gender equality is measured span from parity in education (ratio of girls to boys at primary, secondary and tertiary education levels); to the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector; and participation in governance and decision-making as specifically measured by the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments. The recent status of gender equality and women empowerment as measured against

selected indicators is presented in Appendix 4. Whilst significant progress has been made in the education sector, a lot of inequality remains with regard to other key aspects of social development such as access and control of productive resources for poverty reduction.

Against this background, this study sought to understand current perceptions on gender and gender equality and its linkages to poverty and social development. In addition, the role that social workers can play in practice in order to effectively contribute to gender equality as part and parcel of social development is highlighted.

Perceptions on gender and gender equality

Gender has been on Uganda's development agenda particularly in the last two and a half decades. The study, therefore, sought to ascertain if a common understanding of the concept has been attained among the different development actors. Indeed, the findings showed that there is a general understanding of the concept of gender among social work practitioners, development agencies, educators and policy makers. All respondents correctly described gender as going beyond the biological aspects of maleness and femaleness to refer to the socially ascribed roles and expectations from men and women.

> It is not true that gender means men and women. For me, that's the first misconception that people have. Men and women is equal to sex. Gender is the socially constructed roles that society has put onto a man and a woman. Women have different roles and responsibilities. In fact, these roles differ in accordance with culture. When you understand gender from that way, you know that men and women are certainly not equal. (*Employer, Kampala)*

> As human beings, we are equal. Nobody should ever tell the other that they are less because they are male or female. But in various societies, socially there are certain roles because you are biologically a man or biologically a woman. For example, when you go to Karamoja, a woman builds the house. Where I come from in Busoga, this would be a taboo. *(Employer, Kampala)*

Regarding gender equality, there was similarly a satisfactory understanding of the concept among the elite group of respondents, those that are presumably in charge of designing and implementing social development programmes. A common interpretation was the relation of gender to equal access to opportunities and resources.

> It means equal access to opportunities, access to health, access to education, resources or employment. The only difference between men and women is sex. Otherwise beyond that, you are more or less the same in terms of the capacities that you all have; you can both perform the same assignments, you can make the same contribution. I think social work can play a role of ensuring that the concept of gender in not misunderstood. *(Employer, Iganga district)*

Conversely, while gender equality was positively perceived among the educators, policy makers, social work practitioners and social welfare agency representatives (employers), there were some dissenting voices among the social work clients, particularly the male respondents in Kampala as well as a few practitioners.

> Gender equality came and women are emphasising it. The more they emphasise the word, the more they lose marriages … You tell a woman to cook and she tells you to cook, too, since gender equality exists. Gender equality is like a contest

of pulling a rope between men and women. In fact, I did not support the idea from the very beginning. It has created problems in marriages. *(Men's FGD, Kampala)*

Gender equality brought so many problems. It made women think that they are superior to men. Some men have now abandoned their homes because of their stubborn women … we feel discriminated. Women no longer respect us and they don't care whether we exist or not. *(Men's FGD, Mbarara district)*

In the past, strategies have been targeting women directly in the guise of empowering them. This made men think and understand that empowerment of women is to make their wives disobedient in the families. It's then the role of a social worker to effectively sensitise the public that empowerment of women is for the good of the entire family. *(Employer, Kampala)*

This reiterates the fact that most of the activities to promote gender equality as well as addressing gender and development have been elitist and top-down. As a result, the activities to promote gender equality have not been clearly understood and embraced by the people at the grassroots who unfortunately constitute the category of the population most affected by gender inequality.

Gender, poverty and social development

Similar to the concept of gender, there was a general consensus concerning the existing link between gender inequality and poverty. It was argued that where men or women are excluded from the development process, the result will be poverty at all levels of society:

For example, if only one gender is employed and opportunity is denied for the other, this definitely means income will trickle in the community or household from one side only, affecting the poverty reduction magnitude and thus the level of social development. *(Employer, Gulu district)*

Like me, I was born with four sisters and I am the fifth born of my mother, but I am the only child who went to school. This was because chance to go to school was given to boys and now the girls are poor. They depend on me. When their children fall sick, I am the one who pays the money to go to hospital. This is how inequality brings about un-development. *(Social worker, Kampala)*

The responses reiterate the fact that development cannot take place where there is inequality and oppression of some population categories in society. If either men or women are discriminated against and excluded from decision-making, access to resources and participation in wage employment, poverty is perpetuated and development undermined. The last quotation is a perfect example of how gender inequality breeds a dependency burden and a cycle of poverty. This does not just affect the individual but slows down the social development process at the broader level.

I think that by promoting equitable distribution of income, empowerment of women, provision of opportunities to the women politically or in the job market, then social transformation is likely to happen. If it is both the man and the woman, then most likely, you will have a good home or a home that has addressed most of the challenges. *(Employer, Kampala)*

> The women are much poorer compared to the men. Because of many other barriers women face, it contributes to poverty. There are some other cultural restrictions that say; 'I am a woman, I have to stay at home and do ABCD'; indirectly contributing to poverty. *(Social worker, Kampala)*

The key aspects of gender, poverty and social development were reiterated as relating to decision-making, access to and control of resources, employment and labour force participation as well as gender-based violence.

Participation in governance and decision-making

Participation in decision-making and being in a position to actively contribute to policy-making is crucial for groups and individuals to influence affairs that affect their lives. Exclusion from decision-making constitutes a form of social exclusion, which in turn exacerbates poverty and vulnerability, marginalisation and powerlessness (Wordofa, 2004). Many respondents identified the low participation in decision-making as a key reason why women have remained poorer, generally, in relation to men.

> Issues to do with participation in the community, like in politics… women were pushed aside for many years and I think it's just of recent that women started coming up to take part in politics … when you are sidelined you remain poor and you cannot contribute towards the development of your community. *(Social worker, Kampala)*

The low participation in decision-making was echoed in female social work clients' FGDs as a form of discrimination and exclusion from the development process:

> I feel discriminated against in decision-making in families and clans, because decisions are left to the men only. The

women have no voice. I am left out in politics. I cannot be allowed to take up leadership positions not even to stand up and talk in public … I have been discriminated against, for example, in developmental programmes. We women have no rights over land; the men are the ones who benefit from the developmental programmes. *(Women FGD, Gulu District)*

At the national level, Uganda has made progress with regard to representation of women in parliament and in the cabinet with the percentage of women representation growing over time (see Appendix 4). However, this representation has not necessarily translated into gender responsive development, particularly at the grassroots. There remains a challenge with empowerment of women at the household and community levels. Discussions with female clients in Bugiri district, for example, brought out sentiments that political representation at the highest levels of government may not have yielded the expected results:

Our women MPs (Members of Parliament) do not come on the ground and talk to us about our problems. *(Women's FGD, Bugiri district)*

A key informant reiterated this issue by asserting that participation in development has to go beyond political representation and must be inclusive.

What we are doing in this government or in this country is gender representation not gender equality. When we talk about gender equality, we need to look at people getting equal opportunities, not getting a certain service because they are men or because they are women, but providing a kind of levelled environment where everyone has the same chance to getting that service irrespective of any other kind of social dimension. *(Employer, Kampala)*

The challenge of gender imbalance in decision-making has been highlighted in the 2011 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey where, in spite of government efforts in promoting gender equality, only 38% of currently married women participate in decisions pertaining to their own healthcare, major household purchases, and visits to their family or relatives (UBOS, 2011).

Access to and control of productive resources

Another dimension of gender and social development relates to access to and control of resources. Access and control of resources determines the level of productivity of different population categories and, therefore, has a strong bearing on poverty and social development. The 1998 Land Act (amended in 2004) provides for the protection of women's land rights. Section 40 specifically prohibits sale, transfer, exchange, pledge, mortgage or lease of family land without prior consent of the spouse. The Act also provides for female inheritance rights over land. Most of these enabling policies have barely helped the rural woman who does not come to know of their existence or is too disempowered to seek legal redress even when there has been outright violation of her rights. Hence, women are still severely disempowered with regard to ownership of productive assets.

> Women are basically … because of the cultural set-up, they are denied access to resources … access to productive assets. No ownership of land, to some extent they may have access but ownership - no; ownership of several assets is a big, big problem and that, to some extent keeps the women in poverty. *(Employer, Kampala, 2011)*

In Uganda, it is a known fact that women constitute the majority of the agricultural labour force where the main

resource is land. Ironically, they have the least ownership of land. This means that they are expected to be productive with resources that they do not control. This possibly explains why agricultural productivity has remained low since the majority labour force lacks control over the resources and may not be in position to utilise this resource in more productive ways. The limited control over land by women is perpetuated by tradition and culture which associates land ownership with masculinity. Other aspects, such as access to credit and financial resources, are also skewed towards men since, in many cases, they are is tied to physical resources such as land or houses that act as collateral for securing loans.

Employment and labour-force participation

In Uganda, females make up 53% of the total labour-force (UBOS, 2010); but this rarely favours them in terms of social development as would be expected. Instead, they are mainly engaged in less paying sectors of subsistence agriculture (females constitute 70% of the agricultural labour force), informal sector, and unpaid family work. The 2009/2010 UNHS indicated that four out of five women were employed in agriculture; 70% of females aged between 14 and 30 years were engaged in unpaid family labour; while 62% of women who worked outside the agricultural sector were employed in the informal sector – compared to 55% of men. Only 37% and 29% of public and private formal workers, respectively, are women.

> Most people who are involved in food production are women; most people who are involved in household activities are women; and if you can put the time they spend in the field and home, you may find that they do not have adequate time to address poverty. Going for training, you find that if you

> called women for training and men for training, men are
> more likely to come because they have the time and women
> have a lot of chores. *(Employer, Kampala)*

The limited participation of women in formal employment
denies the economy and their respective households their
productive contribution; narrows the tax base; and increases
the dependency burden both at the household and the
national levels.

Gender-based violence

Violence against women negatively affects their mental
and physical well-being and affects their productivity.
Respondents linked gender-based violence to physical and
psychological trauma – not just to the men and women,
but also to the children; which in turn affects their future
aspirations and participation in development.

> Most of the gender, inequality aspects such as gender-
> based violence are very much linked with poverty and
> social development. For instance, most of the gender-based
> violence usually happens to women; sometimes it is females
> that inflict violence to males. This sometimes traumatises
> the kids. When they grow up, they are not able to contribute
> to development in their communities. Most kids will grow
> up fighting; they will grow up as thieves. *(Social worker,
> Kampala)*

Other forms of violence such as female genital mutilation
(FGM) in some societies in Uganda are wrapped in the
traditions and cultures of particular ethnic groups. Apart
from the physical and emotional pain suffered, these practices
drive young girls into early marriages, dropping out of school,
preoccupation with reproductive roles and a perpetual cycle

of poverty from one generation to the next. This essentially keeps women in a subordinate position.

From the foregoing, it is clear that there is a universal understanding of the linkage between gender inequality and development as has been adduced from both the primary and secondary data. However, respondents also reflected a growing discomfort with the over-emphasis on women in gender debates and programming – perceiving it as counter-productive in terms of social development. Respondents pointed to the fact that some would-be developmental programmes are disadvantaging men and as such failing to yield the balanced and equitable social development that they were intended to.

> When you talk of gender people think of women. Even to us it happened; we have been implementing that approach I told you through the women groups because I thought women are the most vulnerable in terms of gender implementation but now we have come to a conclusion … men were becoming more vulnerable. *(Employer, Kampala)*

> … there are some current trends which have rendered men disempowered and given more power to the women…at the end of the day, men are becoming very poor. *(Social worker, Kampala)*

> Government listens more to the women. They take us to court; even to FIDA (Federation of women lawyers) because of gender equality. When you get to FIDA, they listen more to women than the men. *(Men's FGD, Kampala)*

There is, hence, a need to constantly monitor and evaluate programmes geared towards gender equality in order not to unnecessarily pit one population category against another

and create rifts instead of balanced development. It is also very important to bring men on board to understand and actively advance the cause of gender and development instead of interpreting it as women emancipation and women taking over from men.

Gender in social work education and training

Given their direct role in promoting gender equality and social development, social workers must be well-equipped with skills to integrate gender issues in their practice. The importance of this was well captured by one of the respondents:

> The first thing is to redesign all social work courses. I know there are social workers who are graduating with no knowledge about gender. All universities need to re-design and have gender appear in every course. Let us stop thinking that some people should study and graduate in gender studies. No, let everybody study gender either per semester, this will make all professionals appreciate gender issues. Social workers need to first appreciate gender issues and this will only happen if one is trained or empowered with gender concepts. *(Employer, Bugiri district)*

A scrutiny of the curricula from the participating social work institutions indicates a satisfactory level of integration of gender issues in the social work education. However, there were, differences in the way this is done. Some institutions such as Bugema University, Nsamizi Institute for Social Development and Makerere Institute of Social Development incorporate a fully-fledged course unit on gender and development. Other social work institutions such as Makerere University incorporate gender as a cross-cutting issue. For the latter case, the introduction of gender as an independent

course unit could have been overshadowed by the presence of an independent School of Gender and Women Studies. Unfortunately, unlike other courses such as sociology, psychology and economics, which have been incorporated in the social work curriculum at Makerere University as foundational courses, gender is left out.

Different categories of respondents also gave their views concerning the adequacy of the social work training in addressing gender issues. For example, over 78% of the social work educators expressed confidence that their graduates are adequately prepared to integrate gender issues in practice. The majority of students (87%) also acknowledged that gender issues were integrated in their social work curriculum and they had been equipped with skills to integrate gender in practice (see chapter 6). Ironically, only 15% of these students felt they had the competence to contribute effectively to gender equality and women empowerment as part of the overall achievement of the MDGs and social development. The social work practitioners also positively, though marginally, evaluated the social work curriculum with regard to tackling gender issues, with only 52% of them stating that the social work training had, to a great extent, prepared them to appropriately integrate gender issues in social work interventions.

From the above findings, it can be stated that there has been an attempt to integrate gender issues in the training of social workers but there is still room for more skills development in this area in order for social work to positively contribute more to gender equality as part and parcel of social development.

Role of social work in promoting gender equality

The role that social work can play in accelerating gender equality and women empowerment is embedded in the very definition of the social work profession, that is, not only as a problem-solving profession, but as a change agent that aims to empower individuals and groups and promote harmonious relationships.

At the fore, there is the role of social workers as educators through sensitisation in order to clear misconceptions about gender and gender equality and to strengthen the integration of gender issues in social work practice. The respondents were unequivocal on the role of the social worker as an educator who can demystify misconceptions about gender equality.

> It is ensuring that the concept of gender equality is well understood among the population. There are times when there are a lot of misconceptions about gender. *(Employer, Kampala)*

> They should create awareness among the people that both men and women are equal. They should demonstrate that both men and women have equal capacities to perform certain assignments or tasks. *(Women FGD, Kampala)*

Gender inequality is often perpetuated by social and cultural systems with their long-held beliefs and values, which can also be demystified through sensitisation by social workers.

> I think what social workers have to do is basically to design interventions that are looking at understanding the culture and trying to understand what can be changed. *(Employer, Kampala)*

Whilst offering a culturally sensitive practice, social workers can also play an instrumental role in bringing about change in

repressive aspects of culture. Freire (1970, cited in Hare, 2009) suggests a process called *conscientisation*; where individuals and groups in society are helped to question their reality, unlearn some of the oppressive attitudes and behaviour and begin to promote an environment where equality and social justice become a reality for both males and females.

Another key social work role is empowerment. Empowerment involves a process or processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such ability (Sevefjord *et al.*, 2001, cited in Onyejekwe, 2002). One respondent described this in lay terms as follows:

> Instead of emphasising women's rights all the time, woman power should be emphasised e.g. power to sustain their families, power to lead society, e.g. in his household he may fail to get the money to buy food but the woman is in position to do something and get the food. *(Social work practitioner, Gulu district)*

Social work clients also alluded to empowerment when they pointed out the need for social workers to strengthen the capacities of women and as well enhance their self esteem:

> They (social workers) should build the capacity and esteem of women and young girls to believe more in themselves that they can perform the same tasks as the men do. *(Women FGD, Kampala)*

Empowerment promotes participation of people, organisations and communities and helps them to take control over their lives. It has been noted that whereas Uganda has made significant strides in addressing gender inequalities, the benefits have been skewed towards the top elite categories of women. Women with special needs such as women with disabilities, those living with HIV/AIDS, women in hard-

to-reach areas, unemployed women, and those living in absolute poverty are easily left out in efforts geared towards gender equality and women empowerment. Social workers have a professional advantage in working with vulnerable groups. Therefore, they can actively engage in empowering women through education and information sharing especially at community level, mobilising grassroots women and equipping them with skills to meaningfully participate in local development projects, as well as linking them to external resources through playing roles of a broker.

Summary

There is a shared acknowledgement of the mutually reinforcing relationship between gender equality, poverty reduction and social development. Uganda has an enabling legal and policy environment for the promotion of gender equality and social workers have a major role to play to bolster efforts towards gender equality as part and parcel of the process of social development.

Chapter Nine

Strengthening the Role of Social Work in Social Development

Introduction

This report has provided a detailed description of the current status and role of social work in poverty reduction, the achievement of the MDGs and generally in the promotion of social development. It is evident that social workers are employed in many sectors and at various levels of the economy. Whilst historically, the profession was introduced to respond to social ills primarily through the government structures, currently the main employer of social workers in Uganda are the non-governmental organisations operating at different levels. The most predominant level of operation is the community and, in line with this, the key role played is community organising. It can be concluded from this study that social work is playing a crucial role in poverty reduction and the realisation of the MDGs, alongside other professions. Unfortunately, the contribution of social work has been blurred by the fact that it has remained a latent discipline, with a lot of potential but with limited recognition. As a result, its place is being threatened by an influx of other professions claiming to play similar roles. It is, therefore, crucial to re-position the social work profession as a unique discipline with specialised skills in order to enhance its

contribution to social development. The following sections provide recommendations to strengthen social work at the policy, training and practice levels.

Policy level

In order to increase professionalism and professional identity, there is a need to strengthen the legal and regulatory framework for social work training and practice. It is critical for the government to move and delineate practice areas where mandatory social work qualification is required given the profession's core skills and competences and its key role in promoting social development. Such areas as child protection, probation and other social welfare services, medical and psychiatric social work need to be established by an Act of Parliament as fields where professional social workers must be employed. Social work practitioners would also be required to have certificates of practice in order to be employed in such positions. This will strengthen professional discipline and integrity of practice.

There was concern about the capacity of the NCHE to provide guidance to social work education. For the NCHE to play an oversight role and ensure proper accreditation of social work programmes, there is a need to work in concert with a professional council which is more technical in the profession and its dynamic requirements. In this way, only the institutions and programmes that meet the minimum requirements would be accredited and also regularly monitored for quality training outcomes.

Another key strategy is to strengthen the professional body for social workers in the country. The study recognises recent efforts to revitalise the NASWU, but more efforts are needed to move this association forward. There is a need for

mobilisation to increase the membership base, and at the same time strengthen the structural and coordination aspects of the association so that it effectively becomes an umbrella body for social workers. This will be pivotal in mobilisation, motivation, monitoring, networking and enforcing standards and ethical behaviour in professional practice. The association should be capable of positively contributing to and influencing social policy if the social work role in social development is to be fully recognised.

Training level

Indigenisation of social work should be emphasised in teaching institutions to enable social work to be relevant to the ordinary people and the general context in which it operates. Institutions need to orient their curricula accordingly. Poverty reduction strategies should be underlined in the curriculum so that practitioners are equipped with adequate knowledge and skills in addressing poverty and contributing to its reduction. The strategies that cover the three priority sectors of agriculture, education and health need to be accentuated in training.

There is also a need to initiate avenues and mechanisms for continuous professional training in order to help practitioners keep abreast of contemporary issues and models of practice. In addition, it is crucial that the social work curriculum should include courses that aim to develop positive attitudes and ethical behaviour among practitioners besides the academic and theoretical skills and knowledge. Issues of self-awareness, critical thinking and reflection, ethics and integrity need to be emphasised at training and continuous training levels. Other areas that need to be deliberately incorporated in training as basic foundational courses

include: gender issues in development (particularly issues of domestic violence and equality), conflict management, business and entrepreneurship, communication skills, and rural development issues. Social research also needs to be strengthened and the research results harnessed to improve local interventions. Whereas fieldwork has been a part of social work education for a long time, it needs to be reorganised in order to achieve its intended objectives. The preparation, placement, agency and academic supervision need to be streamlined. In addition, outreach activities can be routinely arranged in the local communities in order to increase the interface between the profession and the local communities. This would also help to increase the impact and visibility of social work in the country.

Practice level

Social development cannot be achieved through social work intervention in isolation of other disciplines and professions. It is essential that multidisciplinary approaches be underscored in practice. Social workers need to be part of the different sectoral teams addressing the MDGs to be able to highlight the social dimensions of the different problems and their causes for effective planning and intervention. It is also crucial to build and harness networks and partnerships within and outside of the communities in which services are rendered.

Social workers operate in highly charged cultural and traditional environments that characterise the daily lives of the people. To make an impact, social workers have to be cautious of all these dynamics by according utmost respect to the traditions and culture of the service users if they are to facilitate them to disentangle themselves from the vicious

cycle of poverty. This culturally-sensitive and/or -relevant practice requires total humility and readiness to work with and not for the community; to be open to and understand the different ways of knowing and doing things within different communities. Social work practice, in other words, needs to go beyond the theoretical knowledge to embrace models that are considered relevant by the local communities. This calls for continuous dialogue with the client systems and ultimately for a community-based approach to social work. There is a need to identify, stimulate and strengthen cultural/community systems that were used successfully in the past to mobilise people to participate in service delivery. Traditional and religious structures can be used as entry points in mobilising people for social action. Social workers must identify the diversities in the communities and decide on how to approach them.

There is also an urgent need to increase the social work role in research, policy influence/development and advocacy. While direct service delivery to the clients is commendable, sustainable social change will require activism at the political and policy level in order to realise institutional and social change that deals with the day-to-day problems of the clients. For, if this is not adhered to, the reactionary, residual approach to social work will only increase the burden of the profession and do little to achieve social development.

Areas for further research

Future research could consider a tracer study on social workers from HEI to concretise the findings of this exploratory study and identify any other gaps that need to be filled in order to strengthen the role of professional social work in social development.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Other problems commonly presented to social workers

Nature of problem	Specific examples of the problems
1. Relationship problems	• Unequal power relationship between women and men e.g. inability of women to make decisions on family planning • Inferiority complex of women • Gender inequality • Stigmatisation and discrimination of persons living with HIV and AIDS • Family disintegration and mutual support • Negative community attitudes towards children with disability • Inadequate community support for persons with problems/ limited social capital
2. Inability to meet basic needs and rights	• Hunger and famine expressed by lack of food, poor nutrition and malnutrition of children • Homelessness
3. Inadequate productive resources and tools	• Shortage of land • Land conflicts • Inadequate and costly farm inputs • Inadequate capital to start income-generating activities

Nature of problem	Specific examples of the problems
4. Ignorance and illiteracy	• Ignorance of existing services and resources such as vocational training, credit • Lack of entrepreneurial skills • Lack of knowledge and practical skills • Lack of minimal reading materials • Minimal data from research
5. Service delivery and management-related problems	• Poor social services such as health care and education • Poor utilisation of existing services • Poor adherence to drugs • Inadequate drug supplies for people and animals • Limited access to ARVs by persons living with HIV AIDS • Deteriorating services • Incompetent/ poorly trained service providers • Poor /late facilitation of service providers and volunteers • Inadequate technology to manage work • Inadequate safe water sources • Limited access to credit • Lack of knowledge on how to access credit

Nature of problem	Specific examples of the problems
6. Policy-related problems	• High interest rates • Long loan processing procedures • Delayed procedures to determine the status of a refugee • Limited choices
7. Physical and economic environmental problems	• Pests and diseases of crops and animals • Unpredictable weather • Soil infertility • Inflation; high prices • Poor sanitation • Poor infrastructural development i.e. poor roads • Lack of firewood
8. Child-related problems	• Orphanhood • Child neglect and abandonment • Defilement • Child abuse • Child-headed families • Vulnerability
9. Culture and community attitudes	• Cultural beliefs and practices and negative attitudes • Polygamy • Dependency syndrome • Large family sizes • Tendency to explain problems in terms of witchcraft and failing to use services

Nature of problem	Specific examples of the problems
	• Family disintegration • Minimal social capital at community level • Group conflicts
10. Personal level practices and problems	• Drug abuse • Prostitution • Unwanted pregnancies • Trauma • Boredom and idleness
11. Institutional /industrial level problems	• Thefts of company products • High labour turn-over

Appendix 2: Specific tasks of social workers at micro, meso and macro levels

Level of operation	Direct services	Indirect services	Agency administration
Individual	• Counselling students, children with disability, juvenile delinquents, refugees, women and children war survivors. all persons; • Home visits to refugees; • Provision of social assistance to refugees; • Provision of referral services; • Rehabilitate war survivors; • Teach children life skills; • Psychosocial care and protection of children affected by war;		• Mentorship of interns • Ensure sustained communication with sponsors • Monitoring and support supervision of clients

Level of operation	Direct services	Indirect services	Agency administration
	• Management of abandoned children; child welfare • Probation services • Counselling of adolescents on reproductive health • HIV counselling • Tracing and resettlement of children		
Family	• Referral services/ brokering • Psychosocial support to caregivers of children affected by HIV and AIDS • Link refugees to services and opportunities		

Level of operation	Direct services	Indirect services	Agency administration
Group	• Working with community volunteers • Help women form social and economic groups • Services to the out of school youths • Adult literacy • Provision of grants to farmers • Rehabilitation of abused children • Social protection of vulnerable people • Placing commercial workers in vocational training	• Advocacy for the voiceless • Awareness creation of human rights of orphans, street children and juveniles	Coordinate HIV and AIDS groups

Level of operation	Direct services	Indirect services	Agency administration
	• Identify potential service beneficiaries • Remind parents about their responsibilities with regard to children education; • Mobilise parents of children with disabilities • Ensure sustainability of safe water and sanitation • Sensitise community about HIV • Provide information on reproductive health • Train community leaders • Sensitise community about the dangers of poverty and poverty reduction	• Organise community meetings/advocacy meetings • Advocate government programmes • Training peer educators • Resource mobilisation • Promote gender issues and institutional development	• Needs assessment • Community dialogue • Research into problems of social groups • Designing IEC for orphans and vulnerable children • Collect data on child welfare in wartorn areas • Identify vulnerable people

Level of operation	Direct services	Indirect services	Agency administration
	• Train local people on modern methods of agriculture • • Link farmers to markets • Education on HIV and AIDs • Technical advice and brokering on food security issues • Promote IGAs • Sensitise community on hygiene • Provide agricultural inputs such as seeds to farmers • Equipping slum dwellers with income generating skills		

Level of operation	Direct services	Indirect services	Agency administration
Institutional	• Link group to other CBOs • Partnership building • Developing research proposals for clients • Capacity building of agency staff in monitoring and evaluation • Capacity building and monitoring of CBOs engaged in the provision of services to women, OVCs and persons with disabilities • Capacity building • Coordination of organisational activities for persons with disabilities	• Marketing microfinance products • Advocate government programmes • Policy formulation; development of policies • Health system strengthening	• Programme planning, work plans and budgets • Programme implementation, • Coordination of agency activities, • Reporting on programme activities and progress • Filling in office documents • Networking with other agencies, • Proposal writing • Human resource management • Staff social welfare • Programme monitoring and evaluation

Level of operation	Direct services	Indirect services	Agency administration
			• Secretary to the executive committee • Design training manuals • Resource mobilisation • Grants management • Supervision of networks • Supervision of factory workers • Office administration

Appendix 3: Specific activities undertaken by the social workers for poverty reduction

Factors associated with poverty	Social worker roles/responses
1. Lack of income/ employment	1. Encourage/ provide income-generating projects such as piggery, goats, chicken, small-scale businesses, candle-making, brick-making 2. Facilitate primary and secondary education e.g. provide scholastic materials; encourage guardians to take and keep children in school
2. Lack of resources for production/ investment	3. Resource mobilisation and provision • Food, relief, accommodation and medical support to refugees; child-headed families • Provide ox-ploughs and oxen to farmers • Resettle families • Provision of assistive devices to persons with disabilities • Build small descent houses • Grants to most vulnerable social groups such as women, orphans and vulnerable children • Microfinance and loans • Provision of inputs for production such as improved draught-resistant seeds • Material support with goats, pigs, chicken etc. • Family resource mapping and harnessing • Provide water harvesting tanks to families

Factors associated with poverty	Social worker roles/responses
	4. Brokering role • Linking people to income-generating projects, CBOs, NGOs, and other services • Link people to technical services e.g. extension workers • Linking people to sponsorships • Dialoguing with government after establishing community needs and problems • Linking farmers to markets • Organising farmers to bulk their crops for marketing 5. Reduce burden on limited resources while improving needs satisfaction • Encourage the use of family planning services • Subsidise on reproductive health services • Provide maternity services to women • Encourage families to use available services in the community

Factors associated with poverty	Social worker roles/responses
3. Limited practical knowledge and skills	6. Capacity-building in accordance with the unique needs of a social group and community • Provision of information on poverty reduction strategies • Provision of education to stimulate creativity for one to meet one's needs • Provision of income-generating skills in modern agricultural methods and entrepreneurship • Transfer/diffuse appropriate low cost agricultural technology • Training social groups on health issues, HIV/AIDs, how to form community-based organisations, and self-help approaches, • Sensitisation on government programmes • Functional adult literacy • Provide training on entrepreneurship • Provide/sponsor vocational training in apprenticeships like carpentry, bakery, etc
4. Relationship problem, inappropriate attitudes and practices affecting wealth creation	7. Community organisation and counselling (individual, families, social groups, and communities) • Mobilise people to form and work in groups • Encourage people to work hard • Strengthen families and encourage members to work together; encourage openness to spouse

Factors associated with poverty	Social worker roles/responses
	• Teach about individual and family rights
	• Encourage social cohesion and co-existence, resolve conflicts
	• Reduce stigma and discrimination
	• Help to identify skills and talents (strengths) for development
	• Build/restore hope in children orphans and vulnerable children and their guardians
	• Encourage people to grow enough food
	• Encourage guardians to support youths
	• Encourage rational use of income
	• Encourage people to save and borrow
	• Encourage group savings
	• Encourage people to shift from subsistence production to commercial farming
	• Encourage farmers to visit successful progressive farmers
	• Teach /Encourage children to read hard
	• Counsel couples involved in domestic violence
	• Counsel refugees
	• Encourage discharged patients from hospitals to engage in some income-generating activities

Factors associated with poverty	Social worker roles/responses
5. Ill-health	8. Prevention and promotion of good health • Support/ encourage health-seeking behaviours • Provide ARVs • Sensitise people on reproductive health issues • Distribute condoms to the sexually active • Improve the lives of persons living with HIV and AIDs • Prevent blindness • Train people on proper hygiene and sanitation • Encourage positive living for persons living with HIV • Create sensitivity /self-awareness to individual health and practices
6. Lack of services, access and use	9. Provide a lacking service in the community • Provide safe water at acceptable distances • Sensitise people about government programmes and services • Encouraging people to form into self-help mutual support groups for attraction of support and services, pooling savings and other resources • Encourage people to used existing services such as education and health

Factors associated with poverty	Social worker roles/responses
7. Lack of opportunities/ choices/denial of rights/ problematic policies	10. Advocacy/mediation • Securing land rights of women living with HIV and AIDS • Advocate the rights of disabled women for employment • Advocate the education of youths • Advocate a people-centred planning and budgeting • Advocate salary increments for employees 11. Research and advice on policy
8. Poor coordination and performance of institutions	12. Coordination and quality assurance of poverty reduction packages, service delivery structures • Train institutions how to package poverty interventions • Coordination of government and NGO poverty reduction programmes • Ensure intervention designs are appropriate • Training of trainers • Support community resource persons/ volunteers • Strengthen the performance of local councils • Train and work with local leaders to mobilise resources for development

Appendix 4 Selected indicators for gender equality and women empowerment

	Indicator	Women	Men
Gender equality in Education	Primary school enrolment	50.6%	49.4%
	Primary school retention/ completion	42%	53%
	Secondary school enrolment	45.3%	54.7%
	Tertiary level enrolment	44%	56%
	Adult literacy rate	63%	76%
	Population with no education at all (2011)	12.9%	4.1%
Women empowerment (access to resources, employment, governance)	Land ownership (registered land, 2009)	20%	80%
	House ownership	25.7%	74.3%
	Share of wage employment in non-agriculture sector (includes informal sector)	43.7%	56.3%
	Unemployment rates (2009/2010, UNHS)	5.2%	3%
	Representation in parliament (2011)	35%	65%
	Ministerial positions	28%	72%

Sources: *GoU, 2010a, b, c; Kasirye, 2011; UBOS, 2010, 2011; UBOS and Macro, 2006.*

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Footnotes

[1] Includes practitioners who had social work training at lower levels but whose highest qualification was not necessarily in social work. Those who did not have any social work qualification constituted 29% of the practitioners.