

Report on the Social Work Symposium held on 9th March 2016

Introduction

A social work symposium was held on the 9th March 2016 at the University of Nairobi's ED 213 (Confucius hall), within the auspices of PROSOWO II Project. The delegates included social work educators, social work practitioners, social work students and policy makers. Overall objective in this symposium was to launch PROSOWO II Project, celebrate the World Social Work Day and officially launch the book *'The Role of Social Work in Poverty Reduction and Realization of Millennium Development Goals in Kenya* by Wairire, G. G., Zani, A.P., Machera, M. and Mutie, P.M. published by the University of Nairobi Press that was an outcome of PROSOWO Project (2011-2014).

PROSOWO II Project

PROSOWO II Project, entitled *'Professional Social Work in East Africa- Towards Sustainable Impact'* is being implemented in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi and Austria. The Project brings together a consortium of six institutions including the University of Nairobi, Kenya, Makerere University, Uganda, Institute of Social Work, Tanzania, University of Rwanda, Hope Africa University, Burundi and the coordinating institution, Carinthia University of Applied Sciences, Austria. At the University of Nairobi, the project is implemented through the Department of Sociology and Social Work and is coordinated by Dr. Gidraph G. Wairire who serves as the national coordinator for Kenya. The project commenced in January 2016 and runs through December 2018.

PROSOWO II is a continuation and an expansion of project activities which were successfully implemented under the PROSOWO project (2011-2014) in order to promote professional social work in East Africa. The overall objective of the international cooperation between five East African and one Austrian partner institutions is directed towards the formation of mechanisms for social work education

and practice to more effectively contribute towards social development and poverty reduction.

The project components

1. Empirical research on indigenous and innovative models of social work practice.
2. Establishment of a regional centre for social work and social development research.
3. Capacity building of tertiary schools of social work through research, training, joint publications and networking at national, regional and international levels.
4. Efforts towards the legislation of social work in the countries of the East African Community.
5. Increased engagement of social work professionals in social policy and advocacy for human rights.
6. Multidirectional knowledge transfer and sharing of lessons learnt within Africa, with stakeholders in Austria and with the international scientific community.

Specific Objectives

1. Facilitate the adoption of relevant indigenous and innovative models of intervention in social work through research, publications and dissemination.
2. Establish a regional centre for social work and social development research.
3. Improve institutional networking through launch of and increased participation in existing national, regional and international professional associations and joint conferences.
4. Enhance the capacity of social work educators in research, publications and teaching through exchange visits and joint publications.
5. Advocate legislation of social work within countries in partnership with national associations of social workers.
7. Promote increased engagement of social work professionals in social policy and human rights advocacy.

7. Multidirectional knowledge transfer and sharing of lessons learnt within Africa, with stakeholders in Austria and with the international scientific community.

Key outcomes of the project will be disseminated through national workshops, regional meetings and international conferences, and through an open access policy with regard to journal articles and internet-based distribution of knowledge, particularly through a new project website. Five country-specific research reports will be produced, and a major publication on social work practice in East Africa will be produced and presented at the end of the project period. The conceptual framework, project components, objectives and corresponding activities were shared with the symposium delegates.



Ms. Cherop, Dr. Nungari Salim, Dr. G. Wairire, Prof. K'Obonyo, Dr. Okello, Prof. Michael Shaffer and Mr. V. Odhiambo at the symposium

The 2016 World Social Work Day

Whereas this event is marked and celebrated by the global fraternity of social work educators, students and practitioners on the 15th of March annually, the day was observed and celebrated during the symposium at the University of Nairobi. This year's theme for the World Social Work Day focussed on the role of social work in responding to refugee crisis. The message from the Association of Schools of Social Work in Africa (ASSWA) to mark this day was shared with the symposium delegates by Dr. Gidraph Wairire who also serves as the president of the association. It highlighted the challenges facing humanity in Africa as a result of different factors that bring about displacement of people among other diverse crisis and the positive impact that social work can make in the lives of the vulnerable, discriminated and marginalized populations. The Social Work Programme coordinator, Dr. Nungari Salim who also served as the master of ceremony in the symposium encouraged the spirit of resilience and teamwork amongst all social work stakeholders for more tangible gains in the profession.

Efforts Towards Legislating Professional Social Work in Kenya

This was the key note address and a central theme in this symposium conceived in line with objective 5 of PROSOWO II. It is one of the critical measures recommended from the findings of empirical research (Wairire et. al 2014¹) about the status of professional social work in Kenya conducted in 2011. For social work to more adequately play its role in the society, there is need to have legislative mechanisms in place in order for the profession to be well regulated both at the training and practice levels and to provide social work stakeholders with a well defined code of ethics and other factors for due recognition as a profession.

The precursor to this was a presentation by Prof. Michael Shafer from the School of Social Work at Arizona State University who extensively focused on the role of social workers in meeting the behavioral health needs for different client groups in Kenya and how well this can be done in the context of appropriate social work legislative

¹ *The Role of Social Work in Poverty Reduction and Realization of Millennium Development Goals in Kenya* by Wairire, G. G., Zani, A.P., Machera, M. and Mutie, P.M (2014)

structures. Such structures if put in place will ensure that social work profession has a clear code of ethics, well defined scope of practice, certification and licensing and specified continuing education requirements all of which are critical for any legally recognized profession.

The step by step process of legislating professional social work in Kenya was presented by Dr. Johnson Okello, Deputy Director of Legal Services, Senate of Kenya and alumni of the University of Nairobi. In his address, he clarified that most professions in Kenya have their legal framework and an umbrella body that regulates their practice and protects their members. He also informed the delegates that legislation for any profession in Kenya is done through an Act of parliament. The important measures that must be undertaken before social work stakeholders embark on the legislation process were also clearly and systematically shared. In addition, he emphasized that legislation will inform the public the role of social work in the society and the framework of qualification for a social worker including the critical parameters of joining the profession. He further advised that social work stakeholders in this process must ensure a blend of both government and self-regulation legislation. The government legislation is for licensing and day-to-day activities (code of conduct). After government legislation the professional body of social workers can deal with self-regulation.

The Book Launch

This was presided over by Prof. Peter K'Obonyo, Deputy Principal, College of Humanities and Social Sciences. He recommended the authors for the noble task of producing the book which has provided a major breakthrough for social work education and practice in Kenya. He noted that social work practice is crucial in Kenya for specific interventions in response to the major breakdowns at individual and family levels. Further, he observed that existing social dynamics in Kenya create a great demand for social work practitioners. In addition, he opined that young people are bombarded by unwanted information from the Internet and other media yet most of them do not know how to filter information from the media leading to wrong choices in life. He encouraged all stakeholders in the event to promote social work at all levels. Thereafter, he launched the book and presented the authors and representatives of institutions present with copies of the new published book. The occasion was graced by Mrs. Juliana Mutie who represented her late husband and colleague Dr. Pius Mutie who was one of the authors for the newly launched book. She gave a touching tribute to her late

husband for his love of academic work and writing. She passionately encouraged social work students to have an open mind and be innovative in their career as social workers.



Conclusion

The symposium delegates appreciated the event and unanimously agreed to keep in touch for more updates on the efforts to promote professional social work in Kenya. They also had a session for questions and answers and agreed to network together once the process for legislating social work unfolds. Social work stakeholders will also be informed of other new development relating to the promotion of social work in all capacities.