

Social workers as “angry reminders”.

Report on the PROSOWO II kick-off workshop and international social work conference in Arusha, Tanzania

By Helmut Spitzer

PROSOWO II kick-off workshop

In March 2016, the new project PROSOWO II (“**Professional Social Work** in East Africa – Towards Sustainable Impact”) was officially launched during a kick-off workshop in Arusha, Tanzania, and a concurrent international social work conference which took place from 15th to 17th March. The project is funded by APPEAR (Austrian Partnership Programme in Higher Education and Research for Development), a programme of the Austrian Development Cooperation.

During the five days’ workshop, the key components and corresponding activities and objectives of PROSOWO II were carefully reviewed against the milestones and achievements under the PROSOWO project (2011–2014), and a detailed work plan for the forthcoming project period of three years was designed. Particular attention was paid to the methodology and study design on social work practice research in the region. The team also utilized the opportunity to get a clear picture on what is currently going on with regard to social work education and practice in the participating East African countries of Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda, plus Austria as European partner.



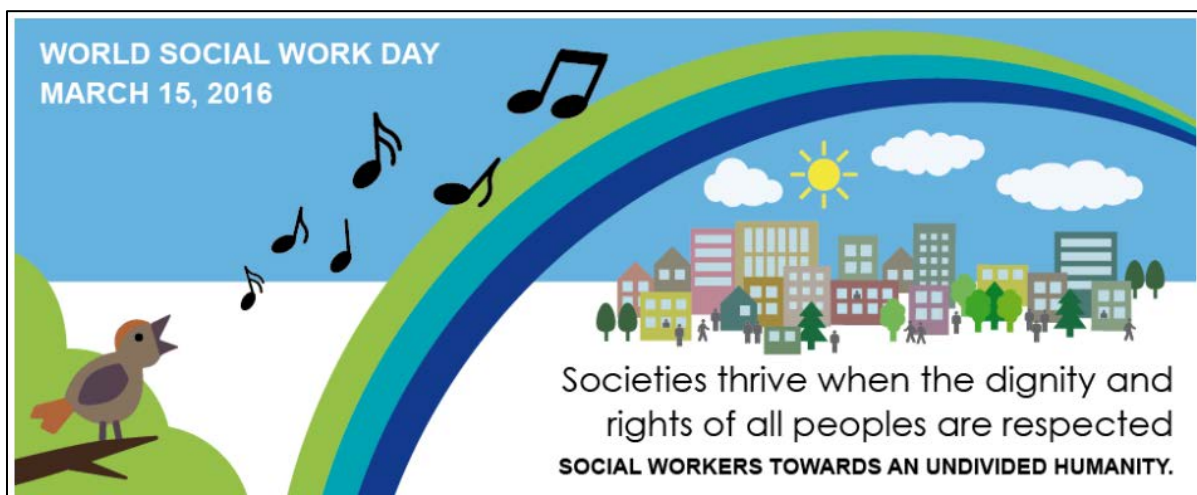
The PROSOWO coordinators and project assistants come from six different institutions: Hope Africa University, Burundi; University of Nairobi, Kenya; University of Rwanda; Institute of Social Work, Tanzania; Makerere University, Uganda; and Carinthia University of Applied Sciences, Austria.

The key components of the PROSOWO II project are as follows:

- Empirical research on indigenous and innovative models of social work practice.
- Establishment of a regional centre for social work and social development research (tentative title: “East African Centre for Innovation & Research in Social Work”)
- Capacity building of tertiary social work institutions through research, training, joint publications, and networking at national, regional and international levels.
- Efforts towards the legislation of social work in East Africa.
- Increased engagement of social work professionals in social policy and human rights advocacy.
- Multidirectional knowledge transfer and sharing of lessons learnt within Africa, with stakeholders in Austria and the international scientific community.

March on the streets of Arusha as part of social action on “World Social Work Day 2016”

On 15th March, the PROSOWO team joined around 100 conference delegates, including social work educators, practitioners and students, as well as representatives from the Tanzanian Ministry for Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children, and the Arusha Regional Commissioner in order to celebrate “**World Social Work Day 2016**”. This particular day under the theme “Societies thrive when the dignity and rights of all peoples are respected” commenced with a lively march on the streets of Arusha.



Source: <http://ifsw.org/world-social-work-day-2016/>

The march led to Sheikh Amri Abeid Karume Stadium where representatives from TASWO (Tanzania Association of Social Workers) welcomed the delegates. The President of ASSWA (Association of Schools of Social Work in Africa), Dr Gidraph Wairire, who is also the PROSOWO II country coordinator for Kenya, provided

special remarks and underscored the need for social workers in East Africa to join their voices to condemn all forms of human rights abuses.

The philosophy of marching on the streets as a means of social action in order to advocate human rights and social justice, but also to bring across the significance of social work to the general public, was first introduced in the East African region during the Kampala conference in March 2014 under the umbrella of PROSOWO. Thereafter, it was subsequently adopted at the social work conferences in Bujumbura, Burundi, in March 2015, and Arusha, Tanzania, in March 2016.



Marching on the streets as social action.

International conference on social work and social development

The Arusha conference was already the third of its kind in East Africa. The TASWO conference organizing committee had deliberately opted to host this social work event in Arusha since it is the headquarter of the East African Community, and it seemed to be the right location for a conference where social work educators, practitioners and students from countries such as Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania (including Zanzibar) and Uganda came together.

The PROSOWO team members, in their various capacities, played key roles in this event. Charles Rutikanga, country coordinator at the University of Rwanda, chaired both a regional summit of social work students as well as a plenary workshop on “Investing towards Addressing Social Work Challenges in East Africa”. Dr Zena Mabeyo from the Institute of Social Work in Dar es Salaam, country coordinator of Tanzania and chairperson of TASWO, provided various inputs during the conference and mediated between the different levels of social work education, practice and policy. Prof Helmut Spitzer from Carinthia University of Applied Sciences in Austria, overall coordinator of the PROSOWO project, gave a keynote speech on “Social Work as a Profession and a Discipline: Reflections on the East African Context”. In tandem, Zena Mabeyo and Helmut Spitzer provided a plenary presentation on “Social Work with Older People: Perspectives and Prospects for East Africa”, thus highlighting the current and future demographic scenarios and corresponding challenges for social policy and social work in the region.



Around 100 delegates had a chance to listen to inspiring presentations and got involved in lively discussions. The conference gained high media coverage with three reports in the Tanzanian television.

Special PROSOWO II workshop during the conference

On the second day of the conference, the PROSOWO team managed to have a workshop, attended by all conference participants, which provided an opportunity to share the achievements of PROSOWO I and also link the current project activities to the views of other key stakeholders in the region. Dr Janestic Twikirize from Makerere University in Uganda, regional coordinator of PROSOWO II, provided a coherent presentation of the first PROSOWO project. As a next step, Dr Gidraph Wairire from the University of Nairobi introduced the conceptual framework of PROSOWO II to the audience. Thereafter, the delegates split into smaller groups and focused on specific elements of PROSOWO II in three parallel sessions, namely: empirical research on indigenous and innovative models of social work practice; efforts towards the legislation of social work in East Africa; and increased engagement of social work professionals in social policy and human rights advocacy. The sessions were well attended, generated significant insights, and provided enriching perspectives to the planned project activities.

At the end of the workshop, 50 copies of publications on social work in East Africa which resulted as a key outcome of the first PROSOWO project were distributed to lecturers from universities, students’ representatives and social work organisations.



Conference resolutions: More than mere lip services?

On the third day, the conference was honoured by a visit of the Tanzanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hon. Dr Augustine Mahiga, who is also in charge of matters pertaining to the East African Community (EAC). In his closing speech, which was extraordinarily well informed and thoroughly grounded with regard to issues pertaining to social work and development, he emphasized the need for people-centred social development and governance based on human rights. He called upon social workers, who are frequently referred to as a friendly, philanthropic helping profession, to act as “angry reminders” of bad governments and failed development. In fact, social workers should play a more pro-active role as watchdogs of democratic principles, political accountability and thorough implementation of policies; they should also act as catalysts for civil society actions and movements.



Hon. Dr Augustine Mahiga, Tanzanian Minister of Foreign Affairs (middle), the acting Commissioner of Social Welfare, Mr. Rabikira Mushi (left), and Dr Zena Mabeyo, national PROSOWO country coordinator and TASWO chairperson

The Minister was thereafter presented with a publication on “Professional Social Work in East Africa” and also received a well-elaborated resolution which had been jointly formulated by the conference delegates. This resolution, amongst other things, stresses the need for supporting the PROSOWO project in the region; it calls for accelerated processes of statutory regulations of social work in the region; and it also appeals to the EAC to invite a key stakeholder of the social work body in the region to act as permanent representative at the East African Community with regard to social policy and social development affairs. The resolution will soon be made available to the international social work community via various fora; it will also be translated into French and Swahili.

As usual, the crucial question now remains whether this extremely significant step in social work policy action will show sustainable impact or just remain another well-

intentioned paper which will never see the light of implementation. We hope for the best.

Next steps

The PROSOWO team members will now fully concentrate on the research on indigenous and innovative social work methods in their respective contexts. Within the scope of PROSOWO II, further regional workshops are planned, and for sure, another major social work conference will be launched in the near future so that the spirit and commitment that unites the social work community across borders shall remain alive and keep growing.

