

**International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW-AP)
Asian and Pacific Association for Social Work Education (APASWE)**

Joint Regional Progress Report on the Global Agenda for Social
Work and Social Development Commitment to Action (2012)

Promoting the Dignity and Worth of People
2014 – 2016

Summary of Activities from the Asian and Pacific Region



**Promoting the Dignity and Worth of People – a Summary of activities across the
IFSW Asia Pacific Region, October 2015.**

This summary has been compiled from the records taken of the two workshops held at the International Federation of Social Workers Asia Pacific Regional Conference in 2015 and some supplementary material provided since that time. The editors apologise for any inaccuracies due to the low quality of audio recording and at times the limited amount of information provided. However the editors hope that the essence of this summary reflects the key issues on this topic from our region. This not an academic paper but captures some of the work being undertaken in our region related to the Global Agenda Theme – Promoting the Dignity and Worth of People. We also acknowledge the role of several colleagues from the region in supporting and sustaining this work, including the organisation of the conference.

In October 2015, members of the International Federation of Social Workers Asia Pacific Region (IFSW – AP) and the Asia Pacific Association of Social Work Educators (APASWE) gathered together for their joint regional conference in the city of Bangkok, Thailand. A major focus of the gathering was on Promoting the Dignity and Worth of People as the current topic of the Global Agenda. A one day pre-Conference workshop on 20 October 2015 was dedicated to the very important issues of Child Labour and Children of Migrant workers as fundamental issues of concern when considering the topic of Promoting the Dignity and Worth of People. Mr M V Sriganesh from India, Dr Bala Nikku from Nepal, Mr Habibur Rahman from Bangladesh and Mr Sompong Srakaew were guest speakers at this workshop. A further workshop on the 22 October broadened the focus of this Global Agenda topic and included a range of perspectives from several of our member countries across the region.

The Asia Pacific region is the largest geographically and arguably one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse regions of IFSW. Although child labour is not an issue in every country, we are united in our concerns about the high rate of child labour in many places and the consequential multiple negative impacts on child labourers and children of migrants as some of our most vulnerable people.

Speakers from Bangladesh, Nepal, India and Thailand informed the gathering at the pre-conference workshop of the multiple layers of complexity attached to this issue, of the variety of ways this issue manifested itself and of some of the ways this is beginning to be addressed.

All cultures recognise the importance of childhood experiences as forming the basis for positive and productive adulthood. Mr Sriganesh MV from India invited a moment of reflection for participants to reflect on a happy memory from childhood which served as a poignant reminder that for many child labourers or migrants, no such happy memories existed. Dr Bala Nikku from Nepal noted that one impact of child labour is to destroy their childhood which is supposed to be free, pleasant, secure and protected.

Mr Sriganesh defined child labour as “Work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity and that is harmful to physical and mental development.” Dr Bala Nikku from Nepal noted the important distinction between reasonable childhood chores or ‘work’, undertaken in all cultures to promote belonging and social development and child ‘labour’ which is exploitation and the focus of our attention.

Internationally, in addition to documents such as the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, there are conventions from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) which include Convention 138 which determines the minimum age and Convention 182 identifying the worst types of child labour. However despite these conventions, the number of children engaged in child labour continues to increase. Not all countries have signed up to these Conventions and all speakers noted that whilst their countries have many layers of policies and various Acts which apply to child labour there are also exemptions, difficulties with enforcement and in some instances, political disinterest in addressing the problem. Mr Habibur Rahman from Bangladesh noted the strong lobby from business persons to maintain the status quo retaining the use of cheaper child labour as well as a lack of motivation for change by politicians as their own personal experiences are so distant from the realities of families for whom child labour is a necessary component of the family income.

Sectors commonly exploiting child labour include factory industries (including apparel and carpet), mines and quarries, agriculture, domestic service, shop work, transportation (producing and assembling vehicle parts) and the construction industry. In addition the exploitation of children in the sex industry is a major concern. As well as the psycho-social impacts, many of these industries also pose significant risk of serious physical injury or death and / or mental injury and abuse. In India the Factories Act does not allow factories to engage a child under the age of 14 and a child between the ages of 14 – 18 must have certification to work in the factory industries.

In Nepal 2% of children are forced to work in the worst forms of child labour and 5% are waged child labour. However a further 26% are economically active children and 41% are working in some way.

In Bangladesh Mr Habibur Rahman reports that in the age band 5 – 17 years, there are 7.4 million working children, 3.2 million child labourers, 1.3 million children engaged in hazardous labour and 421,000 child domestic workers.

The broad approaches for addressing the issue of child labour include Education – enabling children to attend schools; and Poverty – finding ways of supporting families so that they have their basic needs met without the need for children to work. A recent amendment in the legislation in India includes the right to education for children until the age of 14 years. Parents have an obligation to send their child to school and they can be prosecuted if they do not comply. Schools cannot refuse a child – they must admit a child into their school. State governments in India are expected to create the necessary infrastructure to ensure children have this opportunity. However one complication in India is that the Gross enrolment of children in schools is around 50% and the presumption is that if they are not in schools they are engaged in child labour activities.

When families live in poverty – many living on \$2 per day - children are regarded as an asset and the ability to work regarded as an essential economic commodity to enable the family to survive. Dr Bala Nikku noted that if the family was provided with a cash incentive to send their children to school they would be able to stop sending them to work and instead send them to school. He also noted that although statistically 89% of children attend school, this may not be an accurate picture. Mr Rahman also noted that various psychosocial factors such as the death of the earning family member, parental divorce, health problems in the family and being a child who is abandoned can have major impacts on whether a child is able to remain in education or is forced by the circumstances of their family to work.

Dr Nikku noted that one of the consequences of Nepal's geographic location as a 'land link' between India and China, is child trafficking and migrant children. Mr Sompong Srakaew from Thailand further expanded on the issues related to migrant children. In Thailand in 2014 there were more than 1.6 million migrant workers including children – many of these are now second generation migrant workers. Many migrant workers and their families face problems such as having to pay bribes for work, sexual exploitation, accidents at work – they are unable to access health care – or living with the consequences of addictions – commonly a gambling addiction. Registering for a work permit can be a lengthy and difficult process and consequently many migrant workers do not hold such documentation, thereby increasing their risks of exploitation and inhibiting their ability to access any support systems.

Social workers play key roles in dealing with the consequences of child labour with many working within their counties to lobby for ways to both address poverty and enable them to attend schools. The use of media to promote the issue and some solutions should not be overlooked. Social workers also work directly with the children who have suffered from the consequences of child labour. In Nepal promoting a social work discourse based in human rights will provide the basis to eliminate the issue of child labour.

Mr Sompong Srakaew from Thailand is a strong advocate against child labour and human trafficking. He spoke of the work of his agency – the Labour Rights Promotion Network (LPN) – providing many examples of social work practice. The LPN established labour centres more than 10 years ago which work with Migrant workers to ensure their basic human rights, education, health and labour rights are met. In addition to the Labour centres the LPN holds Sunday learning centres, hosts a multicultural centre and assists migrant children to access Thai government schools in many provinces. They also support migrant workers to develop their own cultural centres. Through the use of an app for smart phones, migrant workers can receive news and access key helping agencies when needed. The LPN links with other NGOs in neighbouring countries to work together on the issues of migrant children and migrant workers.

At the conclusion of this workshop the following was drafted as a remit to go forward to the IFSW General Meeting in Seoul in 2016:

“That the General Meeting acknowledges that in all corners of the world, child labour is an unacceptable exploitation of the Rights of Children and that such exploitation seriously and negatively impacts on their long term health and wellbeing. We call upon IFSW to develop a position or policy statement against child labour policies and practices.”

A further workshop held on 22 October 2015 during the Conference in Bangkok brought together a smaller group and after an overview of the purpose and development of the Global Agenda several speakers shared what was happening in each of their countries. We received presentations from India, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Japan, Australia, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Nepal and South Korea. As a joint APASWE and IFSW gathering there was also an opportunity for a brief overview of social work in each of these countries. For some such as Australia and Japan the profession of social work has been established for many decades whereas for others such as Bangladesh, social work is a volunteering activity and in Nepal the profession has mostly developed over the last two decades with the establishment of formal education in 1996. Some countries have

state regulation of the profession whilst others have a form of self-regulation through the professional body. Many speakers also reported on their promotion of the global agenda theme at Social Work Day events earlier in 2015.

Whilst a range of topics were traversed at this workshop, the three central themes specifically relating to Promoting the Dignity and Worth of People, were Poverty, Mental Health and Disasters. In separating these out as three topics it is also recognised that often (but not always) there is a strong linkage between some or all of these. Across our region Indigenous issues also feature highly with many indigenous peoples faring poorly in all three of these areas. Many of the speakers noted the importance of collaboration across the whole social work system – education of social workers, social work practitioners’ professional ethics and standards, and social service providers – to align their work to address the issues arising from these themes. Hong Kong has a strong collaboration between their Council of Social Services, Social Work Association and School of Social Work. Speakers also noted the importance of working at the micro (individuals and their families), meso (community development) and macro (nationally and internationally) levels in order for these issues to be accurately promoted and addressed. The use of media and the importance of strong lobbying of all layers of political influence was recognised. The Australian Social Workers Association has developed a number of position statements on a range of social justice issues promoting the dignity and worth of people. Some examples of position statements include violence against women, children in immigration detention and the death penalty. They also make many submissions to their government on issues such as the decision to prevent people under 25 year of age receiving a benefit for 6 months when they became unemployed, thereby contributing to this policy being revoked.

Re-enforcing the discussions of the pre-conference workshop, the link between poverty and child labour was re-iterated as being a high priority in many countries. Project HELPME (health, education, life protection, monitoring and evaluation) in the Philippines is an interagency collaboration aimed at minimising (if not eliminating) the child labour problem. Another example of seeking to break the cycle and address poverty, is the Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS) in India. This is a residential institute for 25,000 indigenous children that provides free accommodation, food and health care as well as employment following the completion of their education. In the Philippines there are a number of community development initiatives and whilst each of these responds to the particular needs identified in their respective communities, many of these are actively working to address poverty. The Sustainable Livelihood programme of the Department of Social Welfare in

Indonesia caters for up to 723,000 families. The participants in this programme actively contribute in the workforce by using available local resources to meet identified needs in accessible markets.

In Hong Kong, poverty is the number one priority in the government's agenda and they have established a Commission of Poverty. This government led initiative is drawing all the parties together to look at this issue, beginning with defining who are 'poor' and addressing issues such as the lack of social protection following retirement. Hong Kong also noted that at times there can be a tension where social workers advocating for social justice can also be blamed for leading a social movement which may disrupt a sense of order and harmony. In some cases this has led to the prosecution of social workers who take a lead in such movements. A study in India by Sheeja Karalam, George and Kimura, regarding the status of women in developing countries examined the empowerment of women in the context of a community development project at the Centre for Social Action (CSA) in Bangalore. The CSA has undertaken a number of initiatives including improved access to education, better care and nutrition in early childhood and opportunities for community work. In one example a young woman had completed her early education but rather than being able to pursue further education she was found a life partner by her parents and became a housewife and mother. She was confined to indoors (aside from grazing cattle or fetching water) and her world was limited only to her family. Through talking with other women when they were grazing cattle together, she became aware of one of the CSA's Self Help Groups and by enrolling onto this, she was able to gain more education, build social connections and develop new skills. This person has gone on to be an executive committee member of an ongoing group which was formed following the ending of the CSA funding and continues to provide services to the local community.

The issue of mental health was highlighted as a priority issue across the region. In Indonesia high rates of mental disorder, drug abuse and suicide together with low numbers of psychiatrists and limited ability to access psychiatric treatment and rehabilitation services, leads to poor outcomes for people affected by mental health problems. A new Mental Health Act passed in 2014 sets out the roles of social workers in psycho-social rehabilitation and mental health services. The Indonesian chapter of the World Association for Psycho-social Rehabilitation links with international networks bringing professions together for seminars and workshops and they are actively involved in drafting government regulations related to mental health and psychosocial rehabilitation. Social workers are also actively engaged in working to eliminate stigma and discrimination against people with a mental health disability and working towards the elimination of restraining people with a mental illness. Japan also spoke of mental illness as an issue citing the example of the "Bright Future Foundation"

which was established by social workers to work with people with mental disorders supporting them to live within the community. Another Non-governmental organisation links people with a mental disorder into physical team activities enabling them to learn a new sport, make new social connections and build confidence. Through these contacts, people have been able to go on to gain employment and live a stable independent life. Japan also acknowledged the increasing prevalence of dementia and social isolation noting that their government has a strategy of respecting the elderly, promoting awareness and support for people with dementia. One example is where someone with dementia is introduced to the neighbourhood including key people such as the police and supermarkets so that they recognise these folk and collectively look after them. Social workers have been integrally involved in community work to develop these and other types of community supports. Social workers in Malaysia joined with their National Mental Health Association to celebrate world mental health day with the theme of dignity in mental health.

Disasters – especially natural disasters - are all too prevalent in our region. Many countries are on the “Pacific Ring of Fire” and consequently are affected by earthquakes, tsunami, flooding, mud slides and /or droughts. Japan – who recently led the project on social work in disasters for IFSW Asia Pacific – spoke of the 3 ‘S’ (Security, Safety and Stability) project providing accommodation for the victims of the major earthquake of March 2011. The Japanese Association of Social Workers has established an emergency headquarters and sent social workers to the worst affected area. They have categorised disaster recovery into three phases – the first 2 years dealing with the immediate effect of losing their family, friends and acquaintances and coping with any illnesses or diseases that have occurred as a result of the disaster. The next 2 years the cause of the stress was what could be termed as ‘secondary stressors’ with the many environmental changes and general disruptions to daily living and the third phase is dealing with the massive longstanding changes and losses with respect to relationships, employment and property as a result of the disaster. In the 3 ‘S’ project, social workers were involved in undertaking a needs assessment of people affected, linking them with existing services and for those with multiple problems they organised a regional alliance committee to collaborate in resolving the issues. They also worked in communities to promote an environment of acceptance of people with problems providing information and education to these communities. Social workers in New Zealand have been involved in several ways following their earthquakes of 2010 and 2011. Most recently this has seen them working within a multidisciplinary team delivering school based mental health services as the after effects of the quakes, especially the secondary stressors, continue to impact people’s lives – especially children and young people. Nepal’s 2 major earthquakes in 2015 saw many social workers engaged in responding to victims of

the disaster. Students from the school of social work worked with children from the community alongside other organisations. The school became a place for people to come to and get some help.

In addition to the KISS programme (India), Australia, New Zealand and Malaysia noted the particular vulnerability of indigenous peoples in all areas - poverty, mental health and disasters. Australia supports initiatives such as the Reconciliation Action Plan promoting better relationships between the Aboriginal peoples and Others that was developed from the International First Nations Social Work Conference held in Australia. Aotearoa New Zealand has the Tiriti O Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi) as the foundation document between their indigenous peoples, the Maori, and the government and social workers are required to demonstrate their commitment to this Treaty through their bi-cultural practice in their work. The concept of indigeneity or what it means to be indigenous, including such elements as the importance of customs and cultural practices, language, traditional lands and places of significance in order to preserve the dignity and worth of indigenous peoples, is a continuing discourse in Aotearoa New Zealand. In Malaysia their professional body is partnering with a private corporation (Glaxo-Smith-Kline) to manage the Horlicks "School Journey Initiative" for a group of Orang Asli children who live on an island only accessible by boat. This programme aims to "champion the cause of making the often difficult path to an education easier for children around the world". They have employed a social work manager and an Orang Asli teacher to work with 30 Orang Asli children of varying ages for an initial period of 2 years.

Hong Kong notes the significant number of ethnic minorities mostly from India, Pakistan and Nepal, many of whom are second and third generations living in Hong Kong. They are urging the government not to ignore these ethnic minorities and are working to support these groups of people.

In Aotearoa New Zealand social work research into the often overlooked demographic of those identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) within the older population seeks to examine how the quality and quantity of social connectedness impacts on their sense of wellbeing. This will provide new insights into promoting the dignity and worth of these often marginalised older persons.

This paper summarises the many and varied ways that the profession of social work – inclusive of educators, practitioners, social service providers and our professional bodies – promotes the dignity and worth of people across our Asia Pacific region. Through engaging in activities including political actions, community development projects or individual and family interventions, social workers make a positive difference in the lives of people we work with. The Editors wish to sincerely thank all

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