

**2012**



**CODE OF ETHICS  
FOR NATIONAL ASSOCIATION  
OF  
SOCIAL WORKERS OF UGANDA  
(NASWU)**

NATIONAL  
ASSOCIATION OF  
SOCIAL  
WORKERS OF  
UGANDA  
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## Preamble

This code of ethics covers the minimum professional behavior, integrity and conduct that apply to registered social workers and generally to social work profession in Uganda. It is intended to serve as a guide to everyday conduct of members of National Association of Social Workers of Uganda (NASWU) in exercise of social work profession and as basis for adjudication of issues in ethics when the conduct of social worker(s) is alleged to deviate from the standards set in the code. It represents standards of ethical behavior for social workers in professional relationship with clients, colleagues, employers, other individuals and professions and with community and society as a whole.

The NASWU capacity to ensure the protection and assistance of clients depends on the ability of our members to uphold and promote the highest standards of ethical and professional conduct. The members of NASWU are personally and collectively responsible for maintaining these standards and expected to act in accordance with the principles and values stated in NASWU's constitution and this code of ethics conduct. It forms integral part NASWU's membership and social work service in the country.

### 1.1 Commitment and aim of code of ethics

NASWU recognizes that social work is about empowering individuals and transforming communities through service provision. Social Workers have obligation to clients, to their employees, to one another, to colleagues in other disciplines and to society. As a professional association of social workers in Uganda, NASWU has a duty to ensure that its members discharge their ethical obligations to safeguard and promote the rights of clients. The primary aim of this code of ethics is to state the values, principles and responsibilities which are fundamental in social work. The code is binding on all members, and the association will commend itself to all social workers practicing in Uganda.

### 1.2 Definition of social work

“The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and empowerment and liberation of people to enhance wellbeing. Utilizing theories of human behavior and social systems, social work intervenes at the point where people interact with their environment. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work”<sup>1</sup>.

Social work addresses multiple, complex dealings between people and their environments. Its mission is to enable all people to develop their full potential, enrich

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<sup>1</sup> NASWU adopts a definition of social work by International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) jointly agreed on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2001 in Copenhagen.

their lives and prevent dysfunction. Professional social work is focused on problem solving and change. As such, social workers are change agents in society and in the lives of individuals, families and communities they serve. Social work is an interrelated system of values, theory and practice.

### 1.3 Interpretation of code of ethics

NASWU is aware that this code cannot prescribe in detail every behavior expected of a professional social worker however, the code must be interpreted in the wider context noted above, taking into account the balance of responsibilities between employers and their professional staff and in individual circumstance.

## 2.0 Values and Principles of social work

In response to executing and achieving NASWU aims in Uganda, it is committed to three core values from which emanate ethical responsibilities and principles. These core values are:

- Human dignity and worth
- Social justice and
- Professional integrity

Social work practice should promote respect for human dignity through upholding social justice, service provision to clients with integrity and competence.

### 2.1 Human dignity and worth

The social work profession holds that every human being has a unique and equal worth and that each person has a right to wellbeing, self fulfillment and self determination, consistent with the right to culture of others and a sustainable environment<sup>2</sup>.

### 2.2 Social Justice

The social work profession holds that social justice is a core obligation which societies should be called upon to uphold. Societies should strive to afford protection and provide maximum benefit for all their members. These include:

- Fair and equitable distribution of resources to meet basic needs
- Fair access to public services and benefits, to achieve human potential
- Recognition of their rights and duties of individual, families, groups and communities
- Equal treatment and protection under the law

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<sup>2</sup> It is a healthy enough to support within it's a diverse variety of plant and animal wildlife

- Social development and environmental management in the interests of present and future human welfare
- The pursuit of social justice involves identifying, seeking to alleviate and advocating strategies for overcoming structural disadvantage

## 2.3 Professional integrity

The social work profession values honesty, transparency, reliability, empathy, reflective self-awareness, discernment, competence and commitment

## 3.0 Duties and responsibilities to the respective principles

### 3.1. Respect for human dignity and worth

Social workers have a duty to:

- Respect basic human rights as expressed in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and other international conventions<sup>3</sup> derived from this declaration.
- Respect the worth and dignity of clients and not discriminate on basis of age, beliefs, culture, gender, marital status, family status, intellectual, psychological and physical abilities, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and social and economic status of clients.
- Uphold and promote civil and legal rights of the clients where possible

#### 3.1.1 Priority of Client's interest

- Social workers will maintain the best interest of clients as a priority with due regard to respective interest of others.
- In exceptional cases, the priority of clients' interests may be outweighed by the interests of others or legal requirements and conditions. In such situations clients will be made aware that their interests or those of others may be jeopardized.
- Social workers will seek to safeguard the rights, interests and safety of clients who have limited or impaired decision-making capacity or when acting on their behalf or when another person whether legally authorized or not is acting for the client.
- Social workers will collaborate with other professionals and service providers in the interests of clients, maintaining their privacy, and with clients' knowledge and consent whenever possible. Social workers will recognize the clients' rights to self-determination in this regard and where possible include clients in such consultations.

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<sup>3</sup> Documents particularly relevant to social work practice are: The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989), The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

### 3.1.2 Self determination

- Social workers will support and facilitate clients to reach informed decision about their lives and promote their autonomy, provided that this does not conflict with their safety or with rights of others.
- If the client's circumstances limit the possibility of self-determination the social worker must, where possible protect the client's rights and welfare in any dealings with others who have legal responsibility for the client.
- Avoid compulsion unless there is a clear professional or legal justification for such a course of action

### 3.1.3 Confidentiality, privacy and use of information

Social workers will respect the right of clients to a relationship of trust and confidentiality of their information and to responsible use of information obtained in the course of professional service. This includes:

- Obtaining informed consent from clients or their authorized representatives to use this information, even if the information is legally required
- Determining to whom clients wish such information to be given or not to be given, in what detail and in what circumstances
- Determining from whom information about clients may be requested
- Treating information obtained from relatives or others about clients in the same confidential manner as clients' information.
- Social workers will use confidential information only for the purpose for which it was acquired; or, with the written consent of the client, for a directly related purpose; or with lawful excuse (e.g. court or statutory requirement).
- Social workers will ensure clients' anonymity and remove identifying details when permitted to use confidential information for purposes such as case presentation, consultation, teaching, research or education.
- Respect the clients right to privacy and other confidentiality of any information provided in the course of the professional relationship
- Inform the client of the extent to which any other professionals or employees will be able to access client records
- Inform the client about the extent of confidentiality and the uses of which the information held by the social worker may be put, if, for compelling legal, ethical, or safety imperatives, any disclosure of information is required.

### 3.1.5 Informed consent

- Social workers will ensure, as far as possible, that clients understand the principle of informed consent and the circumstances in which it may be required.
- Obtain the informed consent of the client to any public disclosure for teaching, research or professional reasons, of information that may identify the client

- Ensure that if the client is unable to give informed consent because of an inability to comprehend the full ramifications of providing consent, the social worker must confirm that consent has been obtained from a person legally empowered to provide authority (where such a person exists)

### 3.1.5 Termination of relationship

Social workers will renegotiate or terminate professional relationships and services when these relationships and services no longer serve the interests or needs of clients. Whether the decision to renegotiate or terminate is that of clients or social workers, the reason for the decision will be considered and discussed. Social workers will also discuss with clients their needs, options and preferences before continuing or discontinuing services or offering to seek transfer or referral. The social worker will:

- Act to protect the interest and needs of the client by facilitating a referral to an appropriate person or service if the social worker is obliged to terminate the relationship with the client for professional or personal reasons
- Not undermine or damage the reputation and character of a social worker replaced because of professional circumstances

### 3.1.6 Research

In times of conducting a research, social worker will:

- Obtain approval from an appropriate body before undertaking a research project
- Incorporate the ethical values inherent in the code of ethics in the methodologies used by the social worker in teaching or research
- Obtain informed consent of the research participants and ensure that welfare and safety of research participants is protected
- Protect the identity of research participants unless informed consent is gained to allow publication of identity where such publication would not infringe on the rights of any other person
- Record and report research results fairly and objectively.

### 3.2 Social Justice

Human rights and social justice serve as the motivation and justification for social work. In solidarity with those who are disadvantaged, the profession strives to alleviate poverty and liberate vulnerable and oppressed people in order to promote social inclusion. The social worker will:

- Use professional knowledge and experience to contribute to policy development
- Apply knowledge and skills in ways that prioritize needs of others over personal gain
- Responsibly use power and authority in ways that serve humanity. Bring to the attention of those in power and the general public, and where appropriate



challenge ways the policies or activities of government, organizations or society create structural disadvantages, hardships and suffering.

- Seek to change social structures which perpetuate inequalities and injustices and whenever possible work to eliminate all violations of human rights
- Promote social fairness and equitable distribution of resources, aiming to minimize barriers and expand choice and potential for clients especially those who are disadvantaged, vulnerable or oppressed, or who have exceptional needs.
- Challenge the abuse of power for suppression and excluding people from decisions which affect them
- Promote public participation in societal processes and decisions in the development and implementation of social policies and services

### 3.3 Professional integrity

Social workers must adhere to the ethical principles on integrity on maintaining a high code of behavior, honesty, trustworthiness, being respectful, and having a sense of justice and fairness, personal character. Since integrity is associated with all the above, ones' reputation is extremely difficult to recover once it is damaged. Social worker will:

- Refrain from any professional behavior that puts at risk the individual's and/or the profession's reputation and compromises the social workers ability to work with the client in a fully professional and caring manner
- Not indulge in corruption tendencies or exploit their relationship with clients for personal gain
- Provide the client with honest and factual information about the social worker's professional qualifications and experience
- Provide the client with details of the extent and nature of the services to be provided by the social worker and their agency and give details of the client's rights and opportunities as well as any obligations and risks associated with the provisions of services.
- Not enter into sexual relationship with the client. This applies to a client's family or relative of former client, when there is a risk the relationship will adversely affect the services provided to the client and/or the social worker's ability to fulfill his or her professional obligations.
- Not become a party to any conduct, as a supervisor or educator, with supervisees or social work students that could compromise the supervisee's or students professional role with the client
- Not in any way harass a client nor encourage or condone any form of harassment by other towards any client or colleague.
- Act to redress harassment against a client or colleague in circumstances when this becomes known
- Discuss an alternative means of providing the client with high quality service, should the situation arise where the social worker by virtue of his physical, emotional or mental impairment or limitation be unable to provide an appropriate level of service

- Discuss potential or actual conflict of interest (either personal or professional) with the client and attempt to resolve them expeditiously. The social worker should bring any potential or actual conflict of interest to their supervisor's or employer's attention. Unless a resolution is possible, the relationship with the client should be terminated with appropriate referral being made.
- Respond to complaints in a professional manner and implement changes to practice as necessary to address any issues raised in complaints.

#### 4.0 Other Ethical Practice and responsibilities

##### 4.1 Commitment to competence and development

- Social workers will ensure that their practice skills and knowledge are improved and updated through continuous professional development and advancement in order to provide quality service
- Social workers will undertake practice only within their areas of competence or where training/ supervision pertinent to their work role is available or accessible.
- Contribute to education and training of colleagues and students, sharing knowledge and practice wisdom
- Recognize the limits of their competence and advise employers and clients when referral to a more appropriate professional is recommended

##### 4.2 Conflict of interest

- Social workers will remain aware of the potential for conflicts of interest which may affect their ability to exercise professional discretion and unbiased judgment.
- Social workers will be mindful that conflicts of interest can arise in relation to involuntary clients, multiple clients and confidentiality issues. At all times, clients' interest remain a priority with due consideration of respective interests of others.
- Where such a situation may arise, social workers will declare their interest to the relevant parties. If already involved in a professional relationship when the conflict of interest arises, social workers will declare it and take appropriate action such as consulting with a senior person. This may result in negotiating the professional relationship or terminating it and referring appropriately.
- Social workers will not give or accept gifts which may impair professional judgment, affect the integrity or efficacy of the professional relationship.
- Social workers will refuse to accept or will refer cases where it is not possible to manage conflicts of interest.

##### 4.3 Cultural awareness

Social workers will:

- Acknowledge the importance of culture in their practice and appreciate cultural diversities and cultural identities.

- Use a language the client can understand and only in exceptional circumstances that use a different language with help of qualified interpreter where appropriate.

#### 4.4 Responsibilities at work place

##### 4.4.1 Management

Social workers in management positions will observe the following ethical responsibilities:

- To work for the acceptance by the employers of the values and principles and requirements of the code
- To ensure that staff under their direction receive continuing training and professional education and seek adequate resources to meet staff development needs.
- To promote equality policies and practices and advocate for resources to meet clients' needs
- Endeavor to have a conflict resolved in a way that maintains the quality and integrity of the service provided to clients when a conflict arises between the social worker and their employees or among social workers themselves.
- Promote effective team work and communication

##### 4.4.2 Reporting misconduct

- Serious negligence, unethical behavior or misconduct by a registered or non registered social workers should always be brought to the attention of National Executive Committee or Branch Executive Committee of NASWU

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Advocacy** - Advocacy is a term with roots in legal practice. It refers to the activities associated with negotiating or representing on behalf of a person (Burke & Dalrymple 2009, p. 265).

**Autonomy** - The power of a person to act (1) freely and intentionally; (2) with substantial understanding; and (3) without controlling powers forcing them to choose to act in one way rather than another. The term 'self-determination' has a similar meaning. (Clifford & Burke 2009, p. 64).

**Clients** - Clients are individual adult or child, families, groups, communities, organizations and societies, especially those who are neglected, vulnerable, disadvantaged, alienated or have exceptional needs.

**Code of Ethics** - Codes of ethics are documents that aim to identify the broad values, principles and standards of ethical conduct on which a particular profession is based (Bowles, Collingridge, Curry & Valentine 2006, pp. 75, 76).

**Competence** - This is about care-giving, the actual work of care that needs to be done – one's ability to do something about another's needs. The term 'competence' is being used here in a holistic sense relating to professionals' abilities and capacities, rather than a set of discrete technical skills (competencies) (Banks & Gallagher 2009, p. 104).

**Confidentiality** - Respecting private and personal information, unless there are overriding ethical reasons for not doing (Clifford & Burke 2009, p. 68).

**Culture** - The distinctive ways of life and shared values, beliefs and meanings common to groups of people (Quinn 2009, p. 266).

**Discrimination** - Negative discrimination is the prejudging and unfavorable treatment of people on the basis of perceived difference. Positive discrimination refers to policies, programs or actions that favor disadvantaged persons or groups (Chenoweth & McAuliffe 2008, p. 267).

**Corruption** – corruption is a term with main meanings, but generally it entails misusing one's office for a private gain or unofficial end. It involves both a monetary and non-monetary benefit. Bribery, extortion, influence peddling, nepotism, scams, fraud, "grease money", and opportunism. Usually, the very work environment and culture foster of discourage corrupt practices - <http://www.guyanajournal.com/Corrupt.html>

**Ethics** - Ethics is a branch of philosophy which addresses questions about morality, such as what is the fundamental nature of morality and the way in which moral values are determined (Gray & Webb 2010, p. 1).

**Human rights** - Human rights refer to the basic rights and freedoms to which all humans are entitled. They are socially sanctioned entitlements to the goods and services that are necessary to develop human potential and well-being (Ife 2010, p. 148).

**Informed consent** - In general, for consent to be valid following factors must be met:

- coercion and undue influence must not have played a role in the client's decision
- clients must be mentally capable of providing consent
- clients must consent to specific procedures or actions
- the consent forms and procedures must be valid
- clients must have the right to refuse or withdraw consent
- Clients' decisions must be based on adequate information" (Reamer 2006, pp. 167, 168).

**Misconduct** – misconduct is defined as actions or omissions which are likely to be: harmful to the clients or members of public, or prejudicial to the development or standing of social work practice, or contrary to the code of ethics (Code of Ethics for British Association of Social Workers - <http://www.celticknot.org.uk/links/baswcode.html>)

**Oppression** - Oppression designates the disadvantage, marginalization and injustice some groups of people experience as part of their everyday life. It involves the devaluation of people's attributes and contributions to society on the grounds of who they are as members of a group socially configured as inferior (Dominelli 2010, p. 160).

**Social Justice** - Social justice refers to the concept of a society in which justice is achieved in every aspect of society, rather than merely through the administration of law. It is generally considered as a social world which affords individuals and groups fair treatment, equality and an impartial share of the benefits of membership of society (Ife 2010, p. 148).

**Values** - Professional values are a particular grouping and ordering of values within a professional context. In social work such values tend to focus on human functioning, capabilities and development (Congress 2010, p. 19).

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