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THE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION IN ASIA: LOOK HOMEWARD 1968-1993

DAVID DRUCKER

Responding to the chosen theme for this issue — the inadequate orientation of Asian Social Work to the harsh realities of the region, as voiced by innumerable veterans in the field — the author of this paper examines the implications of these statements and then revisits the recommendations made by UN's "Explorations" (1972) to see what remains valid and appropriate today. The Mobile Training Scheme's success and ultimate failure is also discussed, followed by the reasons for the demise of the organised profession in development. The author concludes that social work can find a developmental role in an almost limitless range of situations and does not need to cramp its vision, style and potential in settings, agencies and concepts of "professional" which imitate those that have emerged in affluent countries for the minority who it is conceived as needing to be "adjusted".

David Drucker is Social Development Consultant, Frages, Collonges, Ain, France.

Asia From Afar

On my return from work in Africa (in a country with nine international borders providing nearly half a million refugees, a country in ruins after a generation of externally-supported military dictatorship, mismanagement and pillage), I found waiting for me an invitation to provide an article on "The Social Work Profession in Asia" for a special issue of *The Indian Journal of Social Work*.

I first came to Asia twenty-five years ago and wrote an "Asian Progress" on my first ten years (Drucker, 1979). Although I have been back on brief assignments, another ten years have now passed since I lived and worked in Asia. I wondered how, after such an absence from the scene, could I contribute something more than I had previously?

However, in reading the proposal for this 1993 special issue, I have a very strong sense of *déjà vu* — I have been here before! I note too that, although the thrust of the guest editor's theme is that Western concepts have irrelevantly dominated Asian social work, none of the references provided include an Asian name. In 1993? Something must be wrong here!

Current Voices and Concerns from the Past

I read that my old friend Tom Brigham, around again in Asia in 1984, compared five developing countries which were predominantly rural and continued to find that they "...had adopted American urban models of education..." The guest editor's note emphasises Brigham's "highlighted anomaly" with an exclamation mark:

"...social work arose in the West to help a few marginal people to adjust to society; whereas, in most of the developing countries the poor are the vast and significant majority!" (Brigham, 1984)

Three thoughts immediately present themselves:

(1) "Adjust". The implication here is that in the West, society was by and large okay and the social work task is to assist in seeing that the few marginal people fit in without too much trouble. Perhaps, out of goodness of heart, social workers dearly want those unfortunate marginals to share in the benefits of an okay and, presumably, just and ever-progressing society. A very comforting perception!

(2) My own experience in Asia and certainly in Africa, especially with my most recent struggles still fresh in mind, is that almost all the people I have had much to do with live in extraordinarily un-okay societies which are not merely unjust but often positively murderous.¹ These unfortunates do a phenomenal amount of adjusting to survive in such societies, although by any standards they cannot be considered well-adjusted. It is clear to me that people in dire trouble are being generated at a faster rate than can be helped by any amount of social work "adjustment".

(3) Our old social work ancestor Flexner (1915), referred to in the guest editorial, and his cohorts spent much time trying to work out this kind of dilemma in terms of "Social Work: Cause or Function?" By and large, in America, function won out (there was even a whole school of FUNCTIONAL casework in dispute with DIAGNOSTIC casework when I was in the States in the 1950s, although the diagnostic was not examining social forces, but given over to psychoanalytically-defined disturbances and therapeutics. A big issue for social workers then centred around the pros and cons of private practice, which was where the wealthy marginals were seeking adjustment).²

A Profession must Profess

Social workers of course have a choice and, no doubt, a right to take up an honourable stretcher-bearer role (as Richard Titmuss used to categorise it). Florence Hollis, a renowned casework teacher and practitioner, took an honest position. "I don't know" she would say "what I can do about the problems of society, but I do know something about how we can help some people in emotional and domestic problems to live more comfortably and even creatively". However, whatever choice individual social workers make, and whatever necessary training is developed to fulfil these marginal (not my word, please note) functions, the profession has a much wider responsibility and more important role to play in defining its values and philosophy, identifying objectives, developing skills and giving direction to its on-coming practitioners.

A profession must profess beyond the narrow confines of its current practice and continuously accumulate a body of knowledge of its own as well as seek to provide new perspective for others. No wonder social work has agonised over whether it can really stand with the grown-ups and declare itself a profession.

(3) According to the guest editorial, Katherine Kendall notes in a United Nations study on social work training in 1950 that:

...social welfare, or social service, or social work is a dynamic activity that has grown out of and is constantly influenced by evolving social, economic, political and cultural trends.

How is it then, that over forty years later it is considered that Asian social work has grown out of and is largely influenced by, and apparently still operates and provides training, as Hammond (1988) says: "...considerably fostered and influenced by the liberal values and beliefs of the American society, and may not be acceptable in other countries" and which Midgley (1981) describes as "professional imperialism"?

Can it be that Asian social work still embraces a vision of what needs to be done and how to do it very much on the basis of the social, economic, political, and cultural trends which have successfully promoted such pervasive urban-oriented products as Coca-cola, McDonalds and Rambo?

An Asian Agenda 1970

At least twenty-five years ago Asian social work was urged to adopt a quite different agenda. In 1968 Asian social work educators, administrators and planners meeting in Bangkok reported:

...that professional social work and social work education were still [sic] not sufficiently attuned to developmental needs and problems as currently defined in the plans of the countries in the ECAFE region, and that greater efforts should be made to improve that situation (United Nations, 1968a).

Later that same year, at the International Conference of Ministers Responsible for Social Welfare, 89 countries endorsed the recommendation that priority be assigned:

...particularly in developing countries, to the developmental tasks of social welfare and therefore, to orienting social welfare training toward preparation for such tasks (United Nations, 1968b).

The Asian Ministers meeting in Manila in 1970 extended this concept more specifically: "Curricula on social work training should be geared to social development goals and constantly examined, reviewed and evaluated in the light of the countries' changing needs" (United Nations, 1970).

At the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) Conference in Manila at the same time (1970) the in-thing was to exult at the prospect of social work operating effectively "in the corridors of power" as the challenge of the 70s. Presumably, the profession in Asia had made a choice and was now to turn vigorously to society and its aberrations.

By 1970, then, leaving aside the hubris, at least Asian social work had authoritatively had its attention drawn to the nature of Asian priorities and its necessary direction.

An Asian Agenda — Some Long Time Later

But what has happened since?

Some ten years later Shankar Pathak (of the New Delhi School, an Asian voice) was to write:

It is surprising that even though it is now more than forty years since formal post-graduate education in social work began in this country, there is not a

single book dealing with the historical development of social welfare in India...It was thus inevitable that a student of social welfare would know details of the history of social welfare in the UK and the USA because of the preponderance of available literature and remain blissfully ignorant of the rich heritage of social welfare of his own country (Pathak, 1980).

Kendall in "...Accent on Change" (1986), (lack of change?), in what I suppose was diplomatic understatement, put it mildly:

...particularly in Asia, the efforts towards indigenisation of the curriculum to increase its relevance to the local situation seem to move rather slowly. Equally important is the slow process of indigenisation of the body of knowledge.

The guest editor's note goes on to say:

Indigenous social work knowledge is a must for indigenous social work education and professional practice...Whatever literature has been developed in the Asian countries has not been successfully disseminated even among the Asian countries. As a result, the exchange of knowledge has not taken place (except at seminars and conferences)...

Indeed! What an indictment of all those expensively-mounted seminars and conferences of which the United Nations and the International Association of Schools of Social Work have been major sponsors. Can it be that the subject matter proved to be untranslatable at the national and operational level or that a generation of respected conference-goers proved as expensively marginal to the needs of their profession as the profession seems to have remained marginal to the needs of their societies?

One of these conferences as long ago as 1966 brought together Asian social work educators and field work supervisors to a Regional Training Centre to develop indigenous training literature. Invited to bring the material they were currently using, no one brought even a single item to acknowledge the existence or condition of the poor. The report concluded:

Poverty, as an observed cultural phenomenon in most Asian countries, is striking because of its pervasive presence in the lives of countless people who exist on the brink of starvation. Yet the handling of poverty in professional social work as an observed cultural phenomenon in Asian case records is more striking in its absence. The question might be raised: in what ways do professional social workers in Asia come in contact with such poverty, how does this poverty actually affect the role of the client, as well as the role of the profession itself, not only in its objectives but also in its methods? (United Nations, 1966).

Some six years later, in a work responding to the Asian Social Welfare Ministers' declarations, Drucker (1972) observed that social work's silence on such matters was astonishing and he reported that:

All who discussed this matter are in accord that in practice no distinct chain of action links identification of social priorities with the appropriate teaching of personnel.

Depressingly, the message that emerges from the guest editor's note suggests that things are not all that different now from the state of Asian social work of a generation ago. Can this really be so?

Practice First, Courses Later

The need for "the development of a course in Asian social work", as it appears in the guest editor's note, seems to put the cart before the horse. What is needed apparently is Asian social work in practice, Asian experience gained in Asian conditions, and an Asian professional organisation to distill and effectively disseminate its knowledge. Of course, Western-derived knowledge and experience needs to be examined and utilised where appropriate in the Asian context. However, Asian knowledge, Asian objectives and Asian social work cannot depend merely on the patronising idea that Western knowledge has to be indigenised. What emerges from Asia should be recognised and valued as fundamental knowledge in its own right which can make a considerable, necessary and vitalising contribution to building a truly international knowledge base and an international profession. The West might indigenise some of the Asian experience to spur the embryonic efforts in the West itself, directed to the issue of their poor and unjust social conditions. Western poor, significant and growing in numbers, are still very much un-okay.

Nevertheless, here in 1993, the Tata Institute of Social Sciences must be applauded for once more turning attention to what social work should (and could) be all about; trying to bring together what has been going on in Asia, albeit submerged, fragmentary and discontinuous throughout these years; and pointing to the need to reframe the agenda for social work. For, despite the fact that Asian professional social work intentions in the seventies reached well beyond the honourable, predominantly stretcher-bearer role and vociferously declared itself for development and the corridors of power, the guest editor's note and its references suggest that there has been little change in coming to grips with the task of placing social work in the mainstream of development to meet Asian conditions.

Social work by its very nature is likely to make powerful and wealthy enemies; have we understood how to counter such situations? Have we understood how to build strong constituencies of our own and gradually secure access to adequate resources for supporting demonstrably valuable skills? Can it be that social work has actually pursued, instead, safety, status and prestige on the terms of the conservative forces in society?³

In my opinion, social work has been too eager, too soon, to take on itself the trappings of academic respectability by seeking academic certification on the terms of old-style academia. This has been part of the politics or power ploy of social work. In the process the leadership largely abandoned their potentially unique place of observing, recording and formulating the condition of, and the need to find ways to deal with, the situation where "the poor are the vast and significant majority". In the main, entrance to universities took place at a time when, world-wide, those elitist

and conservative institutions derived their prestige from the laboratory-based, myopic ("pure"), static science of the nineteenth century or from the more romantically-inclined abstractions of the humanities formulated in the comfort of learned literary discourse in ivory towers, far from the misery and chaos of everyday life. Social work, had it been less concerned with its status and acceptability and more with the workings of society and social injustice, might even have contributed dynamic concepts well before the fixed states of the physical sciences gave way to the flux, uncertainties, and living with the unknown of atomic and biogenetic research.

Is social work ready now in 1993 to realistically consider what is the magnitude of the task, the nature of the anti-development forces that have diverted us and what we must do to strike out in the development direction? If so, then perhaps, it is worth revisiting some of the recommendations of twenty years ago, and for current practitioners and teachers to judge what remains valid and appropriate today and for tomorrow.

Social Work and Development

There is a need, of course, to be clear in defining social work in the development context. "Explorations" in 1972 sought guidance by taking the repeatedly pronounced key phrases to see what they actually represented to the social work educators and professionals in terms of the roles to be taught and undertaken. These were:

- (1) *Social policies and planning in development.*
- (2) *Ensuring social justice* (with particular reference to a more equitable distribution of national wealth).
- (3) The essential need for *participation by the people* in policy formulation, planning and implementation.
- (4) Improving the social and cultural infrastructure by *institution building*.

Where to place traditional social work methods in this developmental framework was approached as follows:

- (5) *Social work helping methods.*

The situations dealt with by social workers very often illustrate the malfunctioning of our societies and the gaps and inconsistencies in our policies and programmes. The social worker's role is to be alert and sensitive to this and to systematically report these matters, thus contributing decisively to policy and planning in the normal course of their "helping" activities.⁴

In the course of the "Explorations" study, the importance and the outlining definitions of these roles were emphatically endorsed by the Asian educators and professionals as fundamental to developmental social work. Nevertheless, on investigation it was not found possible at that time to identify coherently what was actually taught and what might be the nature of an overall curriculum to impart these roles.

It was concluded that:

The fact of the matter seems to be that the current machinery linking schools, supervisors, agencies, professional associations, policy makers, planners, etc. is not adequate to the task of producing personnel for the important developmental roles which are currently being canvassed. This lack of coherent machinery constitutes the major problem confronting the schools and the profession (Drucker, 1972).

Among the recommendations made to tackle the shortcomings so identified and to move towards an organised process of applying social work to interdisciplinary developmental programmes were the following:

A Way Ahead 1972

The first set of recommendations were addressed to the United Nations itself (especially the Social Development Division and UNICEF which had commissioned the "Explorations"). It was argued that:

...probably the single most effective thing that international social work might do is to help devise ways for nationals of the countries concerned to move into action with a sense of belonging to an international professional community to offset the sense of isolation within their own country...

It was recommended that a Standing Regional Committee be established

...to identify priorities in social work education and training and to indicate what resources will be provided by whom on the basis of a ten-year, five-year, and two-year plan of operation, with machinery to be set up to provide for the on-going collaboration...

This, of itself, was to be an effective demonstration of social work's capacity to make a contribution to international efforts towards a long-range formulation of social policy and planning for action. It anticipated:

...the strengthening of the role of the United Nations support system, including that of the Regional Adviser heading up an itinerant team as required...essentially to build up a workshop machinery so that each country will begin to strengthen its long-term capacity...getting projects firmly placed within national planning and within 'plans of operation' for external aid purposes.

The intention here was for institution-building within the profession itself — to help set up and strengthen social work associations in each country. (At the time only one country in Asia had a full-time professional servicing an association.) Ongoing *country based workshops* would be supported which

...should have clearly stated *work* to do with specific targets to be fulfilled and followed through by the participants. All workshops should be extensively prepared for by the participants; attendance at workshops should be dependant upon the individuals' preparatory work having been successfully undertaken; and future participation at workshops should be dependent upon the shown results of the previous ones.

This insistence that *work shops* actually produce an operational-directed product was to avoid talking of *shop* with no sustained *work* follow-through.

Research, Knowledge or Initiation Rituals?

Everywhere students at that time were expected, in the main *required*, to choose their own "research topics" and this was considered a virtue and good educational practice. (A typical example of unreality was that of a student accepted at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences (NIMHANS) in India, for a month to research "The causes of teenage mental-illness in India" with a proposal to interview 100 such patients.) Very often completion was postponed (sometimes for years after the time set for graduation) or the material was never produced at all.⁵ Research and theses writing was "a long drawn-out and painfully debilitating affair which both teachers (privately) and students (clamorously) assess as largely an academic certification ritual".

The student 'theses' rarely had any meaningful analysis leading to suggested application and more often than not went unsummarised and uncatalogued to gather dust on obscure shelves. Amongst this fossilised material there existed very little descriptive information of the social work taking place in Asian countries in terms of activities, problems and processes. It was noted:

Only with a rich base of indigenous description can we contribute to theory rather than be straight-jacketed in our perception by theory derived from elsewhere. We must also turn our face away from the research concerns and methods of other professions and the standards and respectability that can be derived from following in their footsteps. Of course we have much to learn from our colleagues, but we must reinterpret their experience from our own social work perspectives. We must begin to identify the questions we need answered, which spring from our own professional practice, and develop theory which can be derived from it. Social work research must be directed to social considerations...and must not be second-hand in method or subject matter (Drucker, 1977a).

"Explorations" argued that:

...the primary responsibility for identifying research topics belongs to the profession in general and practitioners in particular. It is the practitioners in their daily work who are faced with questions that require answers...which are better than guess work.

These answers are required not as fundamental truths but for *practical application*. This is not to denigrate 'pure research' but to argue that students neither have the time nor can be expected to have the resources, experience, or capacity for posing questions and effectively tackling such matters.

...the Association of Schools and individual schools should be responsible for collecting from the professional practitioners lists of...subjects for research, clearly stating the problem and indicating the practical implications which are likely to flow from an investigation... It would be the responsibility of a research group to examine these subjects and sketch in the broad lines of method best

fitted to the matter under consideration and judge whether it is appropriate for a student to undertake.

...The range of topics thus identified is likely to give a student a much broader and practical view of social work and its priority professional concerns than can be expected from those with limited experience in the field as is the case with most students.

There are important implications here for the profession and for organising practitioners in such a way that appropriate dialogue takes place with...the schools, in order to produce this professional agenda for research. The need for relatedness of the research to the profession's progress, and the relatedness to the teaching to professional practice cannot be over-emphasised (Drucker, 1977b).

A detailed *research sequence* was recommended to the schools:

Students should be seen as needing to become primarily *professional "consumers" of research*. (Few will want to go on to become full-time researchers.) For this they would need to be familiar with the range and limitations of social research methods.

Within the limited time available to students they would not be expected to initiate and complete their "own" research, but would be expected to be taken through all the stages of research, adding a step to work in progress. They would start from examining the need and purposes of a practitioner's identification of research, through to action and implementation of findings and recommendations.

Each stage would be taught as a course in its own right. These courses would be: Appreciation of the *objectives of the proposed research* on the list compiled by the professionals;

Identifying the appropriate *research method* for a selected topic and devising *work plans and schedules*; (these selected topics would become the task of students or where appropriate a group of students) the following year;

The *collecting of data* on a research topic for which the method and work plan had been devised by a previous intake of students (devising the method and schedules takes up much time and most student theses seemed to rush through the collecting stage because there was so little time left to them as their courses proceeded);

Analysis of data collected by earlier students;

A *Social Policy and Programming Planning Seminar* (the data analysis would have determined what had been learned from the research and its implication for social work);

Implementation seminars to devise strategies and specific work plans to follow upon what emerged from the research; (as in the normal course of events the research topic had been proposed by a practitioner, the relevant agency (agencies) would of course have a role in working through this phase with the students);

If appropriate for a student worker, the activity would become the subject of a subsequent year's *fieldwork assignment*;

Finally, learning the skills in *evaluating* such projects from topic proposal to completed action.

In this way it was anticipated that the professional practitioners and the schools would be drawn together in identifying need, pursuing research, creating and contributing knowledge, enhancing professional skills, and translating it into action. From the students' perspective, they would have experienced how questions from the field are taken through all the steps to action and final evaluation. Although they would not have had to take responsibility for any one topic from start to finish, the students themselves would have had a role to play, involved at each stage with its specific focus. They would have begun to appreciate the practical pay-off of research, savour the excitement of having contributed to knowledge and change and precipitated organised action. They would understand the importance of providing research topics from the field when they become practitioners and where they belonged in contributing to an overall professional identity.

Ways of Learning

In 1971 in Asia it was widely agreed that students in the Region differed a great deal from students taught in Western cultures: "...a high degree of self-responsibility for learning and independent study habits was unfamiliar" (Drucker, 1972).

It was pointed out that attitudes to authority differed greatly in these divergent cultures. Asia had not had four hundred years of the European experience of the Reformation to filter down and undermine the authority of man-made institutions. This had led (in Europe) to the possibility of challenge by appealing to observed and demonstrated phenomena, rather than deference to persons and eternal truths. Thus (to exaggerate), in the West it was possible (students and professors being considered equally as knowledge seekers) for any junior to challenge his seniors on the grounds of external and verifiable evidence within a scientific ethic which sought to identify and build upon mistakes. Succeeding generations were expected to find the wisdom of the past incomplete and to add to and reconstruct knowledge and supersede their mentors (and social superiors). In Asia, authoritarian relationships at home, school and in society were very much part of the milieu in which both students and teachers had grown up. The style of serving, absorbing the essence, and respecting one's guru, who was a direct descendant of eternal truths, made for different ways of beholding, knowing, thinking, and of the traditional relationships between teacher and learner and the institutions in which learning took place.⁶

The implications of these different backgrounds from which students and institutions emerged, are particularly critical in social work, which is based on premises such as self-determination, participation, and rights derived from a sense of an egalitarian status within (however embryonic and imperfect) a democratic ethic and social structure.

"Explorations" drew attention to the profound nature of the differences in ways of learning in Asia and the West in relation to social work and its teaching. Suggestions were made for tackling these differences. The suggestions involved selection of students with appropriate personality potential and specifically initiating them into

what amounts to a *sub-culture of learning and doing*, because they would have to be different in many respects from students and professionals in other disciplines.

Libraries

Recommendations were made for the *systematic building of relevant libraries and the production of Asian case material*, reminding ECAFE again of previous recommendations to set up a clearing house and become the distributor of social work literature and documentation.

New Learning in New Areas for Teachers and Trainers

Among the most provoking suggestions in "Explorations" was a way in which it might be attempted to ensure that the realities of the development, practice, field supervision, teaching, the accumulation of knowledge and the growth of the profession be brought together. This was designated as:

The See-Saw Approach

It was seen that if social workers were really going to operate in the development arena, they would need to locate themselves in new and unfamiliar settings.

It was proposed that staff members of the schools themselves be assigned to try out possibilities of the envisioned developmental social work activities. This would entail an exploration of the dimensions of the tasks and identify realistic assignments which might be set up for students eventually. The staff member would explore and practice the social work role and from first-hand experience draw up as detailed a job description as possible, based on an analysis of the task involved. Objectives and goals of the service or agency and the learning objectives and goals that students might be expected to achieve would be spelled out. In the course of the practice the staff member would keep a detailed record of happenings, to be developed into case-material.

In identifying the theory, knowledge and skills required to function in this position, the staff member would check whether and where such matter appeared in the school curriculum and would prepare to supplement the teaching, together with teaching materials, either to reinforce what was already being taught or to introduce new content. After perhaps a year the staff member would have paved the way for the introduction of students into the practice role, having prepared the setting and the agency staff to receive them.

The second phase of the school staff member's activity, having fulfilled the role himself, would consist of supervising the students' practice and learning. The staff member, being familiar with the service requirements and the knowledge and teaching base, could then concentrate on the educational diagnosis of the student and the student's needs.

The staff member would then introduce a worker designated to take over the supervisory role in subsequent years by means of an apprentice-type training. As the fieldwork and supervisory role diminished, the staff member would prepare to move back into the teaching role in the school.

Ideally it might be arranged for two members of staff to address the same areas of work. One would be moving through from practice, on to supervision and back to classroom teaching, while the other was moving in the opposite direction — thus the idea of a see-saw.

Of course it was realised that there were dozens of problems inherent in such a proposal career-wise and within university and agency structures. However, if we were seriously to consider the role of institution-building, social policy, planning and so forth, before we could make any claim to competence outside our main domain we would need to demonstrate our ability to manage change within and between those institutions and structures of which the profession is an integral part and over which the profession has some control and participates in decision-making.

Francis Yayas (the United Nations Regional Adviser) had frequently pointed out that: "...a strong expectation still lingers that somehow curriculum could be revised in one or two months time...curriculum evaluation and revision is necessarily a slow and lengthy process."

A recommendation was made for work on a *manual on "How to set about curriculum building"*.

The Regional "Explorations" Meeting 1972

The intention (true to the spirit of the endeavour), on completion of this "Exploration" in Asia, was that different schools would commit themselves to trying out one or some of the recommendations; report on progress and problems from actual experience; and then bring the results of this test against Asian reality to a regional meeting and there take matters a practical step further.

This degree of preparation was not supported, which was not a good omen for the future. Nevertheless, a regional meeting did take place in 1972 specifically to examine the report and its recommendations in detail. Expectations were raised and it was recommended that a series of on-going meetings would be set up to continue to explore how social work might organise and prepare itself to contribute to the mainstream of development. Are there reverberations of all that energy that can be detected in Asian social work today?

The Mobile Training Scheme

About this time, there had been grumblings at the United Nations General Assembly that the poorest countries were not getting their fair share of international assistance. The United Nations came up with a designation of "The Landlocked and Least Developed Countries" (oddly, in ECAFE these included the Maldives and West Samoa). The word went out for suggestions of what might be done for such neglected areas. In response, the Social Development Division proposed the idea of "Training of Frontline and Supervisory Developmental Personnel". To everyone's surprise the United Nations in New York welcomed such an endeavour. So, quite unexpectedly an opportunity arose to get out amongst the poorest and the most backward and to put some of the ideas to the test in a new dimension other than

the perspective of Schools of Social Work. What came to be known as the Mobile Training Scheme was invented.

The Mobile Training Scheme (MTS) was based on the findings of missions (1972/3) to Nepal, Laos, Afghanistan and consultation with professionals and institutions in India. It was designed to take into account the work and conference recommendations of "Explorations" and attempted to set up a process which might become a basis for changing the focus of Asian social work to meet development needs.

The MTS mission in February 1973 made the following diagnosis (which, given the present theme of the Special Issue, has a striking topicality):

Cumulative experience in Asia in social welfare and community development education has clearly shown that many of the curricula are not based on actual field problems in the communities or countries served or on the actual analysis of the jobs to be performed by front line and supervisory level personnel;

...over-reliance on Western models and theories still exist, both regarding what subject matter goes into the curricula and insufficient indigenisation of Western experiences by trainers from Asia who may have been educated in the West. Firsthand observation and evaluation of the local problems are often neglected or not clearly seen as the raw building blocks of both training programmes and social theory. Ideas currently fashionable in Western social sciences and social work are used for analysing the complexities of tradition-laden countries in Asia, whose problems differ not only in magnitude but also in quality;

...most trainers have not had enough in-depth experience at the grassroots levels in their own countries as frontline and supervisory workers;

...most trainers do not generally possess the necessary skills of how to devise a training programme for frontline supervisory staff based on actual local problems to be tackled and the analysis of skills and jobs to be performed, there is very little knowledge and skill of how one gets at the indigenous curriculum or social theory in one's own country. (Yasas et al., 1973)

The MTS recognised that development planning took place conceptually, and geographically far removed from the people at the village level. The people who, now newly targeted by the growing call for "social justice", were supposed to have their conditions of life elevated, had little voice in the schemes invented by remote planners. The planners had perspectives and priorities derived from their particular technical and sectoral expertise. This more often than not bore scant relationship to the people's needs, wishes and capacities to absorb and sustain what the planners had in mind.

The challenge to MTS was to invent training to produce workers at the village level and supervisory staff located strategically so as to be able to contribute effectively in linking village level realities with the political, technical and administrative structures. Method had to be explored that would be adaptable to the very different situations existing in the countries of the region.

The task in hand therefore was conceived as oriented to finding ways in which the people at the grassroots could themselves identify their priorities and become active

participants in development planning and projects. Social work, with its claim to being people oriented and skilled, should have something to offer in working out how to make this bottom-up, support-down vision of development a reality.

The programme was intended to create, and leave behind in the region, local training cadres in each country with a self-generating competence and capacity in the skills of designing curricula and training front-line and supervisory levels of personnel for any kind of field level project. The local trainers who had acquired and demonstrated the necessary skills in indigenous curriculum building in their own country would become on-going members of the Mobile Training Scheme. They would be organised to share their skills and experience with the trainers in other countries, so that a core of competence and expertise in training would be developed and shared cross-culturally as a permanent regional resource. It was this sharing of the resources across the region which gave meaning to "mobile" and would contribute to social work institution-building.

The MTS Nepal Experience

In late 1974, after some delay, the MTS began operation first in Nepal. There at this time village-level organisation was structured within the Panchayat system. The village head fulfilled various government and village functions. Frequently illiterate, and with many other personal and family responsibilities, he was assisted by a Secretary. The secretaries were required to be able to read and write but had no more than six years of any kind of schooling. In Nepal it was these secretaries that the government designated as the potential village-level planners to be created by the MTS.

The MTS began with three international "core" members, able to bring in support staff as required, and a group of nationals responsible for training programmes. Each member served on a number of groups, depending on their particular skills and experience. The notion of a hierarchy was avoided so that a genuine participatory attitude of each contributing what he could do best would infuse the relationships of trainers to trainees, and trainees to the people they served. Along with government advisers, MTS established a number of interacting functional groups:

- (1) *A steering group;*
- (2) *A role-performing group,* to actually operate at the village level and devise suitably simple ways for the secretaries to report their activities, experience, and thinking that would be of significance. (It was with some surprise and a little resistance that trainers were persuaded to live in the villages and experience the roles they were intending to teach later. They found it hard to dispense with the feeling that they knew better and to avoid authoritarian attitudes!);
- (3) Derived from this experience there was formulated: *A job description and role analysis group,* to spell out in great detail the task analysis of such workers, on the basis of observation and careful collection of descriptive material;

In due course, secretaries (two to each village, for exploratory purposes in the first group of trainees) were placed in the work locations. They spent three-week periods at a time in the villages, coming to the training centre every fourth week. As there

were two, it was arranged that from the trainers' point of view they received a group of the secretaries from each village every other week and had a week between each group to examine the written material, reflect on the group discussions, and prepare content and goals for the second group and so on. These materials were developed by:

- (4) *A teaching materials group*, to collect, collate and sophisticate materials for teaching purposes and develop teaching/training notes for each.... Compile annotated bibliographies and an index of research materials from each of the participating countries....and make a collection of cross-cultural examples of particular themes or training points;
- (5) *A teaching methods group*, to provide examples and demonstrations of various methods and relate them to specific aspects of the training programmes;
- (6) *An action research group*, to systematise on-going record-keeping,analyse the wealth of material and monitor and evaluate the MTS process,identify problems, place them in social context and provide research designs in order of priority ("what difference will it make operationally to know what....");
- (7) *A projects and technical co-operation group*, to collect examples of links to departments and agencies etc.,to spell out the social aspects of technical projects and identify the social skills to be exercised and needed to be built into project planning and implementation, and provide "position papers" for these purposes;
- (8) *A policy development group*, to collect all examples of gaps and inconsistencies in policy and programme as observed from the village perspective,to identify the options for dealing with such situations and prepare the documentation for discussion and consultation with the appropriate bodies.

The Village-Eye View

The secretaries kept a simple diary in which they recorded all external agents who came to their villages; who they were; why they had come; what had village people thought about them; and what if anything followed from their visit.

In addition, the secretaries were assigned, every three-week period, to put together a "village profile". For example, they were asked to draw a map of their village and its surrounding features; to describe the year round agricultural activities; to describe the marketing of village produce and purchasing arrangements, etc.

No questionnaire schedules were provided; the secretaries were encouraged to write in a narrative style. Standards of objectivity were not insisted upon. The trainers would take the material as it came to them and so get a realistic assessment of the level of sophistication of the trainee. Teaching would centre upon the material produced and at the level of perception of the secretaries. (So many courses are subject oriented and frequently well over the heads of the learners.) The trainers' task was to start with what came, and plan step-by-step improvement of the worker's performance. Objectivity would gradually be encouraged and expected.

The appropriate trainers' group, in tutorials, would direct the secretaries' attention to matters of specific interest and through full discussion and further assignment in the village begin to put together well developed materials.

A wide range of fascinating "cases" was produced in this way.

The Health Profile — an Example and its Consequences

On one occasion the secretaries were asked to produce a "Health Profile" — again, no questionnaire, just informal conversation. "Who has been sick in the family in the last year?" "What kind of sick?" "Who did they go to for help?" "What happened?" The narrative material produced by these barely literate workers was astonishing. The translated language was grammatically tortured, but it had a poetic and biblical quality and, more importantly, produced the authentic voices of village people whose whole cosmology of what sickness was, the causes, and what needed to be done, bore very little or no resemblance to anything discussed in Ministries of Health!

Quotations from this rich source were divided into six boxes: the Economics of Health; Medicines and their availability; Childbirth; Attitude; Health Posts and Services; and Conjurers, Magicians, Physicians et al. An introduction to where this material had come from and some of its social implications for community-acceptable health provisions were written and the material distributed to those likely to be interested.

This "Mantras and Medicine for Development: a Panchayat Village Task Group Approach to Primary Health Care" (Drucker, 1975) (all materials were expected to have arresting titles) had extraordinary repercussions.

Integrated Planning

At this time (1975), the World Health Organisation, having recognised the impossibility of urban-located "disease palaces" meeting the urgent needs of the developing countries, was turning its attention to the multitudinous poor and thinking of the provision of community health workers to initiate public health activities and introduce primary health care. WHO had constructed a method to assist member States in Country Health Planning. This planning was to be multi-ministerial, multi-sectoral, multi-disciplined. For example, something had to be done in agriculture, where irrigation activities were providing breeding grounds for malarial mosquitoes, etc.

The WHO regional planning team came to Nepal to make a trial run of their method of planning. In visiting the Ministry of Agriculture they saw a map of the country with red measles-like dots. These dots, they discovered, were the Junior Technicians in Agriculture (JTAs) who were "covering the country". They were excited by this and argued that if there was already in place a group operating with the confidence and respect of the people right down at the village level, perhaps with some training in simple public health and health care such a group might well become the first generation of community health workers.⁷

On the basis of "Mantras", WHO asked what was the MTS's opinion of this idea. WHO was told not to depend on opinion, but within a few days, they could be told what the MTS *knew*! It was not claimed that the villages in which the MTS operated

represented a sound statistical sample of the whole country, but it could be claimed that there was a 100 per cent return from the secretaries' diaries that no one had seen a JTA! (It became a joke, that if one were sighted, there would be an application for a conservation order as a JTA was rarer than the Yeti which had been reported from time to time!)

This information regarding the JTAs was precisely the kind of "gaps and inconsistencies" that the MTS was concerned with and would systematically lead to an investigation as to what the JTAs were actually doing and what action was required to improve such discontinuities between expectation and reality. In this particular case neither the Ministry of Agriculture nor the WHO team were overjoyed at this finding!

Mainstream Developmental Social Work?

However, in time it led to WHO offering to put up nearly a half a million dollars for the MTS to continue its work in Nepal. This was followed by UNICEF suggesting it could make a similar sum available, and most thrillingly of all, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (which had been somewhat hostile to ECAFE's administration of the MTS) was prepared to put up money and to incorporate the community development processes begun by the MTS in the National Five-Year Development Plan under consideration by the Nepal Planning Commission. In such circles money talks eloquently and, from being a mini-project with a budget of \$ 400,000 combined for three countries, there was now for Nepal alone, the prospect of about \$ 1.5 million provided, quite apart from ECAFE funds.

The MTS had now not only come well along in producing the material and training and finding a structure in which social work could play a major role in community development but was about to become an integral part of the mainstream integrated development programme of the government of Nepal and the agencies of the United Nations. The success and potential of the MTS was exhilarating; its implications for Asian social work in development seemed obvious and ready for promoting by the United Nations Social Development Division.

However, the Social Development Division in Bangkok failed to fulfil its responsibilities, so that the programme was not presented to the Planning Commission before its decision-making deadline. The exciting possibilities were catastrophically lost not merely for the MTS but for Asian, and perhaps developmental, social work altogether. The MTS left for Afghanistan and later Bangladesh, but its principles and integrity were fatally compromised, its intention to create an on-going cadre, a vital piece of institution-building for people's participation in policy and planning in the region, unaccomplished.

The Demise of Social Work in Development?

It is ironic that just as the United Nations Social Development Division, with a gross lack of vision, lost all claim to a leadership role in stimulating social work to play its part in mainstream development, the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE) changed its name to the Economic and *Social* Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). A regional ESCAP Social Work Centre was later to be set

up in Manila, but it had been poorly conceived, underfunded and soon became defunct. The Headquarters of the Social Development Division were to disappear from the Office of Technical Co-operation in New York (where it had immediate access to UNDP, UNICEF, members of governments at the General Assembly and a potential (corridors of?) power (and funding) base and were transferred to Vienna, strategically and politically poorly located. The International Association of Schools of Social Work transferred from New York to Vienna also, and just now in 1993, it is learned that "the IASSW office is closing indefinitely, due to lack of funds". Is it too much to conclude that social work as a profession, which had international aspirations and had boldly declared itself as a contributor to the development priorities of our time, has lost its way and left just a few isolated social workers scratching away on the periphery?

Time and the opportunity to play a developmental role may have passed by the profession of social work as an organisation. Perhaps it might be wise to consider what went wrong and to understand what self-inflicted and external forces are ranged against a social work role in development. However, the present TISS effort suggests that there may really be a desire, a need, and perhaps a way to review, redeclare and realign ourselves?

Social Planning — Health as an Entry Point for Social Development

The MTS was a social work-founded enterprise and ultimately, although it heralded much, a social worker-abandoned enterprise. Nevertheless, WHO surprised at the MTS departure from its expected collaboration, immediately recruited the present writer to become the bottom-up specialist in their regional planning team. The team consisted of specialists in planning, management, systems analysis, epidemiology, statistics, as well as in medicine. There was now the opportunity for a generalist(?), on a basis of equality, to explore and demonstrate what social work skills might contribute to multi-sectoral planning activities throughout the countries of Asia. Disappointingly, this activity in many respects, came to be experienced as moving off at a tangent from the concerns of social work organisations.

What was contributed were ways of discovering and interpreting what went on at the village level and how to involve ordinary people as partners in the planning to meet their identified needs, of which, health was but one. The medical profession found it difficult to emerge from its impressive institutions but it was possible to begin to develop village-side approaches, and show how it might change from its traditional bed-side manners and have an effective role to play in community based primary health care (Drucker, 1977c).

Among other assignments was the opportunity to explore, on a regular basis, how care of the psychiatrically disturbed might be introduced into primary health care. (The idea that psychiatric disturbances are the prerogative of urban-dwellers is not true!) This included collaborating as colleagues with indigenous healers, for unless one did, there was no way of bypassing their role of gate keepers to village society. With the psychiatric social workers at the National Institute at Bangalore it was possible to examine and spell out how psychiatric specialisation could belong to the development of social work as a whole in a developing country (Drucker, 1977a).