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ESSENTIAL CONDITIONS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A  
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

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**ESSENTIAL CONDITIONS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A  
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK**

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In studying the development of a school of social work, there are some essential, if not fundamental, conditions that should be taken into consideration. Since the term development is a process that does not end with a beginning, this paper will try to analyse essential conditions in the growth of a school of social work which would include surveying, planning, experimenting, evaluating, adjusting and adapting.

**A. Survey of the needs for trained personnel.**

An a priori step in the establishment of a school of social work is surveying the needs for trained personnel in social work. Such a survey should be able to determine:

- a. The "types" of trained social workers needed. This could be in terms of fields of social work (e.g. family services, child welfare, medical social workers etc.)
- b. The "levels" of trained social workers needed. Here there could be three broad classifications (i) field workers, (ii) administrators (iii) policy makers.
- c. A combination of both a and b is necessary because plans without personnel at all levels can only remain as blue prints.

Priority of needs for trained social workers should be established since a country may not be able to afford training for all levels at the same time. In this case it is useful from the financial point of view to consider the greatest need in relation to numbers. In Ethiopia, for instance, it is felt that there is a need for trained people at all levels; however, the number at the base of the pyramid (field workers) is far greater and therefore more economical to have a national training programme. Personnel at other levels (fewer in number) could for some time still be sent abroad for more advanced study as well as to participate in study tours and seminars. Another possibility is to consider

a gradual movement upward of personnel at the base of the pyramid after a few years of experience.

In the early stages of development of the school and indeed through its development it is essential that any training programme fit both the national situation and needs, that is in respect to the national social welfare schemes and development. Failing to do so a training programme will be given in a vacuum. Therefore, repeated contact and study of needs and development for trained social workers is necessary.

Such a policy implies close cooperation with the existing government and non-governmental agencies needing trained social workers, as well as an evaluation of the effectiveness of graduates. With reference to the latter the School of Social Work in the Haile Selassie I University has found it particularly useful to adopt a policy of giving supervision to graduates for a year after graduation - this is also helpful to enhance individual professional development of graduates. Unless carried out by the staff of the school, evaluation of graduates in agencies where there are no trained social workers or no social workers trained in supervision has been found to be unsatisfactory and out of perspective.

B. Study of personnel and student resources.

Included in the preliminary survey should also be a study of both the resources of personnel to run the school and resources of candidates available to enroll in the school. Direction for both will greatly depend on the results of the survey of needs of types and/or levels of social workers. On the basis of such a decision it would be necessary to establish criteria for the personnel of the school and students to be enrolled:

a. Criteria for staffing of a school of social work.

Whatever be the "type" or "level" of personnel to be trained, three categories of personnel would be necessary for a school of social work.

- A director/dean/head.
- Teaching and field work supervisory staff.
- Administrative (secretary, librarian etc.) staff.

The number will be determined by both the anticipated number of students to be enrolled, available staff resources, in addition to budgetary resources.

It is essential to first survey resources of national personnel to staff the school of social work. Primarily because of the "nature" of the profession and the "intimacy" into which social workers are involved in the culture, language intricacies, personal life of clients. This we found not only significant in field work supervision but also in relating principles of social work to the cultural setting, philosophy and even thinking in addition to the development of social welfare. However, professional background and experience, as well as qualities necessary for administering a school, teaching and supervising field work, must form an important part of the selection criteria. In the absence of qualified national personnel, resources of international organizations (UN, UNICEF) or individual countries could be tapped. Having nationals on the permanent staff should, however, be a constant goal in the development of the school as continuity of work and accumulated knowledge for training can suffer with the change over of staff.

When full-time staff is difficult to find, a very useful resource is to invite qualified social workers already working to lecture or give supervision on part-time basis. This will also offer added encouragement and contact with the profession which is of significance to them as well as the profession. One of the problems to control here is the co-ordination of staff which could otherwise have negative effects on training as such.

The method of combining internationals with qualified but maybe less experienced nationals is one method of reaching this goal. Another possibility would be to be alert to trained social workers who are already in the field and who could, after more experience and maturity, hold positions in the school. A third possibility is also in mature and potential students graduating from the school who could be given advanced training. The latter should be carefully evaluated over a fairly objective period of time.

Teaching and field work supervision as combined duties has been found to be very significant, particularly in respect to the coordination of field work to lectures. In our School of Social Work this combination has been used in the spirit of (by lecturers and students) challenging principles to field work and vice versa. Field work supervision by staff in agencies in which students are placed is not satisfactory unless the school can establish standards for supervision and field work supervisors - which could mean a special training programme of its own. One of the major problems we have met was that though there were trained social workers in the agencies concerned, supervision given was more in the light of administrative supervision as against supervision as an educational and developmental process.

b. Recruitment of students and admission requirements.

As stated earlier, level of training will directly determine the recruitment level of students. In addition, the available resources of students will also be a determining factor - since a graduate school of social work would necessarily mean that there should be a core of undergraduates from whom to select.

However, whatever be the resources and decided academic background there are other factors, a preliminary study should take into consideration for recruitment and selection criteria. Here a useful guide would be a study of schools of social work through the International Directory of Schools of Social Work.<sup>1/</sup> In summary admission requirements of schools listed include one or more of the following:

- (i) Academic background (varying by level or slant of training) or entrance examination.
- (ii) Minimum or desirable age, or maturity.
- (iii) Personality suitability or social commitment (determined by tests and/or interviews).
- (iv) Experience - in human relations, teaching, home economics or nursing.
- (v) Physical and/or mental health (determined by certificate and/or examination).

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<sup>1/</sup>International Directory of Schools of Social Work. United Nations Department of Social Affairs, December 1954.

Criteria (i), (ii), (iii) and (v) would seem rather significant guidelines to select from. However, with reference to (iv) it would seem rather difficult to "romould" certain attitudes, approaches and even identities people would have developed in a profession regardless of the fact that it is concerned with human relations. Similarly, one should be careful not to enroll students who are dissatisfied with their professions who would take on the new training as an "escape". Last but not least, trained personnel in all fields are needed in Africa and "losses" for one profession for the "gain" of the other should be carefully weighed. Undeniably, however, working experience is a maturing experience and as such a significant qualification for admission.

Recruitment of students in the early stages of the school can be essentially difficult. Particularly, when the profession is not known and established. Close ties with secondary schools, publicity (talks, press etc.) are useful means to develop. One of the best tools, if it may be called so, are the graduates themselves - their own personal contacts and the fact that they are employed is of great help in "selling" the profession to prospective candidates.

### C. Survey of Finances.

A survey or study of the finances of the school is inevitably one of the most important considerations to be worked out. In this respect it might be advisable to start a school on a modest scale utilizing all possible and existing resources (e.g. building, personnel etc.). Such an approach could ensure initial budgetary support. Starting on a modest scale also has other advantages, such as possibility of greater flexibility for experimentation and evaluation.

The use of international or bilateral aid as a complement should not be overlooked. Such aid (in personnel and/or in funds or kind) may be particularly useful in the beginning of a school of social work, as a spring board and with the objective of a gradual take-over. As such, aid should initially not be over ambitious but rather realistically fit in the envisaged development for eventual take-over.

D. Locality.

In a way, directly related to finances is the decision of the locality and as such the association of the school of social work. Throughout the world the pattern varies and even within countries schools of social work may have various associations as follows:

- (i) Schools attached to ministries or municipalities or agencies.
- (ii) Independent schools or institutes.
- (iii) Schools within a university.

The question of where the school of social work should be, greatly depends on evaluating:

- (i) The source(s) of demand (present and future) for trained social workers.
- (ii) The level(s) of personnel in demand (uniformity versus diversity).

For a start, but particularly if the demand for trained social workers coming from varied sources are uniform in the level of personnel needed, it would seem only too practical (financially and functionally) to establish one school whose graduates could serve the various agencies. Training for "special" jobs could be carried out in any or all the following possibilities:

- (i) Last field work placement to be in prospective job or field the graduate will work in.
- (ii) Organize special seminars or orientation courses during employment.
- (iii) After a year or more experience, to be sent abroad for "specialization".

Our School of Social Work has found (i) and (iii) rather successful; (ii) is somewhat difficult and even costly unless a tangible group of graduates in a special field is available.

A disadvantage of a school being attached to a particular social welfare agency is that, unless this agency functionally and actually coordinates social services in the country, the training will be geared to the needs of the agency (an advantage in itself) and graduates most

likely absorbed by the agency. Thus not satisfying needs of other social welfare agencies, which might in turn necessitate more than one training programme - the practicability and economy of such a situation should be carefully evaluated.

For a new and more so, first national school of social work to be an entirely independent school or institute, raises some problems. Foremost of which is the budgetary problem, and the maintaining of standards which is of great importance in establishing the status of a new profession amongst older professions. Such an independent set-up does have, however, the advantage of the possibility of flexibility without the administration and/or academic pressures.

Pondering on the existence of a university, association to a university has been found to have certain advantages. One of which being the utilization of staff for related lectures, class-rooms, and office facilities - which initially can absorb a greater part of the budget. Another advantage is that certain professional standards can be ensured which can strengthen the training programme as well as the status of the profession. One of the disadvantages often mentioned is the danger of the training becoming too academic for down-to-earth social needs. A factor which could be easily avoided by the school (director and staff) in maintaining the objectives of its training programme.

#### E. Curriculum.

Of equal importance is the preliminary study of the curriculum. The fundamental underlying principles for a curriculum in a beginning school of social work we have found to be:

- a. That it be oriented or related to the national social welfare pattern, structure and development.
- b. The needs for trained social workers. Here not merely in relation to type and level of social workers but also the standards to be established as a result of the training.

A standing curriculum committee consisting of members of the staff (social work and related subjects) and social workers in the field is useful to set up as a guideline and for evaluative purposes. The curriculum of a new school of social work should be based on the spirit of experimentation and adaptation, and on such flexibility as significant. Results of evaluation of effectiveness of graduates through their own efforts can be one significant measuring stick and guide for criteria for curriculum changes. Such evaluation may be carried out by the curriculum committee, utilizing such sources of information as the agencies where graduates are employed, the graduates themselves and professional supervisory reports of graduates if these are done by the school and of course the staff of the school itself.

Curriculum content will essentially vary by level and nature of training. Major groupings could, however, uniformly be classified as follows:

- (i) Social work subjects:
  - a. History and Philosophy
  - b. Methods
  - c. Fields
- (ii) Field work.
- (iii) Allied fields - social sciences in particular.

F. Text-books.

Within curriculum planning is the study of text-books for instruction. The problem of adaptation of principles, philosophy and concepts is one that makes a great deal of text-books a luxury. The use of periodicals and articles has been far more satisfying. Readings from various books is useful though initially (i.e. until a library is set up) rather expensive and impractical unless these are in several copies to be made available to students. Failing this, duplication of excerpts is a more economic approach. Co-ordinated efforts of lecturers and field work supervisors can be especially useful in the development of teaching aids. This may be done through regular and frequent staff meetings and also by

setting up a form of a log book. The latter not necessarily with lecture content but with a record of specific experiences - such as the adaptation of social work principles to the national setting. With the accumulation of such material, text-book development oriented to African needs and setting in social work could be affected.

Conclusion.

Society being a dynamic process and particularly so in developing countries such as in Africa to-day, a school of social work must take an active part in this evolution. The role of the school in the various areas of development of national social welfare should be foreseen in the establishment of the school. The resources of both staff and students in conducting research, developing new fields of social work and even in organizing, if not participating, in seminars, in service courses, social welfare boards and committees to promote social welfare, should be fully utilized, if not exploited.