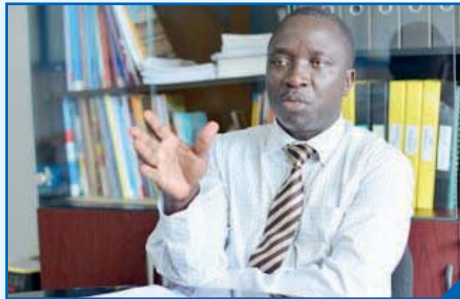




National Association of Social Workers of Uganda (NASWU)

Social Service Workforce Critical in attaining Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Social Service Workforce Week



Draecabo Charles, former President NASWU and currently the National Professional Officer, HIV/AIDS UNESCO Regional Officer for Eastern Africa

In commemoration of the Social Service Workforce Week which will be celebrated from September 24th – 28th 2018, the National Association of Social Workers of Uganda (NASWU) an independent professional body under Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development working for the advancement of Social Work in Uganda will be shining a limelight on social work. Today, we get to chat with Mr. Draecabo Charles, the former President NASWU and currently, the National Professional Officer, HIV/AIDS UNESCO Regional Office for Eastern Africa. He gets to tell us what the social service workforce is and its role in achieving SDGs and much more.

What is the social service workforce?

Social service workforce is a group of professional social workers who are trained in both the discipline and practice of social work to be able to deliver social work welfare services. They must have the cognitive skills, the knowledge and information to be able to provide social work services at individual, group and community level. They are trained, have the relevant skills, experienced in social work service and have the requisite attributes meaning they adhere to the values and principles of social work.

Why is the social service workforce critical in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

When you look at the Sustainable Development Goals, all the 17 goals are anchored in the principle of quality human service workforce. For instance, if we are talking about poverty reduction, no hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality to mention but a few, all these are anchored in having a healthy human-being who is productive, has strong values and norms of what they do and exists to make the world a better place. All the 17 goals in a way must be delivered through an individual or a group of individuals and that group of people can be summed up as professional social welfare workforce. When you talk about reducing poverty for example, you need to understand the fundamental reasons behind poverty in the world. It is either as an effect or is caused by high level of inequality in society where a small proportion of people have access to most of resources. And for you to address that inequality, you need to understand the entire social work case management spectrum. This applies to all other 16 SDGs.

What is the place of social work in addressing Violence Against Children (VAC) and HIV in Uganda?

If you look at HIV and Violence Against Children (VAC) in Uganda, one of the critical area that is not addressed is the issue of the workforce that handles people that are infected or affected by HIV or those who experience violence. For instance, if a child's right is abused or violated, where can that child get a service, does the child go to the police and they are able to get service, does the child go to the courts and if she or he goes, will he/she get justice? If a child goes to a health facility, will he/she get service? The place of the social worker is therefore to act as an advocate and stand in for the right of the child who is deprived of their right or is being abused.

The social worker can also act as a service provider by providing relevant counselling and linking a child who has been abused or persons infected and affected by HIV to relevant services. The social worker offers guidance and direction on how to proceed under such circumstances. By and large, unless we invest in a social welfare workforce that has the competency, skill and

adheres to the code of ethics of the profession, you might find that most people, especially children, who experience violence may end up in the hands of the very perpetrators.

As a former President of NASWU, what are some of the challenges faced by social service workforce in Uganda?

- There is a general misunderstanding or misrepresentation of the profession. Many people think social work is just any of those professions or any of those things that you do. When you go out and talk about social work, you get a general poor response because people are struggling to understand what social work is because we have failed to define its core competencies.
- Mobilizing members to join the association has also been a challenge because we don't have many specialized areas where social workers are working or providing services. Many social workers end up doing other jobs that are not in line with the profession. To pull social workers together and mobilizing them along common areas of interest thus becomes difficult.
- There is lack of clear laws and policies for social work practice. Other existing professions in this country like law and medicine are regulated by an act of parliament which is not yet the case with social work.
- Unclear professional development path. We have not yet established a centre/institution to provide skills and certify our members.

What can be done by government and other non-state actors to strengthen the social service workforce in Uganda?

- The first thing that can be done is to recognize the need and situate this workforce within the entire development path of the nation. What that requires on the side of government, for instance, is to ensure that there is relevant legislation, policies and guidelines that recognizes the profession among other things, defines its scope of work, gives it legitimacy and therefore gazettes it as a profession that needs to be adhered to.
- There is need to provide relevant quality and quantity of skills and knowledge to the social welfare workforce. The training should be relevant in our context today. In terms of quantity, there should be continuous professional development plan

within which capacity building is provided. It is not just an issue of going to university and getting a first degree in social work. We need a relevant skills path. There should be provision for somebody who, for example, ended up as a para-social worker at a lower level to upgrade and become a diploma holder and gradually degree holder in the path of social work practice and eventually move to a masters or PHD level in that professional area. And the major stakeholder here are the universities who should help us scope the key professional areas of competency and come up with an agreed minimum package.

- National Association of Social Workers of Uganda (NASWU) should be able to mobilise social work practitioners, academics, students, interns and put them under one body which has the capacity to influence decisions in favour of the workforce.
- The other area we can do collectively is establishment of the profession by act of parliament where it is gazetted and therefore only those certified to practice will be able to practice. This will help enforce code of conduct and be able to advocate for favourable package or attraction for its members.

What advice would you give to the current NASWU leadership?

We are already on the right track. We have set the framework and have the support of partners. We are recognized and a member of the International Federation of Social Work, we have the basic structure and basic minimum membership that we need. My advice to the current leadership is to take this association to the next level towards its legislation by act of parliament. Additionally, working closely with universities and social work training institutions, we should be able to push for having a harmonized curriculum for social work and a certifying centre.

Any word of advice to aspiring social workers?

My advice especially to the young generation who are still in school and caught up in the confusion on whether they have joined the right profession is, "I would like to assure you that social work profession is a profession of choice and you have not made a mistake by joining it. All you need to do is to reach out for mentorship and support from seniors who are in the field and know that social workers are placed in very strategic positions throughout this country."



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