

# **Position Paper**

## **on**

### **Social Work in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)**

This Position Paper is based on deliberations in a parallel session and a special workshop on social work in the DRC during the International Social Work Conference in Kigali, Rwanda, from 19 to 22 March 2018, with the theme 'Professional Social Work and Sustainable Development in Africa'. This conference was organized under the auspices of CRISOWO – the East Africa Centre for Research and Innovation in Social Work.

The Position Paper was jointly adopted by African and international social work practitioners, researchers and educators who attended the said session and workshop. It aims to depict the precarious situation of social work in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and makes recommendations to the Government of the DRC as well as to international social work bodies such as the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), and the Association of Schools of Social Work in Africa (ASSWA).

#### **Current situation of social work in the Democratic Republic of Congo:**

- There are significant physical and psychosocial needs of individuals, families and communities due to recurrent civil wars, armed conflicts and chronic poverty in DRC.
- Apart from the general population, there are particular vulnerable target groups which deserve social work and social development interventions, e.g. street children, former child soldiers, orphans, victims of systematic sexual violence and domestic violence, victims of child sexual abuse, disabled people, and many more.
- Social and psychosocial interventions are under-resourced and mainly unregulated, and there is no recognition of social work as a profession.

- As an alternative, social and psychosocial assistance personnel were trained by some non-governmental agencies.
- On September 17<sup>th</sup> 2012, the Minister of Social Affairs and Humanitarian Assistance enacted the national policy for the creation, organization and the functioning of a corporation of social assistants under the ministerial decree N° 063/CAB.MIN.AFF.SAH. SN/2012 for the regulation of the social assistance field in the DRC.
- Likewise, different legislations have been enacted in specific social work fields, e.g. the law N°09/001 of 10/01/2009 on child protection; the National Strategy on the Fight against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), etc. Despite this, many such policies have been poorly or not at all implemented due to the lack of adequate resources and qualified social work workforce.
- In 2013, a Social Work Department was established at Université Evangélique en Afrique in Bukavu, eastern DRC.
- There are also efforts to establish a National Association of Social Workers (Initiative Nationale des Travailleurs Sociaux) which deserves support from the international social work bodies, e.g. the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW).
- However, this Association is just in its infancy, and it is not much recognized yet both by the government as well as by the public.
- Under this Association, certain research and practice projects have already been conducted, e.g. on “*Likilimba*” (women’s savings groups) and victims of sexual abuse.
- It has also become clear during the workshop that apart from the vulnerable population groups in Eastern DRC, the social workers themselves have to face extremely difficult circumstances and uncondusive working conditions.
- In addition, social work educators and practitioners realized that there is a need for increased communication between social work education, research and practice in DRC.
- Representatives of IFSW-Africa, who were present at the workshop, promised to support initiatives in the Central African region, particularly in DRC, on behalf of IFSW.
- The two sessions at the International Social Work Conference in Kigali, Rwanda, provided evidence that the PROSOWO project (Promotion of Professional Social Work in East Africa) was able to reach out to the DRC

by means of inviting colleagues from DRC to international conferences and regional workshops in Burundi, Tanzania, Uganda and Rwanda. Additional support was provided through a small grant from the Provincial Government of Carinthia in Austria to support the establishment and activities of the National Association of Social Workers.

### **Recommendations:**

- The Government of DRC should acknowledge social work as an instrumental profession for addressing the prevailing complex needs and problems of individuals, families, and communities. Thus, it is important to launch a big advocacy taskforce for social work to be recognized as a profession and an academic discipline by the laws and legislations of the DRC. Also, social workers' code of ethics should be recognized.
- The National Association of Social Workers and the school of social work in Bukavu should work hand in hand to strengthen the social workers' corporation, implement it in all parts of the country, and conduct joint research and practice projects to increase the communication between social work education and practice.
- The IASSW as well as the IFSW should particularly support all efforts of professional social work as well as social work education in post-conflict DRC.
- The Government of DRC as well as the different international partners should adequately fund social and psychosocial work in DRC.
- Likewise, the social work taskforce in DRC (including the few social work practitioners and social work educators), under close supervision of IFSW and IASSWA, should work towards elaborating the basic regulations, including the Statement of Ethical Principles for social work, and get these sworn in by the government.
- It is worth commending the fact that the PROSOWO II project has been able to reach out to the DRC, and it is important to strengthen this cooperation through more tangible collaborative research projects and services to the community, involving both social work educators and social work practitioners.

- For the Association of Schools of Social Work in Africa, it is important to develop a stronger partnership with the existing school of social work in DRC through teaching, research and services to the community.
- There is also an urgent need to conduct an exploratory study on the general situation of social work and social service provision in the DRC to inform the ongoing implantation of professional social work and social work education in the country (such an exploratory study can be conducted by the National Association of Social Workers, the School of Social Work with the supervision of the Association of Schools of Social Work in Africa).
- The National Association of Social Workers in the DRC should be implemented in all 26 provinces of the country. Alongside the School of Social Work, efforts should be made to strengthen the capacities of the many non-social workers working in social work all over the country.
- Finally, we call upon IFSW-Africa and ASSWA to acknowledge the National Association of Social Workers of the DRC and the School of Social Work at Université Evangélique en Afrique in Bukavu as permanent members in their respective organizations.

30<sup>th</sup> April 2018

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