



social development

Department:
Social Development
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**REPORT ON THE SOCIAL WORK INDABA
HELD AT THE BURGERS PARK HOTEL,
PRETORIA**

DATE: 3 AND 4 APRIL 2006

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**REPORT ON THE SOCIAL WORK INDABA HELD AT BURGERS PARK HOTEL,
PRETORIA, ON 03 AND 04 APRIL 2006**

1. INTRODUCTION

The Indaba was convened at the request of the Deputy Minister for Social Development and the Social Development Portfolio Committee, to address the concerns about the lack of social workers in the country. The aim of the workshop was therefore to facilitate discussions with all stakeholders in finding possible short-, medium and long term alternatives and solutions to the problem; and what contribution the sector could make in this regard.

The report on the Indaba will give highlights of all the presentations as well as inputs of the group sessions, which have been translated into an action plan. The report is meant to provide feedback on the outcomes of the Indaba and will serve as a basis for further action. The report must be read with the Draft Recruitment and Retention Strategy for Social Workers, which proposes a more comprehensive approach to the problem.

2. ATTENDANCE

The following establishments were represented at the event:

- Department of Social Development Deputy Minister, Dr Jean Benjamin
- Portfolio Committee for Social Development
- Institutions of Higher Learning

- The National and Provincial Departments of Social Development (Senior Management and members of the HSWS)
- The NGO sector
- The Department of Education
- The Labour Unions
- HWSETA

3. THE PURPOSE OF THE INDABA

The Deputy Director-General (DDG), Ms Vuyelwa Nhlapo, officially opened the event. She acknowledged and commended the Deputy Minister and members of the Portfolio Committee for Social Development for requesting the Indaba. In her opening speech, the DDG emphasized the following:

- The importance of partnerships in sector reform.
- The new Recruitment and Retention Strategy for Social Workers as a vehicle for transformation and an important milestone for South Africa.
- The need to accelerate the recruitment, training and retention of social workers to meet the social challenges facing the country.

In conclusion, the DDG introduced the Deputy Minister to deliver a key note address to participants.

3. KEY NOTE ADDRESS – DEPUTY MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, DR JEAN BENJAMIN

In her address the Deputy Minister highlighted the following achievements to date:

- The declaration of social work as a scarce skill.
- The need to determine urgent solutions to address the demand for additional social workers.
- The development of the Recruitment and Retention Strategy for Social Workers.
- The implementation of prioritized projects within the strategy such as:

- The new generic job descriptions, which provide opportunities for career pathing and also define areas of specialization for social workers.
 - The improvement of the remuneration package for social workers in government, with due recognition for specialization within the social work field, up to the level of deputy director.
 - The provision of 190 scholarships for social workers to the amount of R2.8m (which is over and above the normal bursaries allocated by government at provincial and national level).
 - The first phase of the capacity building programme for social service professionals that was conducted in all the provinces in 2005. A total of 1869 social service professionals, from the government and the NGO sector, were trained. The trainees were predominantly social workers.
- The exploration of the best practice models e.g. the Cuban model which seeks to integrate the family and its needs.
 - An opportunity to give more attention and resources to social welfare services was created with the establishment of the South African Social Service Agency (SASSA).
 - The provision of the required human resource capacity, in line with the Service Delivery Model.

The Deputy Minister further urged the participants to:

- Collaborate in meeting the demand for social workers to ultimately root out poverty, social disintegration and unemployment
- Re-examine the way training for social workers is provided and accelerate the training in response to the demand for services
- Create a conducive environment/climate for social workers to remain in the country and within the profession.

In looking at the education and training arrangements, the Deputy Minister raised the following fundamental questions:

- 1) Do we have the appropriate and relevant capacity and capability to address the crises of skills shortages?
- 2) Is the current education and training supply commensurate with the needs and demands?
- 3) Has articulation of education in the world of work improved?
- 4) What mechanisms can we put in place to retain social work skills in the country?
- 5) How can we forge links as strategic partners, to address the challenges we are facing as a country?

In conclusion she appealed to participants to specify the actions to be taken, methods to be used and time frames to achieve specified actions.

2. THE CURRENT REALITIES FOR SOCIAL WORK IN THE COUNTRY

Ms Smith of the Council for Social Service Professions (the Council) gave a report back on the provincial visits which were undertaken to investigate and address problems as articulated by social workers in practice during disciplinary hearings, regarding their working conditions.

Interviews were held with Heads of Departments and senior managers in both government and NGO sectors at national and provincial levels. The following matters received attention:

- Awareness creation on the role and mandate of the Council and Professional Boards.
- Repositioning of the social work profession.
- Awareness creation regarding professional and ethical standards of social workers.
- Awareness creation on the role of the employers in creating a conducive environment that will ensure that social workers are able to render professional services to the client system.

- Maintenance of confidentiality and dignity of service recipients.
- Registration of social workers with the Council.

The following critical observations were made during the visits:

- Social workers are managed/supervised by non- social work practitioners and this is in contravention of the applicable legislation.
- The social work environment is not conducive to ensure confidentiality and quality services to the client system e.g. social workers are sharing offices with other non-social work officials.
- There is a lack of proper supervision which is at times due to a work overload.
- Social work activities are at times performed by non-social workers e.g. intake conducted by administrative staff, distribution of food parcels etc.
- Social workers are not registered with the Council.
- Registration certificates are not displayed to be visible to the service recipients.
- There is a lack of resources that would enable social workers to render efficient services.
- There is a need for education and training of supervisors as well as reorientation of social workers.
- Social workers in private practice are not supposed to handle foster care cases, unless arrangements have been made and they have been contracted by government.

As a way forward, the Council proposed the following:

- Development of a joint plan of action between the Department of Social Development and the Council, on identified challenges and problems.
- Continuation of visits to all nine provinces.
- Development and circulation of a pocket-size code of ethics booklet, with the April edition of the Newsletter.
- Development of a code of conduct for employers, to be circulated with the September edition of the Newsletter.

In conclusion Ms Smith mentioned that:

- There is a need to specify persons eligible to register with the Council.
- The representatives of both the Council and Board members should be available to attend provincial visits.
- There is a need to seek assistance from professionals in the province when disciplinary hearings are held. Training should be conducted in this regard.
- Funds allocated by the national department regarding the training of social workers should be utilized for that purpose. Training should focus on both social workers and supervisors.

5. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN THE TRAINING OF SOCIAL WORKERS

Dr Barbara Simpson (ASASWEI), started by giving a background of the Association she was representing. She mentioned that social work academics had been meeting annually since 1968. In those days, the organization was called the Joint Universities Committee on Social Work (JUC). In 1994, the Association changed its name to the Association of South African Social Work Educational Institutions (ASASWEI). She highlighted the vision, mission and goals of the Association.

In pursuing its vision and mission, the Association aims to:

- Facilitate collaboration and exchange information on social work education, training, research and practice with relevant networks (governmental and non governmental) on national, regional, and international levels.
- Develop strategies that enhance the recognition of the social work profession.
- Promote recognition of the contribution of social work to social and economic development and to the transformation of South African society.

- Support the development of appropriate and locally specific research, theory and practice.
- Contribute to the development and implementation of social welfare and education policies in the South African context.

The Association has full members, namely *recognized* social work departments/units in 18 South African universities, colleges, educational institutions; and affiliates namely, *recognized* departments/units in universities, colleges, educational institutions in the Southern Africa region. It gives academics and practitioners an opportunity to meet, share research findings and debate topical issues.

The presenter then focused on the current challenges faced by institutions offering social work. She pointed out that, despite increases in social work salaries in 2005, the conditions of service for social workers remain serious. An emphasis was made that if social work is considered a scarce skill, it would make sense to increase the number of graduates in social work. This is, however, not possible in the present climate due to the following challenges experienced by universities:

- Social work has been placed on the lowest grid of the subsidy that is paid to tertiary institutions. By its nature, social work education is labour intensive. If we want to produce quality graduates, capable of dealing with the challenges of social work practice in South Africa, there is a need to provide skills training in small groups and in many cases, individual supervision for students who are doing fieldwork placements. Academic departments are battling to cope with the existing student numbers due to the subsidy formula.
- In some universities, the Department of Education has capped the number of students in the Human and Social Sciences and this further translates into a lower intake of social work students.
- Criteria for bursaries should be consistent and transparent, and there is a need for an increase in the number of bursaries for social work students.

- Lecturers who leave the institutions are often not replaced. This then leads to a serious lack of human resources.
- The pressure on academics to do research and to publish, further exacerbates the problem. Social work should be placed on the highest grid of the subsidy formula.
- Social work is not an attractive profession for young people, due to low salaries, poor working conditions, huge caseloads and a complex socio-political and economic climate. These conditions make it difficult to market social work.
- A lack of support from the organizations where students are placed, is a problem. For example, students sometimes have to fund their own transport to outlying communities and for home visits. Although, the Department of Social Development is paying 4th year students in some areas, there is a need for this to be standardized across the country, and it should be extended to all placements in both government and in the NGO sector.
- It is becoming increasingly difficult to secure good fieldwork placements for students due to the following reasons:
 - Placement sites often complain that there is a lack of space and resources to deal with student supervision.
 - High turnover of staff (from private sector to government, and from all sectors to overseas) mean that social workers are inexperienced and unskilled in supervision. In some cases, organizations are unable to take students due to staff shortages.
 - Some social workers in the field have not kept abreast with developments in the profession. These social workers are not sensitive to students' learning needs and do not provide the support that the students need.
 - Many social workers in practice are poor role models. For example, there are those who are negative towards the profession and encourage students to leave, while others portray an uncaring attitude towards their clients.
 - Poor quality of service owing to high case load.

Dr Simpson concluded that:

- Social work should be placed on the highest grid of the subsidy formula.
- There must be an increase in the number and amount of bursaries and scholarships for students.
- Criteria for bursaries should be consistent and transparent.
- Working conditions of social workers should be improved.

6. SOCIAL WORK AS A SCARCE SKILL – MEETING THE DEMAND

Dr Ndlovu made a presentation, as a representative of the Department of Education. He highlighted the following:

- The indaba was organized at an appropriate time when sector education is grappling with transformation.
- South Africa had successfully promoted access to higher education.
- The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) provides financial assistance to students. The scheme will be allocated an additional R863 million as a means of showing commitment to education.
- Enrolment within the institutions of higher learning is beginning to reflect the demographics of South African society.
- The higher education system is being restructured to ensure the production of good quality graduates.
- Between 2000 and 2004, an average of 440 social workers was produced by higher education system.
- The National Plan of Higher Education intends to expand enrolment from 15% to 20% over the next fifteen years. The aim is to ensure the sustainable management of student enrolment.
- The Department of Education intends to engage the Institutions of Higher Learning in a discussion to motivate for an increase in the number of social work students.

Dr Ndlovu ended his presentation by emphasizing the need for partnerships between government, business and civil society organizations in collectively addressing societal challenges.

7. DRAFT RETENTION STRATEGY FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

Ms Kela of the Department of Social Development made a presentation on the draft Recruitment and Retention Strategy for Social Workers. The following critical points emerged from the presentation:

- The pace at which social workers are increasing in the country is very slow
- Supervision and training of social workers is crucial.
- There is a need to form a national forum to enable the sector to monitor the implementation of the Retention Strategy.
- There is a need to determine the extent to which social workers render non-social work functions.
- The sector should look at the feasibility of utilizing the best practice models e.g. Cuban models
- The recruitment of social workers will not be effective if the current conditions of social workers are not improved.
- Stakeholders within the sector, individually and collectively, have a critical role to play in addressing the crisis of social workers in the country.

8. PANEL DISCUSSION

- Support in the form of subsidies for student training is critical in ensuring an increase in student enrolment.
- Concern was raised regarding statistics on student enrolment as stated in the Strategy. An appeal was made to universities to assist with the provision of correct information.
- Students should be provided with the necessary tools for training e.g. nursing students are paid while on training. A similar proposal should be made for social work students.
- A challenge is to attend to the working conditions of social workers in practice.
- If the South African social work programme is globally and internationally competitive, why do we reduce the duration of training?
- Social workers across all employing organizations should be supervised by qualified social workers.

- Although proposals are made for the increased momentum in the training of social auxiliary workers to relieve social workers and enable them to focus on professional tasks, the department is not creating posts to absorb trained auxiliary workers, notably the Western Cape and Limpopo.

9. COMMISSIONS

The participants were divided into four commissions. Each commission was expected to discuss and report back on the following:

- How to address the current crisis (shortage of social workers).
- What is the strategy?
- What does the strategy entail?
- Who is responsible?
- Time frames.

10. REPORT BACK FROM THE COMMISSIONS

The commissions reported back on their discussions. A comprehensive view was adopted in identifying short, medium and long term approaches towards addressing the problem of social work as a scarce skill. The input from commissions was consolidated in the table attached as Annexure A.

11. WAY FORWARD

The participants identified the following resolutions, which require urgent attention and are achievable, as part of the way forward by various role players.

11.1 Department of Social Development's Responsibilities

The department will be responsible for facilitating the establishment of a committee to coordinate the process. The committee will consist of representatives from the following organizations:

- National and Provincial Departments of Social Development

- ASASWEI
- SACSSP
- NGOs
- Labour

The coordinating team will carry out the following duties:

- Facilitate the development of an HR plan for the sector
- Monitor the implementation of the plan as well as recommendations made during indaba
- Facilitate reporting and feedback sessions to the sector
- Identify issues to be reported to the social cluster
- Facilitate consultation with the sector and social workers in general
- Evaluate general progress
- Give attention to learnerships of social workers
- Facilitate access regarding students' placements
- Make a list of students sponsored by the department at national and provincial levels
- Facilitate the creation of posts for social workers
- Facilitate the process that will lead to the payment of the following allowances in consultation with DPSA: rural, danger, and scarce skill allowance.
- Facilitate consistent payment of stipends for all students doing practicals.
- Investigate the withdrawal of social auxiliary workers in the Western Cape.
- Advocate for funding of residential and office accommodation.
- Advocate for the provision of office equipment.
- Facilitate consultation between the Ministers for Social Development and Education regarding improved salaries for social workers.

11.2 ASASWEI's Responsibilities

- Facilitate consultation with the Department of Education on the subsidies of students.
- Give input into the Retention Strategy.

- Compile a list of students who are in their third year (those who terminated their studies, probably due to financial problems).
- Compile a list of students owing universities (those who are still in training).
- Compile a list of graduates who could not receive their results due to debt.
- Express their willingness to serve as service providers for the training of social auxiliary workers.
- Circulate the indaba report and submit responses, on behalf of universities, to the department.

11.3 SACSSP's Responsibilities

- Update and centralise the data base for social workers.
- Develop and distribute a code of conduct for employers.
- Distribute a code of conduct for social workers.
- Implement continuous professional development programme (CDP).
- Develop areas of specialization for social work.
- Develop career pathing areas for social workers.
- Validate workplaces where social workers are practicing
- Review the Social Service Professions Act.

11.4 Joint Responsibility of all Role Players

- Market the social work profession
- Develop a model for supervision

12. CONCLUSION

The workshop agreed that the department, through the proposed forum, will facilitate implementation of the plan. Institutions of higher learning and other stakeholders will give input on the recruitment and retention strategy and this will be discussed with the NGO sector that was not adequately represented at the workshop.

The workshop was closed with a vote of thanks to all participants for committing towards turning the tide for the profession and its relevance in addressing the social needs of society, as part of the effort towards sustainable development within the poor and vulnerable sectors of society.