DECLARATION OF ETHICS

Declaration of Ethics for Professional Social Workers

TISS SOCIAL WORK EDUCATORS' FORUM

Background of the Declaration

This draft of 'Declaration of Ethics for Professional Social Workers' has been prepared by the Social Work Educators' Forum (SWEF) at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. The SWEF is a forum for social work educators at the Institute to undertake meetings and activities with a goal to strengthen social work profession and education. In the meetings scheduled by the SWEF in 1991, issues related to values and ethics for social workers were identified and discussed. The SWEF Committee then requested Ms. Lata Narayan to prepare the first draft of a code of ethics for social workers which was discussed at an SWEF meeting in September 1991. In 1992, an SWEF Sub-committee was formed with the following members to revise the draft. A drafting committee was formed, comprising Ms. Lata Narayan, Dr. Murli Desai and Ms. Jeroo Billimoria. The second draft prepared by the Sub-committee was circulated at the National Workshop on Social Work Practice and Education held in May 1993. The third draft was discussed at two SWEF meetings in March 1994. The fourth draft of the same in the form of Indian Declaration of Ethics for Professional Social Workers, was discussed at a Workshop in February 1995 along with the members of the faculty of the College of Social Work at Nirmala Niketan and the members of the Bombay Association of Trained Social Workers. The fifth draft, which was an outcome of this workshop, was sent to some senior social work educators. Feedback obtained from them are incorporated in this Sixth Draft.

Members of the SWEF Sub-Committee for Code of Ethics

Jeroo Billimoria  
Vineeta Chitale  
Murli Desai  
N.A. Gokarn  
Rajshree Mahtani

Vimla Nadkarni  
Lata Narayan  
M.S. Pawar  
Maveen Soares-Pereira  

DECLARATION OF ETHICS FOR PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORKERS

Preamble

The Declaration of Ethics for Professional Social Workers is intended to serve as a guide to the members of the social work profession, who have obtained minimally a bachelor's degree in social work and, thus, base their work on recognised knowledge, philosophy and skills. The Declaration is rooted in the contemporary social reality which has a historical background and in the framework of humanistic values, based on the intrinsic worth of all human and non-human life.

The Bhakti movement promoted the value of humanism, that is, every individual has inherent worth and dignity, irrespective of attributes and achievements. Every person, therefore, has an innate capability to run his/her own life. Democracy emphasises participatory process in the decision making of an entity and accountability of that entity to its members.

Socialism has promoted the values of equality and legal, judicial, social and economic justice for satisfaction of basic human needs, sharing of natural resources and access to essential services. While equality highlighted non-hierarchy and non-discrimination based on equal worth of every person, the growing value of equity emphasises recognition of differences, diversity and pluralism.

The ideology of Sarvodaya has emphasised the values of Swarajya and Lokniti, that is people have to govern themselves in order to obtain equity and justice. This ideology accepts that people are knowledgeable about their situation and the ways to manage them, given the necessary resources. It acknowledges that they have the right to plan their own destinies and determine their life styles. It appreciates that local solutions must be congruent with local resource realities.

The social work profession is committed to solidarity with the marginalised peoples. The basic human rights are very often violated for people, who lack economic, physical, mental, social and/or emotional resources. Lack of resources lead to powerlessness and, thereby marginalisation of people by the social, economic and political systems. Marginalised people are vulnerable to deprivation and exploitation by those who yield power as they have control over resources.

The profession recognises that marginalised people need to be empowered so that they themselves play a dominant role for their development and welfare. Empowerment is the process of gaining
control over self as well as the resources which determine power. This process aims at reforming the nature and direction of the systemic forces which marginalise the powerless. Systemic change is an imperative for redistributive justice.

The Declaration provides general ethical principles to guide conduct with respect to self and the profession, work with the marginalised and other people in need, the society and the state, co-workers and employing organisations and social work education and research. In its practical application, the entire Declaration and its spirit are of importance, and must be viewed holistically, rather than considering a particular ethical principle in isolation. This also implies that the application of ethical principles must be judged within the context in which they are being considered.

Declaration of Ethics for Professional Social Workers

Value Framework

As a professional social worker, I pledge to promote the following values in myself, in the profession and in the society.

1. I pledge to perceive people as having inherent worth and dignity, irrespective of their attributes and achievements and having the capability of continuing development;
   I pledge to perceive myself and other people as part of nature, needing to live in harmony with other non-human existence.

2. I pledge to work towards the overall well-being of people in the spirit of Sarvodaya, through the achievement of the following goals:
   Equity, non-hierarchy and non-discrimination of human groups in terms of race, religion, tribe, language, regional origin, gender, sexual orientation and other such factors, and condemning segregation/apartheid/discrimination among them;
   Social, economic, political and legal justice, ensuring satisfaction of basic needs and integrity and security, universal access to essential resources and protective safeguards for the marginalised people; and
   People-centred development, in the spirit of Swarajya and democracy from micro- to macro-levels, where people participate to determine their life styles and goals for development.

3. I pledge to work with people, guided by the following values:
• Solidarity and partnership with the marginalised people; and
• peaceful and non-violent approaches in the spirit of Ahimsa for resolving conflicts with self, others and the environment.

Ethical Responsibility to Self and the Profession

As the first essential to social work practice, I shall constantly seek an understanding of myself and change my attitudes and prejudices which may affect my work.

I shall be sensitive to and respect the feelings and thinking of others, understand behaviours, avoid stereotypes and recognise individuality in every person.

I accept with humility and openness, the need to learn and shall imbibe the spirit of inquiry to constantly update my knowledge base and intervention strategies.

I shall gear my practice upon relevant knowledge and in the changing socioeconomic, geographical and cultural context.

I shall use my knowledge, power and status as a professional, for the well-being of all and not misuse these for personal gains.

I shall intervene into the personal affairs of another individual only with his/her consent, except when I must act to prevent injury to him/her or to others, in accordance with the legal provisions.

In order to ensure credibility and integrity of the social work profession, I shall constantly review it and work towards its development.

I shall work to promote networking among social work professionals, other professionals and like-minded individuals and organisations, at the micro- and macro-levels, to work towards people-centred development.

I shall work towards developing and strengthening of professional associations, which are means for development of the profession.

I shall facilitate development of the new entrants to the profession.

Ethical Responsibility to the Marginalised and Other People in Need

My primary professional response and accountability are to the marginalised and other people in need I work with. My commitment and professional stand shall be with them.

I shall empathise with people's marginalisation and thereby respect and give credence/value to their life experiences.

I shall work towards changing the systemic and contextual forces which marginalise people, on behalf of and in partnership with them.
I shall respect people's right for self-determination, and shall ensure that they themselves play an active role in relation to the course of action to be taken about their life situation.

I shall nurture a relationship of partnership with people that promotes mutual reflection on our life situation and our development.

I shall facilitate people's access to opportunities and resources and empower them for work towards their stated goal.

I shall share with people, accurate and relevant information regarding the extent and nature of help available to them, that is, opportunities, rights, strengths, limitations and risks associated with the intervention offered.

I shall enable and encourage people to work with other individuals, organisations and groups, when such collaboration is in the best interest of the well-being for all.

I shall obtain people's consent before recording or permitting third party observation of their activities after informing them about its purpose and utility.

I shall keep confidential, all matters shared by them, and shall inform them fully about the limits of privileged communication in a given situation.

I shall facilitate people's access to official records concerning them, if asked by them. While doing so, I shall take due care to protect the confidence of others covered by these records.

I shall ensure that payment for services by people, if necessary, are fair and commensurate with the intervention provided, and within the capacity for such payment of the people served.

When I perceive the need to withdraw from the helping process, I shall give consideration to all factors in the situation and shall take care to minimise possible adverse effects on the people.

When I anticipate discontinuation of my intervention, I shall notify them promptly and seek transfer, referral or continuation of service, with consideration to their needs and preferences.

I shall not pursue a relationship or use any coercive means to continue services, which the people served wish to terminate, and shall offer suggestions or alternative help that they can avail of.

**Ethical Responsibility to the Society and the State**

It is my ethical responsibility to promote implementation of the Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles enshrined in the Indian Constitution.
I shall work towards a society and a state that promotes equity, justice, Ahimsa, Swarajya and Lokniti.

I shall advocate changes in social systems and the State policies and legislation to promote the above values.

I shall encourage informed participation by the people in shaping State policies, legislation, and programmes.

I shall respond and offer my professional services in events of emergencies at micro- and macro-levels.

Ethical Responsibility to Co-Workers and Employing Organisations

Respect the inherent worth and dignity of all my co-workers, that include social workers, other professionals, auxiliary workers, volunteers and all those involved in the development process, within and across organisations.

I shall cooperate with my co-workers towards development, accepting and respecting our personal and professional differences.

I shall contribute to the process of collective reflection and democratic decision-making when working as a team.

I shall acknowledge my co-workers' attributes and achievements and will be willing to learn from them.

I shall respect confidences shared by my co-workers in the course of their professional relationships and transactions.

I shall promote a practice of mutual evaluation with co-workers for our professional development.

When I am an employer or supervisor to my co-workers, I shall ensure clarity of goals in delegation of roles and responsibilities, provide opportunities for growth, give them due credits and jointly review their performance on the basis of goals and clearly enunciate criteria.

I shall act to promote humanistic values and ethical practices in my employing organisation's policies and practices.

I shall ensure that the organisation's resources are used judiciously and for the purpose they are intended.

I shall periodically monitor and evaluate the organisation's policies and programmes by maintaining records, self reflection on people's feedback and feedback from the co-workers.

Ethical Responsibility to Social Work Education and Research

When teaching and training, it is my ethical responsibility to be conversant with the learners' needs, readiness and goals.
I shall keep my knowledge update about social work and the subjects I teach through field experience, reading and training.

While teaching and training I shall impart knowledge, inculcate attitudes and develop skills within the value framework of the profession.

I shall recognise the importance of partnership between practitioners and educators for the purpose of social work education and training.

I shall develop a nurturing relationship with the students, encouraging openness and self study and facilitating sharing and discussions in a learning situation.

I shall, whenever possible, undertake demonstration of people-centred field action projects for the purpose of research and documentation, training and replication.

I shall share the knowledge I gain with other social work educators and practitioners.

I shall contribute to the knowledge base of social work education through my practice wisdom, documentation as well as research.

I shall expose the students to the professional associations and orient them about their role in developing and strengthening them.

When carrying out a research, I shall carefully select the topic for research considering its possible consequences for human beings within the value framework of the profession and towards the goals of people-centred development.

I shall consider the informants of my research as my co-partners in understanding the phenomenon. I shall, therefore, share my research objectives with them and get their informed and voluntary consent, respect their knowledge and attitude about their life situation, and share/interpret the findings with them.

I shall not cause them inadvertent physical or mental discomfort, distress or harm, through my research.

I shall protect the confidentiality of the information shared by them and use the findings for their benefit, by revising policies and programmes concerning them.

I shall provide information services to them, as and when necessary, during the process of data collection.

I shall acknowledge in my paper, the published as well as unpublished material and personal discussions that have directly influenced my paper.