Towards People-Centred Development: The Social Development Agenda and Social Work Education

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This paper contextualises the global scenario and the development process which has created two patterns: distorted and misguided development. The need for people-centred development, which is very consistent with the bases of social work, is strongly felt. The paper elaborates on the conventional, developmental and social reform approaches to social work intervention. Recommendations are provided for social work education for greater relevance within the development paradigm.

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A Divided World

Our world is a seriously divided world. The further development proceeds, with the creation of great wealth, of high standards of living, and a more sophisticated technology, the clearer it is that most societies are unable to accommodate all their citizens in terms of giving them a place within the increasing prosperity. The United States of America has a very high level of poverty and a large underclass; Europe has, in recent years, been very conscious of the phenomenon of social exclusion (and the strong opposition towards immigrants and asylum seekers is further dividing societies); many countries are unable to provide an equal status in society for indigenous or other minority groups; and countries like India continue to present a large population living in poverty, which scarcely diminishes despite the country's overall development. Development is, on many criteria, clearly apparent in the majority of countries; however, it is often not development which is shared to any great extent by at least one-third of the world's population.
Serious though the problem of exclusion from development is, in some situations it is, to a large degree, a matter mainly of leaving people behind and creating situations of relative poverty. That is certainly the situation in regard to 'white' poverty in a country like Australia, and in many places in Europe. So it becomes a matter of equity or justice, and not always one of suffering or severe deprivation. In many parts of the world, however, being left behind in the development process seems to leave many people highly vulnerable to other developments which can be more devastating than their initial poverty or underdevelopment. I refer to situations like vulnerability, civil war, violent social unrest, ecological degradation and natural disasters. Many of the wars that have occurred since 1945, and particularly those of recent years, have mainly affected civilian populations already relatively disadvantaged. Women and children have been particularly badly affected. Similarly, there is a close correlation between populations in poverty and ecological degradation, in that the better-off are able to move out before things get too bad, and it is the poor and the disadvantaged who remain to bear the brunt of further deterioration. Moreover, their very poverty contributes in many cases to the speed of deterioration.

So we have a situation of apparently considerable prosperity alongside one of poverty, disadvantage and marginalisation. Yet even that depiction of the situation may be misleading. It assumes that all is well among those who are participating in the development process, and it is not at all clear that the assumption is valid. Certainly many social indicators, such as of suicide, mental ill-health and crime, suggest that in many areas prosperity comes with a price. Perhaps expectations move much faster than the availability of opportunities to prosper; perhaps many who enjoy the increased prosperity find that it is not as satisfying as they had imagined it would be; and perhaps some of the living and working conditions which are common with increased prosperity are indeed detrimental to well-being. Whatever the reason, those of us whose lives are lived out among the advantaged know that all is not well with many of our neighbours and fellow-residents. This is especially true for social workers and others who are attuned to the signs of dissatisfaction and despair.

**Distorted and Misguided Development**

Is it then that the development process has created two situations: that of distorted development, of which Midgley (1995) writes, and that of
misguided development? Distorted development is development which is biased, whether in favour of urban areas over rural, or of men over women, or of dominant groups over minority groups, or richer people over poorer people and so on. Misguided development is where the goals of development are not consistent with people's real needs. Misguided development is development that emphasises material prosperity over spiritual well-being; that values remunerative employment and devalues the importance of social life in communities and families; that creates expectations always of adding to what one has already — of growth in the economy, improvements in the per capita income and increasing acquisitions as the central criteria of progress; that measures progress always in terms of individuals' prosperity and life situation, and neglects the need for healthy communities within which individuals can flourish; and that is predisposed to regard the latest in any area of development as invariably the best.

**Distorted Development**

Distorted development is, to a large degree, a result of inequalities in the distribution of power in societies (Midgley, 1995). When political, economic and social systems are dominated by some form of elite population then the operation of those systems will tend to favour those with that power. Hence, it is often argued that the key to rectifying that situation is empowerment of those who are excluded from the development process and then to build political, economic and social structures which are more participatory in nature. If, however, that process simply brings a greater number of people into the decision-making process, and in the course of entering into that situation the newcomers embrace the values and aspirations of those already in control, then the directions of development will not change. Moreover, it is likely that as some are upwardly mobile they will tend to shut the door on those who would follow them, for fear of having to share their new-found opportunities and so diluting them. Hence, we still have a divided society but with the line drawn at a different point than it was previously. Moreover, we shall probably have done nothing to affect misguided development, unless it be to strengthen it, in that newcomers to materialism and so on can be more passionate in their acceptance of the prevailing creed than those who have had time to become familiar with it and perhaps develop a more balanced attitude.

We might argue that we know how to respond to distorted development. Whether we, in fact, can respond appropriately will depend
on the balance of power, and probably also on the quantities of resources available to be shared around. Where the power lines are strongly drawn and/or the resources available are minimal, distorted development is likely to remain a reality. Even if we do succeed in modifying the degree of distorted development, whether the outcome of all our efforts in this direction will be to our satisfaction is really a question of whether we are in fact promoting an extension of misguided development. If that may at least sometimes be the case, how do we tackle misguided development?

Misguided Development

Misguided development is essentially the normative side of social development. There is a strong normative dimension to social development as it is presented by most writers and workers today. However, the normative dimensions emphasised are usually ones pertaining to the actual development process. That is, development must be people-centred, highly participatory and so on. Some go further and emphasise the community dimension of development, suggesting that the development process is designed to create healthy, self-reliant and caring communities, recognising that development over recent decades has tended to erode community life, to the detriment of many, if not most, community members. So we have development norms and local community norms being presented to us quite frequently in the literature today. However, there may be a need to add to these two categories of norms a set of societal norms. If the development goals for society are always in the form of large modern cities; of mass industries; of dependence on family, despite the weakening of family life; of the ability of the individual to pursue his or her prosperity regardless of the interests of others as long as it is within the law; and of high levels of consumption promoted by intrusive advertising and socially endorsed evaluative standards, then the outcome may well be a misguided form of development from which few will benefit in the long-term.

Misguided development is not, however, simply a matter of whether people will be happy with the lifestyle that it encourages. Misguided development is a form of development which is clearly not sustainable. The calculations have been made a thousand times; the rate of consumption of the earth's resources in the most prosperous parts of the world is such that it would be disastrous to replicate it over the whole world, even if that were otherwise possible, which it is not. We have
to find forms and levels of development which are consistent with the ecological resources and social contexts within which we live. If large cities are unmanageable; if mass industry is soul-destroying and polluting; if modern housing is energy inefficient; if large-scale communities are unsatisfactory for many; if the levels of consumption of the rich are both impossible to sustain and destructive of the environment for all, and especially the poor; and if our approach to rural areas is threatening our long-term survival, then we have no option but to find alternative development models.

World Summit on Social Development

It is relevant at this point to look at the commitments which emerged from the World Summit on Social Development in 1995. Basically the commitments recognise the problems of inequality, disadvantage and marginalisation confronting the contemporary world. Different commitments recognise the realities of poverty, gender discrimination, inadequate employment opportunities, a lack of social integration and inequitable access to social services. But does the rectification of these realities involve only structural changes within the prevailing development trends, or some basic normative changes? In other words, is it a matter of distorted development alone or of misguided development? Certainly the written material and discussions on which these commitments were based recognise the importance of attitudes, and therefore of values or principles such as equality between different categories of people. However, at the same time, there is little in what is said to suggest that development, as we have witnessed it in recent decades, has not been basically along the right path. If that is the prevailing view it may of course be held as much because of the absence of acceptable alternative models as of confidence in the existing model.

The first commitment which the Summit suggested to the various governments was to create an enabling environment. This is a crucial commitment, but one that can mean different things. If it means that the responsibility of the governments is to ensure economic growth, so that there will be the potential for all to participate in the fruits of development, then experience would suggest that it represents a forlorn hope. If it means the creation of an open and democratic environment in which all may freely participate in the decisions which affect their well-being, then it is a highly laudable aim, but one whose achievement might not significantly affect some of the difficulties with contemporary development presented above. If it means the creation
of a different kind of environment, which will hopefully be more enabling than the one which currently exists, then it needs to convey the directions of the changes called for. The reality is that there is an enormous amount of interest invested in maintaining the current development model. The wealthy and powerful will continue to endorse it, while the middle-classes and the upwardly mobile in most societies will strongly support it. Those who are marginalised by its distorted nature and misguided goals; those who suffer from its shortcomings; and those who are concerned about its long-term impact on the environment and/or on people have very little voice, and are unlikely to be heard until conditions are such that the majority of the well-to-do feel really threatened.

Despite the enormous investment in the current development model to which I have referred, there is today a strong commitment to finding and implementing an alternative development model and the most common such model can be described as people-centred development. So let us turn to an exploration of the concept of people-centred development before considering its relevance for social work practice and education.

**People-Centred Development**

People-centred development is defined by the United Nations Development Programme as 'development of the people, by the people and for the people'. Whatever the precise definition given, the implications are always that people should be involved in their own development and that they should be the chief beneficiaries of development. In effect, people-centred development can be said to rest on five foundations:

1. **Awareness-raising**: People need to be as aware as they can be of the realities of their situation and their environment as a necessary condition for their full participation in their development.

2. **Social mobilisation**: People need to form into groups and local organisations as a necessary condition for drawing on all the available local resources and for insisting on their right to participate in their own development.

3. **Participation**: Development will reflect the realities and needs of a people only when the development process is a fully participatory ones.
4. **Self-reliance**: If the people are to have maximum control over their own development, it is important that development rest, as much as possible, on the resources available within the local community; to maximise self-reliance is to maximise the people-centred nature of development.

5. **Sustainability**: If development is to continue to provide for people's needs it must be sustainable.

An examination of the above understanding of people-centred development reveals the risk-taking nature of this approach to development. As it is an approach which emphasises the freeing and empowering of people, it will be seen by those who stand to lose by sharing with others what they already have as detrimental to their well-being, and therefore a risk. Moreover, it is an approach to development which emphasises process over outcomes, which is an approach that not all parties will be happy with. People-centred development represents, essentially, faith in people, and there are many groups in all societies who do not share that faith.

An important pre-condition for people-centred development is an enabling environment. It is not assumed that people will always be able to devise and implement the types of development necessary to their well-being. At one level the international situation must constitute an enabling environment; at another level it is the role of national governments to establish an enabling environment through their efforts at institution building and policy formulation; and, at another level again, it is the role of professionals to provide an enabling environment by offering people and their organisations the back-up services which they will often require. In the social work context, our concern is largely with the role of professionals as enablers in the people-centred development approach. Most professionals seem to automatically assume the role of expert, rather than enabler, so that there is an obligation on schools of social work to educate in terms of this quite different role.

From all that has been said, it will be clear that the people-centred approach is not one that is easily achieved. Is it indeed achievable? I am not sure that that is a valid question. The purpose for adopting the people-centred approach is that it is an approach consistent with the best principles in this field and one which should logically overcome some of the major deficiencies of the development process to date. Whether it is achievable is perhaps a question which we shall be able to answer only when we have devoted more time to detailing the
precise nature of the approach, seeking to implement it and evaluating the whole process carefully. What is important to recognise is that a people-centred development approach is very consistent with the bases of social work, and that the importance of implementing this approach in a wide range of situations means that social work is faced with a major challenge.

Role of Social Work in Addressing Distorted and Misguided Development and Furthering People-Centred Development

Conventional Social Work

If there is any substance in the above analysis, there will always be a role for conventional social work, whichever aspect of it is emphasised. One aspect of conventional social work has always been a focus on social functioning, that is, people's ability to cope with specific tasks necessary to social functioning (Butrym, 1976). In any society a proportion of people will experience difficulties in social functioning, and society will either draw on some body of social workers to assist or leave the responsibility to the family and community. Any deficiencies or defects in development of any kind will add to the number of people experiencing difficulties in coping with life in society.

A second aspect of conventional social work, although more obvious in the rhetoric of social work than in practice, is the reaching out to society's marginalised, forgotten and discarded population. As the Council of Social Work Education policy statement (1994: 1) says: 'The purpose of social work education is to prepare competent and effective social work professionals who are committed to practice that includes services to the poor and oppressed, and who work to alleviate poverty, oppression and discrimination'. Throughout history there have been such populations in every society. When distorted development occurs, however, there are likely to be many such people bypassed by the directions and forms which development takes. We can see this situation in developed countries like Australia, developing countries like India and transitional societies like the former USSR.

A third aspect of conventional social work is to be 'the practice arm of social welfare programmes, the organised activity that delivers the services devised through social policy' (Meyer, 1976: 1). It is, therefore, a role of social work to ensure that social service delivery is consistent with needs, based on the principle of justice for all, and effective in responding to all people's right to participate fully in
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society. Distorted development will distort the coverage and forms of social service delivery; while misguided development will encompass goals for the social services which are not consistent with either social work or social development principles. The task of conventional social work in relation to this aspect will then be very much affected by distorted and misguided development.

Given current development trends, there will always be a need for an army of professionals with some skills in mending the tears in the fabric of society and attending to the wounds of those afflicted in the course of development. Of course there may be neither a willingness or a capacity to finance that army, and smaller the army the greater will seem to be the need to confront it. This need will exist among some of those who are the 'beneficiaries' of misguided development, as their marriages break down, their children go off the rails, more people turn to substance abuse as an escape, and more suffer from chronic physical, mental or spiritual ill-health. That need will be aggravated by the reality and many societies increasingly do not wish to be bothered by those who are unable to cope and whom society has to carry.

Distorted development, for its part, results in potentially large populations who are shut out from the fruits of development. If governments are oblivious, or unsympathetic to the impact of distorted development, they are unlikely to divert resources to assist these marginalised populations. This work may well be left to the NGO sector.

In the great majority of societies, however, governments will have no choice but to organise a range of social services, whether they deliver them as government or commission them from others. The demands of modernisation require certain standards: the more affluent a society, the more it expects its governments to look after, control or hide away those situations which the successful would prefer to know nothing of. If, however, the evolvement of modern systems demonstrates that significant proportions of populations are dispensable, and basically a burden, we might well see a resurgence of a highly remedial approach to welfare where services represent no more than a sop to those excluded from the fruits of development. Will social work, in pursuing its conventional roles, cooperate if that becomes the scenario?

Developmental Social Work

In addition to these now conventional areas of social welfare, in developing countries, governments will continue to be confronted with
a range of social development tasks. These will exist in the form of the extension of social services into deprived areas, programmes to alleviate or eradicate poverty, and a variety of development projects and programmes aiming to bring areas of the country into the modern system. Such work is going on and will continue to do so. What role social work will play will depend on who are recruited into social work, what skills employers are looking for, and what resources are available for such work. The chances are, on present indications, that social work recruits will not wish to work in remote or deprived areas, that their skills will not readily appeal to potential employers as the ones required, and that the erosion of aid flows and the policies of some governments will mean that there are relatively few resources for this type of work anyway, and certainly not sufficient to pay professional staff.

To this extent, social work and social work education have two options. Social workers can be seen as essentially remedial workers to support the development of society, and/or social workers can be cast in a development role and given the skills to enable the more disadvantaged sections of any society to participate in whatever levels of development are occurring. Preventive work runs through both of these when they are carried out effectively, but the two basic directions remain the same. Neither of these two roles should be dismissed lightly. One has only to witness the nature and degree of personal suffering existing in many places in all of our societies to know that social workers cannot turn their backs: either they work in these areas or they have a responsibility to come up with and perhaps manage intervention strategies that are going to be effective. Similarly, the nature of the development task as it has evolved is such that there is a major place for traditional social work skills. It may well be that the face-to-face work is done best by non-social workers, but social workers may still have a crucial role in the training and supporting of grassroots workers, while bringing research, programme development and administrative skills to bear at the management level. Moreover, social policy and social planning initiatives need to underpin all well-directed development, and social workers should be able to play a role at that level.

There is now a large volume of literature which suggests that social work can and should embrace all of the roles referred to in the previous paragraph. At the same time, there is not a great deal of evidence to suggest that either this is the reality or that the task of enlarging their
scope of education is easy for schools of social work. In all countries it would seem that the majority of social workers are attracted by the professionalism of social work, which to them means relatively good status jobs (or at least a job) in relatively comfortable surroundings. That is not to say that the actual work of social work is easy. That is far from being the case. Indeed overwork, burnout and so on remain major concerns in this profession. However, despite most social workers and schools being attracted to what we might call conventional social work, we are seeing the emergence of both a number of social workers and of schools which are adopting a different paradigm. Some of the schools are rural based and some of them have a developmental focus; while the new breed of social workers (and in some areas not so new) are adopting a more radical approach and engaging either in political activities aimed at social change or in the areas of social work which carry minimal rewards of any kind. My concern is not, therefore, that we do not have such schools and workers, but that they are in danger of being marginalised within social work, and therefore of leaving the profession to take on a new image, thus obviating any possibility of having a significant impact on the directions which social work is taking overall.

**Social Work as Social Reform**

If we go back to our original argument regarding misguided development, it is debatable that the solution lies in confronting the existing system. That is certainly necessary in tackling distorted development, and that is what the more radical or the more pro-active side of contemporary social work is seeking to do. The example has long been there in Latin America with the influence of Freire and liberation theology, and there are other examples to which one could refer. However, misguided development is a different matter because, before we can embark upon action in relation to it we have to understand the specific objectives of such action. It is easy to identify the deficiencies in the existing systems which current development models embrace; it is far more difficult to identify societal forms which will be more effective in meeting the needs of all of their members, yet are feasible to create and are sustainable into the future. To a very large degree, we are looking for alternatives to the big metropolis, to the formal economy, to the prevailing value system in the western world, if not elsewhere now, and to the existing forms of many of the social systems.
necessary to human existence. How far can that ambitious goal be embraced by social work?

Of course social work has no more capacity than any other profession to reshape modern societies. It does, however, have more potential than is often appreciated to contribute to that process. Social workers ought to have considerable insight into the way in which modern societies impact adversely on many individuals and groups. Social work is also, if it embraces developmental social work sufficiently, in a position to facilitate experiments with alternative ways of doing things. Moreover, if it includes research in its repertoire of activities, as it should, it should be able to identify some of the sources or factors related to particular occurrences which are undesirable. In other words, the component elements of social work would seem to place it, as a profession, in a good position to contribute to an examination of both the current directions of development and possible future directions.

**Implications for Social Work Education**

There are many implications for the social work curriculum in what I have just said. If social workers are to help in reversing some of the directions of misguided development, they need to be able to think clearly about research when necessary and otherwise analyse their day-to-day practice experience as social workers and their observations of life around them as residents of society. They need to be sensitive to people's needs as well as be able to understand those needs in the theoretical contexts. They need to be able to think through the policy dimensions of what they are experiencing and the policy implications of the possibilities which they are exploring with families and communities. Then they need to be willing to be politically active, whether individually or as a profession, by lobbying for the changes which they see as necessary. Finally, all of these activities should be carried out in close collaboration with the populations most affected or involved, and that calls for another set of skills to be able to work together with people from a wide variety of backgrounds.

The first change which this list of implications suggests is that social work education reflects the environment or context in which it is set. The prevailing range of needs, and the socio-economic-political-cultural context are country-specific, and the curriculum must reflect this. The second change which this list of implications suggests is the establishment of a series of levels of social work education reflecting the
levels which are clearly there in the practice context. Such a change would overcome the possible objection to what is proposed that the curriculum is already overcrowded, and that the proposed changes may even represent incompatible objectives. So a logical solution is to think in terms of levels of social work education which may, in turn, suggest levels of education within a school of social work, or a number of different schools of social work catering for different levels.

**Three Levels of Social Work Education**

There seem to be three crucial levels of social work education, in each of which there needs to be reflected the conventional, developmental and social reform aspects of social work.

**Basic Level Social Work**

In most countries today there exists a very great need for basic level or grassroots workers. Within the conventional area of practice, or perhaps the social welfare dimension of society, there is a need for trained people to assist specific populations of children, the disabled, the elderly and the sick. Too often those in need of basic social welfare are left to families unable to cope, or hidden away in poorly staffed institutions or left to drift within communities. The best responses to such people may lie in better functioning families, better run institutions or more caring communities, but none of those ultimate responses is viable without some input from skilled staff. Basic social welfare epitomises the caring society, and calls for leadership from qualified workers. However, the level of training called for is not university level.

Turning to developmental social work practice, the experience which we have in the area of micro level or community-based social development clearly points to the need for, in some countries, an army of base level social development workers. Such workers will play the role of catalysts in local development among deprived populations, be they the poor, female-headed households, homeless youth, indigenous minorities or whoever. For example, South Africa's Reconstruction Plan calls for 5,000 such workers to be recruited, trained and deployed. Such workers should not be too far removed, in socio-economic-cultural terms, from those among whom they will work will require careful training but not a university education and will need to be deployed in response to local needs.
Let us not forget, however, that workers at this base level are in one of the most favourable positions to see the impact of existing policies, programmes and social institutions. Hence they are in a good position to see the need for reform and, if appropriately trained, to see the directions which reform should take.

The basic level of social work education should prepare students to practice at the basic level in areas of welfare, development and reform. Such education should be provided at an upper secondary or pre-tertiary level, with the capacity to prepare relatively large numbers for such work, in relatively short training courses, and not with expectations of prevailing professional salaries. If social work does not do this, others will.

The curricula of such courses will require some core subjects essential to all such workers, and some capacity for either schools or student groups to specialise in particular areas of either social welfare or development work, for example, work with children or rural development. The area(s) of specialisation should relate also to the location of schools and/or of the training (for example, rural schools or extended campus teaching in rural areas).

**Intermediate Level Social Work**

While the need for basic level workers in welfare and development is of paramount importance, such work will succeed only if the workers undertaking it are well-trained, supported, deployed and utilised. These are crucial tasks of the intermediate level of social work. There is a need to devise, initiate and supervise programmes of many kinds; there is a need to provide basic workers with appropriate supervision and support; the education of basic level workers requires regular involvement in continuing education, some of which the intermediate level social workers can provide; and the level of expertise of basic level workers will often be such that they will need to refer more difficult situations to this next level of workers.

Intermediate level social work thus calls for a level of knowledge, skills and practice competence additional to those required by the basic level worker. These requirements are very comparable to those already taught in most Bachelors/Masters degrees of social work courses today. The difficulty, however, is that those courses are today regarded as the base social work courses, and their graduates are, in terms of education, expectations and often background, beyond the level which basic level practice in the field signifies. At the same time, however,
they often lack many of the skills which the leadership of operations in the field calls for. For example, they will need to work through volunteers and basic level workers, playing a supervisory, supportive and enabling role, which calls for special skills. They will need to engage in programme leadership and administration, and to work with other disciplines and organisations at a regional level to plan, implement, coordinate and integrate regional welfare and development initiatives, and these roles also call for special skills. Finally, their role in utilising research and data collection as a base for contributing to the improvement of social policy, and hence to social reform, also has requirements in terms of worker attributes.

It is these roles, that pertain to the intermediate level of practice, which should guide all aspects of schools of social work catering for this level of preparation of social workers. The total range of knowledge and skills is rather daunting. In traditional terminology, knowledge for practice should cover key areas of economics, psychology, sociology and political science; methods courses should cover the traditional range, but be expanded to respond more fully to the requirements of social development work; fieldwork experience should have more exposure to the development field; and some opportunities to specialise should be made available. To dilute the coverage of the curriculum would be to detract from the effectiveness of programmes. However, to incorporate it all into a course of two to four years may be costly for all and represent overload for students. We need to experiment more with alternative education strategies — extended campus, block teaching, modulised education, perhaps reflecting set stages, and so on — to ensure that these courses are as effective as they can be, in practice, student and cost terms.

The advantage of a module approach is that a student may take the core module and an area of specialisation as the basis for practice; absorbing further models later, and perhaps in the course of practice over several years. The advantages of this approach are many: students can move into the field more quickly; schools may limit their range of available modules, if rural-based for example; education and practice experience can be more effectively integrated; the range of people involved in teaching might be expanded; and the overall cost of education could be reduced.

**Advanced Level Social Work**

There is clearly a third level of social work practice if social work is to assume its rightful place in the fields of macro level or national (or
even international) social planning, social policy and social administration. This level again embraces the three levels of social welfare provision, social development and social reform. At this advanced level, however, practitioners require a high level of ability to conceptualise situations clearly, and to operate within what are inevitably complex, multidisciplinary and highly political situations.

In the welfare field we are well familiar with the role of social work at the advanced levels of social policy development, social administration and general leadership in this area, although the small numbers of social workers in most countries with the confidence and ability to operate at this level is a major concern, and a reflection on social work education levels as they have existed in the past.

In the development field we have neglected this level perhaps even more than the other two. Yet if social workers are to play their role in relation to distorted and misguided development, as discussed earlier, or in relation to social reform generally, a good education at this advanced level is crucial. Basic courses in social development, even when postgraduate, will not suffice. Nor in many cases will research higher degrees because they tend to be too specific and too limited. Just as coursework doctoral degree are being introduced within conventional social work, so too are they required within the developmental social work field, and especially in relation to social reform.

**Conclusion**

In this paper I have argued that the development pursued world-wide in recent decades has resulted in a seriously divided world, and in prevailing forms and directions of development which can be described as distorted and misguided. The World Summit On Social Development in 1995, along with a host of articles and declarations, have sought to bring the world to face these realities. My fundamental conviction is that social work, and therefore social work education, must also realign itself to contribute to the goals of people-centred development with better levels of equality, justice and well-being for all peoples.

Social work must strive to oppose distorted and misguided development, and that challenge has many implications. We need to give more thought to what are appropriate development models; we have to stir up more commitment to implementing those models; and as schools of social work we need to train and educate people, at appropriate levels and with appropriate educational structures, to play a
leading role in social development. Such goals have implications for all of us.

What Does India Require of Social Work and Social Work Education?

As an outsider, let me venture, for your consideration, a few suggestions on what India requires of social work practice and education. First, India requires that social work education and practice exist at a good standard at all of the three levels depicted above. Currently the country may be inadequately served by all three levels, but seemingly the basic and advanced levels are inadequate.

Second, the range of practice emphases is too restricted to the conventional, and perhaps even somewhat biased in its coverage within that emphasis. Certainly the developmental and social reform emphases seem to be inadequately developed.

Third, and related to the above, the proportion of schools which are set up to recruit students form, and to train for work among the disadvantaged sectors of society is too small. India seems to me to need more rural-based schools within the more impoverished parts of the country, but such schools are likely to require significant external support. With the current thinking as to what constitutes a school of social work, it is not surprising that this state of affairs exists. But it has to change, and therefore the vision of what is a school of social work has to change.

In general, India requires a far greater commitment to poverty alleviation, and social work must be at the forefront of that endeavour. It requires a social welfare plan which is congruent with the realities of this country; and it will almost certainly need to pioneer some new models, which will require research, leadership and the ability to draw on experience logically and realistically. It requires a social development plan, based on sound principles in the Indian context, feasible and acceptable goals in this context, and able to draw on a large reservoir of commitment to implementing the plan.

Poverty alleviation, feasible social welfare services and an appropriate social development plan are three crucial underpinnings of human well-being in this country and essential strategies for building a better society for all Indians. Can social work ignore the challenge to develop these strategies, leaving them for others? If as a profession it is committed to building a better society and enhancing human well-being, then the answer is clearly no; no, it cannot ignore those
three challenges. So the role of social work education is to prepare social workers to work in these areas, and if it is to do that it must either disregard prevailing western models or add to them to the point where they become unrecognisable.

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