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# Social Workers in International Relief and Development: A Natural Fit



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## **ABSTRACT**

This study sought to examine the compatibility between social work competencies with humanitarian assistance job skills requirements in the market. A systematic analysis of international job descriptions (N=500) was conducted with a focus on the skills required of potential employees. The main themes identified and operationalized into discrete skills and/or behaviors were: technical expertise, intra- and extra-organizational competencies, personal abilities, sector specialization, education, and language requirements. To aid educators in curriculum building, the identified skills were cross-referenced with the Council on Social Work Education's *Education Policy and Accreditation Standards* practice behaviors to determine how they translate into standardized competencies. The study offers important implications for social work education and discusses several venues for social work employment in international relief and development careers. [AUTHOR ABSTRACT]

**Key words:** *international humanitarian jobs, employment, competencies, social workers*

## **Social Workers in International Relief and Development: A Natural Fit**

The world of humanitarian aid is a multibillion-dollar industry. Professionals from many sectors find rewarding careers in diverse global development and emergency response programs. When looking over the inter-professional teams that coalesce on the front lines of international relief and development work, one can find diverse specializations represented. Among the professions engaging in international work are medical, agricultural, finance, education, engineering, and business. Working with the world's poorest and responding to emergencies and social development concerns provides increasing opportunities for social workers to fill a myriad of job openings in the global development milieu, but human resource recruiters may not recognize how social work can contribute.

Expanding markets in the global humanitarian industry creates a growing demand for diverse professionals from different academic backgrounds including social work. However, misunderstandings regarding social work's fit with social development may contribute to the relatively low representation of social work in the international realm. In addition, the public's understanding of social workers as direct practitioners and/or child welfare workers may add to social workers' relatively low presence in social development careers. To answer a growing concern about social work and its place in international development, this study sought to examine the compatibility between social work competencies with humanitarian assistance job skills requirements in the market.

### **Interest in International Social Work**

Several reasons account for the increased interest in employment in international social work. First, social forces and global events such as worldwide migration have changed the composition of clients globally. Second, developed, developing, and re-developing nations share many common issues. Third, the information highway and social networking sites have increased global interdependence. Finally, this increase of information flow as well as shared problems/issues highlights that the actions of one country or region affect us all (Rodgers, 2005).

Historically, social work is represented in international community development, albeit not at levels that have kept up with the demand for people trained appropriately to carry out the purpose of social development. For example, international community development was discussed at a conference in 1923 (Brueggeman, 1996) and the first International Social Work Conference occurred in Paris in 1928 (Healy, 2008; Kendall, 2000). Today, there is an increasing interest in international practice by social work students and practitioners as they begin to understand that local problems are no longer a matter of local communities. Twenty-two schools of social work offer international and/or global concentration in their Masters of Social Work (MSW) curricula, and five offer a certificate in international social work ([www.cswe.org](http://www.cswe.org)). International field placements and study abroad have added to this interest (Johnson, 1996; Panos, Pettys, Cox, & Jonet-Hart, 2004). Today's MSW students even express an interest in employment in the United Nations, as well as governmental or international non-governmental (NGO) positions (Rodgers, 2005). In fact, in 2010, the major USA accrediting body for social work programs, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), published a *Guidebook for International Field Placements and Student Exchanges* (Lager, Mathiesen,

Rodgers, & Cox, 2010) detailing a model for social work schools to use when developing placements globally.

One of the earliest studies explored the skills and needs of international social work organizations (Healy, 1987). This article, entitled “International Agencies in Social Work Settings: Opportunity, Capability and Commitment” was published in *Social Work* (Healy, 1987). At that time, the organizations Healy surveyed indicated those seeking employment in their global organizations would need to have a certain skill set. These skills included cross-cultural understanding, comparative social policy analysis, concern with global problems, a general world view, grant writing, fiscal management, education and training techniques, and knowledge of the common aspects of social work worldwide (Healy, 1987). The technical skills required focused on the areas of social work that include: 1) Community organizing or community development; 2) Administration; 3) Social policy analysis; 4) Program design and development; and 5) Education and Training. To these skills and from the authors’ experience we can add: 1) A sense of collegiality with social workers in other countries; 2) A good sense of humor; 3) A high degree of flexibility, and 4) previous experience abroad. Much of what international organizations were looking for in the skill sets of individuals they employed are what social work education calls macro practice skills. An examination of the NGO Café website will indicate skills focusing on community organizing, participatory action research, administration skills, communication skills as well as training methods (NGO Café, 2010.)

American trained social workers need to demonstrate their understanding and use of the concepts of cultural sensitivity and global awareness in international work (Rodgers, 2004). Social work is an international profession and there is an increasing need for social workers to be active in globally focused work (Rodgers, 2005). Although Healy’s study points out that social workers are uniquely qualified to take on international global organizations jobs, there has been a clear gap for more than two decades that now requires the re-examination of the skill sets needed by social workers to take on international humanitarian assistance jobs. It is within this context that the present study takes a closer look at the current skill set required by international relief and development agencies vis-a-vis our social work competencies.

## **Methods**

The key method used for this study was descriptive content analysis. Babbie (2004) defines content analysis as the study of recorded human communication. This exploration involved a comprehensive analysis of social work-related humanitarian job descriptions (N=500). Our major research method used was conceptual (descriptive) content analysis rather than relational (inferential) content analysis. In our conceptual analysis model, we first identified the major themes and then recorded the number of occurrences of each theme within the job descriptions reviewed.

## **Sampling**

Sampling of the job descriptions used in this study was purposive. The research team used the largest free and open access online international development jobs on-line web sites most specifically, (Reliefweb) <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/res.nsf/doc212?OpenForm>, (Careers

United) [http://www.careersunited.org/home\\_jobseeker.asp?Lang=5](http://www.careersunited.org/home_jobseeker.asp?Lang=5), and (Devex) <http://www.developmentex.com/oppsummary.jsp>.

For the international development job descriptions to qualify for inclusion in this study, the job description was deemed to be “related” to social work practice. Only a few of the job descriptions (n=10) sampled actually requested that the degree to be considered for employment should be social work or related training. More frequently, the job description requested a degree in nonprofit management, in management in general, or in social science or a related discipline. There were some generic management descriptions that we reviewed, but most were sector-specific (health, finance, disaster, agriculture, etc.) and not directly linked to practice behaviors that would correlate directly with typical generalist social work practice.

### **Data Collection**

All job descriptions posted over a 24-month period from 2009 to 2010 were selected. Data was collected in two phases. In Phase 1 (the first six months) we used an inductive approach of data collection and worked monthly to identify the seven emergent themes of the first tier of job descriptions included in the sample (n=150). These early themes were codified by an expert team of two social work researchers; each working independently with their graduate assistants. During Phase 2 (the remaining 18 months), deductive data was codified into our pre-identified explicit themes (intra-organizational work skills, extra-organizational work skills and humanitarian specialization sector, and expertise), then aggregated and further operationalized and quantified into subthemes. A few additional outlier themes were found in this second phase and were noted in the narrative.

It should be noted that the international socio-economic context and the humanitarian crises occurring during the 2009-2010 period might have influenced or changed job descriptions, as more specific humanitarian jobs were needed and hence, posted.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis in this qualitative research was an ongoing process of bi-level codification and sub-theming. The primary focus of this analysis was to identify the implicit themes as they emerged such as education level requested attributes, languages required, and other typical employer defined characteristics found in most job announcements. It was after these overarching themes were identified that we began expanding our themes and quantifying the explicit characteristics of job opening requirements and initiated the aggregation process of sub-themes. The process of coding for this study was one of selective reduction and data saturation of the content. Then we tallied the number of times a similar request was identified in yet another international development job description posted online. It was by evaluating each of these job description characteristics that we articulated the findings presented in the following section of the paper.

### **Findings**

The main themes we identified in the job descriptions for positions with international relief or development organizations were: technical expertise, intra- and extra-organizational competencies, personal abilities, sector specialization, education, and language requirements. Using descriptive statistics, we first presented our findings based on the main seven themes that

emerged from the job description analysis; and second, we linked them to the EPAS 2008 Competencies.

Within the *technical expertise* theme, our data reveals that 56 percent (n=282) of the job descriptions required knowledge of social development. More specifically, of these 282 job descriptions that mentioned technical expertise, 15 percent (n=76) required knowledge on current social developments efforts, 26 percent (n=130) asked for familiarity with the international donor community, and 15 percent (n=76) an understanding of the donor funded community. The remaining 44 percent (n=218) called for technical knowledge on health-related issues (8 percent, 38 job descriptions), food security (4 percent, n=22), gender equality (4 percent, n=22), human rights (4 percent, n=19), economic theories (2 percent, n=10), and public relations (3 percent, n=19). Please see *Table 1*.

Table 1: Frequency Distribution Table for *Technical Expertise* in Job Descriptions

<b>Technical Knowledge</b>	<b>N (500)</b>	<b>%</b>
Current Developments	76	15
Familiar with International Donor Community	130	26
Human Rights	19	4
Gender Equity	20	4
Economic Theory	10	2
Donor Funded Projects	76	15
Health Issues	38	8
Food Security Nutrition Approaches	22	4
Public Relations	14	3

The sample of job descriptions reflects a wide range of *intra-organizational competencies* from project and financial management to more general ones, such as leadership, strategic planning, or marketing competencies (see Table 2). Out of the 500 job descriptions included in the study sample, the most requested intra-organizational competencies focused on advanced communication skills such as proposal and report writing (n= 335, 67 percent) followed by: training skills (n=288, 58 percent), financial management (n=224, 45 percent), advanced computer skills (n=220, 44 percent), program/project management (n= 206, 42 percent), organizational skills (n=205, 41 percent), leadership (n=195, 39 percent), team planning (n=166, 34 percent), security management (n=113, 23 percent), strategic planning (n=86, 17 percent), and to a lesser degree, grant and crisis management (n=45, 9 percent), human resources management (n=68, 14 percent), and marketing (n=9, 2 percent). For more details on these intra-organizational competencies, please see Table 2.

Table 2: Frequency Distribution for *Intra-Organizational Competencies* in Job Descriptions

<b>Intra-Organizational Competencies</b>	<b>N (500)</b>	<b>%</b>
Leadership	195	39
Advanced Communication (Proposal & Report writing, presentation)	337	67
Organizational Skills	205	41
Advanced Computer Skills	217	44
Grant Management	78	16
Crisis Management	1.8	9
Overall Management	174	35
Financial Management	224	45
Research	46	10
Human Resource Management	68	14
Team Planning	166	34
Strategic Planning	86	17
Program/Project Management	206	42
Training	288	58
Security Management	113	23
Situational Analysis	7	1
Logistics and Supply Chain Management	67	13
Marketing	9	2
Advocacy	3	1

The required *extra-organizational competencies* focus on donor relations (n=236, 47 percent), followed by the ability to foster networks (n=215, 43 percent), diplomatic skills (n=184, 37 percent), community development (n=62, 12 percent), fundraising (n=58, 12 percent), external/media relations (n=47, 9 percent), and working in faith-based settings (n=5, 15 percent) (see Table 3).

Table 3: Frequency Distribution for *Extra-Organizational Competencies* in Job Descriptions

<b>Extra-Organizational Competencies</b>	<b>N (500)</b>	<b>%</b>
Fundraising	58	12
Community Development	62	12
Donor Relations	236	47
Diplomatic Skills	184	37
Flexibility with Contractors	23	5
External/Media Relations	47	9
Networking	215	43
Working in Faith-Based Settings	7	1

*Personal abilities* of the applicant were identified as another major theme in the international social development job descriptions. The five specific areas included in this theme are: flexibility, strong inter-personal skills, negotiable problem-solving skills, cross-cultural skills, and adaptability (see Table 4).

Table 4: Frequency Distribution for *Personal Abilities* in Job Descriptions

<b>Personal Abilities</b>	<b>N (500)</b>	<b>%</b>
Flexibility	151	30
Strong Interpersonal Skills	164	33
Negotiable Problem Solving Skills	109	22
Cross Cultural Skills	104	21
Adaptability	49	10

Furthermore, our data highlights that the *sectors* in which development assistance jobs occur are: coordination and support services (n=242, 50 percent), multiple sectors (n=72, 15 percent), health sector (n=50, 10 percent), agriculture (n=36, 8 percent), human rights (n=18, 4 percent), and education and microfinance (n=14/each sector, 3 percent). For additional information, please see Table 5.



Table 5: *Sector of Job Descriptions*

<b>Sector Specialization</b>	<b>N (500)</b>	<b>%</b>
Agriculture	36	8
Coordination and Support Services	242	50
Education	14	3
Health	47	10
Human Rights	18	4
Refugees	7	1
Micro Finance	13	3
Shelter	6	1
Security	8	2
Water and Sanitation	14	3
Emergency Response	2	.4
Infrastructure	4	1
Multiple Sectors	72	15

The *level of education* required of the applicant was also one of the themes identified. From the 500 job descriptions included in the study, 61 percent (n=273) required a master's degree, 34 percent (n=149) a baccalaureate degree, 4 percent (n=16) a doctoral degree, and 1 percent (n=4) only certifications. A cross-tabulation between sector and level of education further helped us learn that jobs in the international social development arena tend to require a master's degree. For example, in coordination and support services, out of 213 job descriptions, 122 asked for a master's degree (57 percent) and only 80 (37 percent) for a baccalaureate level of education; in multiple sector jobs there is also a tendency to prefer master's degree employees (n=36) versus baccalaureate (n=16); in health we see the same patterns (27 vs. 15).

It is important to differentiate competency-levels between the baccalaureate degree and the MSW. Specifically, the competencies expected at the undergraduate level are general, that is, students are expected to be prepared to work, usually under supervision, in a generalist social work position. That attainment provides a basic level of achievement that insures quality even at the baccalaureate level. On the other hand, competencies achieved at the graduate level are, by definition, specific. A community practice concentration insures that graduates are prepared in specific, concentrated knowledge and practice behaviors, highly applicable to the practice of international social work and social development (see Table 6).

Table 6: Crosstabulation of Sector and Level of Education

	Degree			Certifications	Total
	Baccalaureate	Master's Degree	Doctoral Degree		
Agriculture	8	25	2	0	35
Coordination and Support Services	80	122	8	3	213
Education	2	9	1	0	12
Health	15	27	2	0	44
Human Rights	2	15	0	0	17
Refugee	3	3	0	0	6
Economic Enterprise	4	8	1	0	13
Shelter	4	2	0	0	6
Security	4	1	0	0	5
Water and Sanitation	7	6	0	0	13
Emergency Response	0	2	0	0	2
Infrastructure	1	3	0	0	4
Multiple	16	36	2	1	55
Total	146	259	16	4	425

Lastly, our findings suggest that holding a job in social development assistance requires that applicants should know multiple languages (65 percent, n=266), English (25 percent, n=125), or French and Arabic (2 percent each, n=9) (see Table 7).

Table 7: *Language Requirements in Job Descriptions*

	N	%
French	9	2
Arabic	7	2
Spanish	1	.2
Portuguese	1	.2
English	125	25
Dari	4	1
Bahasa	1	.2
Thai	2	1
Italian	1	.2
Multiples	266	65

To further understand our data and analyze them in the context of social work curricula, we juxtaposed the identified humanitarian assistance skills with the basic level social work competencies in order to illustrate their association. Table 8 identifies the competencies that underlie each humanitarian skill or task required and shows the behaviors derived from the competencies. That is, social work competencies into our CSWE's EPAS Competencies (Please see below Table 8).

EPAS COMPETENCIES	REQUIRED HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE SKILLS
2.1.1 Identify as a Professional Social Worker and Conduct Oneself Accordingly	<p><b>Intra Organizational Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- organizational skills</li> <li>- diplomatic skills</li> </ul> <p><b>Use of Self Characteristics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- adaptability</li> </ul>
2.1.3 Apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments	<p><b>Intra Organizational Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- advanced communication (proposal &amp; report writing/presentations)</li> </ul> <p><b>Extra Organizational Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- media relations</li> <li>- external relations</li> </ul>
2.1.4 Engage diversity and difference in practice	<p><b>Use of Self Characteristics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- cross cultural skills</li> </ul>
2.1.5 Understand the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination	<p><b>Intra Organizational Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- advocacy skills</li> </ul> <p><b>Technical Expertise</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- human rights</li> <li>- gender equality</li> </ul>
2.1.6 Engaged in research informed practice and practice-informed research	<p><b>Intra Organizational Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Survey development skills</li> <li>- Social development research</li> </ul>
2.1.7 Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment	<p><b>Intra Organizational Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- situational analysis</li> </ul> <p><b>Technical Expertise</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- economic theory</li> <li>- health issues</li> <li>- food security</li> </ul>
2.1.8 Engage in policy practice to advance social and economic well-being and to deliver effective social work services	<p><b>Intra Organizational Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- advocacy</li> </ul>

2.1.9 Respond to Contexts that Shape Practice	<p><b>Intra Organizational Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- leadership</li> <li>- crisis management</li> <li>- management and evolutionary skills</li> <li>- financial management</li> <li>- grant management</li> <li>- HR management</li> <li>- program management</li> <li>- training</li> <li>- marketing</li> <li>- advanced computer skills</li> </ul> <p><b>Technical Expertise</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- current developments</li> <li>- familiar with the international donor community</li> <li>- donor funded projects</li> <li>- public relations</li> </ul> <p><b>Use of Self Characteristics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Flexibility</li> </ul>
2.1.10 Engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate with individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities	<p><b>Intra Organizational Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Team planning</li> <li>- Strategic planning</li> <li>- Security management</li> <li>- Logistics and supply chain management</li> </ul> <p><b>Extra Organizational Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fund raising</li> <li>- Community development</li> <li>- Donor relations</li> <li>- Media relations</li> <li>- Flexibility with contractors</li> <li>- Networking</li> <li>- Working with faith based settings</li> </ul> <p><b>Use of Self Characteristics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Negotiable problem solving skills</li> </ul>

## Discussion

The purpose of the social work profession is to promote human and community well-being. Guided by a person and environment construct, a global perspective, respect for human diversity, and knowledge based on scientific inquiry, social work's purpose is actualized through its quest for social and economic justice, the prevention of conditions that limit human rights, the elimination of poverty, and the enhancement of the quality of life for all persons (Global Commission, <http://www.cswe.org/File.aspx?id=39366>). Through CSWE's EPAS, social work educational programs have been consistently committed to train practitioners, researchers, and educators who can work in a global landscape. Our study findings demonstrate that social workers are well qualified to work in an international relief and development arena because of the competencies they are trained in: working with diverse groups, communities and macro-factors; promoting social change; undertaking social research; and taking on leadership and

administrative roles. Yet, there are very few jobs that specifically list social work as a preferred degree. The phrase “a related field” is often used in job descriptions, which allows an opportunity for those with diverse degrees to apply. In such cases, applicants have to make a strong case for their candidacy in the cover letter and during the interview process. For those with a social work degree, citing the CSWE EPAS is a way to explain the legitimacy of the social work degree by elaborating competencies that a social work education provides.

However, often times it is not the lack of competencies that hold back social workers from pursuing jobs in international relief and development fields, but the weak preparation of students in job seeking and career development. As social work schools take charge of training the best social work cadre of this century, they ought to consider investing in developing strong career development components through which students go beyond learning about how to craft their resumes and cover letters, but focus on the understanding of the job market landscape, and the development of a specific skill set to approach institutions and job openings with confidence.

Lastly, with our need for professional identity, there is yet another layer of challenge – that of the *licensure bias*. It seems that increasingly, as macro practice faculty, we are fighting the pressure to prepare our students to pass the licensure exams leaving the macro skills marginalized in a student’s overall preparation. As our study shows, many of the current jobs in international development are for administrative and community practice. Just how we address the contemporary challenge to prepare students for vendership or prepare them for full systems advanced generalist models will be a discussion that will continue for years to come. It is clear the job demands for global social workers includes them having well-rounded training that is heavily focused on macro practice skills.

### **Job Seeking Tips for International Relief and Development Fields**

When on the job market, it is important to consider where the international jobs are located. An informal survey of a US-based international development NGO membership organizations shows that the top three locations in the United States are Washington, DC, New York, and California. As a hub of the US federal government, Washington, DC, is where decisions are made and money is disbursed. Two notable international governmental institutions are the State Department, which coordinates and implements US foreign policy, and the US Agency for International Development, which funds and implements projects that aid social and economic development overseas. Many federal agencies such as the Departments of Education, Labor, Commerce, and Health and Human Services have international divisions. Also, many NGO headquarters are located in DC making it a city for a plethora of international job opportunities. Washington, DC, is also the headquarters of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the world’s two major social development and economic institutions.

New York (primarily New York City) is a major financial capital of the world. The recent proliferation of social and microenterprise initiatives in international development has attracted the financial services industry to apply their expertise internationally and collaborate with NGOs to promote small business initiatives and local enterprises overseas. In addition, New York is the headquarters of many Fortune 500 companies such as Walmart, Chevron, Ford Motors, etc. Many of these companies have philanthropic and international divisions with programs overseas, which provide diverse employment options. New York is also the

headquarters to many foundations and international NGOs and is the home to the United Nations, making it an international city with a variety of international employment opportunities.

California, particularly in the Silicon Valley area, is a hub for technology and innovation in the United States, which attracts technology-oriented companies like Apple, Microsoft and Intel, etc. Many of these new innovations have benefits internationally for poor, rural populations; innovations such as the use of solar energy for cooking and powering products that are green, energy efficient ways to improve the quality of life for the poor. This creates opportunities for those with a social work background to partner with companies and organizations in this area to assist communities in learning how to use new technology and determine how it can be beneficial to the entire community. Silicon Valley is also another source of funding and partnering for NGOs.

There are many international job opportunities in the non-profit and public sectors; however, one sector that is often overlooked for international development opportunities is the private (for-profit) sector. Within the private sector, large companies often have a corporate social responsibility division, particularly if a company has operations overseas, where child labor, wage and labor disputes, or environmental degradation may be prevalent. This would be an ideal position for someone with community-building skills, such as applicants with a background in social work.

Having the correct mix of skills and experience is extremely important for an international job applicant to be successful. One key skill for working internationally is foreign language ability. A large number of international job announcements require a foreign language (non-English), particularly when working overseas. Currently, the Middle East is one of the largest recipients of US aid; therefore, knowing a language from this region is important—(Dari, Pashto, Arabic). If a job applicant is interested in working in sub-Saharan Africa, French, Portuguese, or Swahili would be helpful, depending on the country. Haiti is also a large recipient of international aid so to work there, knowledge of French or Haitian Creole would be advantageous.

Overseas experience is often a pre-requisite for international jobs and there are a variety of ways to gain experience whether an individual is in school or not. Options for international experience for students include internships, fellowships, and international field placements. For those who are already working professionals, they could put their skills to use by participating in an international service learning program. These programs encompass fields such as health and education, to name a few. For those who are not in school, the Peace Corps, church mission trips, or finding independent volunteering opportunities are alternative options. When volunteering independently, it is important to research organizations thoroughly and speak with people who have previously worked or volunteered with a particular organization. Also, it is important to determine whether the volunteer work is substantive and new skills can be attained. It is also important to recognize that not all international work is done overseas. There are many options to help international populations domestically, through working and volunteering with organizations that provide services to immigrant and refugee communities.

Certificate and online training programs contribute to skill improvement including disaster management and response, international development and nonprofit management. Specifically, there are online modules and courses on microfinance, gender equity and impact

evaluation that provide opportunities to become familiar with a variety of sectors and their assessment tools. It is important to stay current with trends in the international arena by monitoring the projects and programs NGOs and government agencies implement and fund. Following organizations on Twitter, “liking” them on Facebook, and signing up for e-newsletters are effective ways to remain up-to-date.

Lastly, utilizing a personal network and your social capital is an important, informal way to find an international position (Luca Sugawara, 2009). Professional networks allow members to connect with like-minded individuals who share similar interests. This can be done through attending and volunteering at conferences and charity events. Major cities where large NGOs are based often hold annual fundraisers and conferences, which are excellent venues for networking. Many of these events are quite expensive so volunteering may be a more affordable option. Joining international organizations such as United Nations chapters, Society for International Development chapters, or Rotary International, are essential ways to meet people working in the international arena who can connect with others in the field.

### **Study Limitations**

The limitations of this study reflect similar subjective challenges associated with all qualitative research. The findings are not intended to be generalized. More specifically, one of the most significant limitations is the selection of actual job descriptions. Defining social work related job descriptions is a subjective process and relied heavily on the intuition of the graduate assistants conducting the data collection. The validity in this sampling process improved as we refined the theming.

As mentioned earlier, the job descriptions selected were impacted by the global crisis happening in Haiti during the time of the data collection. While emergencies are common to the international social work milieu, this research period was heavily biased with the global crisis occurring at the time of data collection.

### **Implications for Social Work Education**

There is an increasing mandate that social work education prepares students for practice in a complex multicultural and globally contextual environment. Though the CSWE uses the EPAS, social work schools are charged to prepare social workers to work in a global landscape, whether to specifically focus on human rights, human trafficking, or child welfare (CSWE, 2008).

Thus, social work faculty can no longer design curriculum from the ivory towers down, but should instead listen and connect with the requirements and skills needed to fulfill contemporary job openings. Global social work faculty scholars need to establish long-term service/research partnerships with hiring NGOs and IOs. Both our program curriculum and the EPAS requirements must remain grounded to the realities of global front-line field changes and the skills and practice behaviors that will position our students to better compete for job openings.

### **Slow Response to Emergent Trends**

Academic institutions are often like large ships running slow and steady, but difficult to turn very fast. It is hard to change our traditions that are often perceived as proven. Creative

change agents often hear “it is always the way we have done things here!” Global development is a rapidly changing environment and often needs to reflect emergency scenarios where our students and faculty need to go and take advantage of on-the-ground learning experiences. When it takes six months to a year to plan a global trip with our students, how can we expect to train them for the global development relief context? Much of what we need to teach our students to address is emergency response. When a massive tsunami happens but we are unable to deploy to do field training until months after the campus legal counsel has cleared our training trip, how can our students build the responsive skills required for this global industry?

We need proactive plans with our administrators that position us to deploy immediately with our students when training opportunities for preparing them for meeting diverse humanitarian needs. As noted in the findings of the study, flexibility is a central mandate for being a successful international development professional. Institutionally, we need to position our program’s flexibility to match the impromptu demands of a very dynamic industry.

### **Demand for MSW Evidence-based Practitioners**

With the increasing curricular emphasis on evidence-based practice, are we preparing our students for careers in a highly donor driven results-oriented work environment? The accountability skills we teach our graduate students must place them in a prime preparedness position for a leadership role in global development. There is often a perceived threat to jobs for their nationals when other than graduate trained professionals request international work visas. Therefore, the advanced research skills that we train MSW students with prepare them to lead evidence-based results-oriented field project teams funded with a mandate for improved accountability.

### **Inter-Professional Education**

Social work students need to be trained to work interprofessionally. International development is a multi-sector work environment and as project leaders, professionally trained students will need to work with agricultural, health, environmental, engineers, finance, lawyers, and many other experts. Providing leadership of diverse work teams is a skill that all globally contextual social workers need to be ready for. Mediation and conflict resolution are not often front and center among our required practice behaviors, but for international professionals, they become of central importance.

### **Expanded Role for CSWE Global Commission and Katherine Kendall Institute**

Historically, Katherine A. Kendall left us a legacy mandate to better meet professional global needs. CSWE’s Global Commission and the Katherine A. Kendall Institute (KAKI) are wonderful instruments to improve global awareness of social work and the key leadership roles we can fill in complex intervention environments. KAKI focuses on the social work perspective of three primary topic areas: (1) Disaster management and response, (2) Human migration, and (3) Human rights. The Institute conferences, workshops, and panels annually address these topic areas. However, since social marketing is one of the weaknesses of our profession, perhaps a joined effort between KAKI and the Global Commission may be a good starting point to focus on social work branding.



## **Conclusion**

This study offers only a beginning attempt to explore the compatibility between social work competencies with humanitarian assistance job skills requirements in the market. Our research highlights that the competencies covered in social work curricula match the skills-set required in the international relief and development assistance job market. Advanced social workers are uniquely prepared for international relief and development leadership careers. However, social work is lacking career development plans that link the profession to the landscape of international relief and development job markets and social marketing. Adding to this, the social work profession continues to struggle to brand itself among jobs that compete with MPH, MBAs, MSAs, and MPA. Too often social workers work incognito and are reluctant to share their background and training. Our professional pride should be visible and we need to urge large NGOs and IOs to appreciate the unique whole systems perspectives that we bring to complex global leadership teams. We should continue to educate the global humanitarian industry about the unique brand and training that we bring to enhance their successful project outcomes. Sharing openly and unapologetically our social work identity will go a long way in beginning to address the often negative stereotypes that can mask the outstanding professional contribution social workers make. Those of us with Ph.Ds. are often eager to use that as our credibility marker rather than use our MSW.

Much more field-centered research needs to be done to better identify the practice-relevant demands of the front-line humanitarian workforce. We need to ask much more complex questions in future research such as: What roles exist for micro practitioners seeking employment in international social work? What type of positions do social workers with advanced training hold in the NGO community? What is social work contributing to the US policy planning for global social development? What is social work's influence in the world of major donors and governmental organizations? With the global expansion of social work education, another venue of research could address: How do the resources of developed nations and their social work education program support those of emerging schools of social work to place indigenous social workers within their own countries' humanitarian workforce?

Globalization with both the positive and negative consequences it produces are most likely not reversible. Yet, as social work educators, we can be part of the globalization problem or we can continue to work tirelessly to promote the best cadre for this century, a century that is in great need of social work practitioners ready to positively impact global justice and improve services for the world's most vulnerable and marginalized groups. Our social work students are positioned to make a difference. It is up to us to use our passions and expertise to train them to meet these real world issues with global practice skills. The world's next crisis will surely call each of us to our own moment of professional global accountability.

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