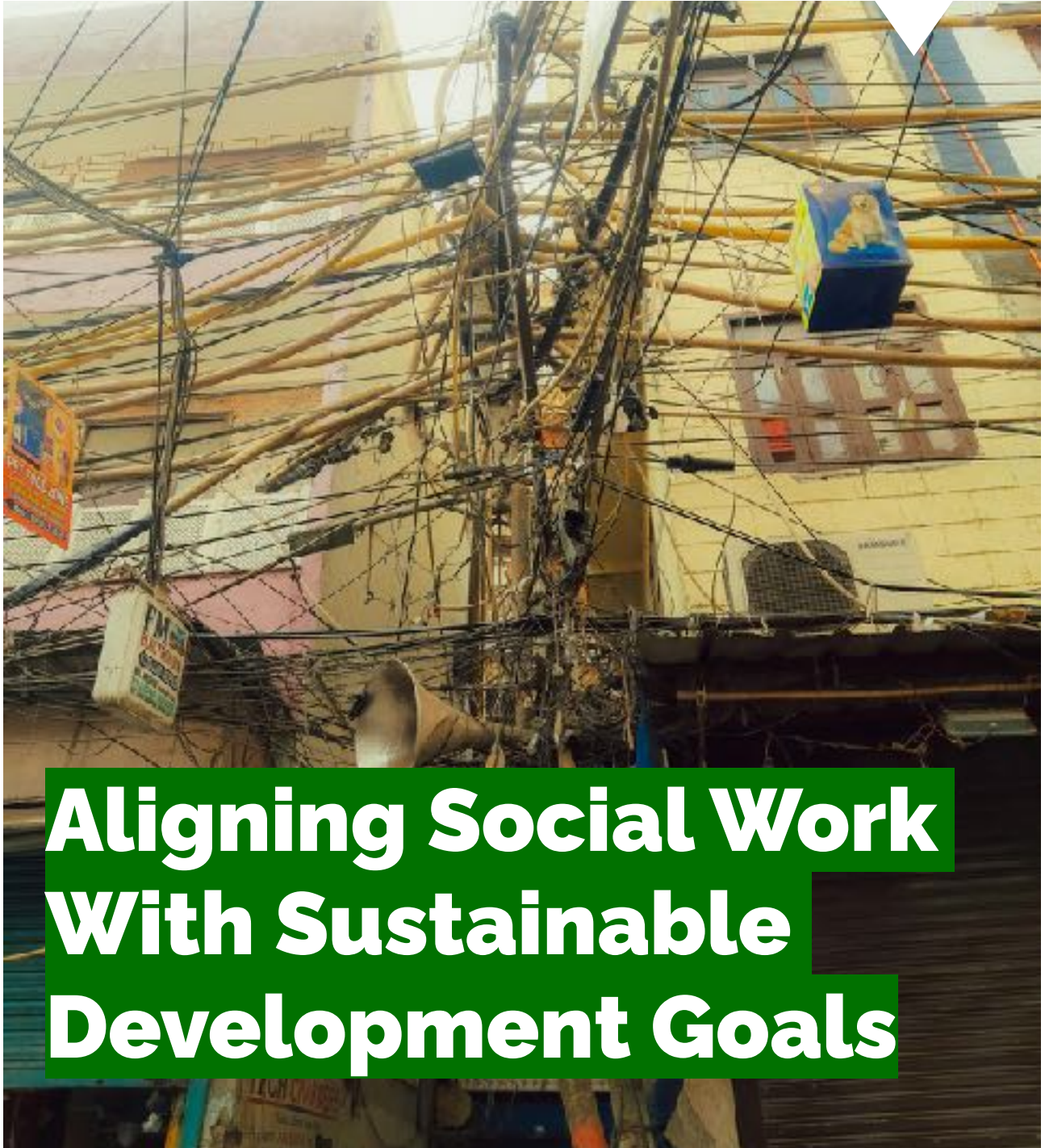


# SocialDialogue

Free Magazine of The International Association of Schools of Social Work



**Aligning Social Work  
With Sustainable  
Development Goals**

## Social Dialogue #28

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Editor-in-chief  
Carolyn Noble, PhD

# Editorial:

Social work unequivocally supports the United Nations Agenda 2030 Social Development Goals (SDGs) see *Social Work and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - International Federation of Social Workers* (ifsw.org) and *The Routledge International Handbook of Social Development, Social Work, and the Sustainable Development Goals - International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW)* (iassw-aiets.org)

As a first, over 193 nations came together to map a global agenda that links economic, social and ecological concerns for the present and future generations with regard to sustainable livelihoods, poverty reduction, education, climate change, disaster risk management, gender and cultural equity and addressing income disparities across the globe. The aim of this global initiative is to foster sustainable development for the overall betterment of humanity and the planet (that's got to be a good thing, YES!).

The 17 SDGs can be clearly linked to social works' pedagogical, academic, and community endeavours and initiatives as articles in this special edition demonstrate. Contributors from India, Malaysia, Germany, Spain, The Kingdom of Eswatini, Zimbabwe, Kyrgyzstan, USA and Indigenous Australia exemplify how social work is contributing to this vision for economic, social and environmental justice locally as well as internationally. In having a whole issue devoted to the linkage between social work's continuing support for achieving these goals by 2030 we see that social work continues to place itself as a key international social policy and practice professional. As many governments are struggling to enact these goals, we see from this edition that social work academics, students, and practitioners are already taking an active role.

We thank Dr Sheeja Karalam for guest editing this 28th edition and send Professor Annamaria Campanini best wishes for the future as she finishes her terms as IASSW's President. She has given so much to social work in her outstanding leadership over the last 8 years and her support for this magazine realises two of IASSW's key commitments to engage with social work educators in international exchange of information and expertise and to foster ecological, social and economic justice.

Enjoy!

**Dolly Paul Carlo, PhD**

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# The difficulties social workers have when putting interventions into reality to achieve the SDGs

Social Work is a profession that provides help to persons in need which aims to enhance the well-being of individuals, groups, and communities, especially those who are marginalized, oppressed, or vulnerable. Social workers promote social justice, human rights, and social change through various interventions either at macro, meso and micro level. Social workers in their practice setting, cannot diverge from their plan of actions and the effectiveness of their interventions relies on how thoroughly and holistically their assessment (Dolly, 2020). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are relevant and synchronous with social work aims and practice (Karen et al., 2022; Jayasooria, 2016).

In addition, the SDGs are significantly aligned with social work's focus on individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities as intervention targets to promote well-being. The SDGs have provided a framework and useful road-map to unite social work and social development efforts for action aiming to address human needs, the planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership in order to meet the needs of vulnerable individuals and communities worldwide (Karen et al., 2022; Jayasooria, 2016). Therefore, involvement of all key stakeholders is essential to mobilize and to achieve the SDGs by the 2030 target date (Karen et al., 2022). Within the agile world, social work interventions should be consolidated and oblique with the SDGs in bringing about change the well-being of their service users. The

effectiveness of social work interventions, nevertheless, depends on their context and overtime context. The SDGs provide social workers with a holistic intervention framework of practice, but in the process of interventions and aiming to make SDGs real, there are challenges for them.

## **"Teach how to catch the fish rather than give a fish"**

Often, in social work, the saying "Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime". This saying can tie in with the concept of empowerment in social work that often cannot be translated into real practice. The empowerment is the purpose of social work, no matter which end of the transaction intervention is directed (Parsons, 1991). The struggling aggregation of this paradigm within the culture and political context of social service providers in certain settings creates challenges for social workers in their practices. Social work deals with society and works side by side with various social services that are full of diversity. The interventions to achieving the SDGs will be unenviable in the context of the environment where the opportunities for social workers in the context of practicing are limited to practicing the concept of 'Teach a man to fish'. The role of social workers in the implementation of the SDGs and finding synergies with social services are very vital in addressing a specific goal relevant to target groups. As Ling (2022) highlighted in community empowerment, the role of the social worker is vital to building bridges-enabling access to human needs and life opportunities. Community work as part of social work interventions in applying this concept and integrating with the SDGs in reality depends on the paradigm and approaches of social services that social workers attach. A great deal of social services is performed just like services. This will challenge social workers to encourage their target group to achieve the SDGs. For instance, in the context of no poverty, if social services provide approaches like 'giving fish and feeding for a day'. Social services and social work practice are supposed to be committed to evidence-based interventions and they incorporate this approach into implementing effective promoted practice either at individual or community levels.

## **Assessing the surface of the problem**

Those who are not trained but considered and played their role as social workers, these uncommon conflicts and challenges (Amar Singh, 2023; Jayasooria, 2016; Ismail Baba, 1992) for social work to be recognized as a profession. Competent social workers have a large indefinite amount needed in their practice. Competence in relation to their ethical practice has always been stressed that trained social workers follow the necessary knowledge, principles, values and ethics, skills, and systematic methods to provide professional service. Assessment is an integral component in social work practice and competence social workers in assessing their target groups will determine appropriate interventions to be carried out (Dolly, 2020). Social workers are trained to identify and assess holistically the needs of service users. Holistic and thorough assessment will bring an appropriate plan of actions and interventions. More often, a wrong assessment will not benefit the well-being of the target

groups. Assessment is not a one-off activity but should be a continuous activity as an assessing process in the whole context of a situation rather than diagnosing the surface of the problem. Öztürk et al., (2022) highlighted that social workers need to be able to critically evaluate the associated processes and results in order to play an active role in the achievement of the SDGs. Diagnosing the surface will create intervention to quickly fix the problem. In addition, understand the whole environment of the problems rather than 'pathologizing' the individuals of service users. Jayasooria (2016) summarized that social workers must work with their service users as partners in development and address issues of injustice and inequality, not be busy processing application forms based on eligibility for the grant or service but focusing on making a comprehensive assessment of the needs and issues for a range of intervention strategies. As Mohd Azahari (2022) highlighted, the SDGs requires social workers who are knowledgeable, skilled and competent in planning and implementing action plans to achieve the agenda and goals outlined for the survival and to ensure the well-being of the target group. Therefore, empowering and strengthening the competence of social workers as a tool in assessing their target groups is required in order for appropriate interventions to be carried out and in making the SDGs become reality.

## **Lack of collaboration and working in partnerships/a multidisciplinary team**

Social workers are not working in a vacuum and do not work alone. Social work relies on collaboration and working in partnerships and a multidisciplinary team with various stakeholders, such as clients, colleagues, organizations, communities, and policymakers. Social services are part of a multidisciplinary system that provides integrated support, engaging and brings together agencies to engage in community partnerships actively involved. Without collaboration and working in partnership with them, social work interventions would not be reached out and in achieving the SDGs will become reality. Building effective social work partnerships can enhance the quality and impact of social work practice, as well as their professionalism. Lack of collaboration and working in partnerships and a multidisciplinary team is one of the challenges for social work intervention in achieving the SDGs to become reality. Making social work interventions into reality to be relevant and synchronous applicable to the SDGs is necessary and the spirit of working in collaboration in partnerships and a multidisciplinary team in practice.

There is a tendency for social workers to work alone and it is one of the challenges if social work is done in non-social-work settings (Klein, 1959) where there is lack of work in multidisciplinary teams with other professions and people from within the same agencies or other agencies. Klein (1959) has emphasized that "if social work is to perform effectively in a non-social-work setting, all parts of the organization must have well-defined functions and procedures so that there is a clear understanding of the various areas of responsibility". Working with various professionals and people from other agencies enables social workers to provide a joined-up service, maximizes services and prevents duplication of services. In addition, one of the main benefits of working in collaboration and partnerships and a

multidisciplinary team allows for a holistic and comprehensive assessment and intervention of the clients' needs and strengths. By bringing together different perspectives, skills, and knowledge, the team can offer more bespoke and effective solutions to the complex and multifaceted problems that social workers encounter.

Moreover, working in collaboration within a multidisciplinary team can enhance the quality and efficiency of the service delivery, as it reduces duplication, fragmentation, and gaps, in particular in the provision of care. Working together and supporting each other to communicate essential information, sharing ideas and pooling skills and knowledge are needed in order for appropriate social work interventions to be carried out. Additionally, working in a collaboration and working in partnerships/a multidisciplinary team can foster professional development, learning, and innovation, as the team members can share their expertise, feedback, and ideas, and learn from each other's experiences and practices. Making the SDGs into reality will become difficult without support, collaboration and working in partnerships/a multidisciplinary team with the social workers. Social work interventions cannot respond alone with support and engagement from others.

## **Limited resources and access to resources with evolving the nature of social life**

There is no single and standard model for social work to work with service users and implementing appropriate interventions as it is the "constantly evolving nature of social life" (Parker, 2013). How the system is operating, availability and accessibility of resources will influence social work interventions. Pooling of resources; head, heart, hands, and joint action are needed by social work interventions to walk side by side in making the reality of SDGs and 'leave no one behind'. In many instances, in particular in developing countries, social workers allocate limited resources and resources always as challenges. In addition to access to getting limited resources due to geographical or political practices is also an obstacle to this. When resources are limited, all eligible people, groups, communities, and organizations would and should receive an equal share of what is available. But when resources are limited and society is transforming at a rapid pace, it is critical for social workers to respond to the evolving nature of social life (Parker, 2013). Often, social workers face dilemmas in thinking about equality and quality but to use and emphasize the procedures used to allocate limited resources rather than the actual outcome. The procedures have influenced decision making and, at the end of the day, challenge social workers to understand the reality of SDGs.

## **Conclusion**

Social work as a committed profession-dealing with social problems, functions in various contexts and within complex situations. Working in complex contexts such as in terms of resources, policies, social problems, culture, and belief will influence social work interventions. How social work is functioning and response to many different contexts in

which it operates will determine their interventions in order to make the reality of the SDGs. Understanding the context and utilization of a holistic approach to social work will influence the way social workers think and what to do, and this will strengthen the way their work and intervention is carried out by their service users. The challenges faced by social work practice should be addressed holistically. The innovative framework for approaching the SDGs through various social services and social work education and practice in the future should be a promising approach and relevant to its context. How best to integrate and frame a social work approach and practice in strengthening the SDGs with various social services must be further explored in order to sustain its development and achieve goals.

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