

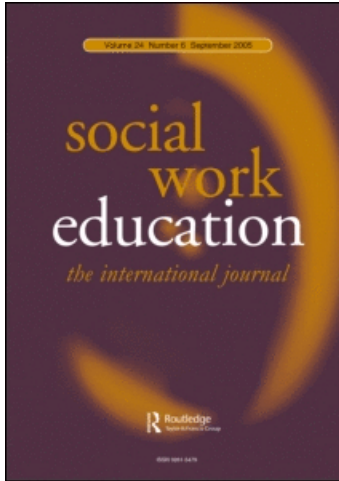
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### Professional Social Work Education in Mongolia: Achievements, Lessons Learned and Future Directions

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# Professional Social Work Education in Mongolia: Achievements, Lessons Learned and Future Directions

Oyut-Erdene Namdaldagva, Sugarmaa Myagmarjav & Denise Burnette

*This article describes the development of professional social work and its education system in Mongolia since the country's transition to a democratic, free-market society after the Soviet Union collapsed in 1990. The authors begin within an overview of the social and economic exigencies brought on by this historical transition in order to provide a context for understanding both universal rationales for introducing social work in a society and the distinctive character of the profession in Mongolia. They then discuss the developmental trajectory of the profession in four phases: pre-professional (before 1996); launching and early professional (1996–2000); capacity building (2001–2006); and institutionalization (2007–present). Each phase has its own actors, issues, priorities, and outcomes, but all aim toward the commitment to relieve suffering and promote well-being among individuals, families and communities in Mongolia. In addition to highlighting key achievements, the authors conclude with some of the main structural, systemic, and professional challenges that remain and a call to action during the next phase of development.*

*Keywords: Social Work; Social Work Education; Professional Development; Mongolia*

## Introduction

In an oft-cited treatise on the subject, Eliot Freidson (1986) views the professions as authoritative in the pragmatic sense of setting the legal, political, and economic limits within which everyday professional work can go on reasonably securely and of guiding the provision of the political and economic resources without which the circumstances and opportunities for work cannot exist. (p. 36)

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This conceptualization of the professions leads naturally to questions of how the prerogatives and parameters of an emerging profession are established and legitimized in a given context. The social work profession in particular tends to arise in response to and be fundamentally shaped by context, that is to say social, cultural and geographic conditions and local, regional and global political economies. The rise of the social work profession in Mongolia illustrates this developmental process.

### **Mongolia: The Context**

Mongolia is a landlocked country in Central and East Asia that is situated, more and less comfortably over the course of its millennial history, between Russia and China. This location, together with its rich historical traditions, gives Mongolia a unique cultural blend of Eastern and Western influences integrated with the norms and values of a traditionally nomadic lifestyle. The country has the socio-demographic distinction of being the least densely populated country in the world. Its population of only 2.7 million is dispersed over 1.5 million square kilometers (Maps of the World, 2010), an expanse comparable to that of Western Europe, yielding an average of only 1.7 people per square kilometer.

Mongolia is also a country of climatic extremes. Social and cultural life revolve around temperatures that range from  $-40^{\circ}\text{C}$  during long, harsh winters to  $+40^{\circ}\text{C}$  in short, dry summers. The most recent winter exemplifies how deeply extreme climatic conditions affect social life and social welfare needs. Known locally as a *dzud*, the particularly harsh winter of 2010 killed 8 million animals, or 18% of the nation's livestock, in a country where the livelihood of a third of the population relies on herding. By mid-May 2010, over 32,700 families had lost at least half of their animals; 8,711 had no livestock left ('Mongolia's winter disaster spurs urban migration', *EurasiaNet.org*, 2010). As Alгаа (2007) observes, migration in Mongolia, as in most countries, is a survival strategy. The only option for many who are affected by severe climates is to seek work in urban areas. Mongolia's urban population exceeds 1 million and rural-to-urban migration flows continue to grow, especially to the capital city of Ulaanbaatar. According to the 2000 Population and Housing Census (NSO, 2001), a third of the people in Ulaanbaatar are migrants and almost half of the entire population of Mongolia lives in Ulaanbaatar (NSO, 2009).

The dominant religion in Mongolia is Tibetan Buddhism. Most citizens are of Mongol ethnicity, though Kazakhs, Tuvans, and other minorities also live in the country, especially the west. Like many other developing countries, Mongolia is experiencing a demographic transition, whereby declining fertility and mortality rates are leading to an aging population. At present, though, children aged 0–14 comprise 32.6% of the population and those aged 65 and over represent 4.1% (NSO, 2007). Universal secondary education is the central feature of the Mongolian educational system; the adult literacy rate is 97.3%, and in 2007 the Human Development Index was 0.727, ranking the country 115th among 182 countries (UNDP Statistics, 2009).

These cultural attributes and sociodemographic trends certainly contribute to the parameters around professional social work in late twentieth-century Mongolia, but

the chief catalyst for the emergence of this new profession and source for defining its prerogatives was the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1990. In 1991, Mongolia shifted from a one-party to a multi-party political system as it transitioned to democracy and Russia, its main source of support, abruptly stopped its aid. A deep recession ensued, leading to the emergence of a wide range of social problems that required major changes in the social welfare system.

Examples of these pressing issues included a marked deterioration in overall living standards, rising unemployment, homelessness, 'street' children, family disruption and substance abuse. The country has since made significant strides towards political reform, the adoption of a free-market structure, and privatization of the formerly state-run economy, but, importantly, these gains have also led to sharp price hikes in essential utilities, with negative effects on real incomes of the poor (Nixon and Walters, 2006). Therefore, even with growth in per capita GDP in recent years, 22% of Mongolians still subsist on less than US\$1.25 per day (United Nations, 2009).

The shift to urban living, daily social and economic challenges, and the incursion of Western lifestyles are also negatively affecting the health of individuals and the nation. Sedentary lifestyles, family- and work-related stress and deleterious health behaviors like smoking, alcohol abuse, poor nutrition and risky sexual behaviors, for example, contribute to a rising incidence of communicable and non-communicable diseases. These behaviors are often compounded by widespread self-medication, excessive use of antibiotics, and environmental risks such as short supplies of safe drinking water, poor sanitation, and dangerous levels of air pollution. Community participation and inter-sectoral collaboration to prevent and ameliorate environmental health hazards is low, especially in rural and peri-urban areas (Ministry of Health, 2005).

With this contemporary context of Mongolia in mind, we next turn our attention to the development of social work as an institutionalized instrument of change. We discuss this topic in terms of four discrete periods; but we hasten to note inevitable overlap among the phases, which reflects the incremental and recursive nature of building a new profession.

### **Background of Social Work Education Development in Mongolia**

Mongolia has an age-old, rich helping tradition. Since ancient times, the survival of nomadic groups depended on mutual assistance. For more than eight centuries, through various historical upheavals, political regimes, and societal structures the government has systematically attended, in policy and in practice, to the well-being of the overall populace and more particularly to the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable citizens. The most recent shift to a democratic political system and free-market economy brought pervasive changes in social, economic, political, and legislative systems—changes that incorporate principles of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. Not unlike the development of the social work profession in Eastern Europe in the 1990s, the core ethos of Mongolian social work is that of social reconstruction and the building of a civil society (see Cox and Pawar, 2006). As the new constitution, adopted in 1992, declares, Mongolia is, 'aspiring toward the supreme objective of developing a humane, civil, democratic society in the country'.

Free market democracy also lends itself to social and economic stratification and devolution of responsibility for the planning and delivery of social welfare services from the state to market and professional entities. Major structural reforms in social services thus followed, as Mongolia's international relations expanded and international organizations established themselves in the country. Paralleling and complementing the introduction of professional social work, numerous and varied civil society groups and non-governmental organizations dedicated to social welfare issues emerged and continue to grow.

Ilmakunnas and Kop (2007) show how different decisions made by the Finnish and Israeli governments to cope with economic challenges between 1990 and 2007 had major repercussions on social welfare in these countries. A main point of their argument, which is relevant here, is that since rapid social change inevitably brings changes in social welfare, these situations should be examined more systematically. To date, changes in economic and social policy in Mongolia have wrought mixed outcomes. At least in the short run, the potential benefits of democracy are overshadowed by the immediate pressures of abrupt, radical changes that have brought rapid inflation, factory shut-downs and job losses, food insecurity and scarcity of consumer goods, and a full range of related social problems. It is within this context that professional social work has emerged in Mongolia—both to help individuals, families and communities cope with the exigencies of rapid, precipitous change and to help foster and shepherd the development of civil society.

Provisions for social work services and social workers are encoded in Mongolian legislation, e.g. the Law on Social Welfare, the Law on Education, and the Law against Domestic Violence. These laws and related regulations define the role of a social worker within the scope and authority of the particular law. The government currently sanctions social work in five settings: schools, social welfare agencies, probation centers, hospitals, and public community offices in each 'khoroo' (the smallest administrative unit). Social workers also hold jobs in national and international governmental organizations.

Codification of provisions for social welfare and social work practice and education is a critical step toward professionalization, as not all people who are titled 'social worker' have the requisite credentials. Reports on the development of social work in Mongolia<sup>1</sup> cover different points in time and different development processes; taken together they suggest that the quality of the profession's knowledge base varies across domains but that significant progress is being made across the board. These studies also concur that priority areas are: the development of a Code of Ethics; integration of various laws that govern social work practice; enhanced job descriptions of social workers in different settings; and the development and implementation of standards for social work education.

### **Development of Social Work Education in Mongolia**

To provide a sense of the overall developmental trajectory of social work education in Mongolia, we discuss the process in four phases: (1) pre-professional; (2) launching and early years; (3) capacity building; and (4) institutionalization.

*Phase 1: Pre-professional (before 1996)*

The concept of social work as a professional discipline and a domain of professional practice did not exist in Mongolia during the transitional period between the dissolution of the socialist regime and the reconstruction of a human service system. Before 1990, the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party operated the government and managed and administered human services. Consistent with the Soviet Union and other socialist bloc countries, all Mongolian citizens had access to health care, education, employment, and cultural and recreational services. In keeping with the country's socialist ideology from 1921 to 1990, responsibility for social services fell to, for example, the Mongolian Pioneers Organization, the Mongolian Revolutionary Youth League and the Mongolian Trade Union.

An important structural change during this phase was thus the establishment of an independent social welfare system (Ogborn and Humphries, 2002). The first Social Welfare Laws of Mongolia in 1995, with subsequent revisions and amendments, established social insurance and social welfare service centers and staffed them to provide services to individuals and families. The government also implemented a National Poverty Alleviation Program in 1994. Mass population-based organizations, such as those for women and older adults, changed; the school system and its services were restructured, education laws were revised, and the Law on Protection of the Rights of Children was adopted. These major changes in society and its institutions laid the legal and structural foundations for social work development.

To foster positive outcomes during this period of rapid social change, international organizations such as the United Nations Children's Fund, Save the Children UK, and World Vision were instrumental in identifying social problems and providing assistance for children and families. Essentially, it was collaboration with these organizations that led to the introduction of social work in Mongolia—although the activities of these organizations also contributed to a public image of social workers as welfare, charity, or relief workers.

The main outcome that emerged during the pre-professional era was a situation analysis that clearly showed the need for professional social work practice and education. In 1995, at the behest of the National Authority for Children and Save the Children Fund, UK, the Center for Social Development, a national NGO, conducted a situation analysis to launch social work education in the country (Tuvshintugs, 2009). Priority areas were child welfare and social protection and suggestions were made for social work education and training programs.

*Phase 2: Launching and Early Years (1996–2000)*

The second phase of development involved the establishment of professional social work education programs. In 1996, with technical assistance from Save the Children Fund, UK, the National Authority of Children of Mongolia, began to provide in-service training for professionals working with children and families. This first initiative of social work education and training in Mongolia reinforced the need to

prepare qualified social service professionals, particularly ‘child social workers’ as they were called (Tuvshintugs, 2009). In 1997, the Mongolian State Pedagogical University (SPU), with technical assistance from Save the Children Fund, UK, launched the first formal education program for social workers and the Mongolian University of Science and Technology initiated an undergraduate social welfare program.

Although social work education in Mongolia began as a response to child welfare issues, the preparation of social workers takes a far more generalist perspective. Further, as the first National Seminar on Social Work stated, the most appropriate model for social work in Mongolia is that of social development. Social work and social development professionals from the US, UK, Australia, Japan, Germany, and Russia contributed expertise and resources to the development of social work in Mongolia during this phase (Social Work Resource Center, State Pedagogical University, 1997).

Major milestones in the development of the social work profession during this period included governmental sanctions and regulations, education and training, the founding of professional associations, and the support of international and national institutions. Of particular importance, the Ministry of Education recognized and endorsed the education of social workers at a baccalaureate level and the National Authority of Children promoted widespread in-service training programs for children and youth social workers (Batkhishig, 2001). Social work educators also played a major role in introducing and popularizing the profession through numerous trainings, seminars, and workshops across professionals and at different levels. Informed by a ‘train the trainer’ model, these activities drew on pedagogies of action. All teachers held degrees in humanitarian and social sciences, not social work, so those who taught in social work programs immersed themselves in the profession through short-term intensive training with academics from the US, India, Russia, Denmark, and Japan.

Specialized training programs were also offered in child protection, school social work, social welfare and assistance, social policy and administration, program planning, community development, poverty reduction, and interpersonal violence. Most training was conducted by university professors, supplemented by qualified professionals from NGOs. Finally, people who performed social work functions in social service organizations took certificate courses, seminars and workshops. Trainings in 1998 by the Danish–Mongolian and Mongolian–Danish societies were instrumental in educating about rural social work.

Since its inception, social work education in Mongolia has stressed field education. By 2000, the State Pedagogical University and the Mongolian University of Science and Technology were partnered with international (e.g. Save the Children Fund, UK, World Vision Mongolia, Norwegian Lutheran Mission, and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit) and national (e.g. Center for Children’s Rights, National Center Against Violence, Center for Social Development, Danish–Mongolian Training, Methodology and Research Center and schools) organizations for field practica. The main obstacle to high-quality field education was a lack of professional workers to supervise student learning, but these collaborations have laid the foundation for the ongoing development of field education.

Save the Children Fund, UK provided technical assistance and funding for all initiatives to develop the social work profession in academia and in practice arenas (Batkhisig, 2001). Two examples merit a mention. After the situation analysis of 1996, the Mongolian Child Rights Center started a pilot program on school social work in two urban schools. This project led to the introduction of school social work in secondary schools of Mongolia and in 2000, the Ministry of Education approved the position of school social worker—the first social work job sanctioned by the government. The second project aimed to build the capacity of social work professionals. In 1997, a two-week social work training session was inaugurated in Russia. This session played an essential role in preparing instructors to teach social work.

Also in 1997, the first professional association, the Mongolian Association of Social Workers (MASW), was established during the first National Seminar on Social Work. The MASW went on to become a provisional member of the International Federation of Social Workers. Despite subsequently losing its status as a leading professional association in the country, MASW played a major role in raising awareness of the profession through the media, advocacy, and training.

By 2000, the Mongolian social work baccalaureate program was fully developed, incorporating lessons learned from visiting professors from the US, training sessions in Russia, and study tours to Japan, India, and Scotland. Developments during 1996–2000 thus laid a solid foundation on which to expand the depth and scope of the social work profession in Mongolia in the early twenty-first century.

### *Phase 3: Capacity Building (2001–2007)*

The third phase in the development of social work and its program of education in Mongolia was dedicated to building capacity that would lead to institutionalizing the profession (Oyut-Erdene, 2009). Social work education was structured at four levels: (1) Master's (1.5–2 years); (2) Bachelor's (four years); (3) specialized training; and (4) in-service training. At this point, 13 universities offered social work education, including four state universities in Ulaanbaatar and three in rural areas. Three programs offered a Master's degree and the rest prepared Bachelor-level social workers. In-service training programs were offered mainly by state universities.

Social services agencies—mainly NGOs—began to approach social work schools for specialized training and in addition to focusing on generalist practice, schools began to also prepare sector-specific social workers. In 2003, the School of Public Health at the Health Sciences University of Mongolia opened an undergraduate program for health social workers. Likewise, MSUE is widely regarded as a base for school social workers.

Mongolian social work curricula are adapted primarily from US, German, and Russian models, depending on the mission and goals of the university and department (Oyut-Erdene, 2004). For example, the MSUE curriculum is modeled on the US scheme with input from Japanese and Indian programs. In addition to the curriculum being a good fit, MSUE obtained resources such as textbooks, visiting lecturers, and training materials from the US. The Mongolian University of Science and Technology, on the other hand, is influenced by the Russian model, and the National University of



Mongolia's model is mainly German-influenced since the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) funded its curriculum development and continuing education project from 2001 to 2004 and later extended this support.

Capacity building extends beyond the mere number of social work programs to include the professionalization of the social work community. An article in the Social Security Sector Strategy Paper (Ministry of Social Welfare and Labor, 2003) catalyzed this process. The paper, published by the government, identified the development of professional social work as one of the reform elements of the social welfare subsector's 10-year strategy, stating that 'the objective is to establish a nationwide national system of social work at the professional level' (p. 26). As a result, a professional development training program was established for social workers in the social welfare sector on topics such as introduction to social work, social work ethics, community organization, social policy, social development, case management, social work with children and child protection, families, groups and special populations. Since 2006, more than 720 social workers in this sector have completed the training in the country.

The Ministry of Social Welfare and Labor was very influential during this capacity building phase, but international organizations, notably the Open Society Institute (OSI) became a powerful resource for strengthening the profession. Participation of Mongolian professionals and academics in the OSI Social Work Fellowship Program, Higher Education Support Program, and Network Scholarship Program contributed inestimably to furthering social work in Mongolia. The OSI Social Work Fellowship Program, for example, supported 15 Master's degrees in social work in two US universities (Columbia University and Washington University) and annual summer schools for teachers and practitioners with faculty from these universities and others in the UK, Australia, and Japan. This cadre of well-trained, committed professionals has, in turn, provided vital leadership in establishing professional associations, enhancing networking, and sponsoring professional activities. They have also been instrumental in developing a professional code of ethics, promoting professional development for practitioners, and improving field education. In 2005, they conducted the first forum on field education and supervisors' training.

OSI-supported summer schools, which have been held annually since 2002, have also played a major role in building the capacity of teachers and practitioners (Oyut-Erdene, 2009). Some 30 teachers from 10 universities and institutes that educate social workers have participated in summer schools; they now represent a core academic group. In addition to developing social work pedagogy, a key achievement of the summer school program has been its contribution to building a common ground for social work education throughout Mongolia.

Topics that drew early attention included 'Development of a Code of Ethics', 'Development of Social Work Research', 'Collaboration among Social Work Schools and Teachers', and 'Core Curricula for Social Work Programs'. The issue of a core curriculum was deemed a priority, as many schools were offering social work education programs, but there was no consensus on minimum standards of basic knowledge and skills or on what content should be core to the professional curriculum (Ogborn and Humphries, 2002; Oyut-Erdene, 2004). Further, few teachers had a social

work background in early 2000 and they thus needed assistance in developing social work curricula in accordance with professional requirements. Even as the demand for social work professionals grew during this period, the quality of education was a serious concern.

Professional associations proliferated during this period, including the Mongolian Association of School Social Workers (2001), the Mongolian Association of Social Work Educators (2002), the Mongolian Association of Professional Social Workers (2002), and the Mongolian Association of Health Social Workers (2006). These entities fostered important linkages between universities and practice agencies. The Mongolian Association of Social Work Educators was particularly instrumental in enhancing the quality of social work education, but these organizations were not sufficiently developed or appropriately positioned to oversee the development or vet the adequacy of a core curriculum. Relying on their own preparation, their knowledge and experience in the community, and the support of international organizations such as OSI, the faculty of social work schools thus assumed responsibility to develop a core curriculum and pursue professional accreditation.

#### *Phase 4: Institutionalization (2007–Present)*

The fourth and final phase of the development of social work education in Mongolia to date is characterized by quality improvement efforts and further institutionalization of the profession. The onset of this phase marked a decade of social work education in Mongolia and it culminated with the approval of social work education standards by the Ministry of Education and Mongolian Agency on Standardization and Measurement in January 2010. During these years, social work education became more systematic, more rigorous and more specialized. The latter includes curricula on, for example, child protection, domestic violence, human trafficking, HIV/AIDS prevention, child labor, and advocacy.

Significant gains were achieved during this period in the areas of *faculty development* (regular trainings; more graduate social work degrees); *curriculum development* (alignment with international standards; enhanced collaboration with local, national and international colleagues and professional organizations; development of curricular materials; schools; and departments preparing for accreditation); *field education* (training/retraining of faculty and field supervisors; academic–practice partnerships strengthened); *community relations and service* (cooperation with the social service community for field education, research projects, and trainings, with manuals); *awareness and interest* (growth in the number of programs and student enrollment); and *network building* (establishment of professional teachers' community; expanded foreign partnerships; teacher and student participation in local, regional and international conferences).

Fourteen universities and institutes now offer undergraduate and graduate social work degrees in Mongolia, with more than 1,200 students and 60 teachers. Likewise, the professional community is growing, reflecting the profession's recognition. In addition to the aforementioned official approval of social work education standards,

the Ministry of Social Welfare and Labor and the State Social Welfare and Labor Department are providing leadership in developing standards for practice in shelters, child protection services, social work in community centers for older adults etc. Institutionalization of social work is also sustained with the help of line ministries and other governmental organizations such as the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (school social work and social work in higher education) and the Ministry of Social Welfare and Labor (social work in the social welfare sector and social services). Inroads are yet to be made with the Ministry of Health, which has eschewed social work involvement despite a social work health curriculum since 2003.

As a result of capacity building efforts, social work schools and departments and professional associations and NGOs began, in 2006, to take initiatives to advance social work education by mobilizing their own resources rather than relying solely on the support of donor organizations. Mongolian professionals have assumed responsibility for social work summer schools, which remain a primary mechanism for professional development of academic faculty and field educators. In addition, schools and departments continue to improve their curriculums, with more teachers now involved in social policy and practice studies and in decision-making processes via ministry-level and agency-level committees and task forces and consultancies with social service international and national NGOs.

Field education is also developing rapidly, largely due to the efforts of a social work education project implemented by Caritas, Czech Republic in 2007. This project involves regular training sessions for social work supervisors and students and the development and use of current, rigorous field education manuals. Similarly, the OSI-sponsored Social Work Faculty Development Program and Academic Fellowship Program have produced significant improvements at institutional, departmental, and individual levels. For example, the OSI Faculty Development Program is now supporting the participation of three Mongolian faculty members for three semesters in US universities. Here, they audit and observe classes and meet and collaborate with administrators, teachers, researchers, and students.

The fourth phase of social work education in Mongolia has also seen improvements in resources and facilities. Handbooks, manuals and other teaching and learning materials from trainings and workshops have been published and disseminated. Teachers can now access and use study and evaluation reports by organizations such as the UNDP, World Bank, UNICEF, Save the Children, UK, ILO, and the National AIDS Foundation. There remains a need for, and there are some early initiatives toward developing, a high-quality Mongolian social work textbook. Finally, in partnership with Caritas, Czech Republic, the *Mongolian Social Work Journal* was inaugurated in 2009.

The working relationship between universities and practice organizations continues to be enhanced by the steady flow of graduates into governmental and non-governmental organizations, some of whom become field supervisors. Importantly, though, professional social workers with university degrees still account for only 20% of the social work workforce in the school and social welfare sectors (Enkhtuya, 2006; Erdenechimeg and Amarjargal, 2007; Enkhtuya *et al.*, 2008). This proportion is

expected to grow over time, with ongoing efforts to build student recruitment, enrollment, and completion of social work degree programs.

### Future Challenges

While acknowledging these considerable achievements, a number of significant structural, systemic, and professional challenges remain. Structurally, social work services are under the jurisdiction of different ministries. The Ministries of Education, Science, and Culture oversee school social work services and in-service training; the Ministry of Social Welfare and Labor administers social work services and training in the social welfare sector; the Ministry of Justice administers social work services in probation institutions; and, as noted, the Ministry of Health has yet to acknowledge the role of health social workers or to support the formulation of their job description at the policy level.

The situation with the Ministry of Health suggests there are problems of inter-ministry cooperation and communication, which in turn affect social work graduates in this specialization. They are successful in gaining employment, however, without a clear job description; they tend to fill positions such as public health specialists, health insurance workers, statisticians, public health project assistants and training specialists instead of delivering social work services to individuals, families, and communities in health-related institutional and community settings.

Another important structural issue is the still low employment rate among graduates in school social work and social welfare sectors. The majority of practitioners who hold social work titles in these sectors are professionals from other backgrounds who became 'social workers' through certified training programs. As a result, social work graduates in these fields are mainly employed in NGOs or in other sectors.

With respect to systemic issues, we would highlight the need to further integrate the development of professional social work education in Mongolia. There have been steps in this direction. For instance, the Minister of Social Welfare and Labor and the Minister of Education recently issued a joint decree about social welfare and school social workers. The need for integration also extends to policy and institutional levels. At the policy level, line ministries, such as the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health, should jointly define parameters for the education, training and practice of health social workers. Policies on social work services and social workers are infused in laws such as the Law on Social Welfare, the Law on Education, and the Law against Domestic Violence. However, the provisions of these laws are not integrated and differences hinder the development and implementation of social work values, ethics, and professional obligations.

Coordination and communication among higher education institutions and front-line practice agencies also needs to be strengthened. Such an effort would improve students' understanding of linkages between didactic and experiential learning and would go far towards rectifying some of the existing challenges in field education. Learning standards and performance criteria should be mutually developed and clearly articulated. This level of specificity and consensus would help to authorize educators to increase the amount of time students spend in the field—currently less than six months total in a four-year program. Further integration of class and field would also

foster the development of new field sites and supervisors, although recent training of students' supervisors has been promising.

There is also a great need to systematically analyze a variety of social, economic, emotional, and health-related problems in order to determine the appropriate interventions and policies needed to effectively address these needs and improve overall quality of life. Empirical studies are lacking and there is little in the way of evidence-based practices for the Mongolian context. Perhaps the single biggest challenge in this regard is the great scarcity of professional resource materials in the Mongolian language. Development of social work knowledge and its application in the country will depend on these resources.

Another challenge that social workers must address is lack of clarity about the legitimate nature and scope of the profession's purview. Among professionals and lay people alike, the predominant view of social work is to provide instrumental assistance to raise an individual, family or community's standard of living through concrete resources. A public education campaign about the breadth and depth of services which professional social workers are prepared to provide would be an important first step.

In a formal evaluation of the social work program at MSUE, Quita (2002) identified these needs: improve the qualification and practical skills of teachers and the qualification of students, add more field work to the program, increase the capacity of the department, enhance computer facilities, and develop a research centre to build evidence for practice. Almost 10 years on, many of these recommendations have been meaningfully addressed. But, as seen in the foregoing discussion, there is still much room for improvement.

## **Conclusion**

Social work was established as a professional discipline in Mongolia in recognition of the need for informed, skilled interventions to deal with pressing social problems during the country's social, political, and economic transition to a democratic society in 1990. The profession has been recognized in the Mongolian government's action plans since the late 1990s. To facilitate a conceptual understanding of the step-wise development of social work and its educational arm, we organized our discussion of this process into four interfacing phases. The overall theme that emerges from this 20-year process is that, with technical assistance and the commitment of a wide range of institutions and individuals, 14 Mongolian universities and institutes now offer education and training programs in professional social work and significant strides are being made toward enhancing the quality of this education and its connections with and relevance for the local context.

We are optimistic about overcoming the challenges we face and believe that doing so is a privilege and an obligation. Going forward, the Mongolian social work profession aims to continue to learn from and share their experiences with others who are developing social work around the world, to acknowledge the contributions of the many individuals and organizations that have facilitated the development of the profession in Mongolia, and to consolidate and build on the substantial gains we have realized in our first decade.

## Note

- [1] The following reports are available from the first author: *Research on Public Perceptions of the Social Work Profession* (Danish Mongolian Society and Mongolian University of Science and Technology, 2000); *Community Attitudes toward Social Work Services: A Research Report* (1999); *Situation Analysis of School Social Work in Mongolia* (Enkhtuya, 2006); *Situation Analysis of Khoroo Social Work from the Perspective of Child Protection* (Erdenechimeg and Amarjargal, 2007); and *Social Work Review* (Enkhtuya et al., 2008).

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