

International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW)
International Project Grant
Final Report
October 2018

Developing Social Work Education and Practice in Malawi

Executive Summary

This Project builds on a partnership between a UK based charity Supporting Social Work in Malawi (SSWIM) and the University of Malawi, bringing together social work practitioners and social work academics to support the development of social work education and practice in Malawi. The project focus was on supporting capacity development for student social work practice placements, specifically, through the co-delivery between social work academics and educators in Malawi and England of a five-day Practice Educator (PE) programme to social work practitioners in Malawi. A total of 22 social workers from all areas of Malawi, working in a range social work projects and activities, actively engaged in the learning and education to support them in developing as Practice Educators to support and assess social work students on placements in practice. The PE Programme provided an opportunity for social work practitioners to actively engage in discourses in relation to the direction of education for social work, continuing professional development for social workers and the profession of social work in Malawi. This project has also facilitated an international collaboration of social work practitioners, academics and institutions who continue to work together in developing social work education, academic writing and research in Malawi. This has contributed to further significant activity to support the development of the profession of social work in Malawi.

1. Co-ordinating and Delivery Group

Felix Kakowa (University of Malawi, Chancellors College; Anstance Chunda (Chair of SSWIM); Dr Simon Cauvain (University of Nottingham Trent); Dr Janet Walker (University of Lincoln);

The Co-ordinating and Delivery Group is very grateful to the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) for the significant financial contribution that was made to enable this Project to move forward. All monies have been spent on direct activity in Malawi. It is also very grateful to UNICEF (Malawi) and Chancellors College for the additional support and funding for the Project. The Malawian Government Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare (MOGCDSW) is acknowledged as a supporter of this Project, and the work of SSWIM.

2. Rationale and purpose of the project

As a relatively new profession, the challenges for social work in Malawi are seemingly overwhelming, for example, the impact of absolute poverty, experienced by 50% of the population; the consequences of climate, including flooding, and subsequent cholera and malaria, particularly impacting on the rural population; HIV/AIDS, with Malawi having one of the highest prevalence in the world; and lack of skilled, qualified human resources and social welfare capacity. However, progress is being made, and the expectations and motivation for the profession of social work to be a key part of the change process is extremely high.

Social work training in Malawi started with a community development certificate in 1964 and later a certificate in social welfare in 1978. In 2006, the first social work degree programme was introduced. As of 2016, three universities offer degree programmes. Programmes have been heavily focussed on theoretical learning in the universities. However there has been increasing recognition that opportunities to priorities opportunities for placements in social work practice, as supporting the development and application of theories, skills and values in and for practice and social work responses, should be a key component of the curriculum. This is seen as a critical component to support and further student learning, supporting diverse and culturally relevant experiences in local cultural contexts, as an active, intentional, and engagement to increase awareness, and empathic understanding of the complex ways individuals interact within systems and institutions in the Malawian context.

The priority, therefore, for colleagues delivering social work education in Malawi has been to identify and develop social work practitioners to enable and support the students learning in practice (described in this report as a Practice Educator (PE)). This is viewed as fundamental in helping students to use and acquire culturally relevant and culturally sensitive professional knowledge, intervene skilfully, apply skills, demonstrate professional values and ensuring that the student is supported in learning and reflection on their practice. This project was therefore focussed on supporting capacity development for student social work practice placements, with a focus on training and supporting PE's as critical to facilitating, supporting and assessing social work students learning in practice.

3. Description of the process of implementation

Led by colleagues at Chancellors College, with support from UNICEF (Malawi), universities offering social work education throughout Malawi have expressed their commitment to work together to develop the profession, particularly through the development of practice placements and encouraging the training of PE's. This is further reinforced by the motivation and willingness of practitioners to support social work students in practice as part of their commitment to develop social work as a profession in Malawi. In addition, student have expressed a desire to have more opportunities to apply knowledge and skills in practice and learn from and in practice settings. Consequently, it was agreed to develop a 5-day programme to support the development of Practice Educators, primarily based in (social work focussed) practice settings, supported by partners based in the UK with previous knowledge of working with colleagues in Malawi and of developing and delivering PE programmes. The overall aim of the Programme was therefore to introduce Practice Educators to the key knowledge and skills required to support, supervise and assess social work students in practice placements.

3.1 Overview of the Teaching

The 5-day Practice Educator Programme was developed and delivered as a partnership with colleagues at Chancellors College to ensure local relevance and experienced social work academics and a practitioner (originally from Malawi) from England. The Programme explored all aspects of supporting and assessing a student in practice, including the role and responsibilities of Practice Educators and others involved in practice placement; assessing knowledge, theories and skills; assessing social work values, ethics and anti-oppressive practice; enabling learning; dealing with challenges and difficulties and writing the student report. Critically the programme was focussed on active participation by participants and

opportunities for discussion and negotiation of relevant process and practice for the development of practice placements and practice education in Malawi (See Appendix One).

3.2 Participants

The wider commitment to learn and support others with their learning was reflected in the fact that applicants for the programme significantly outnumbered the places available. In total, there were 23 participants, twenty of whom were practicing social workers and three were from social work academia. Participants were drawn from all over Malawi, with many travelling significant distances over days to participate in the Programme. Participants on the programme reflected a diversity of work with different service users, for example, community-based mental health services; projects working with vulnerable children and families; projects working with children with a disability and their families; youth in prison; and services for street and vulnerable children. Consequently, the programme participants reflected a diverse range of experiences and opportunities for social work students in undertaking placements in practice.

The Programme was on a residential basis in a Community Centre in the south of Malawi. One of the other benefits of a residential programme was that participants were able to share and debate a number of key social issues and the role and responsibilities of social worker, and the development of social work as a profession in Malawi. This, and the motivation of the PE Programme, has added to their motivation to further develop their own knowledge and skills, to support the development of other PE's and to work with universities to support and develop the social work education programmes.

Participants were very active in their desire for learning, keen to develop their own practice and support learning in practice for student social workers. They were also eager for new information and ideas and enthusiastic about the opportunity to meet social work colleagues from all over Malawi. Teaching sessions were definitely enhanced by the stimulating approach to singing and dancing as energisers! All students engaged in the learning and discussion and exercises generated active debate and discussion, particularly to apply and further the learning of students and the social work profession as demonstrating relevance for social work in in the Malawian context and to supporting and prompting change for vulnerable people and citizens.

There was a real dedication by all to making a difference in the lives of vulnerable people and communities. Communities respect and value their work, and so see social work as a high-status profession. Above all their pride in being qualified social workers is evident. The enthusiasm and professionalism of all the social work practitioners and university educators was clearly evident.

3.3 Evaluation of the Programme by Participants

All participants completed an anonymous evaluation of their experience on the Programme. All participants were very satisfied with the Programme, that it meets the intended outcome and meets their needs as Practice Educators. A selection of comments is set out below.

- This programme has been so inspirational and wonderful. I have gained so much knowledge over a week and am thankful to have had the chance to be here
- This has been a very insightful programme with skills to enhance students practice placements.

- I hope that the programme continues so that other social workers in Malawi can benefit. I hope we can be able to get funding and materials to continue the programme.
- This programme has activated me to do more for my organisation in terms of placement.
- The challenging exercises that we were involved in helped me figure out the best that I can contribute to the development of social workers that will be passionate to their practice.
- The content of the course; the topics has added my knowledge on social work practice and I have learned ways of becoming a good PE.
- We need to speed up the process of a social work association (*for Malawi*) so that there is a strong professional body that will be able to enhance knowledge sharing. This will allow for the development of strong support for educators

4. Direct Outcome of Project and Next Steps

The Programme has supported the desire to embed learning in practice for students of social work into the curriculum as a critical component of education for social work. Having a cohort of trained PE's has supported this aspiration. Participants on the programme have supported and supervised social work students on placements. There is a real need to train more PE's and provide on-going training and support for current PE's. The Programme has added to the enthusiasm of PE's to develop as a 'community of practice' in networking with each other (for example, through a WhatsApp group) and to actively contribute to local and national developments of the social work profession in Malawi and to add their voices to the social work international community.

The aspirations for PE's are to:

- Continue to provide programmes to support and develop Practice Educators to support and assess student in social work practice settings.
- Develop regional support networks to support the role of and development of PE's in Malawi.
- Establish, support and offer workshops as continuing support and development for Practice Educators.
- Be involved in the design and delivery of social work education in universities to support a practice focus.

SWIMM continues to work in an active partnership with the University of Malawi, and other international and national Non-Government Organisations (NGO's), especially UNICEF (Malawi), to support the development of social work and relevant services in Malawi. There is continuing need to train and develop social workers and other professionals working in the community. In addition, there is a real desire to continue the impetus of this Programme, particularly as participants on this programme and the previous programme have supported and supervised social work students on placements. Funding continues to be a significant issue to meet these aspirations, with significant reliance on funding from external funding agencies to support any initiatives. Work will continue to support colleagues in Malawi with funding bids.

Participants were asked to comment on the transferability of the Programme to other settings. The overwhelming response was positive. The view was content was highly relevant to the training and development of a Practice Educator, and as a contribution to their own continuing professional development as social workers. The knowledge and skills of the facilitators in teaching, support and enabling the participants was viewed as essential.

Critical to the success of such a programme in different context/countries is to ensure the 'voice' of social work practitioners is central in the learning and learning is an active process of negotiation and sharing. These 'voices' have a further benefit in being a potential source of evidence and motivation to support local, and regional national developments of social work.

5. Conclusion

The positive outcomes of this Project recognise the centrality of the social worker, particularly in the role of a PE, as a key agent for support for social work students and the development of social work education. They also represent the visibility and importance of social workers as a key professional group in supporting and empowering vulnerable people and the citizens of Malawi. The visibility of this project and the feedback from the PE's, the involvement of universities and key agencies (especially UNICEF (Malawi) and USAid) has added to the impetus and on-going work for the further development and professionalisation of social work in Malawi.

A recent Conference, 'Professionalisation of Social Work in Malawi' (3-5 October, 2018) was facilitated by UNICEF (Malawi) and the Ministry of Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW). The conference brought together 50 participants including District Social Welfare Offices, social work practitioners, students of Social Work, Chancellor College of the University of Malawi, Catholic University, Magomero College, USAID Malawi and UNICEF representatives from SSWIM, and the International Federation of Social Workers in the Africa Region, as key stakeholders. The key outcome of the conference was on the development of a five-year action plan focusing on 5 key thematic areas: regulatory framework; learning and training standards; human resource analysis and planning; resource mobilization and advocacy. A five-year Action Plan is the process of being proposed to establish these prioritise. This represents a significant step in the professionalization of social work and the key role they have in contributing to the strengthening of the social welfare workforce and effective functioning of protection and family welfare system.

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APPENDIX ONE: Overview: Practice Educator Programme Malawi

Dates: Monday 23 April – Friday 27 April 2018

Venue: Liwonde Community Centre, Liwonde, Malawi

Overall Aim of the Programme

To introduce Practice Educators to the key knowledge and skills required to support, supervise and assess social work students in practice placements.

Objectives of the Programme

- To examine key knowledge and skills in working with students and the role of the Practice Educator in their application during the student placement;
- To highlight theoretical considerations and objectives underpinning the practice learning and education and the role of the Practice Educators;
- To highlight what Practice Educators need to consider within the placement and how to accomplish this.
- To consider the current and future support and development needs of Practice Educators.

Date: Monday 23 April

Overview of Learning: Welcome and Introductions
 Getting Started
 Overview of practice placements
 The role of a Practice Educator
 Boundaries

Overview of Learning	Details
Welcome and Introductions	Presenters introduce self. Participants are welcomed to the Programme. Practical/Housekeeping arrangements. Individual Exercise: Presenters/participants are invited to come up to the front, with their name on Flipchart, say a little about themselves and where their name comes from.
	PP One: Overview of Programme, including ground rules and approaches. Small group exercise: Expectations of the Programme: Questions/thoughts/comments I have as I start this Programme. Feedback
Overview of practice placements	PP Two: Overview of Practice Placements – from beginning to end! Individual Exercise One: The placement stages and planning.
What is a Practice Educator?	PP Three: The role of a Practice Educator Small Group Exercise: Management; Education; Support and Assessment
Professional Boundaries	PP: Professional Boundaries Small Group Exercise Two: Boundaries

Date: Tuesday 24 April

Overview of Learning: Managing and Developing the Practice Placement
 Supervision

Overview of Learning	Details
Welcome Back! and Introductions	Presenters re-introduce self. Anything from yesterday? Questions? Concerns?
Managing and Developing the Practice Placement	PP Five: Managing and Developing the Practice Placement Includes: 2 small group exercises; 2 large group exercises.
Supervision	PP Six: Supervision Includes: 1 individual exercise leading onto a small group exercise.
Power	PP Seven: Power Includes: 1 small group exercise

Date: Wednesday 25 April
Overview of Learning: Enabling Learning
 Supervision
 Enabling Reflective Learning

Overview of Learning	Details
Welcome Back!	Welcome! Anything from yesterday? Questions? Concerns?
Enabling Learning	PP Eight: Enabling Learning Includes: 1 large group exercise; 1 small group exercise; 1 individual exercise.
Supporting reflective learning	PP Nine: Supporting Reflection
Supervision	PP Ten: Supervision

Date: Thursday 26 April
Overview of Learning: Values, Ethics and Anti-Oppressive Practice
 Assessment:
 Managing difficulties in practice placements
 Overview of paperwork used in Malawi.

Overview of Learning	Details
Welcome Back! and Introductions	Welcome! Anything from yesterday? Questions? Concerns?
Values, Ethics and Anti-Oppressive Practice	PP Eleven: Values, Ethics and Anti-Oppressive Practice Includes: 1 exercise; 1 Handout.
Dealing with Difficulties	PP Twelve: Dealing with Difficulties Includes: Small group exercise.
Assessment	PP Thirteen Assessment Includes: large group exercise
Paperwork and Report Writing	Overview of paperwork used in Malawi. Consider good practice in relation to report writing for student reports.

Date: Friday 27 April
Overview of Learning: Pulling it all together – the ‘complete’ placement
 What about me?
 Reflections and Evaluations
 Closing Ceremony.

Overview of Learning	Details
Welcome Back!	Anything from yesterday? Questions? Concerns?
Pulling it all Together	PP Fourteen: Pulling it all Together
What about me?	PP Fifteen: What about me? Includes: Large group exercise; small group exercise.
Reflections and Evaluation	Small group exercise: students are invited to reflect on their learning. Completion of individual evaluation
Closing Ceremony	