

NASW INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE

The Global Agenda—Linking Global Social Work to Regional & Local Practice

What has international social work to do with social work in my town?

Everything of importance to social workers' hearts and minds according to The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), and the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), authors of *The Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development (The Agenda)* (International Federation of Social Workers et al., 2010). IFSW staff authored *The Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development: A place to link together and be effective in a globalized world* (International Social Work, Jones & Truell, 2012), a copy of which can be found at <http://ifsw.org/get-involved/agenda-for-social-work>. *The Agenda* presented themes, commitments, and linked global statements with regional diversity. **The authors challenged social workers to help shape the future through professional education, research and action at local, national, regional and international levels.**

Background about *The Global Agenda*

Over three thousand Social Work Practitioners, Educators, and Development Workers meeting in Hong Kong in June 2010 have decided to launch a global movement that addresses the major challenges of our societies. The delegates agreed that our three organizations should speak out clearly from our experience of issues relevant to the larger community. The delegates reaffirmed the need to organize around major and relevant social issues that connect within and across our profession, http://cdn.ifsw.org/assets/ifsw_84013-7.pdf.

In response the NASW International Committee reviews *The Agenda* and joins the discussion.

The IFSW, IASSW, and ICSW say the worldwide recession, heightened inequality, extensive migratory movements, increased pandemics and natural catastrophes, and new forms of conflict force us, as social work and social development

professionals and educators, to heighten our awareness of global realities and to act differently. These organizations aim to achieve sustainable, collaborative outcomes drawing on the acknowledged skills of social workers in creating multi-faceted, pragmatic solutions to highly complex problems, both individual and social (Sucharipa, 2001; Sweifach et al., 2010).

Jones and Truell say the three founding organizations represent only the beginning of the collaboration. Social workers need to build alliances with other like-minded leaders and groups to maximize the future of positive social change. **Such change will best occur when we can find common strategies that link our work globally with our work regionally and locally.** Four core themes were highlighted:

- » Social and economic equalities within countries and between regions;
- » Dignity and worth of the person;
- » Environmental sustainability;
- » Importance of human relationships.

Globally agreed-upon definitions provide a basic framework of common social ills and challenges. However, regional definitions emerge due to global complexity and multiple levels in different contexts. The diversity of interpretation of broader global standards in regional contexts is increasing. The authors hope this will result in a dynamic interaction between global and regional strategies. They believe aligning strategies will increase impact and give more effect to the available resources.

The development of regional strategies takes prominence in *The Agenda*. Social work bodies must be visible not only in the United Nations but also in the increasingly significant regional structures, such as the European Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Organization of African Unity. One of many examples of a specific regional social work response to natural disasters and catastrophes in Asia Pacific was a 2011 conference in Tokyo. It was a place for regional learning as social workers and their communities recovered from devastating earthquakes and tsunamis across the region. It helped to strengthen a regional identity for social workers with their multi-faceted approach.

Jones and Truell say to those social workers who may question the relevance of a global agenda for practice in their setting:

As people move increasingly from lower-income to higher-income countries to avoid poverty, and the dynamics of migration become more evident, no social worker will escape the reality of globalization. There is also growing evidence of increased migration of social workers and other professionals between countries and regions. To minimize the difficulties for all involved, social workers at both ends of the immigration trajectory now need to talk and collaborate. These approaches to social work will soon be regarded as standard, given the pace of globalization.

These are a few examples from many illustrating why *The Global Agenda* is relevant to local practice contexts: international is local. Making the linkages to support the people we work with or making the linkages to bring global change that will affect local change is now part of the social work job description.

IFSW authors acknowledge global, regional and local challenges faced by social workers and some of the institutional initiatives which IASSW, ICSW, and IFSW have developed. Additionally there are challenges inherent in finding common ground between different specialties within social work especially with the inclusion of social work, social welfare and social development. You can contribute! **They have opened up *The Agenda* process to online debate and are monitoring what is written.** They plan to persist with global action and statements while endeavoring to respect the ethical principles of inclusivity and respect for diversity. They believe social work has to survive and thrive in a global, political and competitive environment. They challenge social workers to assert and acknowledge credit for our unique approach within in interdisciplinary and interprofessional teams.

We therefore commend *The Agenda* process as a genuine, democratic and determined endeavor to provide a focus for social work, to reassert the specific contribution of social work knowledge and skills to a world in social crisis, and to encourage self-confidence among social work practitioners, educators, and policy-makers.

Since IASSW, ICSW, and IFSW, have achieved the linking of global bodies to work together and the existing regional and national structures, Jones and Truell say the next stage involves working at all levels to act upon and fulfill *The Agenda* themes and articulated regional objectives. This can only happen, they say, when all levels participate. **They conclude challenging practitioners, “What has the Global Agenda got to do with you? EVERYTHING. Your contributions will shape the strategies that will be implemented.”**

How can I and the NASW International Committee help shape *The Global Agenda* and make it relevant to my social work practice?

- » Go to IFSW’s website to review *The Agenda*. Add your ideas/thoughts of how to make it relevant to your social work practice.
- » Seek out an international experience to benefit from “outside” experiences. That “outside” experience provides insights and solutions that may have never been considered otherwise. What could be more “outside” than outside one’s own country?
- » Read NASW International Committee’s “Social Workers Reap Benefits from International Experiences.”
- » Gain a perspective from another country to help provide insight on ways in which social welfare policies and practices can be improved in your work, in your city.
- » Imbue yourself with a broader vision from local to world-wide (we’re all in this together) and hopefully further your cultural humility/cultural competence skills.
- » Attend and participate in International Social Work Conferences, events, discussion forums.
- » Develop links with other social work professionals and organizations to build stronger alliances.
- » Stay informed: Review/write articles on issues and themes of *The Global Agenda*.
- » Promote scientific and academic research and publications that analyze the development and the transformation of the issues raised by *The Global Agenda*.
- » Identify potential organized networks and organizations working on the same areas for partnership.

Contact the NASW International Committee for ideas, comments, suggestions or questions at srubin@naswdc.org.