

## The State of Professional Social Work and Social Services in Indonesia

The social work profession is one of the foremost international helping professions providing support, access to resources and social justice in time of crisis, and has historically been a key player in mobilizing communities, groups, families and individuals to promote long-term change. Professional social workers have skills in community building, integrating social needs into the economic planning process, and in designing government systems for meeting the needs of vulnerable and displaced populations, as well as using skills in direct practice to empower individuals, families and small groups.

In crises such as natural disasters or civilian-targeted military action, the need for ongoing psychosocial support can persist for years following the actual events have passed and international aid efforts have moved on. When local professional social workers are available, they provide vital helping resources for long-term needs, and they deliver culturally relevant services in the languages used by the community.

Indonesia, a country with the fourth largest population in the world and a host of social problems, maintains a social service delivery system rooted in practices of the early part of the last century in the US. As in many developing nations, Indonesia's orientation to vulnerable populations is institutional. For instance, street children are regularly "rounded up" and placed in institutions for children. Urban slums are often demolished with little integrated planning for permanent housing. The indigent mentally ill, disabled and poor elderly generally without family are also most often cared for in large institutions or with unsupported family care within the community. Some unemployed are also placed in government run institutions. Public social services are delivered in the form of emergency cash grants for the extremely poor. Small voluntary services struggle to provide individual support, community development and protection for the vulnerable such as victims of domestic violence and people with HIV.

Although Indonesian law includes provisions for child protection oversight, no child welfare system links different sectors, or implements child protection service programs. Indonesia does, however, possess a cultural tradition of informal community support; a challenge faced by the social work practice in this country is to improve access to service while employing and integrating traditional values and support methods.

## A Positive Change

Since 1998, Indonesia, home to the largest Islamic population in the world, has been successful in implementing a democracy. The country is currently in transition from a highly centralized system to a federated one. For social services, this means that the provinces have more control over social service planning and implementation. Although this is a positive direction for the country, many provinces lack trained service administrators and practitioners. No accurate data exists to inform social welfare planning, and resources for social development are dependent on the different resources of each province.

Currently the Ministry of Social Affairs and many voluntary services help vulnerable populations in residential care within institutions. These institutions meet basic needs but separate families and provide minimal services. In the effort to find new solutions, the central and local governments and large voluntary service networks are considering community-based services options. One of the problems in moving service delivery from the institutional model to one that is community-based is the **severe lack of trained social workers**. In general, professional social work

intervention with individuals, families, small groups and communities is based on a framework that views human behavior within the context of **community**. Social work assessment looks at the biological, psychological, social and spiritual forces that shape a situation. Thus, professional social work not only supports individual and family change, but also works to create access to support and to develop support **systems**.

Social workers educated in different models of service delivery have skills to develop, administer and implement social services, and train and supervise local non-professional workers in the delivery of services. Social workers are also skilled in organizing and advocating with local government for policy change.

One of Indonesia's biggest challenges, then, is to develop a coherent and unified service delivery system. Without the resources of social work practitioners and administrators, this task would be extremely difficult and far more lengthy.

The Indonesian Professional Social Work Organization (IPSPI) and the Association of Indonesian Schools of Social Work (IPPSI) are two social work organizations notable for their tenacity and hard work, but lacking in the resources or time necessary to adequately promote and improve the profession, implement standards, oversee licensing, or develop a standardized curriculum.

In 2006 with the help of BPSW and UNICEF, IPSPI launched a program in the tsunami affected area of Aceh to help build the capacity of the local government to implement a community-based, family-centered child welfare system. This very successful project is a showcase for quality services, and employs professional social workers in the coordination of community-based child protective services and the training of community workers at the government level. Through this initiative BPSW also established a Social Work Resource Center for community-based, family-centered child protection. The Center, develops training modules, maintains a website and database for information dissemination, sponsors monthly learning forums and develops programs in various social work fields of practice. The SWPRC website can be accessed at [www.socialworkers.or.id](http://www.socialworkers.or.id).

Despite the social work profession being in its relative infancy, Indonesia is home to dedicated, committed professional social work educators and practitioners who are greatly concerned about the lack of protection and services within their country. With very limited resources, they provide consultation to the government, educate new students and provide a wide variety of services from HIV counseling and testing to substance abuse treatment, and services for children and youth, the elderly, disabled, chronically ill, and poor communities. They search for new solutions for poverty alleviation and social development, help write social welfare legislation and advocate for change. These amazing social workers need both support for their continued efforts, and additions to their ranks.

Various government bodies are also searching for more effective methods to alleviate poverty. There exists a growing awareness even at top administrative levels that simply giving cash assistance to a community or individual is not enough to alleviate enduring social problems such as domestic violence, addiction, homelessness, and the increasing numbers of people with HIV and other infectious illnesses. And methods such as occasional "sweeps" of street children, panhandlers, and prostitutes are now often viewed as ineffective as well as unethical.

Within the Ministry of Social Affairs, the head of children's services is working to gradually upgrade services in institutions while moving toward a community-based model that will integrate a variety of services into community service centers. The Ministry also supports the goal of adding about 500 Bachelor of social work professionals to its staff, but at present there is no government funding to do so. BPSW would like to assist the Ministry in whatever way it can.