

Para-Professional Social Work: an effective Paradigm shift towards Community Development to Sustainable Development

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Abstract

In Bangladesh, history of professional social work education crossed more than 50 years. Within this period, social work education expanding from University of Dhaka to more than 60 educational institutions.

NGOs are continuing in Bangladesh with meaningful existence from just after independence of 1971. As on before of social work education and NGO interventions, the philanthropic initiatives-mostly considering of the socio-cultural & religious spirit, had has an effective evidence of the conventional community development specially on the field of disaster response, primary health care, drinking water and humanitarian services. Social Capital had played an important role, in terms of the social integrity, community feelings, and empathy. After promoting the NGO initiative and partial combination of professional social work, it has a big dilemma in terms of nurturing and promoting of philanthropic social welfare and social capital for societal peace and harmony. NGO interventions contributed significant development but at the same time due the gaps in between the philanthropic and indigenous approaches and NGO initiatives, people's participation in program design to implementation is big question. As a result, the impact of sustainability and community ownership still now is frustrating issue in development sector in Bangladesh. Professional social work is one of the best solutions to solve the problem but unfortunately there is a big gap in between academicians and practitioners in Bangladesh. Specially, Para-professional social work is one of the successful and tested initiatives for sustainable community development in many countries. This is the high time for Bangladesh, to initiate Para-professional social work for achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through this paper, try to develop an outline for promoting Para-professional social work in Bangladesh.

Key word: *Professional social work, Para-professional social work, SDGs*

Introduction

Bangladesh have experienced with professional social work education with more than half century. Within this long span of period, social work education has expanded in terms of quantity, diversification, and specialization. Globally professional social work well recognized and accredited not only in western world even some Asian and African Countries.

Professional social workers appropriately address the different problems through different approaches with a systematic integrated manner and six core values (1) Service; (2) Social justice; (3) Dignity and worth of the person; (4) Importance of human relationships; (5) Integrity; and, (6) Competence (NASW, 2018b).

From community development to sustainable development, we have already continuing more than six decades in Bangladesh. Initiatives of Professional social workers, development practitioners and local level organizers try to contribute for upliftment of the grassroots in combination with public and private sector but unfortunately due to lack of effective collaboration, communication, and mutual understanding within the all relevant stakeholders, significant changes trends are slower compare to efforts and investment.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), otherwise known as the Global Goals, are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The SDGs are an inclusive agenda. They tackle the root causes of poverty and unite us together to make a positive change for both people and planet. Supporting the 2030 Agenda is a top priority for the all countries including Bangladesh.

Considering the SDGs target, indicators and time bound, need to scale up paraprofessional social work for effective, significant and evidence based initiative. Without meaningful coordination, communication, mutual trust and shared vision in between Professional Social Workers (Academicians), Practitioners, Development agencies, CBOs, NGOs including public and private sector, it is really difficult to achieve SDG 2030 Agenda.

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Conceptual Framework

Social work

According to The International Association of Schools of Social Work and the International Federation of Social Workers (2014) define “Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. (*The International Federation of Social Workers*. <http://ifsw.org/get-involved/global-definition-of-social-work>)

Para-Professional Social Work

Until now, there has been no agreed upon and recognized definition for Para professional social workers at either the global or national level. The term *Para professional* refers to someone who is typically not university educated (i.e., does not have a degree in the social work).

Para professionals take on a myriad of titles and roles within the larger social welfare system (Davis, 2009; Bess, Lopez & Tomaszewski, 2011; Mendenhall, 2012; Mwansa, 2012).

They work under supervision of professionals in various fields and may be trained to help make decisions about services and supports.

A supervised Para professional staff person or volunteer – often community based – who serves the needs of vulnerable individuals including children and families, particularly where social welfare systems are underdeveloped or severely stretched. (*Adapted from Linsk, et al., Building the social welfare workforce through Para social work, 2010*)

Community Development

Community development has many varying definitions. Many scholars trace the origin of modern community development as a discipline to post-World War II reconstruction efforts to improve less developed countries (Wise 1998).

Others cite the American “war on poverty” of the 1960s with its emphasis on solving neighborhood housing and social problems as a significant influence on contemporary community development (Green and Haines 2002).

According to UNESCO’s definition, developmental activities are ‘conscious and scientific processes that involve five elements: population, social setup, environment, resources and technology; which when used proportionately and in a qualitative manner ensure quality of life at the macro and micro levels’

Sustainable Development

The concept of sustainable development arises from a new worldview, which sees the survival, continued progress, and maintenance of the human community as dependent on the continued health and viability of the earth’s life support systems.

The definition of sustainable development provided by the Brundtland Commission in *Our Common Future* (1987) is “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Sustainable development can be defined as the process of strategic changes in our social systems and institutions needed in order to achieve sustainability.

Core Functions and Competencies for Para Professionals in the Social Services

Para-professional Social workers provide an array of social services in various countries across the globe; the functions and activities of these workers are not well described or delineated within or across countries.

Training, credentialing, supervision, and evaluation of Para professional social workers vary as well based on local context, the existence or lack of formal social services or social welfare structures as well as the professional and local cultural stance on how vulnerable people are to be supported and helped.

A number of professional fields of practice have deployed community level Para professionals as a way to support vulnerable groups as well as a way to fill gaps in the social service workforce.

These functions and competencies should serve as a useful base to develop such programs; however, they will always need to be supplemented by functional areas and competencies specific to the context or discipline related to those served by the Para professional workers.

The functions and competencies are generic in that they may apply to most Para professional cadres, but at the same time not all Para professionals are expected to need all of these competencies.

Potentially they may also be used to ensure ethical practice and enforce related laws and professional standards that relate to Para professionals practicing in these fields.

The Following skills must be ensured for Para-professional social workers:

1. Communication skills
2. Direct work with children, youth, and families
3. Applies knowledge related to client needs
4. Community work
5. Collaboration skills
6. Organization and leadership
7. Monitoring and evaluation
8. Developing self and others

Para-Professional Social Work: Bangladesh Context

In Bangladesh, the recruitment of Government/ NGO staffs for any community development program only considering academic qualification from any discipline (sometimes with some relevant experience). Nothing preference has given for the academic background and professional skills of social work. NGO workers have delivered their services through some conventional approaches and their own policies and procedures.

Due to the poor coordination in between the professional social work academicians with Government & development sector of Bangladesh, said recruitment process still now continuing.

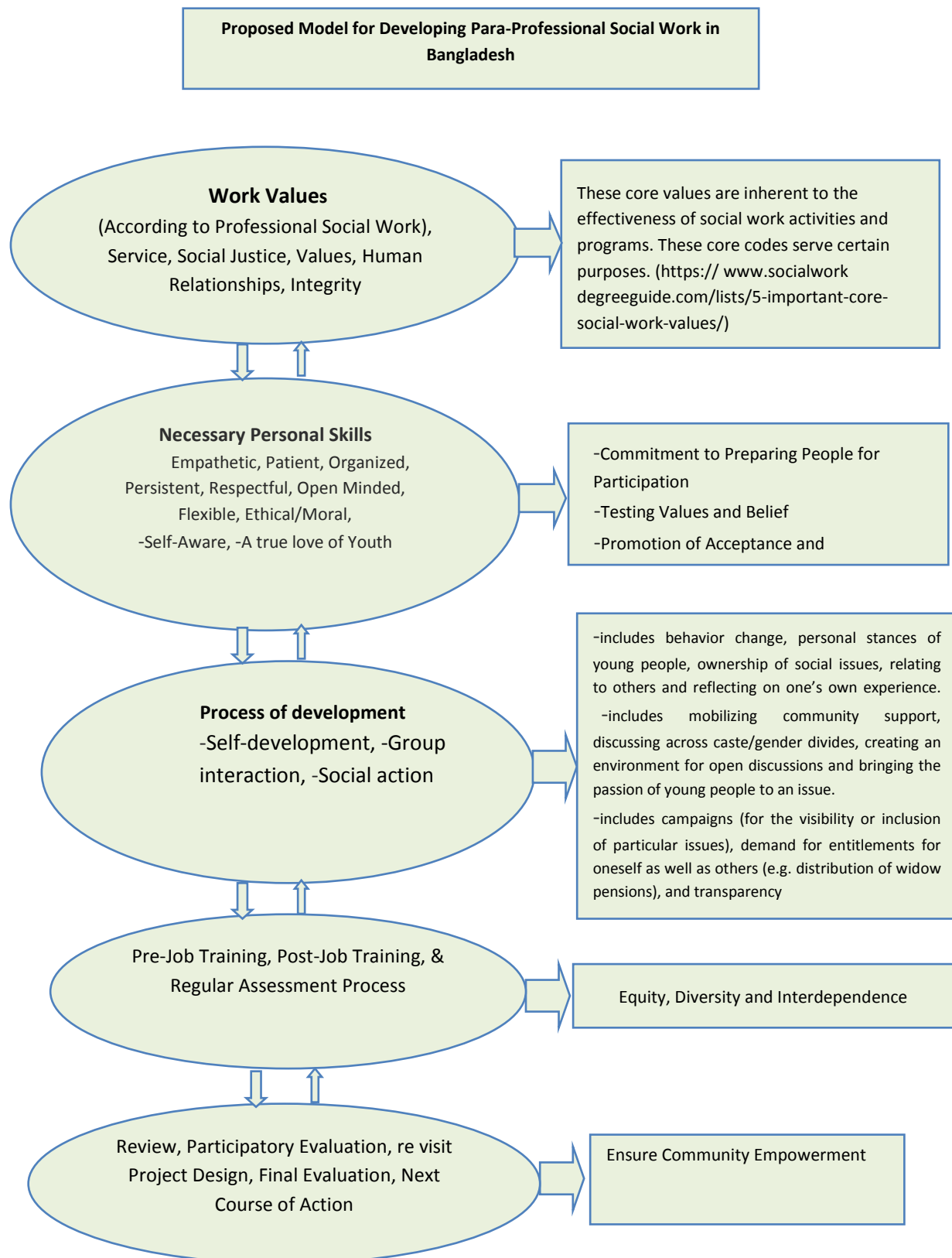
Un-fortunately, Para-professional social work concept is absence in Bangladesh and Para-professional social work Education system not yet initiated within the country. One of the major reason that, professional social work not yet recognized in Bangladesh. But, informally, a widen number of Para-professional development workers have already working in Bangladesh in NGO sector.

They are enough capable to work to solve the socio-economic problems but due to absence of professional social work training, lack of professional relationship in between academicians and practitioners, Para-professional social work is a dream not reality in Bangladesh.

But the ground is ready and considering SDGs targets, this is the high time for promoting Para-professional social work for appropriately addresses SDG 2030 Agenda.

Proposed Model for developing Para-professional Social Work in Bangladesh

Considering the core values, skills and professional standards of Professional Social Work, the proposed model recommended for future course of action.



Proposed Model of Institutional Mechanism to Practitioner Mechanism

