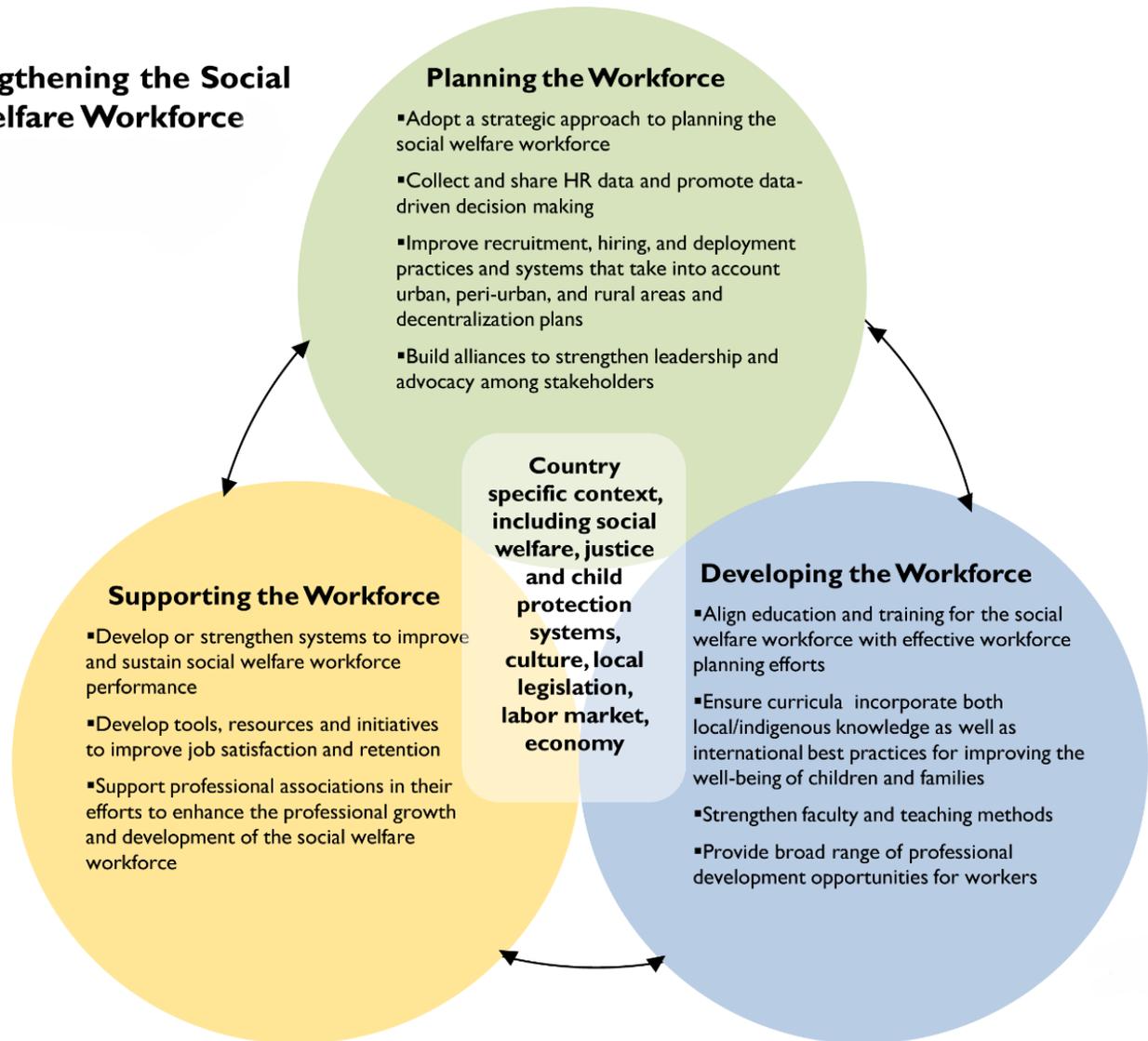


# Social Welfare Workforce Strengthening Framework:

*A framework for investing in those who care for children*

## Strengthening the Social Welfare Workforce



# **Social Welfare Workforce Strengthening Framework: A framework for investing in those who care for children**

## **Introduction**

A functioning social welfare system serves as a vital safety net for children and families made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS and other challenging circumstances. When the system is functioning effectively, families and children have access to an array of quality services that promote wellness and protect them from harm. Services can include family support and early intervention, child protection to address abuse and neglect and alternative care for children separated from their family of origin. Historically, the social welfare workforce has played a critical role within social welfare systems, from provision of direct services, to administration of government agencies, policy development, research, workforce education and preparation, and advocacy.

Unfortunately, for many countries around the world, the social welfare system (and the workforce) is weakened by authority and responsibility distributed among/between different ministries, extremely high need with little to no resource allocation, unclear or conflicting policy and programmatic mandates, little access or availability to quality training and education, and overwhelming demands for social welfare assistance. In addition, one of the most critical barriers to effective service delivery is a marginalized and disempowered social work workforce. These systemic issues have a direct impact on service delivery for children and families made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS. Often times, the end results are detrimental to the overall wellbeing and safety of children who are underserved, may not be receiving life-saving treatment, support and care services, and are further marginalized.

The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) has prioritized efforts to mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS on children orphaned or made vulnerable by the disease. Over the past six years, PEPFAR has successfully provided critical support to nearly 4 million children, most of whom live in Sub-Saharan Africa. The second phase of PEPFAR emphasizes strategies intended to improve the sustainability of these initiatives. As a result, there has been a growing interest in strategies to strengthen systems – primarily health systems but also social welfare systems. Likewise, PEPFAR has increased its efforts to strengthen the healthcare and social welfare workforce. PEPFAR has established Technical Working Groups focusing on Health Systems Strengthening and Human Resources for Health and funded several workforce strengthening projects and training programs. Several additional initiatives supported by UNICEF, DFID, and others concerned with the welfare of vulnerable children have contributed to the development of a growing body of knowledge and resources to support efforts to strengthen the social welfare workforce and social welfare systems. The results of these initiatives indicate that successful efforts require a multi-faceted approach, including strategies to improve planning for, development of and support to the social welfare workforce.

One step in this multi-faceted approach involves supporting efforts by country teams to draft a national action plan that will serve as a guide to strengthen the social welfare workforce, and to measure key indicators of success to achieve outcomes. It is important to note that the framework or model proposed in this document is intended only as a guide to support country efforts to strengthen the social welfare workforce and systems. Ultimately, country ownership will be a driving force in achieving the successful implementation of national action plans.

## **Defining The Social Welfare Workforce**

It is important to note that how the workforce is labeled differs from country to country – social welfare, social service or social development workforce each seems to be an acceptable term *depending on the*

country. What works in one area, however, may have negative connotations in another. For example, at the Social Welfare Workforce Strengthening conference held in Cape Town in November of 2010, participants from some countries noted that the term ‘welfare’ is a big problem, one that means workers get seen as ration givers, giving handouts, or relief, or food for the poor. This powerful image contributes to the profession as being perceived as not attractive and disempowered. In these countries, the term ‘social development worker’ is seen as empowering, forward looking, and positive. In other countries, this did not seem to be the case, and social welfare workers seemed to be a fine term. In yet other countries, social service workforce seemed to be the term of art. In this framework document, the term ‘social welfare workforce’ is used throughout, not to champion it as the ‘correct’ label, but because it seems at the moment to be the one that is still the most prevalent.

It should be made clear from the outset that ‘social welfare workforce’ is meant to be an inclusive term, describing the broad variety of different workers – paid and unpaid, governmental and non-governmental – that presently make up the workforce. These workers are called by different titles in different countries, a few examples of which follow: social workers, para-social workers, community counselors, community development workers, community health workers, and so on. It is not possible at this point to put forward a few terms that everyone in the field would recognize and agree on, so we are using a more general term. It will be important as the field is strengthened to agree on *social welfare or social service workforce functions*. This can inform common definitions with regard to titles. This would also avoid some of the divisive conflicts within some countries over what some of the titles mean.

One other definitional note – there was a certain level of agreement that the use of the term ‘volunteer’ should be discouraged; if people volunteer, it was put forth, they can choose to stop at any time, to do only what they want, and, most important, it is hard to *sustain* a workforce with volunteers. The suggestion was made to replace ‘volunteer’ with the term ‘community based care givers’, as that would give more value to the work, and it would be easier to make a stronger linkage between them and the more formal SW system; it also might make it more compelling to provide a small stipend.

### **Country specific context, including social welfare, child protection, justice, education, and health systems, and culture, local legislation, labor market, economy**

It is important to note that this framework – like the work of the social welfare workforce – takes place within a country specific context that includes social welfare, child protection, justice, education, and health systems, and cultural, legislative, labor market and economic factors that have an impact on all three areas of the framework. Social workforce strengthening decisions need to be made while taking these contextual factors into consideration. It will be very helpful if plans are built after undertaking an environmental scan that takes into account all these broad and sometimes overlapping aspects of context: national, regional, political, social, cultural and economic contexts with legal and regulatory laws and ordinances, national social welfare, protection, health and education policies and other government as well as donor priorities. This range of characteristics must be considered to effectively design and build viable workforce plans.

Cultural context, in particular, has a significant impact on the social welfare system and thus the work of the social welfare workforce. This context may vary dramatically even within a country. This could involve issues regarding the respective roles that community and families play with respect to vulnerable children. Indigenous practices ought to be considered in different parts of the system, but might be especially important in planning for the training and education of workers, as well as in how they are supported.

The “labor market” refers to the market in which workers compete for jobs and employers compete for workers. And just like other workers, social workers are active agents in the prevailing labor market, and they respond to both pressures and incentives to decide where they want to work, who they want to work

for and for how much pay. As such, it is important to carry out some sort of analysis of the labor market to establish the likely source of social welfare workers and to determine the reasons for turnover within the present workforce. This is especially important considering that, in some countries, the workforce includes a large contingent of unpaid workers – even bringing up the issue of whether the term ‘workforce’ applies in this situation.

Finance remains a critical crosscutting issue in planning, developing and supporting the social welfare workforce. It is the least resourced and recognized workforce, often without a grading system, salary structure, and not always supported by their own governments. In countries where the economy is low performing, this situation is exacerbated and must be taken into account when planning workforce strengthening initiatives and to ensure long-term sustainability. In these situations, donors often play a key role, and the ways in which that role gets played also needs to be considered.

As a final note, it is important to emphasize that the link between workforce strengthening and context in which it occurs is a *dynamic relationship*, one in which people act within to plan, develop and support, but one in which *people also change the context*, or try to do so. That is, people do not just passively accept the context, but rather they work to modernize policy, to change legislation, to develop codes of conduct, and so on.

## **Activities to Plan the Social Welfare Workforce**

- *Adopt a strategic approach to planning the social welfare workforce*
  - Identify human resources requirements and costed plans to carry out national legislation and policy for meeting the needs of highly vulnerable children
  - Determine the current composition of the social welfare workforce (e.g., numbers and distributions)
  - Carry out periodic workforce assessments to identify gaps in human resource requirements
  - Promote appropriate workforce realignment and task shifting among different cadres of social workers and through decentralization of appropriate social welfare responsibilities
  - Create stronger, effective links with the social welfare workforce education and training system to address future workforce needs
  - Strengthen mechanisms and capacity for financing, accountability and producing costed plans.
  
- *Collect and share HR data and promote data-driven decision making*
  - Build and strengthen Human Resources Information Systems (HRIS)– Bring key stakeholders together to identify where sound social welfare workforce data exist, to discuss gaps and shared data needs, and agree on requirements of an HRIS.
  - Establish and use common definitions and functions across multiple disciplines (e.g., social worker, community worker, para-social worker, social work assistant)
  - Set up systems for monitoring progress to create a feedback loop for future planning
  - Determine costs and budgets for utilizing useful technological resources to share timely and accurate data and information.
  
- *Improve recruitment, hiring, and deployment practices and systems that take into account urban, peri-urban, and rural areas and decentralization plans*
  - Recruit individuals into various certificate, diploma and degree social work education/training programs
  - Use a competency model to develop clear job descriptions for social welfare workforce cadres
  - Establish fair, transparent, and efficient practices for recruiting, hiring, and promoting for social workers and para-social workers and others in the social welfare workforce
  - Create or strengthen systems for hiring and deploying social workers to underserved areas; engage community leaders in helping to transition new social workers into their work.
  
- *Build alliances and coalitions to strengthen leadership and advocacy among broad range of stakeholders*
  - Advocate for *intra-ministerial dialogue and coordination* at central and district levels to generate the political will, legislative frameworks, and resource allocation to strengthen and support the social welfare workforce
  - Develop a national advocacy agenda for the social welfare workforce, identifying the roles and responsibilities for government and non-government, national and local stakeholders in efforts to implement the agenda; this includes advocating to emphasize of the work, and for increased financial commitments to the social welfare system
  - Solicit input from the social welfare workforce and the communities that they serve to link the formal and informal practices and system more closely together, and to contribute to national and local advocacy agendas and social welfare workforce strengthening strategies.
  - Identify champions and leaders who are willing and able to work together to advocate for needed change.

## **Activities to Develop the Social Welfare Workforce:**

- *Align education and training for the social welfare workforce with effective workforce planning efforts*
  - Develop social work pre-service education and in-service training programs to address gaps identified by workforce assessments
  - Use competency based job descriptions to develop appropriate social work education and training programs for specific social welfare workforce cadres
  - Identify ways to 'fast track' social welfare education and training to meet urgent and critical needs
  - Ensure information from education programs (i.e. number of expected graduates, what level, gender and home region) is fed into the Human Resource Information System
  - Develop capacity to plan, budget and advocate for needed resources to make improvements to the pre-service education and in-service training system.
  
- *Ensure curricula incorporate both local/indigenous knowledge as well as international best practices for improving the well-being of children and families*
  - Conduct periodic curricula reviews by recognized experts as well as local practitioners and develop new curricula, as needed.
  - Promote best practices and curricula that focus on *indigenous knowledge and culturally competent methods of practice*; that strengthens the capacity of social welfare workers to utilize best practices within their communities (e.g. community-based care)
  - Allow for both standard curricula to enable students to achieve social work qualifications as well as electives to promote innovation and diversity
  - Ensure that curricula recognize the different skill areas of social welfare work (e.g., social case work with the family and directly with children requires a quite different skill set than mobilizing and strengthening community capacity).
  
- *Strengthen faculty and teaching methods*
  - Establish competency standards for social work educators and periodically assess their performance against standards
  - Encourage social work education programs to send faculty and professionals for regional and international exchanges; as well as host international faculty in order to learn new perspectives and approaches and promote exchange of ideas and best practices
  - Build capacity for field placements that include field supervision; require internships/field placements for social work students prior to graduation and promote field placements for paraprofessionals.
  
- *Provide broad range of in-service professional development opportunities for workers*
  - Organize flexible courses and/or internet or smart phone based courses (where practical) for workers or community based caregivers living in remote areas or unable to leave their employment for full-time study
  - Establish specialized credentials and in-country credentialing systems.
  - Encourage social welfare workers access to additional in-service coursework and test-based credentials in order to achieve advanced credentials
  - Expand access to diploma and degree programs for social welfare workers
  - Facilitate ways to recognize non-formal and on-the-job learning (e.g., by offering competency based assessments)

## **Activities to Support the Social Welfare Workforce:**

- *Develop or strengthen systems to improve and sustain social welfare workforce performance*
  - Improve mechanisms (including leadership development) for supervising and managing the social welfare workforce; seek out any special mechanisms that may be needed for community-based caregivers.
  - Create guidelines for formal induction of staff, including formal orientation programs, and peer mentorship from seasoned staff
  - Improve systems for measuring social welfare workforce effectiveness (e.g., performance evaluations, measuring deliverables based on clear and realistic job descriptions with clear expectations and timeframe, performance feedback, etc.)
  - Solicit input from families, community members and clients on service delivery and quality
  - Provide incentives for high performing social workers and develop and implement performance improvement plans for poor performing workers
  - Develop standard operating procedures for more coordinated and comprehensive services between national and district governments for children and families (e.g. better tracking and documentation of services, referrals, and ongoing support for children and families)
  
- *Develop tools, resources, and initiatives to improve job satisfaction and retention*
  - Solicit and implement ideas from social welfare workers for improving the workplace conditions aimed at enabling them to carry out their responsibilities more effectively
  - Provide the social welfare workforce with the tools and resources that they require to carry out their jobs to the best of their ability, particularly in under resourced rural settings (e.g. vehicles and fuel, offices, computer, printer, copier, phones or phone cards, etc.)
  - Consult with social welfare workers and community based care givers to identify ways to acknowledge achievements or incentives and (merit-based) promotions to provide for individuals who stay with organizations for longer periods of time
  - Solicit data from community based care givers about what would motivate them, and implement interventions to the extent possible (e.g. explore possibility of providing stipends to community based care givers for travel and other applicable expenses)
  - Develop viable career ladders for workers and mobilize support for these among employers, funders and other appropriate stakeholders
  - Ensure adherence to International and national labor policies, legislation & regulations for conditions of employment and workplace standards (e.g. salaries, case loads, working conditions, gender discrimination, medical benefits/Insurance plans, etc.)
  - Engage in on-going monitoring to measure progress of job satisfaction and retention interventions and make appropriate changes based on evidence.
  
- *Support professional associations in their efforts to enhance the professional growth and development of the social welfare workforce*
  - Strengthen professional social work associations where they exist and support the establishment of new ones
  - Encourage networking and mutual support among social welfare workforce professionals (e.g., communities of practice list serves, electronic job postings, job fairs, social media)
  - Support ongoing development and updating of association-based professional standards and codes of ethics for the social welfare workforce
  - Advocate for and encourage adherence to professional standards and ethics for the social welfare workforce
  - Issue position and policy statements in addition to lobbying decision makers on behalf and in support of the social welfare workforce