

# RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF SOCIAL WORK FACULTY: A MULTICOUNTRY REVIEW

REPORT TO THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DEANS  
AND DIRECTORS OF SCHOOLS OF SOCIAL WORK

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## INTRODUCTION

This report describes a collaborative venture by Monmouth University and the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance to explore challenges and strategies related to recruitment and retention of social work faculty across different countries. The work described in this report has been funded through a grant from the US-based National Association of Deans and Directors (NADD).

The Monmouth University School of Social Work is built around the ideals of advancing human rights and social justice. Dr. Robin Mama, dean of the School of Social Work and chairperson of the National Association of Social Workers International Committee, represents these organizations on the Steering Committee of the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance.

The Global Social Service Workforce Alliance (the Alliance) is a nonprofit network supported by PEPFAR/USAID and hosted by IntraHealth International. The Alliance works toward a world where a well-planned, well-trained, and well-supported social service workforce effectively delivers promising practices that improve the lives of vulnerable populations. The mission of the Alliance is to promote the knowledge and evidence, resources and tools, as well as the political will and action needed to address key social service workforce challenges, especially in low- to middle-income countries. One of the ways in which the Alliance pursues this is by serving as a convener for an inclusive, representative network of stakeholders including government organizations, nongovernmental organizations, academic institutions, donor groups, professional associations, and community practitioners to create a forum for discourse and collective learning. During its formation and since its official launch in June 2013, the Alliance has hosted a webinar series on social service workforce strengthening, which is carried out with support from the USAID-funded *CapacityPlus* project. To date, 17 webinars have been held, featuring speakers from a broad range of countries, including: Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Haiti, Kenya, Indonesia, Japan, Malawi, Moldova, Nigeria, Philippines, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, United Kingdom, United States, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. Presently, over 2,000 participants have joined the webinars from over 45 countries.

Since its public launch as a network in June 2013, the Alliance has drawn attention from faculty and deans domestically and abroad. Ninety faculty and deans representing 21 countries from all regions of the world joined the Alliance in its first year of existence. This interest from the academic community underscores the value of an initiative devoted to a topic that all deans and directors deal with—how to recruit and retain high-quality social work faculty.

The activities described in this report support NADD's goals affiliated with strengthening social work leadership and collaborative partnerships, addressing transitional issues related to social work administration, and improving the sustainability of the social work profession. The purpose of this report is to describe common challenges facing universities and offer examples of promising models that have been implemented in different countries.

## METHODOLOGY

The overall methodology included three components: 1) An initial data-gathering process to learn more about retention and recruitment issues from a representative sample of institutions; 2) an international social work conference panel in Uganda in March 2014 within which the recruitment and retention issues would be explored; and 3) a webinar composed of five university deans and directors of social work programs in September 2014, which would use the results of the first two components to inform a deeper discussion of the issues and recommendations.

In the first component, a multicountry data-gathering process was conducted to identify common challenges and promising practices through interviews with deans, directors, and faculty in participating countries, including the US, Tanzania, Rwanda, Kenya, and Vietnam. The interviews covered the scope of social work educational programs and included questions about demographic information, school size, scope of program cohort, available degree levels, faculty background and training, and common challenges and approaches to faculty recruitment and retention.

Further understanding of the topic in question was gained at the Social Work 2014 Conference in Kampala, Uganda, entitled “Professional Social Work in East Africa: Towards Social Development and Poverty Reduction.” The conference brought together over 400 social work educators, practitioners, students, policy-makers, and other stakeholders to discuss the future of social work in East Africa and learn from international, regional, and local experiences and best practices. The conference was jointly planned and delivered by Makerere University in Uganda, the University of Nairobi in Kenya, the National University of Rwanda, the Institute of Social Work in Tanzania, and Carinthia University of Applied Sciences Austria under the PROSOWO project supported by the Austrian Development Cooperation under the auspices of the Austrian Partnership Programme for Higher Education and Research for Development (APPEAR). The conference organizers incorporated a plenary panel discussion entitled “Global Perspectives and Innovative Approaches to Recruitment and Retention of Social Work Faculty.” Gidraph Wairire, University of Nairobi, moderated the panel with Amy Bess, coordinator of the Alliance. The panel included deans and directors of social work programs from Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda.

As a final component in this initiative, the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance hosted an associated webinar entitled “[Roundtable Discussion on Social Work Faculty Recruitment and Retention](#)” on September 23, 2014 (see Appendix A). The panelists included social work deans and directors from Indonesia, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, and the US. The discussion was moderated by Dr. Robin Mama, dean of the School of Social Work at Monmouth University, and Dr. Jim McCaffery, representing *CapacityPlus* and chairperson of the Alliance’s Steering Committee. Meanwhile, invitations and announcements were distributed through various outlets for interested parties to participate as audience members in the discussion. In addition to the

moderators and panelists, 38 participants from 12 countries participated in the webinar, which is available for download from the Alliance's website.

## **FINDINGS**

Based on the multicountry review garnered from interviews, conclusions from conference participants in Uganda, and recommendations from webinar participants during the roundtable discussion, this report consolidates the main challenges and effective strategies related to faculty recruitment and retention.

### **RECRUITMENT CHALLENGES**

#### **Shortages of Social Work Faculty**

In many countries, it can be difficult to recruit social work faculty who possess master's or doctoral degrees because of the shortage of candidates who hold these higher-level qualifications and choose a career in academia. The reasons for these shortages tend to differ substantially based on country context. In Rwanda, Uganda, and Tanzania, the number of social workers holding master's degrees or PhDs is too low to establish a strong pipeline of future teaching staff. In the US, a shortage of faculty is the result of a relatively constant number of doctoral program graduates over the last fifteen years compared to a growing number of new programs requiring faculty. More schools are competing for the relative same number of PhD graduates to fill faculty positions. Similarly, the University of Nairobi in Kenya experiences faculty shortages due to the demand for social work programs growing at a rate that outpaces the current number of PhD holders. While the growth of social work programs indicates a university's optimism for recruiting appropriately trained faculty, the increased competition for an already small number of doctorate-holding instructors creates a pronounced shortage. In South Africa the lack of adequate staff representation takes a distinct form in a post-apartheid country. The merger of universities brought the unique challenge of aligning staff representation with the demographics of the country and the student body, in order to meet new legal requirements regarding equality for black South Africans. Recognizing that skewed representation can disproportionately impact the quality of education for black South Africans, efforts to recruit a more diverse range of candidates to faculty positions needed to be addressed.

#### **Competition**

In Indonesia, recruitment of social work educators is challenging due to internal competition for qualified academic personnel with the national Ministry of Social Affairs. There is also competition from other academic disciplines and career paths when enlisting social work teaching staff. In Rwanda, the relatively new bachelors of social work program faces internal competition from sister disciplines that have been in existence for longer periods of time, such as clinical psychology and sociology. Additionally, the historical prominence of the natural sciences over the social sciences leads to a relative lack of dedicated value and priority being

placed on the social work discipline. Attempting to bring promising graduates on board as faculty involves negotiating a competitive marketplace and motivating them to turn down opportunities in other sectors. In post-apartheid South Africa, for example, efforts to recruit a more diverse range of candidates to faculty positions were ramped up. However, candidates who are highly qualified are quickly recruited with better compensation into government and corporate sectors. The low perceived status of social work and the relative lack of financial incentives lead to fierce competition from other fields that ultimately absorb social workers at higher rates of pay. Several countries mentioned the lack of “marketing campaigns” that would raise the profile of social work and create interest in the opportunities available to social work academics. For instance, in Kenya and Uganda, raising the status of the social work profession to increase interest in teaching social service-oriented programs represents a challenge. Potentially, the lack of inherent motivation to join this academic discipline—given its lower status—is compounded by the lack of financial incentives tied to the field.

### **Regulations and Policy Restrictions**

Several countries experience recruitment issues related to government restrictions on funding and the number of openings for faculty positions, despite increasing numbers of students. Government human resources departments that oversee university staffing may take substantial time to process requests and approve candidates. Furthermore, the government’s valuation of best candidates may not align with those the university would ideally hire. Potentially, this represents an investment of significant time made by universities to identify and interview candidates that may not yield fruitful results in the end if final candidates are not granted government approval. As an example, in Indonesia there are government policies that may move existing qualified staff between various Ministry of Social Affairs divisions and from one geographic location to another within the country as needed. The corresponding turnover rate caused by such deployment often requires recruitment of qualified faculty members at the university level to fill posts, which can contribute to a lack of stable teaching faculty at the university. The absence of staff continuity represents a faculty recruitment and retention issue. On the other hand, in the US, as a matter of institutional policy, universities are generally unable to immediately recruit from their own pool of graduate students to fill faculty vacancies. Overall, recent graduates are strongly encouraged or required to gain experience in the field and/or at a different university before applying for a faculty position at their alma mater.

## **RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES**

### **Short-Term Strategies**

In order to address recruitment issues, participants reported that they tended to fill gaps in a more immediate sense with guest lecturers. Often, vacancies in faculty staffing are filled through partnerships with other universities by sharing part-time lecturers, collaborating with international NGOs to provide qualified lecturers and specialized teachers, as well as providing training and field practice opportunities for students. Ideally, these strategies present opportunities for temporary or guest faculty to incorporate their practice experiences from the

field into classroom instruction for the students. While incorporated on a relatively revolving scale, the use of temporary lecturers aims to quickly fill a pressing need.

### **Mid-Term Strategies**

Mid-term solutions to recruitment challenges involve conducting routine headhunting for qualified candidates who are prepared to meet the requisite credentials for the profession. While this method requires an investment of time and resources, searches can be conducted on an ongoing or as-needed basis. In South Africa, this may help address cultural and legal imperatives to include proportionate representation across all demographic groups. Another method for recruitment involves attracting candidates who are already prepped for faculty positions. In Kenya, the master's program in community development attracts candidates from other social science backgrounds to collaborate with the Department of Psychology. This enables recruitment from other related social science disciplines—even if only as part-time lecturers—and demonstrates the ability to continue educating students through university and faculty partnerships.

### **Long-Term Strategies**

Meanwhile, some recruitment issues require the need for longer-term planning. For example, in Tanzania the recruiting process goes through government agencies, so petitions have been made to conduct recruiting that is independent of the government and use a mentorship model. The concept of supportive guidance is also applied to external sources of support. For example, Rwanda's bachelors of social work graduates are recruited to attend outside universities—particularly in South Africa and Sweden—to obtain their master's and PhD degrees. These candidates then agree to return to the university to teach after their tutorial assistantships. This strategy involves partnering with other universities on an international level for mentorship. The use of mentoring with the intent to subsequently become faculty is incentivized through the promotion of academic scholarships and opportunities for further financed education. Thus, students are motivated and supported to obtain advanced degrees and stay in the field of social work; also, as part of accepting the support, they commit to service within the university setting instead of a competing sector. Similarly, in Uganda recruitment efforts involve identifying promising students as potential faculty candidates and encouraging continued graduate study.

As a country-specific response to similar recruitment issues, the “grow your own timber” concept is employed in South Africa to groom high-achieving members of the master's program for future faculty positions; currently, five members of the faculty are recent graduates. Conversely, in the US many universities have instituted policies that prevent them from immediately hiring recent graduates of their own program, in part to ensure an infusion of new ideas and perspectives. Thus, one option involves adopting an early identification strategy for discovering doctoral students from other institutions as potential faculty. The university then works to establish a relationship with the candidate as early as possible before prospective employment is offered. This may be coupled with a spousal partner program as a recruitment tool to help partners of faculty members find employment. The contrast between South African

and American policies represents the notion that solutions to faculty recruitment issues tend to be context-specific based on individual country circumstances and practices.

## **RETENTION CHALLENGES**

### **Overburdened Staff**

Governmental and private-sector posts are often seen as more desirable than faculty positions due to more sufficient compensation and resources. Within universities, other disciplines such as those in the natural or social sciences also tend to have better facilities and equipment. Meanwhile, the pressing demand to produce sufficient research is linked to a perceived pressure to compete favorably with leading international institutions in order to become established as a relevant player on the global stage. However, the burden to compete globally may come at the cost of celebrating the university faculty's inherent strengths and interests and their innate mission to prepare future leaders in the field of social work through educational investment. In these cases, the role of faculty can become more dedicated to producing research and procuring funding than facilitating social work education and producing future scholars and practitioners, which can create retention issues. Many teaching staff are overburdened by bureaucratic obstacles, managerial oversight, and administrative duties. Faculty members are challenged to balance organizational, teaching, research, and practice responsibilities. The drive to produce research also has financial motives. Universally, the competitive resource landscape may also take the form of inherently aggressive fundraising prospects for faculty. For faculty, the opportunity to conduct research can be both a requirement and motivating factor to maintain their positions, since research and incoming funding are innately linked; however, research opportunities tend to be predominantly available at higher-profile universities. Thus, institutions with higher profiles and histories of providing supportive capital represent attractive employment options and fare better than those working to establish their presence on the research landscape, which makes it increasingly challenging for the latter to retain faculty.

### **Regulations and Restrictions**

Dissatisfaction impacting retention may be related to the lack of regulations affording staff the opportunity to achieve the status of professor. In Indonesia, there is no procedure for scholarly staff to go on sabbaticals for professional development or to elevate in status, which is integrally linked to increased compensation. Bureaucratically denying professional development tied to status, pay, and augmented faculty qualifications affects staff retention in a competitive landscape, and filters through to the quality of education being provided to students. However, competing institutions such as the Ministry of Social Affairs offer these development opportunities, which represent rivalry for retaining quality faculty. Meanwhile in other countries, regulations linked to mandatory and otherwise forced retirements impact the number of experienced, high-quality staff on board. Mandated retirement potentially disrupts prime research contributions and hinders institutional access to experienced faculty.

## **RETENTION STRATEGIES**

### **Development from Within**

Consequently, retention efforts involve investing in faculty through accelerated training, procurement of research funding, publishing, promotions, and improving staff incomes through consultancies. In Tanzania, this is accomplished by offering professional development through short training courses, evening classes, and foundation courses to candidates who do not have requisite minimum qualifications. These various incentive schemes support the growth of faculty profiles and encourage prominence on a broader scale. Rwandan efforts involve initiatives to develop international partnerships with universities in the US and Canada through research projects and conferences as faculty incentives. In addition, conducting research that is published gains international recognition and promotion of faculty members. Moreover, this process encourages tenure, generates income, and raises the profile of social work as a discipline. Development of existing staff also rewards teaching with financial relief related to advancing faculty study. Current faculty are encouraged to further their training by obtaining doctoral education financed through the institution. Subsequently, investing in these select individuals supports promotion from within, and PhD-level teachers are created instead of being hired from an external source. By improving the teaching environment, promoting staff development, creating independent funds, and establishing doctoral-level staff, institutions also create a setting that is appealing to drawing in and retaining external faculty members. An increased number of PhDs in the faculty attracts other PhDs to join the university because it implies a positive reputation and elite associations. These factors play a key role in promoting the independence of social work from other social science disciplines and professions while raising its profile and inherently increasing dedication to the profession.

### **Incentives**

Retention incentives include performance-based benefits, scholarships for continuing education, opportunities to join national and international conferences, social work certification and licenses, and the chance to work with local government and NGOs to do practice work. In the US, an effective retention mechanism relates to matching or exceeding compensation offers made to current faculty from other universities. Meanwhile, initially strong staff salaries are supplemented with opportunities for sabbatical and large merit-based increases based on productivity. However, one of the main caveats made by panelists was to be aware of the temptations of boosting pay through consultancies or teaching additional evening and weekend short courses. While acknowledging the inadequacy of low salaries, panelists felt that this method of boosting pay tends to overextend faculty and erode the quality of their teaching and support to the core bachelor's and master's students. As opposed to relying on consultancies, the opportunity for incentivized community outreach occurs through collaboration with colleagues and teaming with other universities for strategic planning, research opportunities, policy dialogues, and research with external field agencies. These partnerships provide opportunities for additional income while preventing the need for consultancies that might overburden faculty and be unfavorable for the university. In Uganda, collaboration engages the staff by establishing a connection between the university and community through professional

development training courses and creates a pipeline of income through community groups, NGOs, and policy institutions. The partnership between public universities and the private sector also yields new funding opportunities as short, tailored courses are marketed in child protection and research. Similarly in Kenya, faculty can increase their income through self-sponsored programs that are taught on evenings and weekends on topics such as proposal writing, developing teaching modules, eLearning, and pedagogy. Lastly, strengthening relationships through collaboration with other schools of social work in effect creates a consortium both within country and globally that exercises the power and influence of educators to promote social work as a profession.

### **Supportive Work Environments**

Establishing an inherent sense of worth by honoring faculty and promoting accomplishments through both awards and rewards was seen as significant, so they know they are valued. This also includes creating a pleasant working environment and good-natured relationships that discourage faculty from wanting to leave. Other highlighted retention strategies included opportunities for providing intellectual freedom in research and ensuring validation through developing cohesive, amiable departments. Lastly, the administrative change of increasing the compulsory retirement age was discussed as a potential way to expand the career of academic faculty via service retention. Ultimately, the freedom of personal expression in one's academic work as well as establishing strong relationships with colleagues are often cited as powerful factors in retaining faculty members.

## **CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS AND REMARKS**

There is a critical need to produce future social workers who are skilled providers of social services. In order to meet this need, it is well recognized that a strong university workforce is needed to prepare the next generation of social work practitioners as well as to create a pipeline of future faculty. Deans and program directors of social work programs from around the world face similar challenges in recruiting and retaining high-quality social work faculty.

Addressing challenges in recruiting and retaining faculty requires a holistic approach that incorporates a range of linked recruitment and retention interventions that fit the particular country context. While certain interventions might focus on concrete components of the university system—such as faculty recruitment protocols, compensation, or the relationship between research and teaching—other efforts will need to be made to raise the status of the social work profession, both within the university and beyond. This effort will require a multidimensional approach, which can include some short-, middle-, and long-range plans.

In this paper, a number of different examples have been described that could help inform such plans. In addition, a few recommendations emerged from this work that might be considered. There is a need for additional sharing of resources and best practices on faculty recruitment and retention by deans and program directors with their colleagues around the world, especially with those in new programs and schools. Space to exchange best practices in recruitment and

retention strategies should be promoted, such as through the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance and its website, or through listservs and networks such as the National Association of Deans and Directors, the Association of Schools of Social Work in Africa, and the International Association of Schools of Social Work. Also, faculty need to be encouraged to create research and/or scholarship projects that involve collaboration with colleagues in other institutions where opportunities arise to support mutual learning across institutions or countries.

Comprehensively addressing faculty recruitment and retention can support the development of strong educational institutions and in turn help to ensure that new generations of social workers enter the field with the support, knowledge, and tools needed to join the profession of social work.

## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEWEES, UGANDA CONFERENCE PANELISTS, AND ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSANTS

NAME	TITLE AND SCHOOL	COUNTRY
Dr. Preston Chitere	Dean, Department of Sociology and Social Work, University of Nairobi	Kenya
Ms. Ngoc Thi Doan	Instructor of Social Work and Gender Studies, Ho Chi Minh City Open University	Vietnam
Mr. Kenneth Herrmann	Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, SUNY Brockport	US
Mr. Charles Kalinganire	Lecturer, Department of Social Work, National University of Rwanda	Rwanda
Dr. Ira Kolby	Dean, Graduate College of Social Work, University of Houston	US
Dr. Swizen Kyomuhendo	Lecturer, Makerere University	Uganda
Dr. Abu Mvungi	Rector, Institute of Social Work	Tanzania
Dr. Kanya Eka Santi	Head of Bandung College of Social Welfare, West Java	Indonesia
Dr. Vishanthie Sewpaul	Professor, School of Applied Human Sciences, University of KwaZulu Natal; President, Association of Schools of Social Work in Africa; Vice-President, IASSW	South Africa
Dr. Karen Sowers	Dean and Professor, College of Social Work, University of Tennessee, Knoxville	US
Dr. Gidraph Wairire	Lecturer, University of Nairobi	Kenya

## APPENDIX B: UNIVERSITY DATA AVAILABLE

INSTITUTION	DEGREES OFFERED	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	NUMBER OF TEACHING STAFF	STUDENT/TEACHER RATIO
Department of Social Sciences, University of Rwanda	Bachelor of Arts with Honors in Sociology and in Social Work	Department: 300 Social Work: 150	Department: 20 Social Work: 9	Department: 1:15 Social Work: 1:17
Institute of Social Work, Tanzania	Master of Social Work; Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work; Bachelor of Social Work; Ordinary Diploma in Social Work; Certificate in Social Work	Master: 50 Postgraduate: 10 Bachelor: 504 Diploma: 434 Certificate: 227 Total: 1,225	Social Work: 20	1:61
Bandung College of Social Welfare, Indonesia	Bachelor Degree; Postgraduate/Master Program	Bachelor: 1,801 Postgraduate: 62	68 and 23 guest lecturers	1:21
School of Applied Human Sciences, University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa	Bachelor of Social Work; Master of Social Work (research); Master of Social Work (clinical practice: coursework and dissertation); Master of Social Work (welfare policy and development: coursework and dissertation); PhD	Bachelor: 625 Master: 30 PhD: 9	12	Bachelor only 1:52 based on headcount
College of Social Work, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, US	Bachelor's Degree in Science in Social Work; Master's Degree in Science in Social Work; Doctorate in Social Work; PhD in Social Work	600	45	1:13
Department of Sociology and Social Work, University of Nairobi, Kenya	Ordinary Diploma in Social Work; Bachelor of Arts in Social Work	Ordinary Diploma: 50 Bachelor: 150	Department: 28 Social Work: 9	1:22