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GLOBAL AGENDA FOR SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: A PATH TOWARD SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL WORK

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The Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development (2012) reflects the commitment of social workers, educators and social development practitioners to the Post-2015 Development Agenda. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, effective from September 2015, provides a framework for positioning the Global Agenda to contribute towards a more just society. This paper explores how the four commitments of the Global Agenda link with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Implications and opportunities relating to the Global Agenda for social work practice and education are discussed, and guidelines are presented for more sustainable development outcomes for social work practice and education.

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INTRODUCTION

The Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development (2012) [hereafter Global Agenda] aims to recognise and respond to the "profoundly unjust, unfair and above all unsustainable social, economic and political system of the contemporary world" (Tasse, 2014:283). Social workers and social development practitioners are in the frontline to alleviate the hardships and challenges that people, communities and societies face. In preparing for the Post-2015 Development Agenda, the International Association for Schools of Social Work (IASSW), the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), and the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) collaborated and consulted over a three-year period on the sector's role in contributing to the Post-2015 Development Agenda. These three bodies represent social workers, social development practitioners, educators, and international, national and local organisations. In working towards a better future, the starting point was to recognise collectively the unequal consequences of political, economic, social and cultural orders in specific contexts and the negative impacts these consequences have for people, as is evident in global, national and local communities (Global Agenda, 2012).

The Global Agenda is not meant to be a rigid document, but is rather, "[w]ith all its insufficiencies and limits", a platform "to create a space for debate within the profession and beyond with all those committed to social, economic and political justice" (Tasse, 2014:283). In essence, the Global Agenda (2012) was designed to serve as a common platform for debate and as an Agenda of Commitments to Action from 2013 onwards. The Global Agenda was officially submitted and recognised by Helen Clark, head of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) at the headquarters of the United Nations (UN) in New York on World Social Work Day, 26 March 2012.

The purpose of this paper is to compare the Global Agenda to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development [hereafter 2030 Agenda], which will be adopted in September 2015 (UN, 2015). The discussion starts with a brief overview of the 2030 Agenda and how its vision correlates with the vision of the Global Agenda on the path toward a just society. This section includes a discussion on what constitutes a just society within the constraints of capitalism. Next, the Global Agenda commitments, also referred to as Global Agenda themes or pillars, are outlined and linked to the respective Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Then the focus shifts to the role players and partners who need to implement the Global Agenda, followed by a look at its implications for social work education and practice, and a discussion of the Global Agenda and sustainable development outcomes for social work. Finally, conclusions are drawn on the Global Agenda and social work.

THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND THE GLOBAL AGENDA

The 2030 Agenda lists 17 SDGs and 169 targets for global action over the next 15 years. This is a "comprehensive, far-reaching and people-centred set of universal and transformative goals and targets" intended to stimulate action for the next decade and a half in areas critical for humanity and the planet, and for global prosperity, peace and partnership (UN, 2015:3). The SDGs build on the UN's Millennium Development Goals and seek to complete what these have still not achieved, particularly in reaching the most vulnerable (UN, 2015). The 2030 Agenda recognises that "eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development" (UN, 2015).

The 2030 Agenda is a product of wide public consultation and engagement with civil society and other stakeholders around the world, including the voices of the poorest and most vulnerable. Hence, it is "a charter for people and planet in the twenty-first century" (UN, 2015:10). The vision and commitment of the Global Agenda to contribute to a more fair and just society correlates with the "supremely ambitious and transformational vision" of the 2030 Agenda for "a world free of poverty, hunger, disease and want, where all life can thrive; free of fear and violence; a world with universal literacy, equitable and universal access to quality education at all levels, to health care and social protection, where physical, mental and social well-being are assured" (UN, 2015:3).

Because it goes on from the MDGs, the 2030 Agenda will continue to support development priorities such as eradicating poverty, and promoting health, education, food security and nutrition (UN, 2015:4-5). In the wide range of economic, social and environmental objectives that it lists, it also envisages more "peaceful and inclusive societies" (UN, 2015:4-5). These priorities are also reflected in the Global Agenda's commitments, which specifically pledges support for the social protection floor initiative developed by the International Labour Organization (ILO), decent work and international labour standards, and the World Health Organization (WHO) initiative on the social determinants of health and education for all (Global Agenda, 2012).

The Global Agenda's (2012) commitments are aligned with the call in the 2030 Agenda to transform the world to a more "just, equitable, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world in which the needs of the most vulnerable are met" (UN, 2015:4). A just society requires equality of opportunity, but there is no guarantee of equal outcomes, because of external constraints (e.g. resources) and internal constraints (e.g. health), fuelled by capitalism (Isbister, 2001:15).

Capitalist society embraces neoliberalism, which refers to the free market – an "economic ideology that insists that the market is the most effective mechanism for organising society and hence addressing social need" (Higgs, 2015:114). The neoliberal policy framework influences how services are resourced, which has an impact on cuts in public spending (Higgs, 2015), which in turn have devastating consequences for vulnerable people. These people's welfare is a priority in overseeing how the commitments in the Global Agenda and the 2030 Agenda are met. Green (2012:87)

states: "At their best, markets are mighty engines, generating wealth and transforming the lives and expectations of people throughout society. At their worst, they exclude poor people, exacerbate long-term inequality, and degrade the natural world on which we all depend." As Amartya Sen (quoted in Green, 2012:87) aptly remarks, the problem is not with markets per se "but with the rules and institutions that govern them", which determine how poor people can "exert influence over the way they operate".

Commenting on the realities of capitalism, Tasse (2014:283) notes that today many believe that nothing can be changed, that there is no alternative, that "wild neoliberal capitalism" is acceptable, and that it is "normal" to live in societies of extreme social, economic and political inequalities. The Global Agenda refutes this stance in its premises, calling for "radical struggles for social change", where social workers and development practitioners are exhorted to perceive themselves as not only "technically competent", but also as agents of transformation (Tasse, 2014:283). Social workers' ethical obligations include working for social justice, and this aspiration should embrace both intellectual understanding and political action (Higgs, 2015). Against this background, as is discussed later in this article, the Global Agenda incorporates political action as part of its strategy of engagement (Tasse, 2014). The Global Agenda's commitments (as discussed below) focus on both the personal and the political in addressing structural causes of injustices.

GLOBAL AGENDA: COMMITMENTS TO ACTION

The commitments listed in the Global Agenda tally with the 2030 Agenda's commitment to achieving sustainable development in three dimensions – economic, social and environmental – in a balanced and integrated manner (UN, 2015). It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the SDGs in depth, but it is important to note the "deep interconnections and many cross-cutting elements across the new Goals and targets" (UN, 2015:4) in order to understand the challenges inherent in implementing the commitments of the Global Agenda for sustainable outcomes. Next, the Global Agenda commitments are outlined and linked to the respective SDGs.

Promoting social and economic equality

The 2030 Agenda states that "billions of citizens continue to live in poverty and are denied a life of dignity", that inequalities are rising within and between countries, and that there are enormous disparities of opportunity, wealth and power (UN, 2015:4-5). Furthermore, gender inequality and unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, and global health threats remain key challenges (UN, 2015). All these challenges have unequal outcomes, which affect particularly vulnerable people, who are at the bottom end of the income stream, and are excluded from the labour force (Isbister, 2001). In a capitalist economy where such inequalities are left unregulated, many of these people are left with little or nothing to survive on (Isbister, 2001).

The kind of sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth essential for prosperity and for strong economic foundations for countries is only possible if wealth is shared and income inequality is addressed (UN, 2015:7). Economic power and political

power are always interwoven; hence, redistributing economic and political power more fairly is often the first step towards breaking the cycle of inequality (Green, 2012:26).

The Global Agenda (2012), like the 2030 Agenda, is committed to "work to build dynamic, sustainable, innovative and people-centred economies, promoting youth employment and women's economic empowerment, in particular, and decent work for all" (UN, 2015:7). Furthermore, the Global Agenda (2012) takes a strong stand on eradicating "forced labour and human trafficking and end[ing] child labour in all its forms" (UN, 2015:7). The Global Agenda (2012:2) is particularly committed to supporting the ILO's social protection floors initiative which the International Labour Conference adopted in June, 2012, to the creation of decent work and international labour standards, and to the WHO initiative on the social determinants of health and education for all. The ILO's strategy is two-dimensional, reaffirming the human right to social security and acknowledging that this right, along with the promotion of employment, is an economic and social necessity to combat poverty and social exclusion, and to promote development, equality and equal opportunity (ILO, 2012). By supporting the ILO's Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202), social workers can advocate for people's right to both social security and development, because this recommendation has been promulgated as a new international labour standard to ensure social security for all. The floors of protection should guarantee essential health care, as well as basic and income security during childhood, adulthood and old age (ILO, 2012).

By promoting social and economic equality, the Global Agenda can contribute to the following SDG goals (UN, 2015):

- Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls;
- Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all;
- Goal 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation;
- Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries;
- Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

Promoting the dignity and worth of peoples

Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948) states that all human beings are born free and are equal in their dignity and rights. Article 25 articulates everyone's right to a standard of living for his/her health and wellbeing, including food, clothing, housing and medical care, necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of particular circumstances. Article 26 emphasises everyone's right to education. The recognition of the inherent dignity and the equality and rights of people is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world (UN, 1948).

The 2030 Agenda continues to wage war on poverty and hunger. It envisages a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, and of equal opportunity. It calls for a world where commitments regarding the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation are reaffirmed, and where there is improved hygiene and food security. It aspires to a world which invests in its children, and where every child grows up free from violence and exploitation, where every woman and girl enjoys full gender equality, and all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed (UN, 2015). This commitment includes supporting migrants and refugees so that they have access to social services, and eliminating human trafficking.

Human dignity forms the value base of human rights (Straub-Bernasconi, 2012). A rights-based approach anchors the debate about equity and justice in the principles of international law, which is endorsed by the international community (Green, 2012). Therefore, the Global Agenda (2012) advocates for the universal implementation of international conventions and other instruments on social, economic, cultural and political rights for all peoples, and for social strategies that build cohesive and peaceful societies. This includes standing up against injustices, and challenging violent state responses to people's actions to defend their rights (Global Agenda, 2012). The SDGs (UN, 2015) relevant to the Global Agenda's commitment to promote peoples dignity and worth include the following:

- Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere;
- Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture;
- Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages;
- Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Promoting environmental and community sustainability

Natural resource depletion and the adverse impact of environmental degradation and climate change undermine the ability of all countries to achieve sustainable development (UN, 2015). The Global Agenda is aligned with the focus of the 2030 Agenda in that both see people and the planet as important. Both argue that the development of people can only take place in harmony with the environment (UN, 2015). Seven goals in particular are dedicated to ensuring sustainable environments (UN, 2015):

- Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all;
- Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all;
- Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable;
- Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns;
- Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts;

- Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development;
- Goal 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

By promoting environmental and community sustainability, the Global Agenda commits social workers and social development practitioners to aligning their activities and programmes with development initiatives that integrate the environment with human dimensions. This includes strengthening established relationships with the UN and other international agencies in order to reaffirm the profession's and the sector's support for initiatives aimed at protecting the natural environment (Global Agenda, 2012). There is a strong focus on the Rio+20 process, the World Urban Forum, and the SDGs, including attention to disaster prevention and management (Global Agenda, 2012).

The commitment includes building community capacity to respond to environmental challenges and human and natural disasters (Global Agenda, 2012). In a study on the Global Agenda by Raniga and Zelnick (2014:393), a social work student said: "It is essential that any social work activity occur within a framework of ecological sustainability or else we will simply reinforce the existing unsustainable order." Students who participated in the study indicated that studying the Global Agenda led them to make connections between social work practices and environmental justice and advocacy, "connections that are far too rarely observed" (Raniga & Zelnick, 2014:393).

Jones (2013:213) argues that reorienting social work in the light of environmental crises requires a transformation of the very foundations of professional education and a rethinking of the purposes and goals of education itself. Jones (2013:213) suggests that using ecology as an "overarching thematic lens", and ecological justice as a "serious concern" creates an opportunity for social work education to identify key ecological concepts and values which can be used as foundation to develop the necessary knowledge, values, and skills for professional practice.

Strengthening recognition of the importance of human relations

Dominant economic, political and social forces have a negative impact on communities and their supportive relationships (Global Agenda, 2012). It poses in particular threats to human security, social cohesion and community sustainability. The Global Agenda (2012) indicates that strong local communities are required to promote sustainable social wellbeing of all its members. In the context of poverty and inequality and its consequences, this commitment is closely related to the other three commitments (promoting social and economic equalities; promoting the dignity and worth of all peoples, and promoting environmental and community sustainability).

Green (2012:229) contextualises: "Conflict both feeds and is fed by inequality." The threat to human security and community instability is evident during armed conflict, when women in particular suffer inhumane violence when armies "use mass rape and sexual enslavement as weapons of war…The intent is to destroy social cohesion by

impregnating women so that they bear the children of the enemy" (Green, 2012:230). Women who survive "this act of warfare" are left broken and traumatised, and are commonly stigmatised and rejected by their own families and communities (Green, 2012:230).

Strengthening recognition of the importance of human relations underscores the role of social workers in supporting people with psycho-social services and on a structural level. Interventions should reduce people's social isolation and should facilitate inclusion through capacity-building in developing agency and social cohesion, by mobilising for responses to the consequences of injustices and inequalities, and by advocating for their rights (Global Agenda, 2012). This includes strengthening communities' capacity to interact with governments to further the communities' social and economic development through policy development (Global Agenda, 2012).

Green (2012:231) argues that wars, and thus conflicts in general, represent the failure of political leaders to resolve social and economic problems. Social workers can contribute to peacebuilding by supporting communities in building capacity to protect themselves, but also by claiming a response from government to address violence and alleviate people's suffering (Green, 2012:231). This social work role links with Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. The 2030 Agenda unequivocally states that peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence are vital for sustainable development, but conversely also admits that there is also no peace without sustainable development. It recognises the major challenge to achieve "durable peace and sustainable development in countries in conflict and post-conflict situations" (UN, 2015:9).

The discussion above mentions various role players and levels of partnerships relevant to the need to act on these commitments. These role players and partnerships are discussed below.

ROLE PLAYERS AND LEVELS OF PARTNERSHIPS NEEDED TO IMPLEMENT THE GLOBAL AGENDA

In order to create a more socially just and fair world for future generations, the Global Agenda (2012:1) pledges that role players will work with the UN and other international bodies, communities and organisations in "supporting, influencing and enabling structures and systems that positively address the root causes of oppression and inequality". This pledge links with the 2030 Agenda's Goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development (UN, 2015).

The partnerships for the 2030 Agenda cut across the North-South, South-South boundaries and trade systems, and envisage triangular cooperation (UN, 2015). Partners relevant to the Global Agenda on various levels include governments, the UN system and other international institutions, local authorities, indigenous peoples, civil society, business and the private sector, and the academic community (UN, 2015). The Global Agenda (2012:1) lists the UN and other international bodies, communities and

organisations which should work together and keep an open door for "others who share our objectives and aspirations". At an international level, the Global Agenda aligns with the 2030 Agenda in seeking partners in "a spirit of global solidarity, in particular solidarity with the poorest and with people in vulnerable situations" (UN, 2015:8). Leadership at an international level is undertaken by the Global Agenda Group, which represents three international bodies mentioned above: the IASSW, IFSW and ICSW. The need for a global platform is stressed by Isbister (2001:173), who argues that "[i]f our obligations to provide justice [are] based upon our connections with people, it cannot be the case that we have no international obligations of justice, since we are closely connected as foreigners".

Isbister (2001) supports an international approach in response to the consequences of the global scope of capitalism, because many countries have strong economic, political and cultural connections. The 2030 Agenda affirms the importance of supporting regionally specific initiatives, such as the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the programme of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) (UN, 2015). In terms of the Global Agenda, regional Observatories consisting of partnerships between universities, social workers and social development practitioners were launched in 2014 and are currently in different phases of establishment. Together, these Observatories will form the Global Observatory, led by the three global bodies (IASSW, ICSW and IFSW). The Global Observatory is supposed to provide a "robust structure and engine for collecting qualitative and quantitative data for future reports and to sustain the debate" (IASSW, ICSW & IFSW, 2014:4).

At a national level, countries have to take the primary responsibility for their own economic and social development, and for the implementation of relevant declarations, strategies and programmes of action, all of which are integral to the 2030 Agenda (UN, 2015) and the Global Agenda. As indicated above, cooperation between various role players in different sectors, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the private sector, academics, governments and civil society, is key to acting on the Global Agenda's commitments. In capitalist systems, where there are vast disparities between income levels, the state's involvement can compensate for injustices generated by the private sector by providing public services (Isbister, 2001). This is vital in implementing the Global Agenda (2012), as governments are responsible for overseeing the implementation of policies and legislation, and the adoption of budgets – governments play a key role in ensuring accountability for the effective implementation of the SDG commitments (UN, 2015).

The key partners in development are the people in each country or region. The 2030 Agenda refers to itself as an "Agenda of the people, by the people, and for the people" (UN, 2015:10). Likewise, the central role of communities in the Global Agenda is emphasised in the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development 2014: First Report (IASSW, ICSW & IFSW, 2014).

Many decades of experience have taught those in social work practice that the people who are the targets of development policy need to be engaged from the beginning in the

policy frameworks that concern them, and that solutions have to be locally driven. Including people, developing shared visions and empowering the people to take charge of their own environments and futures will always have greater impact than imposing strategies upon them. A people-centred focus is in line with the human rights approach of the Global Agenda. Social work is a human rights profession (Ife, 2012) and in acting upon the commitments of the Global Agenda, social workers should facilitate people's involvement and participation at several levels, for example, in service planning, delivery, research and evaluation (Bell & Hafford-Letchfield, 2015:123).

The 2030 Agenda outlines partnerships relating to *resources* (financial, technology, capacity building, trade), *systemic issues* (policy and institutional coherence), *multi-stakeholder partnerships* (including public, public-private and civil-society partnerships), and *data, monitoring and accountability* (UN, 2015). There is no point to having a Global Agenda if it fails to report on progress made in achieving the agreed commitments. It has been envisaged that every second year, based on regional reports, a global report will be published on the chosen commitment (theme) for the period. The intention is that the regional reports will draw on data collected by regional Observatories, including surveys, conference presentations and discussions, the existing literature and other information from as many countries as possible (IASSW, ICSW & IFSW, 2014).

Reports on the first theme, Promoting social and economic equality, were published in a Special Issue of *International Social Work* (2014), and in the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development 2014: First Report (IASSW, ICSW & IFSW, 2014). The Special Issue includes various views on and critiques of the Global Agenda. For future reports, it is relevant to take note of Tasse's (2014) remark that various approaches to promoting social and economic equalities in the profession do not always reflect a particular region's view. Divided views are "ideological[ly] based positions between those who think that social work and social development should position themselves within political debates and those who focus on the profession from a technical perspective" (Tasse, 2014:284). He adds that between these two "extreme" postures, there are several other positions in constant movement in relation to contextual questions (Tasse, 2014:284).

The theme to report on for the period from 2014 to 2016 is *Promoting human dignity and worth of peoples*, which is due for submission in July 2016 at the international conference in Seoul, Korea. The intention is that the reports will "grow in scope and rigour" as capacity to report on progress develops, "drawing from 'on-the-ground' experience of the policies and practices which work and those which fail people" (IASSW, ICSW & IFSW, 2014:4). Reports on the themes are strengthened by annual celebrations of the relevant themes on World Social Work Day across the globe.

The Global Agenda implies effective and ethical working environments for social workers to act on their commitments, and "high quality education and training" to prepare them for this task (IASSW, ICSW & IFSW, 2014). The next section explores the Global Agenda's views on social work practice and education.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE GLOBAL AGENDA FOR SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION AND PRACTICE

The commitments of the Global Agenda relate to social problems such as poverty, unemployment, and HIV/Aids, and hence to developmental challenges which manifest at a local/national level, but have global dimensions (Raniga & Zelnick, 2014:395). The Special Issue of *International Social Work* (2014) reports on studies which reflect on possible implications of the Global Agenda for social work education and practice.

A study reported by Sims, Chenu and Williams (2014:362) was conducted by academics from six universities in the United Kingdom from 2010 to 2011. It introduced the Draft Global Agenda to 400 social work students and engaged them in developing the final Global Agenda. The study used a set of questions derived from the Global Agenda. Discussion focused on local meaning and implementation. The data indicated that their engagement gave students a "professional and political voice" in policy-making at national, regional and international levels, which is the aim of the Global Agenda (Sims *et al*., 2014:361).

Social workers' role in engaging with service users should be supportive in order to enable vulnerable people (who do not want pity or made to feel helpless) to use their own abilities to regain or maintain control over their lives (Sims *et al*., 2014). Therefore, working together should involve a partnership where the relationship reflects the partners as equals (Sims *et al*., 2014). However, students pointed out that social work was not just about supporting individuals, but about the "overall welfare and improvement of society", as social workers often work with people who are powerless in the political situation they live in (Sims *et al*., 2014). The students emphasised anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice as key aspects of social work practice (Sims *et al*., 2014). The primary findings of the study indicate that students are "politically and internationally minded", that they have international perspectives on local inequalities, on disadvantages experienced by vulnerable groups such as migrants, and on the need to promote "human rights and relationship-based social work" (Sims *et al*., 2014:371).

Similar findings were reported in a South African and United States study by Raniga and Zelnick (2014). They used the Global Agenda as a framework to analyse social work policy education. The final papers of 58 social work students from one South African university were analysed by means of an exploratory qualitative study (Raniga & Zelnick, 2014). Students' papers were selected for analyses if the papers obtained a mark of 70 per cent or more, assuming that such a mark would indicate critical reflection and comprehensive analyses of the relevance of the Global Agenda as a tool for local practice.

The students identified concerns about the fact that social work practitioners were not involved enough in policy formulation, about a lack of adequate funding, and about a lack of access to resources in organisations to support social workers' service delivery (Raniga & Zelnick, 2014). These challenges "reflect the detrimental impact of neoliberal economic policies on the delivery of social work services in contemporary South Africa" (Raniga & Zelnick, 2014:394). They therefore see a role for social workers in critiquing

and challenging the "limits of neoliberal capitalism as an unjust social system which entrenches inequality and poverty in society" (Raniga & Zelnick, 2014:394).

The students observed that the Global Agenda provides social workers with a platform to strengthen their voice and join social movements in order to influence and develop a more just society (Raniga & Zelnick, 2014). In response to this finding, Raniga and Zelnick (2014) argue that if social workers are to make a difference and address the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalised sectors of the population, the challenge is not just that social workers have to make critical choices to reposition themselves to speak out on injustices, but also that they have to reflect critically on their roles (Raniga & Zelnick, 2014).

The link between the local and the global is a reality in relation not only to the nature of social problems, but also to the lived experiences of practitioners and students, who often face complex social problems themselves, which contextualises their position towards global and transformation issues (Raniga & Zelnick, 2014). Sims *et al*. (2014:364) also point out connections between the personal and the political, and structural issues among many social workers who are also "members of the working class or minority ethnic groups with shared experiences of discrimination". Nikku and Pulla (2014:378) articulate this link with the Global Agenda, which anticipates a "twin process of internationalizing social work on the one hand and simultaneously increasing the ability to responding to the local priorities and needs on the other". Nikku and Pulla (2014) report on a small survey of 12 social work educators from eight Asian countries. Despite many challenges in the region, the trends suggest that there is no foreseen "contradiction nor competition between advocating for further internationalization in social work education, nor simultaneous development of contextual (indigenous) social work to meet both the local and regional needs and realities" (Nikku & Pulla, 2014:383). The study by Sims *et al*. (2014) suggests that showing people that their problems are related to global or societal problems creates a mutual desire for social justice and, hence, collective action, which the Global Agenda intends.

Raniga and Zelnick (2014) conclude that the Global Agenda can be a guiding document for social work that connects local practice to global concerns; that it can serve as a teaching tool to reflect critically on the relevance of the Global Agenda for practice; that it provides an opportunity to enhance students' policy analysis skills, and that it creates opportunities for academics to research and network to strengthen their commitment to the training of future social workers as policy advocates and for research. Their study indicates that integrating the Global Agenda in curriculum teaching can shape the training of professionals who will be able to engage and influence international, national and local policy development, and ultimately contribute to the development of a socially just society (Raniga & Zelnick, 2014). The Global Agenda (2012) suggests that promoting education and practice standards in social work and social development within the scope of the four commitments will enable social workers to facilitate sustainable social development outcomes.

The next section discusses possible directives of the Global Agenda towards sustainable development outcomes for social work. For the purposes of this discussion, sustainability refers to the "capability of an economic or social system to meet its current needs without impairing the ability of future generations to meet their needs" (Black, Hashimzade & Myles 2012:397). As indicated earlier, sustainable development refers to the integration of economic, social and environmental dimensions, as in the Global Agenda (2012) and the 2030 Agenda (UN, 2015).

THE GLOBAL AGENDA AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES FOR SOCIAL WORK

The definition of social work internationally adopted by IFSW and IASSW in 2014 (IASSW, 2014) describes social work as "a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people" and adds that "[p]rinciples of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work". Furthermore, it indicates that social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. The theme of social justice correlates with the vision of the Global Agenda to contribute to a more just society by means of the four commitments. Higgs (2015:120) states that a social work definition of social justice goes beyond an abstract "thinking about" on what a fair society would look like, to include "acting and doing". Consequently social justice needs to be struggled for, as well as conceptualised. For sustainable development outcomes, an ethical commitment to social justice is therefore a "good starting point" for social work (Higgs, 2015:120). With regard to the "acting and doing", a number of guidelines emerged from the current article towards sustainable outcomes for social work.

Linking the local and global

Sheedy (2013) contends that the way in which social workers construct people's problems and the professional interventions they offer depends largely on social workers' view of how the world they live in operates. If social workers have a clearer grasp of how they think society operates, it will assist them to gain a fuller understanding of the origin of the problems faced by service users, and of their lived experiences. This raises the issue of the political nature of social work (Sheedy, 2013). Ife (2012:119) argues that social work must be concerned with the global, and therefore postulates that all social work is "international social work". Furthermore, an international perspective assists social workers in understanding social work practice within a human rights context (Ife, 2012). Jones (2013) maintains that social work, as a profession espousing human rights and social justice, has a responsibility to do more than simply ameliorate the consequences of environmental change – it has to become part of the global movement to address environmental issues and direct people towards a sustainable future.

A human rights perspective also has implications for social work education, the most obvious of which is the inclusion of material on human rights, and including a human rights approach to practice in the social work curriculum (Ife, 2012). In developmental

social work, which is underpinned by a human rights approach, social work students are expected to demonstrate critical awareness of the global forces of oppression, exclusion and disempowerment, and also to be able to analyse policy so that they can act as change agents to meet the end goals of social justice and human rights (Raniga & Zelnick, 2014). Policy analysis skills emphasise social workers' role in both micro (personal) and macro (political) practice.

Bridging micro (personal) and macro (political) practice

Hanisch (1969, quoted in Sheedy 2013:89) states: "Nowhere is the link between agency and structure more succinctly expressed than in the phrase 'the personal is political'." Since the early history of social work Jane Addams, the co-founder of Hull House in Chicago, fought social problems at both the micro and macro levels (Hoefer, 2012:205). The social problems addressed in the Global Agenda arise in the lived experiences of individuals, who need healing through psycho-social services, and freedom at a societal level from the consequences of colonialism, apartheid and capitalism. Social workers cannot devote attention to individual and interpersonal dynamics if they exclude "thinking and actions directed at organizational and social institutional structures" (Sheedy, 2013:6). Thus a "combination of the two" is required, recognising the contribution of both personal action (agency) and structural changes, resulting in a practice in which both aspects are addressed proportionately (Sheedy, 2013:6).

In the context of sustainable development, Bell and Hafford-Letchfield (2015:123) point out that wider community development challenges social workers to be more "ethically or socially responsible" in the ways in which they invest in future services. They argue that this emphasises the role of organisations in achieving sustainable outcomes, and hence in the environment (Bell & Hafford-Letchfield, 2015). In following examples of successes achieved by businesses, Bell and Hafford-Letchfield (2015) claim that care services are moving towards engaging principles of sustainability where they show concern about the environment. Doing so requires restructuring organisations or "collaborating with a range of partners towards maximizing potential for pooling resources" (Bell & Hafford-Letchfield, 2015:123).

Tasse (2014) remarks that the social workers referred to in the Global Agenda are not those employed to maintain the existing social order (for social control purposes). The Global Agenda refers to social work practitioners, educators and social development workers who engage in "radical struggles for social change", perceiving themselves as "technically competent", and as "agents of transformation". This does not mean that all social workers have to engage equally in both areas, but that they should work in synergy within and across organisations and among themselves to ensure that interventions are planned and implemented holistically and for sustainable developmental outcomes. Sheedy (2013:5) observes that some social work students commence their studies claiming no knowledge of politics, or even stating that they have no interest in politics. This poses serious challenges in educating students for policy and advocacy practice.

Engaging in policy and advocacy practice

If social workers want to be taken seriously in policy circles, they have to act as advocates to present their policy ideas and values from a service user's perspective (Hoefer, 2012). This implies that more social workers need to become active and skilled advocates in policy-making and advocacy (Hoefer, 2012). It is through policy development and advocacy that improvements in services and policies take place and that social justice is promoted (Ife, 2012). With increased globalisation and a decline in effective state power, the location for social action and policy advocacy shifts from the national to the local and the global, and "it is the capacity to link these two that will determine the future success of social work" (Ife, 2012:119). This highlights the importance of social workers' understanding the global dimensions of seemingly local problems (Ife, 2012).

The studies of both Raniga and Zelnick (2014) and Sims *et al*. (2014) allude to the important role that students can play in policy development and advocacy. Since the profession began, social workers have a rich history in advocacy for social justice (Hoefer, 2012). Social work training in policy and advocacy is vital to bridge the micro (personal) and macro (political) practice divide in responding effectively to service users' problems, which manifest at micro, mezzo and macro levels (Hoefer, 2012:211). This calls for a critical review of social workers' practice.

Critical reflective practice

By incorporating a critical stance into their practice, social workers are able to question and analyse the forces in society that produce and maintain injustice, discrimination and oppression (Sheedy, 2013). Higgs (2015) suggests that social workers use critically reflective practice to explore the bigger political picture about power and disadvantage in society, and to consider different aspects of social work interventions and the methods used. In the context of a need to achieve sustainable outcomes, Bell and Hafford-Letchfield (2015:123) aver that social workers can achieve social justice through "transformative critical action" by engaging in situations requiring a structural analysis of aspects of society that are oppressive, unjust and exploitative. Critical social work does not imply one method, but rather a set of principles for a practice based on questioning and analysing society and social service delivery from a "position of opposition to what undermines, disenfranchises, deprives and oppresses people" (Sheedy, 2013:90).

Social workers should be prepared to be openly accountable, not only by critically analysing themselves and their practice, but also by being critically analysed by others (Sheedy, 2013). Critical pedagogy is well suited to deliver on the Global Agenda's commitments towards a more just society. Social justice is linked to human rights and talking about human rights. This means talking about both theory and practice at the same time and "constantly weighing each in terms of the other" (Ife, 2012:216). Education that delivers social workers as human rights professionals contributing to social justice requires teaching methods that can generate a critical discourse among students, as the studies of Raniga and Zelnick (2014) and Sims *et al*. (2014) imply. The

engagement of both teachers and students with the subject of the Global Agenda indicates that a critical pedagogy (Freire, 1996) provides a theoretical framework to prepare students for critical and reflective practice. Critical pedagogy starts with a solution to the teacher-student contradicting views, where the extremes of the contradiction are reconciled so that both are simultaneously teachers and students (Freire, 1998:72).

Ife (2012) explains that in critical pedagogy knowledge is not natural, but is contextualised, and that both the teacher and student construct and reconstruct the knowledge. Ife (2012) compares this dialogue with the process of dialogical praxis. The idea of Freire's (1998) "praxis" is that theory and practice, or "learning and doing", cannot be separated; it is about both knowledge and action (Ife, 2012:216). Because social work is grounded in the world of day-to-day practice, it cannot afford theoretical formulations that are not similarly grounded in people's lived reality (Ife, 2012). Because human rights are embedded in a praxis orientation, social work can contribute to a more just society, in developing both "practice skills" and "theoretical understanding" at the same time, as effectively they form part of the same process (Ife, 2012:216). Furthermore, social work practice can only occur in an environment of ongoing learning, and therefore social workers should be "constantly learning and reformulating their world-views and approaches to practice, as a direct consequence of their day-to-day work" (Ife, 2012:216). This is highly relevant in the continuous changes in society and subsequent demands that face social workers to remain focused on the Global Agenda's outcome for a more just society.

People participation

The Global Agenda and the 2030 Agenda are about those who are at the receiving end of injustices and hardships, in both the personal and the political realm. Service users face exclusion, marginalisation and oppression in their immediate world of experience, and in the wider societal contexts which influence professional practice (Sheedy, 2013).

In line with the abovementioned social work definition, the study by Sims *et al*. (2014) argues that social justice needs to be underpinned by liberation, empowerment and equal rights. In particular, liberation depends on people's "having and getting a voice and being heard and understood" (Sims *et al*., 2014:364). In a rights-based approach, people living in poverty are not regarded as "passive recipients of charity", but rather as "active subjects of their own development", as they seek to realise their rights (Green, 2012:24).

The Global Agenda (2012) states clearly that social workers and social development practitioners should use their talent, capacity, knowledge and skills to mobilise people in their commitment to work closely with those whose voices are marginalised (Tasse, 2014). Sims *et al*. (2014:365) refer to the attitudes and motivation of social workers, calling for passion, empathy and a mindset aimed at working together for change with service users as equals. This requires procedural or participatory justice, which is in line with Amartya Sen's and Martha Nussbaum's theory of a form of justice that focuses on the capacities necessary for individuals to function fully in their daily lives (cited in Schlosberg, 2007). Sen and Nussbaum both regard participation as a key political

capability, and as necessary for individuals to ensure their functioning (cited in Schlosberg, 2007).

Development is context-specific, and people should participate within their cultural contexts. Mwansa (2012) emphasises that social work practice will benefit from indigenous knowledge, because of the natural fit between knowledge and practice. A people-focused "praxis-dialogue" approach (Ife, 2012:53) can support building on indigenous knowledge.

CONCLUSION

The legitimacy of the Global Agenda as a guideline for social workers, educators and social development practitioners to contribute to a more just society is strengthened by links to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Moving social work toward more sustainable development outcomes requires clear targets and indicators for social work practice and education, in relation to the 17 SDGs. The Global Agenda has to extend its platform for debate ("thinking") to more "action and doing" (Higgs, 2015:120) if social work is to be taken more seriously in policy circles for its contribution to sustainable development.

As a human rights profession with social justice as a core value, social work cannot claim to be relevant in contributing to a better future if there is no tangible evidence that social work attempts to engage in international matters with local implications. Social work must bridge micro and macro practice in a more focused way by integrating the personal with the political in social work interventions and policy development, and by adopting critical reflective practice to account for what social workers do and why.

Being relevant starts with social work education. Hence, as has been demonstrated in this article, students should be engaged in policy development and practice that will prepare them to work alongside people who plan and engage in their own development from within their lived experiences. Students also have their own lived experiences, which have to be used in their teaching and learning to harness their understanding of the local and integrate it with the international. Therefore, appropriate social work teaching approaches and methods relating to human rights, reflective practice and critical pedagogy should be adopted to prepare students for a practice that serves a broader social justice agenda.

In the long term the relevance of the Global Agenda will be determined by whether it can deliver on its commitments, and in particular by how it contributes to the 2030 Agenda. Working closely with vulnerable people who need a more just society compels social workers, social work educators and social development practitioners to be in the front line of the 2030 Agenda's call for action to change the world in the next 15 years and to "ensure that the journey is successful and its gains irreversible" (UN, 2015:9).

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