Macrothink Institute™

International Journal of Social Work
ISSN 2332-7278
2019, Vol. 6, No. 1

Social Work Education in Ethiopia: Past, Present and Future

Wassie Kebede (corresponding author)

Addis Ababa Universitry, School of Social Work

P. O Box 1176, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Tel: 251-911-442-701 E-mail: wassiek7@gmail.com

Received: November 19, 2018 Accepted: January 3, 2019 Published: January 5, 2019

doi:10.5296/ijsw.v6i1.14175 URL: https://doi.org/10.5296/ijsw.v6i1.14175

Abstract

The study presents the history and current status of social work education in Ethiopia. Five heads of social work schools, eight social work educators and 35 social work professionals participated in the study. Data from participants were gathered through online survey. Qualitative tools were designed for each group and distributed by email. In addition, review of literature was made to generate data about history of social work in Ethiopia. Results of the study revealed that social work education was closed for 30 years [1974-2004]. In less than two decades since its re-birth in 2004, social work education is expanded to 13 universities. The study further revealed that social work education in Ethiopia experiences various challenges related to poor curricula contents, limited number of social work educators, and absence of coordination to regulate the quality of education and practice. The study suggests the need for immediate revision of curricula and creating harmonized and modularized curriculum. The study also suggests to establish a national social work council and professional association to regulate the quality of social work education and practice.

Keywords: Ethiopia, Social work education, Professionalization, Social work council, Social work association, Social work curriculum, Field practicum

1. Background

Ethiopia has a rich history of traditional support system partly emanated from the old-age co-existence of Christianity and Islam and partly due to the communal living tradition of communities. The first migrants of Muslims came to Ethiopia in 615 AD and welcomed by the then Christian king and its people with the provision of full support for their permanent settlement. “This was the first hijira (migration) in Islam’s history” (Zarihun, 2012). The Ethiopian Orthodox *Tewahido* Church with more than 50 million followers, 450,000 clergies, 40,000 perish churches and 2,000 monasteries (Gobena, 2018) has a long history of providing

social support to the vulnerable groups such as orphan children, persons with disabilities and the elderly. Churches and monasteries in Ethiopia are known in providing social assistance at times of necessity. The social assistance duties of churches are backed by the *Fetha Nagast* (Law of the Kings), a religious law being in action for almost two millennia.

The Ethiopian tradition traces *Fesha Nagast's* origin back as far as the 318 sages of the Council of Nicea, during the reign of Christian Roman Emperor Constantine. Chapter 18, section 2 of the *Fetha Negest* was dedicated on "charitable legacies. The second secular part (chapters 23-51) deal with … food, clothing, habitations and trades proper for Christians. This law was in use until 1950s during which it was replaced by other secular laws in the country. (Abba Paulos Tzadua, 2009, pp. xxxiv & xli).

Similar to the Orthodox *Tewahido* Church in Ethiopia, the Muslim religion has made an immense contribution for the expansion and sustenance of social assistance in the absence of strong formal institutions to provide such service. Zakat, which is a payment of 2.5% of income is considered as an obligatory charity, which is redistributed from those who haves, to those who haven't (Rehman, 2011). This is also widely practiced in Ethiopian Muslim society. In Islam in Ethiopia, as it is elsewhere, humanitarian service is not an option, it is an obligation. Krafess (2005, p. 327) describes "the act of giving money or helping someone in distress is not left to the free choice of the believer, but is instead an obligation in the same way as is prayer, fasting during the months of Ramadan and the pilgrimage to Mecca." The essence of social assistance is strongly institutionalized (become part of faith) both in Christian and Muslim religion in the country.

In addition to religious institutions dedicated for helping the poor and vulnerable at times of needs, other traditional support systems played pivotal roles to render social assistance, mostly focusing on mutual assistantship. These traditional support systems are known by different names such as *Iddir, Iqqub, Jige, Mahber, Affini*, etc. *Iddir,* for example, has particularly long history since the time of invasion by Italy in the 1930s. Through *Iddir* local communities come together to render social, economic and emotional supports at times of crises (Yenehun, 2016). This traditional institution is still the strongest community support system recognized by the government. *Iddir* today is involved in development activities apart from the social assistance role it plays to the local communities. *Iqqub* on the other hand, which has a financial motive, plays significant role in bringing local communities together to strengthen their income and contributes for sustainable livelihood. Other traditional gatherings have more or less similar functions like that of *Iddir* and *Iqqub*, with specific purposes.

In Ethiopia, until today, religious and traditional support systems remain the strongest service providers to vulnerable groups compared to supports rendered by professional entities including social work. It is not unique for Ethiopia that social assistance by traditional and religious institutions predates the emergence and establishment of formal and professional organizations. For example, in England, the philanthropic services as the predecessor of professional social work can be traced back to the 1200 AD. Christian teaching had provided the foundations for charitable services which was legally endorsed by the Elizabethan poor law of 1601 (Mwansa, 2010). Therefore, across the world, far before the emergence of social work as a formal profession, there have been practices of helping the vulnerable groups, the

practices of which was cherished by religious thoughts both in Christianity and Islam (Joseph & Fernandes, 2006).

In the United States, it was only in 1900 the term "social worker" was used by Simon N. Patten to identify those individuals who were passionate to visit their friends in need and settlement house residents. In developing countries, the emergence of social work profession is recent influenced by colonialism "largely mirrors the one that is being practiced in Britain, France and Portugal among others" (Chitereka, 2009, p. 144).

2. Describing Social Work Education

It gives sense to briefly describe social work education in general before presenting the emergence and development of social work education in Ethiopia. Before describing social work education, it is also helpful to review the evolution of the definition of social work itself. The first formal definition of social work was provided by NASW 1958. This definition was based on five core components: value, purpose, sanction, knowledge and method (Ramsay, 2001). Each of these core components shape the design and execution of social work education. The International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW] and International Association of Schools of Social Work [IASSW] provide a more comprehensive global definition that accommodates the above authors' views and additional perspectives. According to IFSW and IASSW (2014) social work is defined as follows.

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.

Social work education is necessitated to provide a unique set of knowledge, value and skill to its educators due to the holistic nature of their engagement to address biological, psychological, social and spiritual needs of human society. As history documents, the traditional curricula of social work education were based on interrelated frameworks which include the ecological approach, the biopsychosocial model and systems perspective. Current approaches of social work education, "…certainly necessitates cognitive learning that often entails learning new theories, studying empirical evidences, and engaging in the important…practice of 'critical thinking'" (Pyles & Adam, 2016, p. 8). These authors propose the necessity of holistic new approaches to social work education in the 21st century due to the influence of the factors including; "the invisible suffering of globalization, increase diversity and prevalence of non-western cultural practice, compartmentalization of social work and lifestyle-orientation health risks" (p. 9).

3. The Emergence and Development of Social Work Education in Ethiopia

The history of social work education in Ethiopia is viewed in this paper from two time perspectives: the pre-2004 and post 2004 periods. It is important to note that, there is no much research done on the history of social work education in Ethiopia and very few publications are available in the subject area. The break between the above periods is necessitated by the fact that there was no social work education for 30 years between 1974

and 2004.

3.1 Pre-2004 Period

The 1960s was the period where social work as a profession was introduced in many African countries, although the first schools of social work in South Africa, Egypt and Algeria were opened far earlier in 1924. 1936 and 1942, respectively. In Ethiopia the first school of social work was opened in 1959 (Mwansa, 2011). The social work education was situated in the then Haileselassie I University, which is now Addis Ababa University. The program was a two-year diploma training, which later, upgraded to a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) in 1967. School of Social Work at Haileselassie I University was considered as a centre of excellence in Africa (Addis Ababa University, School of Social Work, 2006). However, in 1974, when the socialist regime came to power, the school of social work was closed and all references and methodological approaches related to social work were discouraged. By the socialist regime [as it was the same in other socialist countries as well] social work was considered as a bourgeois profession which could deny the active participation of the proletariat to defend its revolution. Government alone was responsible to address all human needs including social welfare services (Stout, 2009; Mwansa, 2011).

Following the closure of school of social work in 1974, the former school of social work became the Department of Applied Sociology. In the new department "there [were] no methodological courses in the social work sense, research and statistics [were] given considerable emphasis. … study visits have replaced field work" (Kendall, 1986, p. 18). During this period two pioneers of the profession (Seyoum Gebreselassie and Andargachew Tesfaye) continued to instruct secretly six macro social work courses (social administration, methods of social action, social policy and planning, rehabilitation services, fields of social welfare and methods of social research) within the curriculum of sociology and different affixes were used at different times during this turbulent period. This helped the essence of social work profession to survive under a different rubric. By maintaining some social work courses within the curriculum, the Department of Sociology was revised and renamed in different times. It started with Applied Sociology, then to Sociology and Social Administration, and then Sociology and Social Anthropology, until a permanent divorce was made between Sociology and Social Anthropology in 2008. Irrespective of changes made in naming of the department, some social work courses remained part of the curriculum until the re-birth of social work education in 2004 (Author, 2014). An online search from the program list in the College of Social Sciences at Addis Ababa University shows that in the current revised curriculum the Department of Sociology removed the former social work courses taught in the Department (http://www.aau.edu.et/css/ba-program/).

3.2 Social Work Education Since 2004

A synopsis of the rebirth of social work education since 2004 is summarized here. The re-birth of social work education has a connection with a visit made by an American professor to Ethiopia in 2001. In 2001, a social work professor from the University of Illinois at Chicago, visited Addis Ababa and met Professor Seyoum Gebreselassie. She heard about him from Professor Rosemary Sarri, at the University of Michigan. Professor Seyoum Gebreselassie was a former social work student at the University of Michigan. The first conversation between the two professors paved the road to start social work education in

Ethiopia in 2004. In the words of Professor Seyoum Gebreselassie, the ball started "rolling again [after 30 years of sojourn] in the process of establishing a graduate program" at Addis Ababa University (Author, 2014, p. 162). The development and expansion of social work education after its re-opening in 2004 is presented in the finding section of this paper. The finding section is presented based on data generated from a survey conducted with head of social work schools, social work educators and social work professionals who were former graduates of social work after its reopening in 2004.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is twofold. First, it tries to knit the two historical periods of the development of social work education and; second, it reflects the current status and provides insight to the future of social work education in Ethiopia.

5. Method

5.1 Study Design

The study applied a qualitative method with a diverse case study design. A diverse case study design is preferable when the primary objective is to achieve a maximum variance along relevant dimensions (Sewright & Gerring, 2008). In addition to diverse dimensionality, there is a strong interplay or less boundary (Babaheidari, Pareto, Spante & Svensson, n.d.) between social work schools, educators, graduates and the interest of the study, which is the present status of social work education and its future in Ethiopia. As stated above, one of the objectives of the study was to learn the present status (quality and success), and the future of social work education in Ethiopia. To achieve this, the views of heads of schools, social work educators and former graduates (social work professionals) were found to be relevant. Therefore, three types of cases were identified: heads of social work schools, social work educators and social work professionals.

5.2 Participants

First, from over 45 universities available in the country, 13 of those with social work program were identified. Out of them, a random selection of five universities was made. Second, heads of social work schools from the five universities selected for the study and social work educators in these schools were invited to participate in the online survey. Third, social work professionals (graduated from the five selected universities and whose email addresses were available) were approached by email. Through this process, potential study participants were identified. Accordingly, 30 social work educators and 50 social work professionals were communicated by email to fill the questionnaire. From the potential participants approached by email, five heads of social work schools, eight social work educators and 35 social work professionals filled and returned the questionnaires designed to the respective group of participants. Out of the 35 social work professionals 20 of them were with MSW and other 15 with BSW degrees. From the eight social work educators, one was with PhD and the rest seven were with MSW. From the five heads of Schools, one was with PhD and others were with MSW.

5.3 Data Collection Techniques

I gathered data from two sources: namely documents and self-administered questionnaires. Documents used as data sources include various publications on social work education at the

global, regional and national levels. To find relevant documents for review, some popular websites including Jstore, B-ok.org and Addis Ababa University e-library were consulted. On the other hand, I gathered primary data from three groups; namely, heads of social work schools, social work educators and social work professionals. Tools designed for each group were sent by email to those who showed interest to participate in the survey. Two weeks after sending the questionnaire, a reminder email was send to those who did not submit the filled questionnaire. A 2nd reminder email was send after three weeks. On the last day of the fourth week, the survey date was concluded with a various response rates by each group. The response rates indicated the following: heads of social work school (5/5), lecturers (8/30) and social work professionals (35/50). Though the response rates from heads of schools was 100 percent, the least response rate was documented among social work educators.

5.4 Data Analysis

A qualitative technique was applied to analyse data. The analysis process includes: familiarizing with the data through review of each response, organizing and indexing data for easy retrieval and identification, identifying themes, developing provisional categories and exploring relationships between categories. This was followed by the final step, which was writing the report including excerpts from the original data. For the purpose of rigour, data triangulation was made to confirm the validity of data generated from the three sources. References were made to secondary data and triangulated with the primary data for further corroboration.

5.5 Ethical Validity/Consent

First, voluntary participation was requested and consent secured via email communications. Although more social work educators and professionals confirmed for their participation in the survey, not all of them who provided such confirmation did fill the survey questionnaires and returned. Detail description of the purpose of the study was provided on the first page of the questionnaires. In the consent form, it was clearly stated that, participation is fully voluntary and there is no any negative consequence by not filling the questionnaire. Furthermore, anonymity of their names was assured by omitting any question that identified name or other personal identifier.

5.6 Limitation

Online survey has its own limitations. One of the limitations was low response rate, especially from the social work educators. The second anticipated limitation could be inability to make clarifications of any question that the participants might have. This would not happen if the data collection had taken place in a face to face interview. In addition, by adding more probing questions, it would be possible to document detailed qualitative data. This could not happen due to the nature of the interview method (which was a self-administered online interview).

6. Results

6.1 Overview of Schools (Note 1) of Social Work in Ethiopia

In the last 14 years (since 2004), social work education was expanded to many public and private universities and colleges. Based on my review of available social work programs in the country, there are eleven public and two private universities that run social work

education. Some of these universities offer BSW program and some others BSW and MSW programs. Until the last date I conducted a survey of universities using their websites in July 2018, only two universities run three programs (BSW, MSW and PhD). As indicated in the previous section, this report is limited to data generated from five universities/social work schools. The number of students enrolled in the five universities during the 2016/2017 and 2017/2018 academic years were 1165. Among them 750 were admitted to BSW programs, 409 to MSW programs and 6 for a PhD program in one of the five universities. Total enrolment for the 2016/17 academic year was 553 students and the figure was 612 during 2017/18 academic year. If the survey would have included all the 13 universities that run social work programs, the total enrolment would be about double the above figures.

Increasing the number of universities that offer social work education from one in 2004 to 13 in 2018 is a significant achievement in the expansion of social work education in the country. The study did not attempt to document the total number of graduates since the re-birth of social work education in 2004 in the country. This may require to undertake a separate survey to register graduates of social work from all universities since 2004.

6.2 The Present Status of Social Work Education

The present status of social work education in Ethiopia is analysed in view of the existing programs (content and quality), field education (approach and challenges), quality assurance mechanisms, educators' competence, graduates' satisfaction, existing opportunities and challenges.

6.2.1 Program Content and Quality

Ethiopia implements a harmonized and modularized programs in all public universities since 2012/13 academic year. In 2011 when program harmonization was initiated by Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency [HERQA], there were only two universities that run social work programs. These two universities involved in making program harmonization and curriculum modularization. All other social work schools opened in the other public universities are expected to use the harmonized program and modularized curriculum. Therefore, program contents of social work education are supposed to be similar in all public universities.

Program quality goes beyond its curricular contents. It covers modes of course delivery and quality assurance mechanisms, among many factors being considered. According to HERQA (2006) higher education program quality in Ethiopian is measured against the criteria related to (1) mission, vision and educational goals, (2) governance and management system, (3) infrastructure and learning resources, (4) academic and support staff, (5) student admission and support services, (6) program relevance and curriculum, (7) teaching-learning and assessment, (8) student progression and learning outcomes, (9) research and outreach activities, and (10) internal quality assurance.

Taking the above list of indicators as well as the global standards of social work education and training (Sewpaul & Jones, 2004) into account, this study assessed the quality of education programs in the studied social work schools. Some of the specific indicators included to assess the quality of social work education were related to graduates' satisfaction on their knowledge and skill acquisition on the five core focus areas of social work and ten

competencies of social work. Social work professionals revealed that among the five core focus areas of social work (human behaviour & social environment, research, methods & practice, policy and field practicum), 30 of them had reflected, they were fully satisfied in the offering courses related to research. In contrast, many of them (24/35) reported, they were partly satisfied on courses related to social work methods and practice. On the other hand, the study documented varied responses on the level of satisfaction in the other core focuses of social work (policy, field practicum and human behaviour & the social environment). Only few (8/35) were fully satisfied on policy and human behaviour and the social environment related courses. All of them were not satisfied on their placements for field practicum. Generally speaking, professional social workers participated in this study demonstrated minimum satisfaction in the acquisition of knowledge and skills on the five core focuses of social work. The very unique response was on the research courses, where many of them had reflected a full satisfaction that they witnessed received the necessary knowledge and skill. However, this needs to be validated by detailed interviews to understand their level of competence in undertaking research activities.

The study also paid attention to learn the professionals' level of satisfaction in relation to the ten foundation/core competencies of social workers, which are basically demonstrated by the development of the necessary knowledge, values, skills and the resulting practice behaviour. For the full description of the foundation competencies, refer Council of Social Work Education-CSWE (2008) educational policy and accreditation standards. The result on acquisition of knowledge, values, skills and the resulting practice behaviour on the foundation/core competencies of social workers demonstrate varied responses. For example, all participants reported their acquisition of knowledge, values, skills and the resulting practice behaviour in relation to "engage in policy practice to advance social and economic wellbeing and to deliver effective social work services" was partial. Though less in number, seven of the participants acclaimed that they had full acquisition of the required knowledge, values, skills and the resulting practice behaviour in any nine of the ten core competencies. Professionals' responses with regard to the level of satisfaction on the social work core competency areas and the ten core competencies of social workers demonstrated existing problems either in the curricular contents or the quality of delivery or both. Partial satisfaction/acquisition of the necessary knowledge and skills as well as values and behaviour for practice calls for detail analysis of available curriculum in each schools and also mode of delivery of social work education.

For the purpose of triangulation of the responses from professionals, social work educators were also asked to reflect on the level of acquisition of social work students in the areas of the ten core competencies. The educators' responses were mixed like that of the professionals. Very few of the educators participated in this study assumed that students had fully acquired the necessary knowledge and skills as well as values and behaviour for practice during their training. However, all of them agreed that although curriculum contents are good, mode of course delivery compromise the quality of social work education in their respective schools. For the poor quality of education, educators listed a myriad of problems that support their argument. For example, in one of the universities included in this study, until recently, social work was mixed with sociology as a single major. In such cases, participants stated that "it is

difficult to weight whether graduates have proven acquisition of such necessary knowledge, skills, values and behaviour to practice as social workers. Educators also related less quality of social work education with recruitment and admission of social work students. One of the educators stated that:

There is no specific criteria set to admit social work students in the BSW program level. Sometimes when students feel they have less capacity in computational sciences, they choose social work assuming that there are no such courses with numbers. When they reach to the level to take statistics and research courses, some of them withdraw or ask for replacement courses to refrain from taking courses with numbers. Reasonable number of them do not develop a passion for social work since they did not make it as their choice. Rather, they consider social work as a field for their refugee from joining other fields of study, especially those with mathematical computations.

Lecturers' qualifications are at stake for some educators who participated in the study. One of them stated that some lecturers teaching in social work schools have no the proper level of qualification to teach social work. According to this participant, in some social work schools there are lecturers who have PhDs in social work but do not have BSW/MSW training. This will be dealt below under the section that talks about staff competencies. It becomes clear, however, from the reports by professionals and educators that the program contents and quality of social work education in Ethiopia have clear problems that need to be reviewed in detail since such problems could be school specific.

6.2.2 Social Work Field Education Manual/Guide

Authors in the field of social work believe that field education is the heart of social work education (Wayne, Bogo & Raskin, 2010). For example, Papouli (2014, p. 4) argues that "field learning occupies a central role in the curricula of social work schools around the world." As the result, social work field education should be guided by appropriate guideline/field manual. In addition to availability of a guideline, social work field education has to be supported by provision of extensive seminars for students, liaison staff and agency field instructors; resources (time, material and financial) and experienced team that coordinates the process and routine activities of social work field education. In respect to the above expectations, I posed a couple of questions to social work professionals, social work educators and heads of social work schools who participated in the study. Four of the five heads of schools reported availability of field education manuals in their respective schools. However, all of them explained the lack of independent team/unit to coordinate the field education activities. Social work educators are temporarily assigned to coordinate the field education in addition to their teaching loads. Similar to the head of schools, social work educators also reflected that, absence of independent unit to coordinate social work field education contribute to poor quality of coordination and follow-up of students' performance in their field practicums. Many of the social work professionals (27/35) participated in the study regret to appreciate the field practicum part of their social work education.

Main problem listed by the professionals include; inconsistent follow up by social work educators assigned to liaison the field placement, limited/absence of on-going seminars on field placements and absence of trained social workers (in some cases) in the placement agencies to supervise students. From the above assertions by head of schools, educators and

professionals, field education in the five schools, included in this study, is not meeting the required standard to assist students develop the required level of professional competence in social work. Field education is one of the five social work core competencies that need to receive the necessary weight as equal as other areas of social work education.

6.2.3 Academic Staff Composition and Competence

According to the global standards for the education and training of the social work profession (Sewpaul & Jones, 2004, p. 8):

…schools should aspire towards the provision of professional staff, adequate in number and range of expertise, who have appropriate qualifications as required by the development status of the social work profession. As far as possible a master's level qualification in social work… should be required.

Two observations were made from the data. One was that in one of the five schools included in the study, majority of the staff members were reported to have BSW degree who teach in a same level (BSW program). The other observation was that, one of the five schools included in the study was understaffed where only two staff comprised of the faculty. The strong aspect as reported by head of schools and educators is, almost all academic staff members in their respective school have social work degrees either at BSW, MSW, PhD or a combination of them.

6.2.4 Existing Opportunities and Challenges

Study participants described a list of existing opportunities and challenges that might facilitate or hinder social work education in Ethiopia. According to one of the participants, there are enormous social problems that seek for social work intervention. In the views of this participant, in order to address such problems, the roles that social workers can play are immeasurable. He describes:

As we all know, Ethiopia has been suffering with multifaceted social, economic, political and cultural problems…which affect all community groups irrespective of their age, gender, ethnic identity or place of residence. To address such complex problems, social work professionals' role is pivotal. Specific groups suffering from the atrocities of socio-economic and political upheavals include children, youth, families, elderly, people with disabilities, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and other marginalized groups. It is the primary role of social workers to assess the needs of these groups and design solution focused strategies and implement to solve their problems. To this effect, many and yet competent social work professionals are needed in the entire country.

Although the above assertion describes existing socio-economic and political threats in the country, it is also an opportunity for social work schools and educators to strategically plan to train and graduate adequate number of social work professionals to respond to the needs. Existing policy environment was mentioned by another participant as an opportunity. This participant stated:

Ethiopia has a social development policy that provides the roadmap to solve major social problems which exist in the country. With reference to the existing policy environment which are favourable to social work education in Ethiopia, it is important to mention the Growth and Transformation Plan II (GTP-II). GTP-II sets a plan to reach 795,293 people with

psychosocial services during the plan period (2016-2020). In such services, social workers will play major roles.

The participant further stated that "governmental and non-governmental organizations show interest to employ professional social workers. Due to the demand for employment, social work schools entertain many applicants in every academic year and admit many students in their program mainly at the BSW level." Study participants believe the existing good policy environment and the high demands on the part of applicants to join social work schools are good opportunities for social work profession to grow in the country.

Social work educators participated in the study were particularly acknowledging that social work becomes a recognized profession in some government institutions including hospitals and courts. Such recognition of social work and social workers by governmental and non-governmental organizations coupled with favourable policy environment create opportunities for universities to open social work schools and enable to admit many students in a shorter period (less than two decades) since the rebirth of the social work education in 2004. Social work professionals participated in the study shared the views of heads of schools and educators and claim that existing socio-cultural, economic and political problems ultimately call for support from social workers. This will give more opportunity for social work education to grow and expand in other universities as well. It is important to note that currently there are over 40 public universities in the country, of which only thirteen of them have social work schools/departments. The number of private universities/colleges are many in number, yet only two universities have social work schools/departments.

Participants listed a number of potential challenges that may affect social work education in Ethiopia today and in the future. Head of schools and educators mentioned that limited number of social work academics is a number one problem that currently dwarfs social work education. The larger public (many employers and service users) are yet to acknowledge social work as a profession. This hampers employment opportunities and proper use of social work services by the service users at individual, community and institutional levels. Professionals participated in the study also strongly mentioned absence of national association (Note 2) of social workers as a challenge (Note 3). Lack of such organized body, according to them, will jeopardize the professionalization process of social work. Further, social work educators mentioned that at present there is no clear mechanism to make a check and balance on the quality of social work education in Ethiopia. One of these educators stated "although each university has its own ways of assuring quality standard for curriculum design, and teaching-learning processes, social work needs to have its own independent body [social work council] that provides professional support to social work schools and professional social workers in order to maintain the quality of education and practice. This will enable social work education and practice in Ethiopia to meet the minimum global standard of social work education, training and practice.

7. The Future of Social Work Education

Considering the current status of social work education in Ethiopia, study participants were asked to suggest what should be done to improve the futures of social work education. The following questions were raised to each group of participants.

"Can you please describe at least three challenges at present that would hamper the future of social work education in Ethiopia?"

"What are your suggestions to improve social work education in the future?"

Data generated from each group of participants indicate existence of six major challenges which might hamper the future of social work education, if appropriate action steps shall not be taken. These challenges are summarized as follows.

- *Problems related to the intake of students*: Many participants from each group argue that social work schools do not have clear criteria for students 'admission particularly at the BSW level. A reasonable number of students join social work education without their interest. This produces many incompetent graduates or some of them leave schools before completing their training.
- *Problems related to curriculum and year of training*: Social work educators and professionals argue that there are problems in the course contents and mode of delivery of social work curriculum. Although, there is a nationally harmonized and modularized curriculum for social work since 2012/13 academic year, there is no way to check whether all schools of social work have adopted the harmonized curriculum. Even, the harmonized curriculum needs revision due to a fast changing social and educational environment in the country. The baccalaureate degree for many field of studies were changed from a four-year training to three years training since 2011. Social work is one of the disciplines reduced to three years training. This has brought a number of challenges including the incompleteness of field education. Social work field education has four sequential ladders that students need to pass on yearly basis. Due to the conversion of social work education from four years to three years, one of these ladders has to be cancelled or merged with another ladder.
- *Poor publicity of social work profession*: According to participants of this study, little or no work is done to promote social work as an emerging profession in the country. This lack of promotion shadowed the profession's proper place in the job category and its demand by service users. Such challenges, according to one of the participants from the social work educators, "will have a negative consequence on the demand for social work education in the future." Promotion and publicity contributes to influence government to pay due attention for social work education including its professionalization.
- *Lack of Standard and National Code of Conduct*: According to study participants across the three groups, social work education in Ethiopia is moving without a proper regulation whether each school meets the minimum global standard for social work education and training. Similarly, there is no established code of conduct that regulates the professional behaviour of social work educators and practitioners. No licensing of social workers taking place. This has brought challenges to make distinctions between a professional social worker from anyone else who claims practicing social work.
- *Poor targeting of most vulnerable rural communities*: Participants believe that over 80% of Ethiopian population live in rural settings. Relatively speaking, rural population are more exposed to different types of risks and are highly vulnerable than the urban settlers. Educators commented that none of the courses in their respective schools have focus on rural social work. Professionals' comments are similar, in that, during their stay in schools, none of them

were experienced placement in rural settings and their research projects were highly skewed towards urban environment. One of these professionals stated "only my personal experience and individual effort to understand way of life in rural community helped me to work in such rural settings. My social work training did not give me any clue about rural social work."

- *Missing-links between social work schools and alumni*: Although there are already hundreds of graduates from social work schools, professional social workers participated in the study reported that, there is no formalized communication with the former schools where they attended their education. Professionals argue they could provide useful feedback to improve social work education if there was a proper channel of communication. Educators and heads of social work schools agreed with the professionals' view that former graduates would be useful not only in terms of feedback on their experience as former students but they could be helpful to supervise students in their field practicum.

The challenges listed above are critical that need due attention at national level and by each social work schools. Participants have suggested relevant action steps in order to address the above challenges so that social work education shall be improved better in the future. Directions suggested by study participants which are pertinent for future improvisation of social work education are summarized as follows.

Professional social workers and social work educators agreed that a special set of criteria including entrance examinations should be put in place to recruit and admit social work students both at BSW, MSW and PhD levels. However, three of the five heads of schools were hesitant to support the idea to set admission criteria especially for the BSW program since student admission to each department takes place in a college or university level. However, educators have a counter argument that sit for entrance exam is a norm by many universities especially in medical schools. Therefore, social work schools should convince their respective universities to recruit their students through entrance examination or other means to verify applicants' interest, motivation and ability. With regard to curriculum content and year of training, the study gathered relevant suggestions. Participants suggest, all schools need to come together to review their curriculum and revise according to the national needs and global standards of social work education and training. By doing this, a revised harmonized national curriculum has to be developed, which should be open for modification by each school as per their local context. Further, head of schools and educators suggested all social work schools should develop a proposal to government and request to change the period of social work education from three years to four years.

Challenges related to poor publicity, lack of standard and absence of national code of conduct shall be addressed through establishment of a national social work council and a professional association. Participants believed that a council established by law shall be mandated to guide the approval of social work education programs, follow up of quality of social work education, and also licensing of social work practitioners. In addition, existence of a social work association, will create supportive environment for practitioners. Such association can also fill the missing link between social work graduates and social work schools. Existence of national council and association of social workers shall address the problem of lack of publicity of social work since the main duty of the two institutions shall be to create forums using which social work shall be advocated. Participants also suggested that by conducting

curricula revision, the loose focus given to most vulnerable rural communities in social work education shall be addressed.

8. Discussion

Social work education in Ethiopia has been under attack during the socialist regime. Even today, the emphasis given to this profession by government is very low. The reduction of its year of training from four years to three years is a good example that government either does not have clear understanding on the volume of contents of social work education or is simply give it less recognition. In the absence of a social work council (Note 4), it becomes difficult to evaluate and speak about the standard of social work education in Ethiopia today. Further, the lack of an independent association of social workers at national level jeopardizes the professionalization of social work occupation. Through their association, social workers could update their knowledge and skill as well as enable to protect their profession from being abused or attacked by others who claim themselves as social workers without proper training or those who snatch social work jobs.

The above challenge is not unique to Ethiopia. Such challenges also happened in many other countries where social work education emerges as a new professional training (Nikku, 2011; Sackville, n.d.). For example, Sackville (n.d., p. 4) noted that "the complex interaction between the development of professional association of social workers and social work as an occupation cannot be divorced from the wider context within which they are both set." As an emerging profession, social work education in Ethiopia needs protection and safeguarding. Such safeguarding could be properly done by speeding up its professionalization process. The discussion on the importance of professionalization of social work dates back to the 1970s during which some scholars published articles on the subject. For example, Leighninger (1978, p. 188) claimed that "professionalization in social work is seen as consisting of two major components: concern with producing effective service for clients and concern with gaining autonomy." Professionalization can be also seen from two perspectives: in the areas of education and areas of practice. Professionalization of social work education include the development of well standardized and contextualized curriculum, placing competent educators and instituting effective administration of schools. These together create an effective program to produce graduates fulfilling the required social work competences.

The scope of professionalization also includes "establishment of an independent regulatory body, which can accredit and approve programs leading to professional registration and also maintain a register of qualified social workers and approved care workers" (Pugh, 2005). Such a regulatory body has to be established in Ethiopia as a first step to professionalize social work. Some of the challenges indicated by study participants can be properly addressed in the presence of regulatory body. All social workers have to be guided by the professional code of ethics in their area of teaching, practice and research. Such code of ethics can be developed and maintained by a professional body, which in many countries is named as professional association of social workers. For example, the National Association of Social Workers-NASW (2017, p. 3) argues that "the profession has an obligation to articulate its basic values, ethical principles and ethical standards." These values, principles and standards are codified by a national code of ethics to be formulated by a national association of social workers.

Today, social work in Ethiopian lacks a professional body which should be responsible to codify the basic values, ethical principles and ethical standards in line with the Country's socio-political and cultural standards. This lack of professional body along with the absence of the regulatory body, contributes for social work education and practice unmonitored/unregulated. This implies that professionalization of social work is under question until measures are taken to established these bodies and they become active in changing the present landscape of social work education and practice.

9. Conclusion

The study concludes by recognizing that while social work education has expanded to 13 universities in a short period of time, it is critical to develop a process for professionalization. It is high time that all social work schools, educators and professionals collaborate in order to initiate quality improvement for social work education and practice, as well as its professionalization. Some suggested action steps needed to improve the quality of social work education include; immediate revision of social work curricula (standardization and modularization), establish an independent national association, and a national social work council (regulatory body). These two bodies will help to facilitate the accreditation process of social work schools and licensing of social work professionals.

References

Abba Paulos Tzadua. (2009). *The Fteha Nagast-The Law of Kings*. Durham: Carolina Academic Press.

Author. (2014). *Social work education in Ethiopia: Celebrating the re-birth of the profession*. In H. Spitzer, J. Twikirize, & G. Wairire (Eds.). *Professional Social Work in East Africa: Towards Social Development, Poverty Reduction and Gender Equality* (pp. 161-172). Kampala: Foundation Publishers.

Addis Ababa University, School of Social Work. (2006). *Graduates Bulletin: Master of Social Work.* July 2006. Addis Ababa.

Babaheidari, M.S., Pareto, L., Spante, M., & Svensson, L. (n.d). *A systematic Process for Selecting a Typical Case in School Setting*.

Chitereka, C. (2009). Social work practice in developing continent: The case of Africa. *Advances in Social Work, 10*(2), 144-156.

Council on Social Work Education. (2008). *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards for Baccalaureate and Master's Social Work Programs*. CSWE commission on accreditation.

Gobena, A. (2018). *Importance of Teaching and Practices of Ethiopian Tewahido Orthodox Church in Forest Biodiversity Conservation: Implication for National Conservation Policy*. Swedish University of Agriculture Science: Southern Swedish Forest Research Centre. Master Thesis.

Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency. (2006). *HERGQ Institutional Audit Procedure*. HERQA, QA05/06/V1. Addis Ababa, May 2006.

IFSW & IASSW (2014). *Global Definition of Social Work*. Retrieved from https://www.iassw-aiets.org/global-definition-of-social-work-review-of-the-global-definition/

Joseph, J., & Fernandes, G. (Eds.) (2006). *An Enquiry into Ethical Dilemmas in Social Work*.

Mumbai: College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan, 38 New Marin Lines.

Kendall, K. (1986). Social Work Education in the 1980s: Accent on Change. *International Social Work, 29*, 15-28. https://doi.org/10.1177/002087288602900104

Krafess, J. (2005). The Influence of the Muslim Religion in Humanitarian Aid. *International Review of the Red Cross, 87*(858), 327-342. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1816383100181378

Leighninger, L. (1978). Professionalism and Social Work Education: Substance and Structure. *The Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare, 5*(2), 188-213.

Mwansa, L. –K. (2011). Social Work Education in Africa: Whence and Whither? *Social Work Education, 30*(1), 4-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/02615471003753148

National Association of Social Workers. (2017). *Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers*. Washington DC: National Association of Social Workers, 2017.

Nikku, R. B. (2011). Evolution of Social Work in Nepal: Challenges in a Transition Society. *Asian Social Work and Policy Review, 6*, 252-264. https://doi.org/10.1111/aswp.12001

Papoui, E. (2014). Field Learning in Social Work Education: Implication for Educators and Instructors. *Field Educator, Simons, School of Social Work*, *4*(2), 1-15.

Pugh, R. (2005). The Professionalization of Social Work in the UK: Independence, Prescription, and Regulation. *Portularia, 1,* 77-94.

Pyles, L., & Adam, G. (Eds.) (2016). *Holistic Engagement: Transformative Social Work Education in the 21st Century.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Ramsay, R. (2001). *Revisiting the Working Definition: The Time is Right to Identify a Common Conceptual Framework for Social Work*. A paper presented to "reworking the working definition," the Kentucky conference on social work practice and education. Lexington, Kentucky, February 8-10, 2001. Retrieved on August 2018, from http://people.ucalgary.ca/~ramsay/papers/working-definition.htm

Rehman J. (2011). *Islamic Law of Obligatory Alms (Zakat): A Teaching and Learning Manual*. UK Centre for Legal Education: The Higher Education Academy.

Sackville, A. (n.d.). *Professional Association in Social Work 1900-1990*. Retrieved from https://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/policy-institute/scwru/swhn/2013/Sackville-Professional-Associations-in-Social-Work-1900-1990-Paper.pdf

Sewright, J., & Gerring, J. (2008). Case Study Techniques in Case Study Research. *Political Research Quarterly, 61*(2), 294-308. https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912907313077

Sewpaul, V., & Jones, D. (2004). *Global Standards for the Education and Training of the Social Work Profession.* Adopted at the general assemblies of IASSW and IFSW.

Stout, C. E. (2009). *The New Humanitarians: Inspiration, Innovations, and Blueprints for Visionaries (Vol. 2*). Westport: Praeger.

Wayne, J., Bogo, M., & Raskin, M. (2010). Field Education as the Signature Pedagogy of Social Work Education. *Journal of Social Work Education, 46*(3), 327-339. https://doi.org/10.5175/JSWE.2010.200900043

Yenehun, T.E. (2016). *The role of Iddirs for Family Welfare at Kebele 02, Dire Dawa City Administration, Ethiopia*. *The International Journal of Humanities and Social Studies, 4*(6), 143-152.

Zarihun, D. (2012). *Muslim-Christian Co-existence in Ethiopia: An Overview. Inter-religious Council of Ethiopia,* May 28,2012, African Union, Addis Ababa.

Notes

Note 1. For the purpose of uniformity, I use schools throughout the text, which also represents departments

Note 2. The author acknowledges the existing joint association named as "Ethiopian Society of Sociologists, Social Workers and Social Anthropologists."

Note 3. At the time of revising this manuscript, the author received information that a group of social workers are in the process to establish an independent social work professionals' association.

Note 4. Social work Council is a legal body in many countries that oversee the quality of social work education and practice.

Copyright Disclaimer