

## World Social Work Day, 15 March 2022

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### Abstract

We live in a bizarre world that is constantly changing. While thousands fall into a country demarcated below poverty lines, the world's top ten wealthiest men appeared to have more than doubled their fortunes during the epidemic. 'Davos Man: How the Billionaires Destroyed the World,' a book written by New York Times reporter Peter Goodman, explored how the ultra-rich are responsible for things like climate change, violence, and the collapse of democracy. Social workers seem to go along with fixing the society and reach the last impoverished man on the planet, unmindful of what appears to happen to resources. The following is a report on the topics that were discussed at a meeting of social workers from around the world on 15 March 2022, which the Brisbane Institute of Strengths-Based Practice organised. *Journal Space and Culture, India* was also a part of this endeavour. Nearly one hundred social workers attended the conference and a few thousand through other social media outlets.

**Keywords:** Social Workers; World Social Work Day; Antyodaya; Reaching the Last Man

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## Introduction

It would, of course, be silly to think about the last man on Earth or the most impoverished to be served by what transpires at the World Economic Forum group meetings, where Goodman and others attend as reporters. In fact, most often, those who discuss heavy items such as world poverty and (or) inequality have a tourist approach and feed on midnight commercials for a child in poverty in Africa or Bangladesh made for world vision; they rank high in condescension and have a very humiliating effect on the natives of those countries. We indeed need to have redesign policies and programmes that promote equity. We do not know about sustainability, with the ongoing impacts of the pandemic—the way it has put the brakes on development. Also not clear how these World Economic Forum (WEF) pundits can usher in a semblance of the eco-social world without addressing the glaring inequalities of resources in this world.

The World Social Work Day was observed on 15 March 2022, which was the 15th anniversary of the first celebration. The theme of the people's summit, which will take place from 29 June 29 to 02 July, is *Co-building a New Eco-Social World: Leaving No One Behind*. This year's theme is similar to the people's summit. There will be 'no one left behind', as the summit's theme will be.

The 15 March meeting was arranged by Venkat Rao Pulla, President of the Brisbane Institute of Strengths-Based Practice, Australia, that brought together academics and professional practitioners and Social work students of social Work from Kenya, Australia, Philippines, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. . The speakers stated W their attempts so far already in their attempts to reach the last man and briefly gave testimonies of their work during the Pandemic, which was a very challenging time so far. Clearly, social Work as a profession is geared towards its primary vision to promote trust, security, and confidence through practice in all contexts. World Social Work Day is a significant opportunity to mobilise all social work networks and the communities in which they work to contribute to the values and

principles that enable all people to have their dignity respected through shared futures, as well as to engage all social work networks and the communities in which they work.

Gidraph Wairire, Associate Professor at the Department of Sociology, Social Work and Women Studies, University of Nairobi Nairobi's Kenyan University of Science and Technology, welcomed the attendees and expressed gratitude to the social workers for raising their voices in support of cultural preservation, improving the quality of lives and communities, and assisting people in alleviating their suffering. Many social workers were on the front lines, pleading and urging governments and non-governmental organisations to assist the needy, especially during the pandemic, and they were successful. Social work legislation is the most recent practice adopted by many countries in order to internationalise social Work and provide more assistance to the common man. His message also called on all social workers to band together and work together to make the world a better place to live. He expressed his gratitude to the Brisbane Institute of Strengths-based Practice and Professor Venkat Pulla, and he requested that more opportunities be created for students from a variety of developing countries to learn from one another's experiences.

There has been a lot to be learnt from the pandemic by the way of utilising resources. He also highlighted the concept of *Antyodaya*, optimisation of the benefit to the last man.

Professor Bhavna Mehta, Dean & Head, Faculty of Social Work, The MS University of Baroda, mentioned the impact of the ongoing pandemic as well as the upcoming impact on the world because of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war; the social workers need to be ready to face the challenges and believe in inclusion, working for social justice where there is a dignity and sustainability of development. Research, Training and Extension are the three critical interventions of involvement areas during the pandemic. Professor Mehta and staff and students undertook a baseline survey of the

*Psychosocial Impact of Lockdown on the Common People of Vadodara City* in April 2020, post one month of the imposed lockdown. The online study was conducted on 1094 respondents living in the city of Vadodara using a snowball sampling method.

Additionally, students were involved in community kitchens during the entire phase -1 of the pandemic and in generating awareness on

preventative methods through door-to-door campaigns. Regular fieldwork engagements with various social services were suspended, and the entire efforts of students and staff were directed into COVID-19 utilising the opportunities that came up from the government and the hospitals. Figure 1 illustrates the multiple lessons learned by the students and the faculty.



**Figure 1: Pandemic learnings in Social Work at MS University, Baroda**

Source: Authors

In his description of the pandemic as a mental health crisis that has been presented to the world, Associate Professor Subhasis Bhadra of the Department of Social Work at the Central University of Rajasthan said that for the teaching faculty in Curaj, Rajasthan, this challenge meant a general level of unpreparedness at the faculty level— many worries, adjustment and anxiety issues emerged due to the empty campuses,. Plus, there were challenges to deal with the effects of the digital divide. Except for the fact that the institute had to move forward with online teaching, the teachers had to be at the forefront of providing psychological first aid, which was quickly surpassed by the second wave of the pandemic. Dr Bhadra addressed the mental health crisis that was rapidly spreading in the University's catchment area straightforwardly.

**Reporting From Nepal**

Kadambari College's principal, Dr Pradipta Kadambari, described the pandemic as "the same sea but with different boats." The challenge was to ensure that no students were left behind and ensure that educational integrity was not compromised, particularly in rural social work practicums and social work camps. In Nepal, social work students played an important role in school social work, assisting with the implementation of the existing curriculum in schools and dealing with the high levels of anxiety experienced by the children. It was necessary to work within the scope of social work tenets of working with diversity and inclusion for such roles to be more meaningful with children with disabilities, and a plan was developed to involve every student in learning about these aspects. Figure 2 presents the changed role of student social workers during the pandemic.



**Figure 2: Pandemic transformed roles of student social workers into teacher aides and school therapists: Kathmandu Nepal**  
**Source: Authors**

**Mental Health Care for all**

Mental healthcare for all, leaving no one behind, was discussed by R. Dhanasekara Pandian, Professor and Head of the Department of Psychiatric Social Work at NIMHANS in Bengaluru, India. He shared his insights on the types of interventions that can be used, including supportive psychotherapy, building, and reinforcing their health, sleep hygiene techniques, and medical education. Professor Pandian also specified the role of NIMHANS as a nodal centre for the Tele-mental health programme in India, which provided support to the covid affected community. Besides, during the pandemic, Psychiatric Social Workers (PSWs) were one of the volunteer groups that were a part of the multidisciplinary team that responded to the calls through the interactive voice response system (IVRS) and addressed psychosocial issues through the helpline. Moreover, when acute cases necessitated higher-level consultation, PSWs forwarded the calls to senior consultants at the Institute for

Advanced Medical Studies. Professor Pandian said that 11 batches of training with over 1920 social workers and allied health workers were trained.

**National Association of Social Workers of India (NAPSWI) Report from Schools of Social Work, India**

Professor Sanjay Bhatt from Delhi University, speaking on behalf of the NAPSWI (Figure 3) and the larger Community of Social Workers in India, expressed gratitude to the social work professionals in India who rose to the occasion during difficult times and assisted in raising awareness and improving the quality of services provided. The psychosocial support they provided to the migrants, the covid-affected community among COVID-19 appropriate behaviour, access to vaccines, doctors, medicines, quarantine centres, and other resources through telephone calls, social media, door-to-door campaigns, and other means is particularly noteworthy.

The report documented the support provided by Social Work Professionals in India in different capacities.

340 respondents across 3 categories		
Social work Schools/ Depts 68 respondents	Civil Society Organisations (CSO) 130 respondents	Individual Social Workers 142 respondents
24 States & UTs represented 72% departments >10 years old	36 States & UTs represented 62% CSOs >10 years old	74% affiliated to organizations 77% collaborated for support

**Figure 3: NAPSWI Reported Data for all Schools of Social Work**  
**Source: Authors**

### Yogi Srinivas Arka Exhorts Social Work Community

Yogi Srinivas Arka had delivered the inaugural speech on World Social Work Day, which is given below:



At the outset, a very happy and reflective Social Workers Day for you. I have met many of you at the Nepal Social Work Conference in 2018. I invite you all to hold your next conference in Arka Dhama in Mysuru city, in a very serene ambience. In Returning to your theme today, the pandemic struck us, and we haven't completely come out of it. But we are now engulfed by war. This war, although between two nations partly in Europe and partly in Asia, have serious ramifications for all entire humanity and indeed for all those countries in the southern world. No better time and day than today to reflect on the world's resources and human greed, and the unfortunate human desire to aggrandise. Of course, not all societies show this greed, similarly, not all human species shows greed. There has been a lot to learn from the pandemic — and the way resources were allocated and reallocated and how the Darwinian theory was proved once again that the mightiest will have a lion's share of the resources... The vaccine wars and hoarding away of the PPEs and masks — showed the

ugly side of the nations and races. Anyway, it appears we are moving away from the pandemic into new life.... Whenever something goes wrong in our societies, your work as social workers increase.

You are called upon to do the fixing. You are always called upon to deal with life after disasters, whether it is war, floods, fires, or humanly created war for a piece of land or resources. Not many people choose social Work, although there is so much need for social Work in our society. You are all rather very special to be social workers, for you have compassion in you, and kindness comes out of you by default. I have spoken to many of you at the Nepal conference, and I know about your passion for humanity. On this day humanity ought to express its gratitude towards your Work. But of course, the world would be better if you were more involved in preventing disasters, be it natural or manmade. In the Indian philosophy and our thinking, we reiterate *Sarve Jana Sukhino bhavantu*. But in saying *Sarve Jana Sukhni Bhavantu*, it is equally important to ensure that.

The last man, the common man, or the man in distress and poverty is included in all your talks and planning deliberations so that meaningful development can be brought out.

The *Antyodaya* concept is applicable here. The sunrise for the last man .... the optimism for the last man.... Ensuring the smile and future of the disenfranchised person is very important. I am very happy that your theme this year is dedicated to including everyone in the construction of a new social order. This is a great aim. I wish that you do have a role in ensuring that no one is excluded in your consultations in working out the modalities for this new social order and I also hope that your profession is at the forefront of building this new social order. Thank you for inviting me and. I wish you all meaningful social work deliberations today.

### Reporting from Arunachal Pradesh

Ravi Ranjan Kumar, Associate Professor and Head, Department of Social Work, Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh, India, highlighted the prospects of Social Work as a profession in contemporary India and the interventions in Arunachal Pradesh, especially during the pandemic. Dr Kumar revisited the Gandhian principles behind the *Antyodaya* that encourages one to see the face of the weakest or vulnerable person that one was ever met and ask oneself how the acts contemplated will assist that person. Founded in 2015, the Department of Social Work, Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh, is relatively younger. They have produced approximately one hundred fifty MASW graduates, while eight PhD Scholars are currently registered with their Department. The motto of their Department is EMPATHY-EQUITY-INTEGRITY, which constitutes the central sphere in all their initiatives and interactions. During deliberations, it was also highlighted that their fieldwork includes their signature pedagogy with

over 40 active partner agencies spread across the length and breadth of the country to facilitate on-field training and internship of students.

### Reporting from the Philippines

Associate Professor Justin Nicholas from the College of Social Work & Community development, University of Philippines shared his experiences in the field on mothers of children in conflict with the law, and psychosocial support program during the pandemic. He also highlighted the way forward in collaboration through social work volunteers as a network. The pandemic, how it has played havoc with the communities, and the response of the Social Work and community development fraternity has been recorded by three researchers and published in the *Philippine Journal of Social Development*, Volume 14, 2021. In addition, Dr Nicholas also presented insights on grassroots-led responses to the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 4).

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**Figure 4: From the Philippines**  
Source: Authors

### Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Tuljapur Reporting

As part of his engagement experiences during the pandemic, Professor Ramesh Jare, Dean, Tuljapur Campus, and Coordinator-MA Social Work (Rural Development) of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) in India, shared his

insights. The activities and interventions carried out by the Tuljapur Campus in the Osmanabad district of Maharashtra State, India were described. When Covid 19 struck in the first wave, the district was not severely affected; however, after the country was shut down, migrants began to travel from Maharashtra to

Karnataka and Telangana state. To assist the migrants, social workers from our campus mobilised resources such as food, masks, and hand sanitisation materials. During the 'Covid 19', the Gram panchayats (village councils) played a critical role. In addition, campus social workers conducted informational sessions to dispel common misconceptions about COVID-19 and its effects. Professor Jare stated that the situation in the second phase of COVID-19 was extremely difficult to navigate. COVID-19 There has been an increase in the number of COVID-19 patients in the country. TISS Tuljapur Campus, in collaboration with TISS Mumbai Campus, had provided online psychosocial counselling services. There are approximately 5000 'COVID-19' affected people who have received counselling, including proactive and reactive counselling. As part of the district administration's war room, TISS Tuljapur was connected to the district hospital, which was in charge of coordinating a wide range of government services, including providing proper information to COVID-19 patients, supplying oxygen to various hospitals, and coordinating the services of the district hospital. Professor Jare further mentioned that his campus colleagues are working on two studies requested by the district administration:

- preparation of socioeconomic profile of COVID-19 widows and children for better rehabilitation and
- it has been observed that there has been an increase in child marriages in the past two years. TISS Tuljapur will conduct a study whether there is any relation between COVID-19 and an increase in Child marriages.

**National Institute of Social Development (NISD), Sri Lanka Social Work Students**

Dr Shamini Attanayake, Director General (Acting), ADG (Academic), NISD (Figure 5), mentioned that COVID-19 in the country was brought under control by the government of Sri Lanka. The National Institute of Social Development and its Social Work students and faculty assisted all around through awareness promotion strategies of social distancing, quarantine, lockdowns, travel restrictions, and isolation of villages. In addition, with the help of social work students and staff, the institute undertook a study to investigate the effectiveness of the overall control process with the aid of classical compartment models and network models in the management of COVID-19.

Sri Lanka has been ranked 9th best country globally for its successful immediate response to tackling the virus.



**Figure 5: The NISD School of Social Work Students**  
**Source: Authors**

**Report from Rural Dharwad Social Work**

Professor Sangeetha R. Mane, Chairperson of the Department of Social Work, Karnatak

University, Dharwad, spoke about the activities in rural Dharwad that the social work students and staff have undertaken. Their activities included food kit distribution to all COVID

warriors of urban, rural and slum masses. Auto-Raksha, a unique and innovative PINK Auto services by students of the Department of Social Work for women and girls in distress or difficult situation; a free pick-up service to reach their destination in late night hours and self-defence training to empower women and girls through adequate services so that they can rebuild their lives and stop violence from re-occurring.

### **Acharya Nagarjuna University Social Work**

Professor Saraswati Raju Iyer, Professor and Head, Department of Sociology & Social Work, Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences from the Acharya Nagarjuna University also shared their engaging experiences of various activities that helps the community on aspects such as human trafficking and its impact on society, social work profession, support extended during pandemic by them. Professor Saraswati Raju Iyer stressed more on the social workers' need for engagement in fieldwork. The Department undertook community work during the COVID-19 pandemic by:

- identifying vulnerable groups and addressing their issues.
- undertook awareness programmes on COVID-19 related issues.
- Networking with Governments, NGOs, and other civil societies.
- disseminated information about COVID-19 protocols to be followed in communities.
- rendering psychological counselling to deal with psychosocial issues of the people dealing with COVID-19.

### **Nagpur MSS Institute of Social Work**

Associate Professor Keshav Walke, In-charge Principal of the Nagpur School of Social Work in India, spoke about the school's significant contributions to COVID-19 and the challenges they face in their work. The following are the primary issues that have been identified— lack of cooperation from the public, duplication and multiplication of services, a lack of ICT skills among the people, a lack of resources, and limited response from Social Work Institutes.

Nevertheless, all the participants, including himself, were participants in the government's programme and volunteered their time. The lessons learned from their personal experiences and observations are that applying social work methods in a crisis-driven pandemic community re-organisation and networking and collaborative teamwork is critical in meeting the pre-determined goals.

### **Kerala Social Workers' Involvement in COVID-19**

Professor Ipe Ipe Varughese, Head, Department of Social Work, BCM College, Kottayam General Secretary, Kerala Association of Provisional Social Workers, in his report, listed various activities of Kerala social workers. Some of these activities are the preparation of IEC materials, posters, short videos etc., by the Kerala Association of Professional Social Workers and Social Work institutions. Besides, there were training programmes on counselling the COVID affected, mothers, pregnant women etc. Moreover, intervention among the Hindi speaking migrant population; distribution of food materials, masks and sanitisers; conducting surveys; supporting children with equipment for online classes. In addition to the above, the Association's social workers assisted government programmes such as:

- Karam Thodathe Karuthal (Care without contact) programme
- Koodeyundu Kottayam (You not alone.. We are with you Kottayam), Project Implemented in Kottayam District,
- Running a Call centre
- Working with Local Self Government Institutions

### **Report from Avadi Chennai, Nazareth College**

Professor Mary Angeline, Principal of the Nazareth College of Arts and Sciences at Madras University, spoke about the activities carried out by the faculty and students of her institution in Tamil Nadu during the pandemic. She emphasised how these activities assisted the covid-affected community in overcoming challenges they faced during the first and second



phases of the pandemic. In addition, due to the college's semi-rural location and the presence of several hundred migrant workers from other states, students and faculty had the opportunity to put their social work skills to the test, particularly their crisis management abilities.

### **Need to Refocus on Spirituality**

In his speech Professor Suresh Pathare, Director of the CSRD-Institute of Social Work and Research, he thanked every social worker for their valuable contributions to society during difficult times. Being relevant, responsive, and resourceful are essential characteristics of social workers to demonstrate commitment to the community. He believes that social workers have come to refocus their attention on spirituality. As social workers, they contributed to promoting social change, problem-solving in human relationships, and the empowerment and liberation of people to improve their overall well-being and quality of life. With the knowledge gained from studying human behaviour and social systems, one can intervene at the points where people interact with their surroundings

### **Promoting Social Cohesion**

Professor Ida D Souza, Assistant Professor, Department of Global Health, PSPH, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal, Karnataka, India, stressed the importance of promoting social change and development, social cohesion, respect for diversity, engaging people in addressing challenges, and enhancing well-being in her speech. She also shared her thoughts on the sustainable development goals that can be implemented in their institution and the practices adopted by their institution and the impact they have had on the local institutions during the pandemic.

### **Towards Responsible Behaviour toward Earth**

Professor Jose Antony, who was speaking on behalf of the Association of Schools of Social Work in Kerala, shared his thoughts on how they are constructing or enacting change in the economy, culture, human rights, and countries. He emphasised the importance of creating

pathways to the future based on past experiences and the current existence of the world around them. In particular, he was concerned with every social worker's responsibility toward Earth and the environment.

### **Deal with Eroding Values**

In his final message to the Forum, Professor Venkat Rao Pulla posed the following question: If diagnosis is that there is an erosion of values and a lack of security of all kinds, including food security, in the world today, what will be the approach? Is it possible to become disruptive in societies and bring about change? Those questions are at the heart of the theme of peace and humane treatment of those whom we serve, and they are also the most difficult to answer. We do not need to infer anything about ourselves from what is happening in Europe. We cannot allow societies and organisations to devolve into miserable collectives that are unable to predict what is going to happen next. In my opinion, the people and governments of each of our countries should be involved in a more meaningful way. I would like to see each of us provide peace to our children and their children. Please accept my heartfelt greetings on behalf of the social work profession. He further raised the following questions:

- how does one engage in a debate about the provision of peace to the citizens of different societies?
- how do we prevent injustices from manifesting themselves in our relationships and our institutions on a daily basis? and
- how do we allow everyday injustices to continue in the name of market liberties?

Venkat Rao Pulla emphasised that answers to these questions must be found.

### **Appreciations from Social Workers**

In an appreciative note, Neelmani Jaysawal, Assistant Professor Department of Social Work, Visva-Bharati, wrote that social workers could fight any pandemic and bring an international social order based on social development and

environmental synergy. He particularly appreciated the achievements of various schools of social work in response to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Of importance to mark was the active involvement of the students and faculty members in providing services of tele-counselling, telemedicine, distribution of groceries and essential items among needy people. In his post-event communication to the authors, Jaysawal reiterated the tremendous initiatives taken by these schools of Social Work.