

Building the Capacity of Social Workers' Associations in Africa: the Case of Zimbabwe

NIGEL HALL,* LEONTINA KANYOWA ** & JOSPHAT M MATHE ***

ABSTRACT

Social workers' associations have been formed in many countries around the world to benefit and support their members – ie, professionally trained and qualified social workers. Their mandate is to provide the necessary professional expertise and networking capability to assist in building and develop their members' skill base and to protect and strengthen the profession generally. As social work is very closely linked to social development in the developing world, social workers also have an important societal and national role to play in this respect.

However, one of the critical problems facing the rather weak social workers' associations within Africa, is how they can sustain the interest of their members and build their organisational base in such a way that they can contribute in a positive way to social development. This article examines the situation of the National Association of Social Workers (Zimbabwe) and outlines an organisational development strategy which aims to mobilise and educate members of the Association in order to bring them more fully into the mainstream of the country's development.

Introduction: Problems Encountered by Associations of Social Workers in Africa

The role of the social work profession is sometimes not fully appreciated and in response social workers have tried to form associations which would improve the public image of the profession. However the formation and establishment of these associations have been weighed down by various problems. One major problem is

* Nigel Hall is Vice President (Africa), International Federation of Social Workers and National Secretary of the National Association of Social Workers (Zimbabwe). He is also a Senior Lecturer at the School of Social Work, Zimbabwe and Editor of the *Journal of Social Development in Africa*. Contact at P Bag 66022, Kopje, Harare.

** Leontina Kanyowa is Treasurer of the National Association of Social Workers (Zimbabwe), Harare Branch and is also a Lecturer at the School of Social Work, Zimbabwe. Contact at P Bag 66022, Kopje, Harare; Tel: 263-4-751815; Fax: 751903

*** Josphat M Mathe is President of the National Association of Social Workers (Zimbabwe), International Federation of Social Workers' Executive Committee Member, and Member of the Founding Steering Committee of the Commonwealth Association of Social Workers (COSW). He is also Programme Director of Redd Barna-Zimbabwe and a member of the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Social Development in Africa*. Contact at P O Box 4581, Harare; Tel: 263-4-732517; Fax: 263-4-796535.

the marginal status that the profession is accorded in many countries. While this is not necessarily a problem only within developing countries, the recent emergence of the profession, its links to social control of delinquents and other "remedial" activities linked to charitable, voluntary and missionary philanthropic concerns has meant that it is even much more difficult for social workers to obtain professional acceptability and approval than other professions.

Civic education on the role and function of the social worker is necessary as indicated earlier. However due to financial and other constraints, it has not been possible to educate civil society on the role and functions of social workers. As a result in some developing countries, associations of social workers have been misconstrued to be political groups, or seen as marginal organisations which play an insignificant role.

In many countries the major problem that has been encountered by social workers has been financial and subsequently the formation of these associations never reaches fruition. In most cases there is inadequate money to enable the associations to set up secretariats with full-time or even part-time paid staff. As a result association business is conducted by social workers who are in full-time employment elsewhere and can only attend to voluntary work after hours and over weekends. The associations are subsequently deprived of the attention that they require.

Bureaucratic delays in formal governmental registration of the associations and in the passing of important pieces of legislation that would facilitate more effective management and functioning of these organisations have also been experienced in some African countries. These delays have led to potential members becoming disillusioned and even leaving the profession altogether.

Members often expect that the association should provide them with immediate benefits, but are not prepared to invest time and energy themselves. Sometimes this has to do with the leadership taking all the decisions and not involving the general membership sufficiently; but it also has to do with a reluctance on the part of members to spend time building their associations (see Hall, 1990:15).

Associations are sometimes organised in a haphazard manner without sufficient attention being paid to structural arrangements which can ensure continuity. For example the recently-launched (in June 1997) Kenya National Association of Social Workers has now built the idea of having trustees for their Association into their Constitution. The expectation is that the trustees who will be persons of community or even national significance will provide a "watching brief" over the affairs of the Association.

It is important obviously to have somewhere from which to operate, yet lack of office accommodation has bedevilled many associations. Files must be kept in good order and held securely, yet without a base from which to operate important material may go missing.

Problems have developed when no one is prepared to take responsibility. Often people may seek leadership positions solely for the status and prestige of the position and yet are not prepared to take responsibility. It is important that committed social workers are elected to leadership positions – and that they also have the time to devote to association business.

Capacity-building of members of the associations through cooperation with other associations of social workers which have been established for a much longer period of time is a strategy which needs to be encouraged and developed further. For example the Tanzania Association of Social Workers (TASWA) has linked with the Norwegian Union of Social Educators and Social Workers (FO) for a number of years. Other associations have received assistance on an *ad hoc* basis at various times. However more formalised and mutually beneficial “twinning” partnerships have generally not been established.

Above all it is very important to have active branches. In the African context it is relatively easy to develop a strong national executive based in the capital city, with almost no organisation or base in the provinces and districts. Yet if the general members around the country are not involved in some way, they will feel the association has no meaning or benefit for them personally and hence will lose interest.

The National Association of Social Workers (Zimbabwe)

Objectives of the Association

The National Association of Social Workers (Zimbabwe) [NASW(Z)] was formed in 1968, four years after the establishment of the only School of Social Work in Zimbabwe. NASW was formed with the view:

“...to seek to support the professional growth and development of social workers within Zimbabwe so that they might serve the community through both direct service and building the capacity of people within the community” (NASW[Z], 1995).

The three main objectives of the Association, as noted in the Constitution are:

- (1) To provide the opportunity for communication and exchange of ideas among social workers throughout Zimbabwe.
- (2) To ensure the participation of social workers in social planning and the formulation of social policy nationally and internationally.
- (3) To establish the status of the profession through the maintenance of high standards.

Further objectives of NASW are:

- to encourage research into issues of concern to the profession;
- to disseminate information about the profession and encourage debate;
- to inform social workers about advances in the profession and keep them abreast of new trends;
- to develop a code of ethics and encourage social workers to abide by it;
- to foster creative initiatives within communities related to action on matters of social concern;
- to encourage the provision of *"appropriate, reactive, preventive and developmental social services of high quality"* (NASW[Z], 1997).

The Association has faced a variety of difficulties and has functioned in an uneven way since its formation. At times it would be reasonably successful in organising members and promoting various activities. However this would usually only last for certain periods which often would coincide with energetic and active leadership at a national or branch level. Once these individuals had left, the interest would be likely to wane and the organisation either cease operating or function on an *ad-hoc* basis – like the period 1986-7, when a Task Force of three based at the School of Social Work maintained a semblance of the Association. However an over-reliance on the leadership can be self-defeating, and as Mupedziswa (1986:8) points out it is necessary that the general membership also show commitment and unity:

"A purposeful association would be expected to base its activities on the motto: Ask not what your association can do for you, but rather what you can do for your association."

However despite the wisdom of this statement, it appears that the Zimbabwe Association has experienced some serious difficulties in the past, which perhaps only now are being rectified. Some of the reasons for these difficulties are outlined below.

Problems faced by NASW (Z)

The history of NASW(Z) since its inception has reflected many of the problems common to social workers' associations elsewhere in Africa and in the developing world. However the particular problems that the Association faces in Zimbabwe can be identified as follows:

- (1) Although the social work profession is well-established and social workers are found in a very wide cross-section of occupations, as a professional grouping they are fragmented and disparate.

(2) Salaries, particularly in the Governmental sector are low and social workers are overworked and given a very wide range of responsibilities which are almost impossible to achieve satisfactorily. Social workers are expected as a major part of their work to undertake clerical duties, leaving little time for more challenging and professional work, such as child welfare, juvenile justice, counselling and the assessment of benefits for the destitute. This leads to an undervaluing of the worth of the profession and lack of funding to support professional activities.

(3) Partly as a result of low pay and overwork in the public service, social workers themselves have little time to devote to developing their own profession. Together, these factors lead to a self-defeating "feedback loop" of apathy, disinterest and low self-esteem.

(4) NASW(Z) has had no representative status with the Public Services Commission on matters affecting social workers in the public service. However very recently the process of formalising this representation commenced.

(5) The lack of a Social Workers' Act to regulate the profession has meant that social work has not gained broad public recognition and the Association consequently has lacked acceptance. The Act – which is to be tabled before Parliament in the near future – was originally drafted by the national executive, with the intention of providing for the formal registration of social workers and regulation of their activities under the auspices of a Social Work Council.

Some Positive Developments

Members of the Association were very concerned at this lack of effective functioning and sought ways to try to improve the situation. One of the needs that had long been identified by the the National Executive Committee of NASW(Z) was for the establishment of a Secretariat that would be headed by a National Coordinator. In an attempt to meet this need, NASW(Z) made an application to the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) to assist in its establishment.

In 1996 the Danish Association of Social Workers, in collaboration with the International Federation of Social Workers, rendered financial assistance to NASW (Z) for the purpose of establishing an office and employing a full-time co-ordinator. This support was in line with IFSW's two major aims, namely: *"To promote social work as a profession through cooperation and action on an international basis"* and *"To support national associations in promoting the participation of social workers"* (Constitution of IFSW, 1996).

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW)

The IFSW is the international body representing National Associations of Social Workers: it is divided into the five geographical regions of Africa, Asia & Pacific, Europe, Latin America & Caribbean and North America. Only one national professional association in each country may become a member of the Federation, although this may be a single national association, or a coordinating body representing two or more national associations. At present there are 59 national associations or organisations with more than 435,000 members belonging to the Federation, which has its secretariat in Norway. The IFSW also has a tradition of "twinning" between member associations in developed and developing parts of the world, although this relationship is currently being revised to try to find more equitable and less paternalistic modes of operation.

The initiative to build the organisational capacity of NASW(Z) follows on from ongoing contacts and links between NASW(Z) and the IFSW over many years. These close ties resulted in executive members of NASW(Z) elected to key positions in IFSW, for example the Vice Presidency of the Africa Region, the IFSW Executive Committee and the Human Rights Commission of IFSW.

Building the Organisational Capacity of the Association

As previously mentioned, the Danish Association for Social Workers (DS) with its organisational experience in workers' education and its commitment to assisting developing world associations was approached and agreed to become a partner in this initiative.

An agreement was reached whereby the national executive with assistance from the international partners would try to establish the nature and extent of assistance that the Association required to strengthen it and boost the membership. It was established that although Zimbabwe possibly has an estimated 4,000 social workers, only 80 at that time were actively participating in NASW (Z) activities. The magnitude of this apathy was definitely cause for concern. The low membership partly contributed to the weak financial base as only a few social workers paid the Z\$120 (US\$12) annual subscription. Furthermore, the social workers in Zimbabwe had a sound professional background and skills and therefore could be expected to participate in a professional association.

Arranging of a "Needs Assessment Workshop"

In order to boost the membership of the Association and to increase its relevance for the potential members, the partner organisations agreed initially to host a

"Needs Assessment Workshop" to examine how the Association could be improved and made more useful to social workers in Zimbabwe. The implementing agency on the Danish side had a particular interest in workers' education in the sense of developing the capacity of organisations through enhancing the skills of elected leaders, branch representatives and rank and file members; this coincided with the need as seen by the Association's executive to develop the body in a strategic way. Funding was sourced through the Danish Development Agency (DANIDA) and managed by the LO/FTF – the Danish Trade Union Council for International Development Cooperation.

A meeting to discuss this application was held during the biennial Social Workers' World Assembly in Colombo in 1994 and was attended by members of the NASW (Z) Executive Committee, members of the IFSW, and some Scandinavian and German colleagues. During the discussion it was revealed that the Secretary General of IFSW had taken the initiative to approach alternative possible donors from within the Nordic region and had received a positive response from the Danish Social Workers' Association. At this meeting it was also learnt that assistance being extended to Zimbabwe, could also be broadened to include the development of social work organisations and the profession within southern and eastern Africa, with the possibility of establishing a secretariat in Zimbabwe. It was against this background that a Needs Assessment Workshop was planned to take place in Harare during February 1996 to address the issues involved.

The main objectives of this Workshop were identified as follows:

- (1) to examine the general need for education and training programmes – in particular the needs of special "target groups" such as trainers, elected leaders, branch representatives and rank and file members of the association;
- (2) to examine the structure of the Association, its processes and its method of communication;
- (3) to strengthen the association and set up a plan or strategy to operate on its own resources and become self-sufficient;
- (4) to provide an overview of how social work associations operate in the region.

The Workshop was attended by 29 local social workers and one social work association representative from the following African countries: Botswana, Malawi, Namibia, Tanzania, Swaziland, South Africa, and Lesotho. Also attending was one representative from the Danish Social Workers Association, the Secre-

tary-General and President of the IFSW, one trainer from the Danish Trade Union College, the Secretary-General of the LO/FTF Council, and two representatives from the German and Norwegian Social Work Associations.

At this Workshop, it was established that NASW (Z)'s needs were as follows:

- to develop a membership drive;
- to establish a secretariat and employ a full-time Coordinator;
- to boost NASW(Z)'s financial base;
- to train members of NASW(Z) on basic trade union issues such as:
 - administration and management of an association
 - conducting union meetings
 - communication and public relations, and
 - grievance handling;
- to equip members with lobbying skills with a view to assist NASW(Z) to improve its access to political decision makers;
- to develop public awareness and information dissemination to the public on NASW(Z) and its functions and the role of the social worker in society; and
- to produce a regular newsletter.

During the Workshop members were asked to develop small-scale and realistic projects which they felt would assist in developing the Association. A further task for the groups was then to cost each activity through the preparation of detailed budgets. Although this remained at the level of an educational exercise, it soon became clear that some members had wildly unrealistic ideas of what the Association could afford. It was then realised and agreed that costs must be kept as low as possible and that members needed to work out ways of financing some of the identified activities. The exercise exposed the participants to the problems of budgeting and started a constructive discussion on the problems of external finance and the risk of being dependent on external resources.

It was agreed that NASW(Z) in collaboration with the IFSW and the Danish Association of Social Workers would institute a workers' education project which would be conducted over a period of three years. The objective of this project was to strengthen NASW(Z) so that the capacity-building exercise will result in sustainability through continued workers' education programmes which will address any new identified needs. This co-operation emphasised the need for international donors to assist with *processes* and not *products*.

Conclusions of the Needs Assessment Workshop

Some of the key conclusions were that although the Association only presently had a few members, there was great potential to expand membership; a reasonably good relationship existed with the Department of Social Welfare – a key employer; and there was need to negotiate wages and salaries for social workers as they were considered too low, particularly within the Government sector. The major problem identified was that the Association was weak due to low membership, a limited financial base and limited political influence.

Following the Needs Assessment Workshop, further discussions took place between NASW(Z) and its international partners and a Leadership Training Workshop agreed for late 1996.

Leadership Training Workshop

This Workshop was designed for the executive committee (national and branch) of NASW (ie, the “leaders”) who were seen to have a major responsibility in deciding on the future development plan for the Association. During discussion on the purpose of the Workshop (an “interactive session”), participants exchanged ideas on what they considered needed to be achieved and several comments were made, among which included the following:

“People don’t feel they belong to this Association.”

“Let’s develop some practical programmes and projects we can take back home with us.”

“There is something lacking in the Association – is it poor governance, or poor participation?”

Participants shared their frustrations, anxieties and uncertainties over the Association, but then developed a common vision of the goals they wanted to achieve. One particularly pertinent contribution listed the needs as follows:

“We need workable objectives, commonly understood by our members, a strategic development focus, sustainability of the Association over time, and good governance which allows for transparency, accountability and democratic processes.”

The style of facilitation used with the Workshop followed the “logical framework approach” used by the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 1996). Initially a

a *design matrix* was used to focus group attention on the various strategies to be adopted. Using interactive sessions to encourage participation the group then examined a “catalogue” of activities that the Association could be involved in. These included, for example, the need for:

- membership mobilisation to enhance the strength of NASW and place it in a position to represent and develop services for social workers in Zimbabwe;
- establishing a representative status for the Association in order for it to take on an advocacy role on issues pertaining to the social work profession, including conditions of service and other issues of concern to members;
- training of trainers to develop the organisational and training skills of members;
- training of leaders to develop the management and leadership skills for those in leadership positions within NASW;
- training of “union” skills to enhance the negotiating capacities of members to advance their working conditions at their places of employment;
- to increase the public awareness of the profession through an organised public relations campaign;
- to lobby for the implementation of a Social Workers Act which will define regulations concerning professional social work, administered through a Council of Social Work;
- to communicate regularly with members through production of a newsletter;
- to be able to provide research on issues related to social welfare, social policy and social work in Zimbabwe;
- to establish a fund for legal assistance and other benefits for members;
- to create a network with agencies and other organisations in Zimbabwe and abroad to support the development of a strong social work association in Zimbabwe.

These interactive learning sessions resulted in the drawing up of project proposals using a design matrix “The Contents of a Project Document” illustrated in Figure 1. An adapted version of this matrix was used for the Workshop and some of the key sections used are explained in some further detail below:

1. Development and Immediate Objectives

Development objectives essentially describe the ultimate reason for undertaking the programme/project. The *immediate objective* describes the situation that is expected to exist at the end of the programme/project. It shows the change that the programme/project itself is expected to bring about, and in what way the target group will be better off. As far as possible, an immediate objective should be stated in quantifiable or verifiable terms. The key word linked to the concept of the immediate objective is to *achieve*.

2. Indicators of achievement

Indicators add precision to the formulation of the immediate objectives. Indicators provide verifiable evidence to assess the progress made towards the achievement of the immediate objectives of the programme or project. Indicators should be factual, verifiable, specific and linked to the objective concerned. An indicator should describe the effects of the programme/project intervention and it should be noted that it cannot be an output of a programme. The sources of information on indicators should be reliable and accessible. The key word linked to the concept of the indicators is to *measure*.

3. Outputs

Outputs are the products which result from the programme/project activities. They might be training materials, reports, curricula, or people trained. Outputs should be described as concretely and precisely as possible and in quantifiable terms. The key word linked to the concept of output is to *produce*.

4. Activities

Activities are the actions undertaken by a programme/project to produce the planned outputs. Producing one output usually requires carrying out a number of activities. Activities transform inputs into outputs. They should be described in a logical sequence in a timetable indicating the planned starting and completion dates, as well as who will be responsible for doing what. The key word linked to the concept of activity is to *do*.

5. Inputs (National and International)

National inputs are the national resources necessary to carry out the activities and produce the outputs. The resources may include local support staff and local office premises. *International inputs* are the international resources necessary to carry out the activities and produce the outputs. The resources may include international experts, consultants, purchase of equipment, training, evaluation, etc. The key word linked to the concept of input is to *provide*.

6. Assumptions

These are external factors that may affect project implementation and performance, positively or negatively, and are beyond the control of project management. However they must be taken into account during programme/project execution and their effects on implementation and performance must be assessed whenever the project is reviewed and evaluated.

7. Prior Obligations

Prior obligations are actions to be undertaken by the partners concerned prior to the launching of programme/project activities. They are conditions that must be fulfilled before the start of the project's implementation. Utilising the design matrix described above, the participants came up with project documents on research, membership mobilisation, networking, communication and public relations.

Detailed Contents of Selected Project Documents

Some areas selected for analysis during the Leadership Training Workshop using this design matrix are detailed below.

Research

The participants of the workshop felt that NASW's *development objective* was to engage in research with the view to bring about change and to influence policy development in the areas of social welfare, social policy and social work practice in Zimbabwe. As an *immediate objective*, it was felt that NASW could provide research on a particular identified area of concern, such as the problem of street kids or AIDS. *Indicators* identified to measure success were that by the end of 1999, NASW would have carried out at least two research projects in the mentioned areas and would have also established a mechanism to provide future research services.

Outputs identified would be in the form of a database on socioeconomic issues and comprehensive information pertaining to the details of qualified social workers in Zimbabwe. The two main activities to be undertaken in order to achieve these objectives are: (1) to establish a research committee within NASW(Z) which would be tasked to plan and design research activities before the end of 1997; and (2) to perform at least one research study in the identified areas in 1998 and one in 1999.

National input from NASW(Z) would be to identify social workers to participate actively in the research committee. *International inputs* will be in the form of funds to enable NASW(Z) to conduct the research and to disseminate the findings.

Figure 1: The Contents of a Project Document

BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION	What is the <i>situation</i> that gives rise to the programme/project? How does it fit in with development (economic, social, political) <i>priorities</i> ?
TARGET GROUPS INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK	For whose <i>benefit</i> is the programme/project undertaken? Who are the <i>partners</i> ? What are their <i>responsibilities</i> ? Is the division of labour clear?
DEVELOPMENT AND IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVES	What are the <i>changes</i> the programme/project itself is expected to <i>bring about</i> or <i>contribute</i> to?
INDICATORS OF ACHIEVEMENT	How will <i>success</i> be assessed?
OUTPUTS	What will the programme/project <i>produce</i> and <i>deliver</i> ?
ACTIVITIES	What will the programme/project staff <i>do</i> ?
INPUTS	What funds, expertise, equipment, etc. are <i>needed</i> ?
ASSUMPTIONS	What are the <i>external factors</i> that may <i>affect</i> the implementation and performance of the programme/project?
PRIOR OBLIGATIONS	What <i>conditions</i> must be satisfied by the partners <i>before</i> the programme/project starts?
MONITORING, EVALUATION AND REPORTING	How will the partners be <i>informed</i> ? <i>When</i> will the project be <i>reviewed</i> and <i>evaluated</i> and by <i>whom</i> ?

Source: ILO (1996) Design, monitoring and evaluation of technical cooperation programmes and projects: A training manual, International Labour Office, Geneva.

The international partners will also make available material and information in the areas being researched by NASW(Z). This project will operate on the *assumption* that other key training and service-delivery organisations will enter into collaborative partnerships with the Association. It is also assumed that the Government of Zimbabwe and other relevant institutions will make relevant material available to NASW(Z). The *prior obligation* identified was that there would be commitment from NASW(Z) to dedicate human resources to this research activity.

Membership Mobilisation

As mentioned earlier, very few social workers are members of NASW(Z). Therefore, one of the *development* and *immediate objectives* identified was membership mobilisation so that more social workers can become active members of NASW(Z). *Indicators* identified to measure success were that NASW(Z) would have increased its membership to at least 200 by the end of 1997, to 350 by the end of 1998 and to 500 by the end of 1999. It is anticipated that the *output* of membership mobilisation will be that NASW(Z) will be a much stronger organisation with enhanced possibilities to represent and develop services for social workers in Zimbabwe. *Activities* to meet these objectives will be to develop useful material to recruit social workers and social work students to NASW(Z) and to ensure that this material is accessible. Further activity will be to conduct research on where social workers are employed. *National input* from NASW(Z) will involve follow-up of social workers who are not members by the National Coordinator and the executive committees of the branches. *International input* will come from partners in the form of funding to develop material for this mobilisation, and they will also fund meetings where recruitment strategies will be discussed.

The underlying *assumption* of this objective is that the media and other relevant organisations (eg, School of Social Work) in Zimbabwe will support the efforts of NASW(Z) in building its organisational base. NASW(Z) is *obliged* to be committed to the achievement of this objective and the international partners are *obliged* to provide financial support to make this activity possible.

Communication

The *development* and *immediate objective* is that members of NASW should receive regular and interesting information on internal and external affairs concerning the Association. *Indicators of achievement* will be the preparation of publicity and informational material and the *output* to show that communication is indeed taking place within NASW(Z) will be that all members will receive a newsletter at least twice a year. An editorial committee will therefore have to be established and they will be tasked with the production of the newsletter. However, office bearers will have to establish a mechanism that will ensure more regular and

frequent communication. *Activities* will include a workshop on newsletter production; the producing of articles for publication by members and the distributing of the newsletter.

National input will include payment of subscriptions for the newsletter by members of NASW(Z) who will also be invited to contribute articles. *International input* will be from the external partners who will give input in the form of financial support for the development and production of the newsletter. Fortunately, technical support for production of the newsletter is already in place and two newsletters have already been published.

Public Relations

The *development objective* aims to raise professional self-confidence among members by increasing public awareness of the role of social workers which will hopefully lead to greater public acceptability of the profession. The *immediate objective* is to gain public recognition and to attract social workers to identify with and join the association. *Indicators* to measure success are that NASW(Z) will become a recognised representative of the profession and will be consulted on issues to do with social work. Reference to social work activities in the national press is also expected to increase. *Outputs* will be in the form of consultations by policy makers, production of newsletters and position papers. *Activities* will be aggressive public relations drives which will include responding to issues regarding social work and other socioeconomic and cultural issues in the press and elsewhere, and a course in public relations will be considered.

Summary/Lessons for Other Associations

Voluntarism vs paid Organisation help

For any association to succeed, a great amount of voluntarism is expected, particularly in the context of a professional association where members are expected to work on a collegial and collaborative level. This spirit of voluntarism either contributes to the success or failure of professional associations – and in the case of NASW(Z) has meant that the organisation has at times worked well or failed dismally. Generally speaking financial resources available for voluntary associations are limited, not only in third world countries, but in most parts of the world. Therefore, in order to ensure success, voluntary commitment should be utilised as far as possible in order to conserve the limited financial resources which could be used to cover expenses which cannot be covered by volunteers. Voluntarism also indicates serious commitment on the part of members of an association. Furthermore, potential donors very often are interested in establishing the members' own input before they consider rendering any assistance. Developing a culture of voluntarism is therefore an important ingredient for sustainability.

Registration and Legalising of the Association

It is necessary that associations are formally registered in terms of either an Act of Parliament or other legal instrument. This will mean that they will be able to source funding through means that are reserved only for registered organisations. This will also have the effect of raising the status of the profession within the country concerned. For example in Zimbabwe NASW(Z) has recently been recognised by the Public Services Commission as the authentic representative of professional social workers in the public service. This will mean that the Association can participate in discussions concerning salaries and other conditions of service within the public service.

Broadening Membership

There is need to increase the membership of associations in order to strengthen and diversify their constituency – and make them more representative. For example students can be encouraged to form their own branch and women may wish to develop their own caucus within the association. The category of associate member can also be utilised to encourage others to join the association. A further possibility is that a category of affiliation entitled “friends of the association” be inaugurated to encourage sympathisers and well-wishers to support the association.

Sustainability and Self-Reliance

NASW(Z) has been extremely fortunate to establish relations with donors who have useful experience in the running of voluntary associations or trade unions and are willing to provide not only financial assistance, but also technical advice. However, it is important to take cognizance of the fact that the financial assistance will come to an end – in the case of NASW(Z) in 1999 – and that associations of social workers should strive as far as possible to develop a culture of self-reliance from the onset.

Some of the strategies which could be utilised in order to ensure sustainability are the following:

- ensure that subscriptions are deducted from salaries at source. This means that an agreement should be reached if possible with the employer to deduct subscriptions each month. Experience in Zimbabwe so far has demonstrated that some members have experienced difficulty in making direct payments to NASW(Z), usually because salaries are generally low and money is a scarce commodity.

- offer services to the public – for example research or project work (ie, “consultancies”). National Executive Committees could be responsible for sourcing and coordinating the allocation of the consultancies to be undertaken by members at branch level who would be paid commission for undertaking the work. In Zimbabwe, this will be made even more possible after a Social Workers’ Act is passed which will register and legitimate the social work profession.
- good quality publications can be a source of income, although it should be acknowledged that the costs are high and without a good marketing and distribution policy this could become a liability to the association. A professional biannual journal could attract income from sales and advertisements. NASW(Z) is already producing a quarterly Newsletter and the intention eventually is to produce a higher quality and marketable Journal.

Dealing with Apathy

Apathy is often identified as the reason why NASW(Z) has experienced difficulty in organising members and building a viable organisation. However placing all the blame on members for their inertia and apathy may be similar to “blaming the victim.” More likely as an explanation for failure to thrive as an organisation is that the association does not deliver any useful or viable services to its potential members and hence does not retain their confidence. Some of the factors which are likely to increase membership and interest in the Association have already been outlined, but are likely to include the following:

- becoming more responsive to the needs of the membership;
- adopting a trade union orientation, or at least protecting the interests of members through creation of a legal fund or similar assistance mechanisms to members;
- capacity-building of all members to further develop their skills and improve the functioning of the organisation;
- more efficient communication among members through regular meetings, brochures and newsletters;
- securing office accommodation to enable the safekeeping of files and other correspondence and to offer a base from where the coordination and administration can take place;
- if possible the employment of a full-time Coordinator and administrative assistance to facilitate all these activities.

Conclusion

In spite of the problems that have been highlighted associations of social workers are necessary in the promotion of the interests of members and in building a positive self-image for the profession. A well-organised and functioning association provides the forum through which these interests can be promoted and issues of concern to the profession be debated. The linking of the local association on a regional and international level to other associations and bodies provides a wider scope and information base for the association. Use of a design matrix, perhaps similar to the one previously outlined will provide a framework for drawing up the objectives, inputs, outputs and activities of the associations concerned. This framework will also allow the measuring and assessment of the achievements of the association.

Although many difficulties remain in terms of organising and building effective professional organisations capable of representing their membership, it should be noted that there is usually a high degree of motivation on the part of social workers to reverse this situation. The developmental needs of most developing countries are so vast and social workers involved in so many areas that there is no lack of variety and initiative on the part of social workers. Organising the profession may provide many challenges and there are a variety of constraints, but there is a high degree of motivation on the part of members to succeed.

References

- Hall, Nigel (1990) *Social Work Training in Africa: A Fieldwork Manual*, Journal of Social Development in Africa, School of Social Work, Harare.
- IFSW (1996) *Constitution*, International Federation of Social Workers, Oslo, Norway.
- ILO (1996) *Design, monitoring and evaluation of technical cooperation programmes and projects: A training manual*, Evaluation Unit, Bureau of Programming and Management, International Labour Office, Geneva.
- Mupedziswa, R (1986) "The Role of an Association of Social Workers in a Developing Socialist State," unpublished paper presented at the Workshop on Social Development held at the Oasis Motel, Harare, Zimbabwe, 10-14 June, 1986.
- NASW[Z] (1995) *Brochure of the National Association of Social Workers*, Harare.
- NASW[Z] (1997) *Constitution of the National Association of Social Workers*, Harare.