

# A Study of the Human Resource and Training Needs for the Development of Social Work in Vietnam

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## Acronyms

AASW	Australian Association of Social Workers
BA	Bachelor of Arts
BSW	Bachelor of Social Work
CNSP	Children in Need of Special Protection
CPFC	Committee for Population, Families and Children
COLISA	College of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs
DOLISA	Department of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs
FRC	French Red Cross
HCMC	Ho Chi Minh City
HIV/AIDS	Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
IASSW	International Association of Schools of Social Work
IFSW	International Federation of Social Workers
INGO	International Non-Government Organization
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
MOLISA	Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs
NGO	Non-Government Organization
UK	United Kingdom
ULSA	University of Labour and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USA	United States of America
VNRC	Vietnam Red Cross
VNU	Vietnam National University – Hanoi
WHO	World Health Organization

# Executive Summary

## The background to social work in Vietnam

This report presents the findings of research into the human resource and training needs for the further development of professional social work in Vietnam. In recent years steps have been taken towards this goal, following the recognition that as Vietnam grows economically it is encountering many social problems in response to which a systematic and scientific approach is required. These include children at risk, the social protection of disabled and elderly people, the prevention and amelioration of social evils, poverty alleviation and the need for community development. Social work is established globally as the profession that has the skills and knowledge to respond in these areas, complementing the work of other professions. A decision has already been made in Vietnam that the profession of social work should be developed in a way that follows the global model. Social work is therefore now a central factor in the strategies for the social well-being of Vietnam.

Internationally, the profession of social work has developed over a lengthy period, beginning at least as far back as the late nineteenth century in industrial countries. Originally this work was based on charity, but as social problems became increasingly complex it was recognised that a scientific approach was required. This led to the formation of university based training courses and the employment of qualified practitioners in government and non-government organizations.

Social workers use a range of methods and theories to assist individuals, groups and communities to resolve problems of living. These include counselling, casework, case management, groupwork, social advocacy, community development, social research and social policy. The balance between these methods varies according to national circumstances. Although some of these practices overlap with those of other professions, the unique feature of social work is that all of these are combined and that social work brings to them a distinctive approach grounded in a focus on the individual person in their social context.

The international basic standard for professional social work education is now an undergraduate university degree, although there are some variations (such as the master of social work in the USA). Such programs include a minimum of the equivalent of two years full-time post-school education

specifically focussed on social work, specific teaching on social work theories and practices, teaching on social science and law (including policy and research methods) and a substantial amount of supervised and assessed practice as part of training.

A common feature of all professions is a formal structure or mechanism through which each individual member can be recognised as appropriately qualified. There are three such mechanisms that can be observed globally in social work. These are boards of registration (in which a government appointed body approves individuals and holds a register), licensing (in which the state issues licenses for practice to individuals, normally for a fixed period of time and subject to renewal) or self accreditation (in which a professional body approves specified forms of training as the basis for professional recognition).

Professional associations are also important for social work, as they are for all professions, as they provide the basis for developing knowledge and skills in the field and the promotion of the objectives and values of the occupation. These associations, which now exist in 80 countries, also provide a mechanism for the maintenance of ethics and practice standards through their codes of ethics and the sanctioning of unacceptable practice.

Some of these features have been developed in the last ten years in Vietnam. In particular, there are now eleven social work programs approved for university level training of which five have admitted students. However, there is as yet no job code and there is no professional association. At this stage there are key questions that need to be answered in order to be able to plan for the next phase of social work development. These are:

- what are the tasks that social work is required to do?
- what is the most effective way of organising social work employment?
- at what level or levels should professional social work education be located and how is this to be facilitated (including the training of teachers and opportunities for extensive assessed practice)?
- how can the various types and levels of 'social work' be trained and organised (and should 'para-professional' work be seen as part of or separate from social work)?
- how can professional social work share and develop its knowledge and skills collectively (for example, through the formation of an association)?

## The research

The project reported here was designed to provide answers to these questions. It utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods in order to obtain data about the current workforce and training situation and to consider ideas from those involved in the field about future possibilities.

The areas used for the research included a city and a province from each of the North and the South of the country. These were Hanoi and Lang Son in the north and Ho Chi Minh City and Dong Thap in the south. For the questionnaires, these sub-samples were also stratified according to work roles, with both organisationally senior and practice levels included. This produced a final sample as in the following table (with column percentages in brackets).

### The questionnaire sample

Location	Organization level	Practice level	Total
Hanoi	39 (27)	56 (30)	95 (29)
Lang Son	32 (22)	38 (21)	70 (21)
Ho Chi Minh City	41 (28)	57 (31)	98 (30)
Dong Thap	33 (23)	33 (18)	66 (20)
Total	145 (100)	184 (100)	329 (100)

For the qualitative interviews a total of 112 interviews were conducted, with 34 in Hanoi, 22 in Lang Son, 30 in Ho Chi Minh City and 24 in Dong Thap, plus two that were conducted in Thanh Hoa by the international consultant and which were included as a triangulation (cross-checking) exercise.

Data collection took place between 25 April and 30 June 2005. The quantitative data were analysed using SPSS, using basic descriptive statistics and tests for correlations. The qualitative interviews were coded using an analytic induction approach to identify themes.

## The current situation: the quantitative findings

The demographic in this sample has a profile that is not surprising. The mean average age of the organisationally senior participants was slightly higher than those of the practice level, although this was not significant. The overall range of ages was greater among practitioners than in the higher levels. Distributions by sex showed that more men than women held senior

positions, on a ratio of 56:44, and by the same proportion women outnumber men in the practice level.

Of the organisations represented in the sample, the largest proportion was from MOLISA (24%), followed by the mass organizations (15%), CPFC (12%), health (10%), MOET (9%), NGOs (7%) and the remaining 24% was made up of a diverse range of other organizations. As MOLISA was a major sponsor of the project this is of itself not surprising, and the overall profile raises questions about the range of possible answers that may be obtained. However, the range of areas of practice by types of need (children, disability, family breakdown, prostitution, mental health, HIV/AIDS, drug misuse, poverty, isolated elderly and 'other') showed that many of the respondents worked across more than one. All areas were covered by at least 30% of the sample, with children's work undertaken by 60%, and disability, HIV/AIDS, drug misuse and poverty dealt with by approximately 40%. Practitioners tended to work across fewer areas of need, but even in this sub-group there was a mean average of 2.5 areas per practitioner. This suggests that at present social welfare practice tends towards being generalist.

Although formal four-year undergraduate programs are only just commencing, it was reported that about 2858 people working in social welfare services are regarded as trained in social work. Of the sample, 60% said that they were trained in social work. When asked about the type of training it became clear that the training is either in the form of short in-service courses or else the one-semester course that has been taught as part of the Bachelor of Arts in Women's Studies at the Open University of Ho Chi Minh City. (It also means that the sample was heavily weighted towards people with some training and experience in social work.) However, given the higher proportion who have other college or university level education, it can be suggested that forms of training that build on this, such as accelerated entry, would assist in a more rapid development of a fully qualified workforce.

Estimates of the need for social workers in Vietnam produced very different types of answers. There was wide agreement that social workers are required in all areas of social welfare, with a tendency for respondents to emphasise their own area. Child care and protection was most widely recognised as requiring social work. Although more people stated that in-service forms of training are required (53%) than formal full-time university programs (33%) this was, as before, a reflection of the wish to see training available for those who are already employed in social welfare services.

Of the types of practice that are needed, counselling was most widely stated, with social policy, program management, community development and other work with individuals and families also strongly identified. In terms of the areas of work in which greater training is needed, child care and protection was most frequently stated, followed by family breakdown, disability, HIV/AIDS and poverty. A similar pattern emerged when respondents were asked in which areas social work training should be necessary for practice. Thus it is concluded that flexible forms of training at various levels and covering all areas of need will be required to create the necessary social work workforce for Vietnam.

## **Ideas for the development of social work: the qualitative findings**

Descriptions of the role of social work provided in the interviews matched the pre-coded answers in the questionnaires. Because many of the interviews had also completed questionnaires this should be expected, but tends to confirm the range of the answers received. Children and families, disabled people, poverty alleviation and the elimination of ‘social evils’ were all mentioned widely. These were also seen as the areas in which not enough is currently being done and which require trained social workers in the future. One new theme that came out of the interviews was the importance of distinguishing social work from charity. The distinction being made was that charity work does things *for* people, professional social work should act *with* people and promote their capacities to act *for themselves*.

With regard to the skills and knowledge of social work, communication skills were most frequently stated. These include being able to listen carefully to all aspects of what is being said and of the non-verbal aspects of communication, to be able to analyse the content of communication and to make plans from this. The other interpersonal skill that was frequently mentioned was that of ‘empathy’, of being able accurately to understand another person’s situation without getting caught up in it. Other skills that were stated were the formal methods of social work, including counselling, casework, groupwork, community development, social policy and research skills. A particularly Vietnamese construction on the skill of ‘mobilization’ was widely voiced, emphasizing the local context of people’s lives.

The knowledge base of social work was described as being founded on an applied approach to diverse academic disciplines, including psychology, sociology, law and economics. These are ‘applied’ in the sense that they are not used in a theoretical way, but through the understanding of Vietnamese

people and society that they make available. Other forms of knowledge that are valuable are those which are constructed from social work practice.

Personal qualities that are important in social work again included empathy. Unanimously, social workers are expected to be ethical people, valuing social justice, being trustworthy and also not being 'self-important'. In addition, many interviewees spoke of the need to be enthusiastic and committed, 'having the blood' for social work.

Regarding social work training, interviewees spoke about two aspects: the level of training and the modes of delivery. Very wide support was voiced for systematic basic training for workers at commune level. This, it was said, should be in the form of regular short-term courses. In addition there was also very wide agreement that university level education should form the standard for professional social work. However, although it was stated that this should be formal, there was concern that it should be accessible for experienced people who were employed in social welfare work and so should be delivered in modular form that could be taken on a part-time basis. This factor points also to the value of having advanced entry, or 'top-up', programs for those who already have university degrees such as in sociology or economics. In addition, some need for distance education was mentioned.

One factor in training that was widely regarded as very important was that of supervised practice. This is almost non-existent in Vietnam, and there is a major issue in the lack of qualified practice supervisors or instructors. However, there was strong agreement that this should be developed.

In terms of the spread of social work across areas of need the range of issues that has already been identified again emerged, with additional ideas such as working with domestic violence, the needs of ethnic minorities, women's rights (including forced marriage and 'women marrying foreigners') and school counselling and youth work. As one interviewee said, social work involves 'all the issues'. Similarly, when asked who should employ social workers all possible social welfare agencies were mentioned, the most frequent being those that have been identified in the quantitative part of the study. However, estimating how many social workers are required in Vietnam was too large a task and most interviewees spoke only about their own work situation.

When asked about the difficulties faced by social work and what assistance is needed for it to succeed, there were clear themes that emerged. The most

important of these was that at present there is no job code for social work in Vietnam and that for all the developments in training and services to be successful this is now an urgent priority. Other factors that were discussed were the need for laws and policies for social work, a better common understanding of the role and function of social work, budgets and other material support for social work services, and a professional association. Improvements in training were also widely mentioned, including the need to develop more interactive and less passive forms of teaching, more materials including those developed in Vietnam, more supervised practice within training and more extensive training for social work educators (training the trainers).

## **Discussion: a framework for the development of social work**

The role and tasks of social in Vietnam have been consistently reported in both the quantitative and qualitative data as covering the whole range of social welfare. The most emphasised areas were children and families, especially children in need of protection. Other aspects of social protection, the areas of 'social evils', community development, counselling and assistance in health and education and social policy and research work have all been identified. Similarly, all agencies involved in social welfare have been seen as requiring qualified social workers. MOLISA (and DOLISA) and CPFC feature very strongly in this, but also mass organisations such as Women's Union, hospitals, schools and universities, NGOs, the courts and police were all identified.

In terms of education and training, the need for three levels or 'standards' of training are suggested. First, there is a necessity for a large number of workers in the communes who have systematic basic training. This standard can be seen as 'para-professional' in that it comes under but does not reach that of the full professional qualification. Second is the standard of professional social work, which is of those who are trained at university level through four-year dedicated degree programs. Third, there is also a standard of 'post-professional' training that includes advanced specialist education (for example, in child protection) as well as higher degrees (both masters and doctorates).

Several factors will underpin the development of social work. First, the para-professional level must be recognised as necessary and having a distinctive role to play. Second, unless a job code is produced as a matter of urgency then all other elements in social work's development will be impeded. Third,

a professional association that includes all three standards of training will assist in the continued development of the profession and the maintenance of ethics and standards of practice.

Using these conclusions to make core assumptions about the scale and distribution of para-professional, professional and post-professional qualified social workers, a framework for human resource planning is proposed (see pages 69-73). In the next ten years Vietnam should set a minimum target of 42,900 to be trained at the para-professional level, 13,641 at the professional level and 1,492 at the post-professional level. This produces a cumulative total of 58,033 of whom 15,133 would be trained at university level (and includes the professional and post-professional training of university teachers in social work). Those who are professionally trained would have a particular responsibility for the training, supervision and support of colleagues at the para-professional level.

## **Moving forward: summary of recommendations and conclusions**

The report concludes with a summary statement of 13 core recommendations. A brief discussion of each is presented in Chapter 6. The recommendations themselves are as follows.

1. Social workers should be engaged in providing counselling, family casework, case management, groupwork, community development, program planning, social policy and social research in all areas of social need.
2. Social workers should be engaged in working with children in need of special protection, adults (such as isolated elderly people) who are in need of social protection, the treatment and/or rehabilitation of those who are involved in or affected by 'social evils', social care and support to patients in hospitals and other health services and to students in schools and universities, social and community development, and in the planning and development of these services.
3. Social workers should be employed in all the government and non-government organizations that provide services to meet the needs that have been defined above (see list in Chapter 5, page 62).
4. Social workers should be fully trained in programs relevant to the professional level at which they are working.
5. Social work training at different levels should be integrated and flexible, to enable sufficient numbers of people to become qualified and to

- promote opportunities for career progression. The university bachelor degree should be seen as the main professional level.
6. Workers already in practice, or those who are resident in provincial and rural areas, will require flexible access, including modular and distance modes of learning.
  7. All training in social work, and especially the para-professional and main professional qualifying levels, should contain a sufficient emphasis on practice.
  8. A system of articulation between levels, and between professional social work and other related programs of training, should be developed.
  9. The para-professional level is vital to the possibilities of developing social work in Vietnam. This level should be seen as part of professional social work.
  10. A job code is now a very urgent requirement for the development of professional social work in Vietnam.
  11. The public profile of social work is low. Attention should be paid to this by all stakeholders.
  12. A professional association for social work should be formed.
  13. Planning for a social work workforce should be based on an optimum number that provides sufficient qualified people in the various organizations but is realistic in terms of the likely growth of the profession.

Professional social work has been developing in Vietnam for many years. Progress has been slow, but in recent years significant steps have been taken through the MOET approved curriculum. The support provided for the project reported here, from MOLISA, CPFC, MOET, the Women's Union, the universities and other organizations, is evidence of wide-spread acceptance that professional social work should be placed on a firmer foundation and its growth accelerated. The needs of Vietnamese society as it undergoes economic development are such that strengthening social work would be timely in order to address the many social issues that accompany a growing economy. The scale of growth that has been suggested for the next decade is feasible, but will require support and action from many stakeholders. It is to be hoped that this will occur, so that Vietnam can benefit from an appropriately educated professional workforce as a central element in the provision of social welfare.

# Introduction

There are now 80 countries in the world where the profession of social work is established, as defined by membership of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW). In recent years social work can be seen to be developing in countries that are in transition from planned to market economies (Oanh, 2002; Sawada, 2002). In 1997 a decision was taken that this profession would be developed in Vietnam. Since then progress has been steady but slow (Robertson & Heiss, 1998; Kelly, 2003). In 2004 the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) approved a curriculum for the training of professional social workers through a four-year university degree. This has now made human resource planning, including issues in training, a matter that requires attention.

Workforce planning for social work is not widely developed cross the profession. In most western countries the numbers of social workers in training and the numbers in the workforce are usually left to market forces. That is, university places are allocated by universities according to the balance of disciplines that they seek in their own planning and these places are filled on the basis of the numbers of potential students who apply. In some countries, such as the UK and the Scandinavian countries, governments have created entities to monitor and advise on patterns of training and workforce requirements (for example, Skills for Care, 2005). However, such work is not extensively developed and has been slow to produce any substantial findings or recommendations (Higham *et al.*, 2001). This is partly because of an historical dispersal of responsibility for social work between several government and civil society organisations, and partly because of the widely recognised difficulty in modelling with very complex variables when standardised data are not available (for example, see O'Brien-Pallas *et al.*, 2001). There is, therefore, no well-accepted model that is already available to which workforce planning in Vietnam could look.

Because this type of workforce planning is crucial to the development of professional social work, UNICEF Vietnam together with the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) and MOET commissioned the study that is reported here. UNICEF had received reports from other recent projects (Sawada, 2002; UNICEF, 2005) that have recommended that the establishment of social work should be regarded as a priority. In particular, social work internationally has played a major role in child protection, which is a key area for UNICEF Vietnam. For this reason supporting the

development of social work assists work undertaken in these other areas of concern.

A brief word of clarification of terms will be useful at this point. The title of social worker is legal protected in some countries, so that only those who have recognised qualifications can use it about themselves. However in many other countries the term is used colloquially to refer both to professionally trained practitioners and also to a general category of actions performed by concerned citizens for the welfare of their neighbours and their communities. (A similar complex usage can be seen in the terms ‘nursing’ and ‘teaching’ where there are recognised professions but also actions performed by untrained volunteers.) This has caused a lot of debate that is not resolved in a country such as Australia (Healy, 2004). In Vietnam the expression that is used for social work, *công tác xã hội*, is unclear in this respect as it can be used for those with formal training and for those who are charitable volunteers. So it should be stated from the outset that, for the purposes of this project, the title of social work refers to those who are trained and employed in a recognized capacity, whether or not there is a legal protection to such a title.

The study on which this report is based took place during 2005. Therefore it presents findings and recommendations based on them that reflect the situation at that time. The purpose of the study is to provide the basis for change and so it is to be hoped that many of the observations recorded here may become matters of historical interest in the not too distant future. The document and the recommendations it contains will be able to provide indicators to show how the development of social work has progressed.

The goals of the study were to collect and analyze data concerning the human resource and training needs for the development of social work in Vietnam. These are detailed in Appendix A. The outcome was to be recommendations that would facilitate planning and action to make this a reality: this report is presented as the next step in fulfilling these goals.

# 1. Background to the Development of Social Work in Vietnam

## Introduction

This report presents the findings of research into the human resource and training needs for the development of social work in Vietnam. In the last decade several steps have been taken towards the creation of professional social work (Kelly, 2003). This report considers the current situation and makes recommendations that will form the basis for the next phase of this journey. The move to build up the social work profession has come as a response to the recognition that as Vietnam develops economically it is encountering many social problems in response to which a systematic and scientific approach is required.

This chapter examines the background to this development. It looks at the need for professional social work and then briefly reviews the history of social work as a profession in Vietnam so far. The succeeding chapters then report and discuss research into the present situation that was commissioned by UNICEF in conjunction with the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA), the Committee for Population, Families and Children (CPFC) and the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). Finally, it presents recommendations and a plan for the sustainable development of social work in Vietnam over the next decade.

## Social problems faced in Vietnam

Vietnam is a country in transition. In recent decades it has seen enormous economic growth that has followed the introduction of the policy of *doi moi*. This policy has created a market economy within a socialist system. As a consequence the levels of poverty in the country have decreased markedly, from between 60-70% of the population in 1992 to around 20-25% in 2004 (Hàng, 2005). However, at the same time the gap between the richest and the poorest has widened significantly, with the major benefits of economic growth going to the richest 20 per cent of the population. It is also the case that poverty is concentrated geographically, with rural areas faring worse than the cities, mountainous areas faring worse than the plains, and approximately five per cent of communes recognized as still suffering infrastructural poverty (Tang, 2005). In this context the elimination of poverty and hunger, associated with greater fairness in receiving the benefits of economic growth, are key objectives for the Government of Vietnam.

As has happened in most other parts of the world, new social issues have emerged along with economic growth. Changes in working patterns have begun to affect family life, though mobility and through the demands for long working hours. For example, time for a family to spend together or to assist each other often becomes more limited; this includes the capacity to care for disabled children or elderly relatives (Lan, 2005). In addition, the abuse of alcohol and drugs has increased, in many cases with a resulting rise in the incidence of domestic violence and child abuse (UNICEF, 2005). Children and women are particularly vulnerable to the impact of poverty, either directly or as the victims of domestic violence and abuse. They may also be subject to trafficking as families seek to find ways out of poverty. Young women migrating to the cities, or already in the cities and without work, may be drawn into prostitution. The problem of 'street children' is also associated with migration into the cities, affecting both young women and young men. Although many earn money by selling goods on the street or by begging, they are also at risk of being drawn into prostitution, illegal drug use or other sorts of crime (UNICEF/CPFC, 2002). From this it can be seen that children in particular are likely to be affected adversely by the negative impacts of economic development.

Interwoven with these social problems there are serious health issues that are associated with growing affluence and industrial society. In particular, the incidence of mental ill-health is exacerbated by increasing isolation and the demands of life in industrial society. This includes both the minor psychiatric illnesses such as anxiety as well as the major conditions such as depression or the psychoses. Another very serious health issue at present is that of HIV/AIDS. The rapid spread of HIV is closely associated with prostitution and drug misuse (and hence also with other forms of crime). Men who use the services of commercial sex workers may subsequently pass the infection on to their wives, with subsequent catastrophic results for whole families, so it is not only commercial sex workers and their clients who are directly affected.

## **Social Protection**

Responses to these social needs can be divided into two parts, each of which is the specific concern of a Section within MOLISA. The first of these is the area of social protection. Under this area of concern are children in need of special protection, those who are invalids through service to the revolution and frail older people. Social services are provided for these needs, both in the community and in institutions.

With regard to children in need of special protection, under the Law on the Protection, Care and Education of Children the government has identified ten categories (Law number 15/2004/QH11). These are:

- destitute orphans;
- abandoned children;
- disabled children;
- child victims of toxic chemicals;
- children infected with HIV/AIDS;
- children engaged in hazardous or dangerous work or exposed to leather substances;
- children working far from their families and street children;
- sexually abused children;
- children addicted to narcotics;
- children in conflict with the law.

The total number of children being cared for in the social protection centers is 15,126, while the number of children in the community receiving social protection support is 64,384.

The number of war invalids, disabled adults and isolated elderly people who receive support under social protection policies is large, probably over 7 million. This includes people who received financial and other assistance in the community and also those who are resident in social protection institutions.

## **Social Evils Prevention**

The other Section of MOLISA that is concerned with the social issues that have been noted is that of social evils prevention. The five major issues that are defined as social evils are:

- women and children trafficking;
- prostitution;
- HIV/AIDS;
- drug misuse;
- crime.

In each of these areas there is a two-fold need. The first is to respond through the criminal justice system (that is, the police and the courts) and the health services to try to prevent unacceptable activities. The second is to provide rehabilitation and ongoing care for those who have been affected by

the social evils. For example, women and children who have been trafficked and who return to their home location require a great deal of support, both practical and psycho-social, in order to readjust to life after their ordeal. Their communities also require assistance in understanding and accepting people back. Similarly, people receiving rehabilitation from being prostitutes or using illicit drugs require this type of care and support. Communities also need to be provided with advice and information about the dangers of these activities.

In the field of HIV/AIDS sufferers have to be provided with information and psycho-social counselling once they have been identified as a positive carrier of the virus. The risk of spreading the infection, for example through intravenous drug users or the clients of prostitutes transmitting the disease to large numbers of other people, is high. Again, not only individuals but also communities as a whole need to receive information and advice about risks, but also about the ways in which a sufferer, if known to be such, may be safely accepted back into community life.

## **Social development**

The major reason for the need for social protection and social evils prevention is that the benefits of economic growth and restructuring have been uneven. The causes of women and children trafficking, prostitution and other crime are mostly economic, as people on low incomes seek to improve their situation or simply to avoid poverty and hunger. The appeal of drug misuse, as well as the misuse of alcohol, is also often associated with poor economic opportunities, unemployment and social marginalization. The spread of HIV/AIDS, as has been noted, follows from these other factors. Thus it may be said that these social evils cannot be completely addressed without considering the social impact of economic development. Similarly, the need for social protection policies and services are increased by the same social changes.

Providing social protection and eradicating social evils therefore cannot be seen separately from the way in which economic development affects families and communities. Attention to social and community development alongside the economic restructuring is necessary if interventions with individuals and families are to have a sustainable effect. At commune and ward level people require advice and assistance to engage with the processes of development so that they can benefit from growth, as well as ensuring that they are able to make their voice heard in the formulation and implementation of policies. Stated simply, the full sustainable benefits of economic growth for all

members of the society will not be realized without a conscious effort to address social and community development as part of modernization and industrialization. Poverty and hunger elimination thus goes together with the empowerment of communities and the pursuit of social justice.

There are also those problems that are associated with affluence. The effect of busier lives and fragmenting families on the need for social protection has already been noted. In addition, Vietnam is now seeing a considerable increase in stress for students in school and universities as well as in family relationships more generally. There are connections here, also, with some social evils such as drug misuse, where affluent young people become more influenced by their peer group and spend less time with their parents and other family members.

Economic growth also creates pressures for health services. Although some conditions, such as certain mental health problems, arise in conditions of greater affluence, it is the case that expectations of health services increase along with the improved technical possibilities. However, the knowledge among the general population of how to care for one's own health and to make appropriate use of services may be limited. Medical and nursing staff are over-stretched in the demands of their work, some of which could be assisted by having suitable information, guidance, psycho-social counselling and advocacy for those people who have difficulties in accessing health services (Cuong, 2005). In this sense modern health services are also part of social development.

## **Creating a professional response to these issues**

The common feature of the range of issues and problems that have been identified is that all have been encountered by other countries as they have industrialized and modernized their economies. While some of the policies that led to the formation of welfare states can be traced back as far as the sixteenth century, and even earlier, the beginnings of a modern response to these problems clearly dates from the nineteenth century in Europe and North America. This response was the gradual formation of the profession of social work, through which it emerged as a skilled science of intervention with issues of social protection, social evils, poverty and hunger elimination, and social and community development.

In Vietnam a decision has already been made that the profession of social work should be developed in a way that follows the global model. A curriculum has been approved by MOET (35/2004/QD-BGD&DT) and

training has already begun in five universities, with five further programs planned. There are also developments in fields such as that of child protection, for example the CPFC training centre, that are based in the knowledge and skills of social work, which are central to the policies for these social needs. Social work is therefore now a central factor in the strategies for social well-being of Vietnam. Yet as a profession social work is new and is not widely understood. Key figures in relevant government departments and non-government organizations (NGOs) have made considerable efforts to become familiar with social work, especially in the Asia-Pacific region. What is now required is that a plan for the structure of the profession is worked out, both in terms of the human resources (including areas of work, objectives, numbers and so on) and the training (at all levels) that will be necessary to ensure that professional social work develops appropriately and as rapidly as possible.

## **The origins of social work**

The first social workers were volunteers, performing charitable work. They worked in particular types of settings, where people were encountering the harshest interaction with problems of living. These included, for example:

- the courts, to assist people who had been convicted in avoiding a return to crime;
- hospitals, to assist those who were poor to gain access to charitable health care;
- housing schemes, to assist families that had problems to find socially functional ways of dealing with those problems.

In each of these settings, the objective was to form a relationship with the person in difficulty in order to assist that person to find new ways of dealing with their problems, while at the same time to administer charitable support effectively. As these activities developed, charitable organizations increasingly employed people to undertake this work.

By the late nineteenth century the charity workers had begun to consider that the administration of charity could not be effective unless it became more scientific. The influence of the emerging social sciences was considerable. This led to two particular developments that set out the characteristics of modern social work (Parry & Parry, 1979). The first was the formation of agencies, such as in the English speaking countries the Charity Organization Society (COS), which sought to use social science knowledge to create a basis for the effective use of charitable assistance of individuals and families. It is

from this type of background that counselling and family casework grew. The other strand was the formation of 'settlement houses'. These came from the idea that the more successful, educated and wealthier sections of society coped with difficulties because they had personal resources and life skills that could be shared. The settlements were originally groups of university students who went to live in areas of great social problems so that they could assist people to deal with their problems as communities. This is the background from which community development work grew.

Both the scientific organization of charity and the settlement movement ideas spread between the industrialising nations, so that by the beginning of the twentieth century they were well established in many major cities in those countries. Despite their differences, these organizations shared a common understanding of the need to be scientific and in the period of approximately 1895 to 1910 social work courses were opened at colleges and universities in Amsterdam, London, Liverpool, New York and Chicago. These two elements of social work, focussing respectively on individuals and families and on communities, actually shared many of the same developing techniques, as well as a commitment to applied social research into social issues and into the policies as well as the practices to deal with these issues. Similar developments followed in other European countries and Scandinavia.

## **Contemporary comparisons**

Social work has not followed exactly the same path in every one of the 80 countries where it now exists (as defined by membership of the International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW]). For example, although the charity organization and settlement movements had been established in Australia and Canada by the early 1900s, it was some forty years later that university training programs were established in Sydney, Melbourne and Toronto (often by pioneers who themselves had trained in the UK or the USA). By this stage the idea of 'charity organization' had clearly been replaced by professional social work in its modern form.

In many parts of the world social work and university based professional training has followed models established in the western countries. The influences of British approaches in Hong Kong, India and Sri Lanka, for example, or of American ideas in the Philippines, Thailand or Japan are examples of the common roots but with increasingly diverse details. Especially as the forms of practice became more appropriate to each different country, the balance between individual and community based approaches has come to reflect the social circumstances in each place. Indeed, if Hong Kong and Japan are compared with India, Sri Lanka and the Philippines, the

way in which shared roots can diverge can be seen to be related more to the pattern and pace of economic development than to whether models from a particular other country were the starting point for social work. (That is, social work in Hong Kong and Japan closely resemble the UK and the USA, with an emphasis on clinical practices, whereas in India, Sri Lanka and the Philippines social work tends to be much more focused on community development approaches.) At the same time, all these national and regional variations are still regarded very clearly as part of social work, as seen in the capacity of social workers from all around the world to have meaningful discussions at international conferences and scientific workshops.

The way in which social work has developed has also varied. In some countries it has been fought for by pioneers who have struggled to create opportunities and alliances with other professions and with policy makers, while in other countries it has been created through the actions of governments who have sought to meet the needs of their populations to resolve social problems. In this sense, when considered comparatively, although social work is one profession, there is no single pattern in the way it has grown.

## **What do social workers do?**

The IFSW, together with the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), defines social work in this way:

The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.

These objectives are achieved through a range of practices (methods) (Payne, 1997). These practices include:

- counselling (the use of interpersonal therapeutic techniques to assist individuals and families to achieve personal change);
- casework (using a sustained professional relationship to advise and assist individuals and families to identify and resolve problems of daily living – in some countries this may be called ‘social education’);
- case management (the co-ordination of professional social services to assist people with complex needs, often for long-term care and protection);

- groupwork (working therapeutically with groups where people share the same problems);
- social advocacy (assisting individuals or groups to access services or responses from other parts of the society that they need in order to achieve well-being);
- community development (assisting a community to identify shared problems and to find solutions through shared action);
- social research;
- social policy development.

Some of these functions overlap with other professions or groups, such as counselling, social research or policy work. What is distinctive about social work is that all those who are professionally qualified have studied all of these practices and so have a holistic foundation to their knowledge and skills. For this reason, social workers bring a distinctive approach to these practices (for example, compared to psychologists or those trained in the theoretical social sciences) that complements the approaches of other groups. Social work focuses on the person within their social environment, working with both sides of this, that is with both the individual and the social environment to promote change in whichever is necessary.

As has been noted above, the emphasis between these different practices often varies between countries, according to the issues faced by each society and the problems of living encountered in them. Concrete examples include social work in hospitals in Australia, where practices to assist individuals and families such as counselling, casework, case management and groupwork are all common, with some more senior social workers also being involved in social research and policy development. This compares with a country in transition, such as Sri Lanka, where many social workers are engaged in community development in areas where economic growth has had negative social effects. However, this is a matter of proportion, as some community development is practised in Australia and some social work with individuals is provided in Sri Lanka.

Looking at methods as listed above is not the only way to consider what social workers do. It is also necessary to give regard to the tasks that the profession might perform that are not described in terms of methods. In many countries, for example, social workers play a major role in social protection work. Most frequently such work is about the care and protection of children who are at risk, whether from violence or neglect by members of their own families or neighbourhoods, or from the impact of rapid social change that might draw children into crime, drug use or prostitution. The

specific tasks of social work in these cases will include assessing the social needs of the child, arranging for the care of children outside their families where this is necessary or supporting parents where the child can remain at home, promoting change in parents' orientations and capacities to care appropriately for their children through counselling and casework, and making plans with the child (as far as this is possible), parents and relevant authorities and ensuring that these plans are carried out. Some social workers may also be involved in providing direct substitute care for children who cannot live with their families, for example in running a group home for children. Other social workers will be involved in the management of such services, program planning, policy development and research within government and non-government organizations. Similarly, social workers are involved in many countries in social protection for vulnerable adults, such as people with severe disabilities or very elderly people. As with children in need of protection, social work for adults involves doing social assessments, care planning and arranging practical services; support for family members caring for adults with severe disabilities and very elderly people is also a social work task, using counselling, casework, case management and sometimes groupwork methods. Again, also, administration, program planning, policy development and research in services for vulnerable adults will involve social workers. In all of these tasks, social work collaborates with other professions and agencies, including teachers, medical doctors, nurses and other health professions, police and the courts, and government officials.

Social work also places great importance on professional values (Banks, 2001). These include a respect for each person as inherently valuable, a respect for social justice and human rights and a commitment to using skills and knowledge for the service of the community. In this respect social workers are not unique, as many professions would also claim a similar value base. For social work, however, because both the methods and the objectives practice are social it is often more difficult to distinguish methods from goals and so social work is often shaped by the society in which it is located more than many other professions. It is for this reason that the international *Statement of Ethical Principles* adopted by the IFSW and IASSW in 2004 is important in providing an objective point of reference for social workers in different countries.

## **Forms of training for social work**

In most countries the training for professional social work is located at university level. This is increasingly common and is the position recommended by the IFSW and the IASSW in their 2004 paper *Global*

*Standards in Social Work Education.* Although the IFSW/IASSW position advocates that all professional social work should have a bachelors degree as a minimum standard, these international bodies accept that in some countries this is an aspiration at present and that for a time in some countries social workers may have to be trained at pre-university as well as university levels in order to achieve the numbers that are required.

There is no single international model for professional social work training. At the same time, there are some common features that can be identified (Barnes & Hugman, 2002), in particular:

- a minimum of the equivalent of two years full-time post-school education specifically focussed on social work;
- specific teaching on social work theories and practices;
- teaching on social science and law (including policy and research methods);
- a substantial amount of supervised and assessed practice as part of training.

Increasingly most countries are moving towards the university degree as the defining qualification. But even in this respect there is still a lot of variation. Examples are:

- in the USA, a two-year masters degree following four years at bachelors level (although if the bachelors is also in social work, this may be reduced to one year through course credit arrangements);
- in Japan, Australia, New Zealand, India, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Scandinavia and most countries in Europe, where a four-year bachelors program is now the standard model (although in some cases two-year 'graduate entry' programs are available);
- in the UK, since 2002, a three-year bachelors is standard (although two-year intensive masters programs similar to those of the USA are also widely offered).

In addition in some emerging countries, such as the Maldives, pre-university diplomas are currently the minimum standard. (It should be noted that this was also the minimum standard in the UK until 2002, although bachelors and masters degrees had existed also for many decades.) Yet, even though there are differences, within each of these patterns the four core factors identified above can all be seen.

In all countries the levels of education forms the basis for the recognition of a person as a professional social worker. In some countries, as we will consider in the next section of this paper, the qualification in itself may be the way in which someone is so recognised.

## **Accreditation for practice**

A common feature of all professions is a formal structure or mechanism through which each individual member can be recognised as appropriately qualified. Internationally there are several different ways in which this might be achieved; even within some countries there may be differences between regions, provinces or states.

One mechanism is that of registration, in which a body that is sanctioned by government has the authority to keep a record of each person who has been recognised as a qualified member of the profession. The decision is made on the basis of the individual practitioner showing that he or she has the necessary qualifications. This type of structure exists in some of the states in the USA, some provinces in Canada and has just been introduced in the UK in 2005. Under the registration model, the individual practitioner can be expelled from the profession if it is decided that the person is no longer fit to practice. A variation on this model, that of licensing, requires each individual to obtain a license from a government office and similarly the license can be withdrawn if the practitioner does not fulfil the requirements of their job. This exists in other states of the USA and provinces of Canada.

A different approach is where a designated body such as a government office or a professional association assesses and accredits programs of study and recognises all graduates of such programs as professional social workers. This was the model in the UK until 2005, where a government body performed this task, and is the mechanism in Australia where it is the professional association that accredits programs. In Australia the completion of an accredited program enables a person to be recognised as eligible for membership of the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW), which is deemed to indicate their status as a professional social worker. The Australian government has also given to the AASW the task of assessing the qualifications of social workers trained in other countries for recognition in Australia.

## **Professional associations**

In 80 countries there are professional organizations for social workers that are members of the IFSW. These associations each serve to bring social workers together nationally to share knowledge and skills, to develop the art and science of social work and to promote social work to the wider community. (In Palestine and in the Scandinavian countries these organizations also serve as trade unions.) The IFSW in turn brings the many national associations together on a global basis.

Professional associations serve a very important function in providing a structure for the exchange of ideas about how social work can constantly be improved and developed. In this way they equip social workers to maintain the highest possible standards of their work, once they have qualified. Such organizations also provide a basis for social work to explain and advocate for the profession, in dialogue with government, other professions, the media and the wider society. In some countries, such as Australia, as noted above, the professional association has the role of recognising university programs as appropriate to prepare students for qualified practice. Even where this function is undertaken by another body professional associations are actively involved in providing advice to the process through which individual practitioners are recognised as professional social workers.

## **The history of social work in Vietnam**

Historically Vietnam has a long tradition of mutual social assistance. In feudal times there were laws concerning help for disabled people and isolated elderly people. Following 1945 laws concerning the eradication of poverty were introduced. Priorities were famine relief, the protection of orphans and care for elderly and disabled people. Following 1954 organizations were established to respond to these needs as well as to deal with the social problems that had arisen from the war.

Modern professional social work was first introduced into Vietnam by the French Red Cross (FRC) in 1948. In conjunction with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the Caritas School of Social Work was opened by the FRC. In 1968 a second formal training school was established in Saigon with funding from UNICEF and organized by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). However, after the reunification of the country in 1975 these programs ceased and many of the teachers and graduates went overseas (Oanh, 2002).

In the late 1980s several initiatives to develop social work began to emerge. In Ho Chi Minh City the Social Work and Community Development Research and Consultancy was formed and social work began to be taught as a subject in the Women's Studies program at the Open University. In Hanoi several INGOs started introducing social work theories and methods within short courses, for example in in-service training for officers of the Women's Union and the Youth Union. Thus, gradually, a demand for social work training has grown among people working in the social welfare sector.

Since 1997 there have been social work training courses at the College of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (COLISA) as well as that at the Open University of HCMC. COLISA is now the University of Labour and Social Affairs (ULSA). In recognition of the need for professional social work, the Vietnam Government gave approval for the wider development of social work and this led to the approval of the MOET curriculum in 2004. In addition to the two original universities, Open University of HCMC and ULSA, students have been admitted to programs at the Trade Union University, Da Lat University, Hue University and Thang Long University. At the time of writing this report, programs are being prepared at Dong Thap Pedagogical University, Qui Nhon University, Quang Binh University, the Teacher Training University and Vietnam National University.

However, while the need for professional social work training has been recognised, the nature of social work as a profession remains poorly understood in many places. An accurate appreciation of the role of social workers is not uniform throughout the government departments and NGOs that are concerned with social welfare. As a consequence, some confusion remains, with some people using the term social work (*công tác xã hội*) to refer to everyone working in social welfare, others seeing this as primarily a charity role, while others remain sceptical about whether the work of social protection, social evil prevention or social development requires specific training. A particular issue here is the very large number of commune level 'bare-foot social workers' (Oanh, 2002) who provide much of the direct intervention with individuals and families but who are either untrained or who have only limited access to short in-service courses. These workers can be regarded as 'para-professional' in that their role, along with their skill and knowledge base, is very like that of professional social work, but their formation of skills and knowledge remains at a level which is less than that necessary for professional recognition.

At the present time, while there is a body of students training for professional social work, a specific job code has not yet been written. This crucial point is addressed in the following chapters. So it may be said that the history of professional social work in Vietnam has reached a very important point, at which decisions have to be made, some of them quite quickly, to ensure that the opportunity that has been created is now realised.

## **Questions for the development of social work in Vietnam**

In order to consider the part that professional social work should play in Vietnam society, it will be necessary for all the stakeholders to reach a common understanding in respect of the following:

- what are the tasks that social work is required to do?
- what is the most effective way of organising social work employment?
- at what level or levels should professional social work education be located and how is this to be facilitated (including training of teachers and opportunities for extensive assessed practice)?
- how can the various types and levels of ‘social work’ be trained and organised (and should ‘para-professional’ work be seen as part of or separate from social work)?
- how can professional social work share and develop its knowledge and skills collectively (for example, through the formation of an association)?

The answers to these questions will significantly shape the development of social work in Vietnam for the next period of potentially twenty years, with stages at five and ten years for which goals may be set.

Workforce analysis and planning in the social welfare sector is notoriously difficult (Higham *et al.*, 2001; O’Brien-Pallas *et al.*, 2001). Shifting definitions and a lack of clarity about roles, which at the operational level can sometimes overlap, can make the task of collecting sound data quite daunting. Nevertheless, in order to have a scientific basis for making plans for the development of a workforce, a robust method for analysis must be found. This project therefore used these questions to inform the research process and to provide a framework to guide the analysis of the information that was obtained. At the point of making concrete recommendations for a human resources framework, the principle used in the recent United Kingdom ‘social care’ workforce analysis (Skills for Care, 2005) of basing target figures on a population ratio has been applied as a starting point for the commune level (see Chapter 5). However, because of the specific circumstances and

requirements of Vietnam, this principle cannot be applied to all levels, so a distinctive framework is proposed.

## **The research project**

In order to provide a scientific basis for answering these important questions, a research project was designed and conducted through co-operation between UNICEF, MOLISA, CPFC, MOET and three universities (The Social Sciences and Humanities University (VNU Hanoi), ULSA and the Open University of Ho Chi Minh City). The following chapters present and discuss this research and then present recommendations for action.

This research presents an analysis of a particular point in the development of social work in Vietnam. This point is one at which the decisions that are made will have important consequences for social work in this country for several decades. Therefore, these findings and the conclusions that are drawn for the recommendations have been produced specifically to inform this process and to contribute to the strength of professional social work in Vietnam.

## **2. Methodology**

### **The research project**

In order to gain as complete a picture as possible of the current situation of social work in Vietnam, the Child Protection Section of UNICEF Vietnam came together with MOLISA, CPFC, MOET and three universities to undertake an empirical survey and analysis of the facts about the social welfare field, the extent of knowledge about social work and the opinions of a wide variety of stakeholders about the development of professional social work.

The research project was led by an international consultant (the present author), together with two national consultants and teams of researchers from ULSA and the Open University of HCMC. Throughout the process the research group was co-ordinated and supported by UNICEF. The methodology was designed by the research team in consultation with the sponsoring organizations, finalized at a workshop at ULSA (Hanoi) in April 2005.

### **Methods for the study**

Research into complex social phenomena often benefits from using a multiple methods approach (Hakim, 2000). In this project there were already some questions that could be identified, which are presented in the previous chapter. These questions were synthesised from existing literature that was analyzed prior to the finalization of the research instruments. The prior literature review informed both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the empirical phase of the project.

In terms of providing specific answers to some of these questions it was necessary to collect quantitative data. A survey was chosen to do this. At the same time, there were also many aspects of the overall scope of the study for which pre-existing ideas were lacking. Thus it was also necessary to collect qualitative data, in order that the views and opinions of stakeholders in the process of developing professional social work could be sought as widely as possible. This is best achieved through individual interviews and focus groups. So it was decided to utilize both approaches.

## The sample

The sample of people from whom information was sought was very broad. It included government ministers, officials of government departments at all levels (central, provincial, district and commune/ward), mass organizations, staff of NGOs, teaching staff in universities and social work students. So it was seen that there would be different perspectives on the issues for social work development, according to whether the person was in a position of management or policy making or in a position of working directly with those who use the services provided by these organisations. Thus careful attention was paid to the way in which questions could be formulated to take account of this and two questionnaires were constructed in order to obtain both *organizational level* (that is, policy making and management) and *practice level* perspectives. The two questionnaires are referred to by these labels throughout this report. Only one qualitative interview schedule was required as the framing of those questions was sufficiently broad as to include people working at all levels. These questionnaires are presented as Appendices A and B at the end of this report. The qualitative interview schedule is presented as Appendix C.

The sample thus consisted of ministers and officials in MOLISA, CPFC and MOET, People's Committees and mass organisations such as the Women's Union and Youth Union, police and the courts, staff in the Vietnam Red Cross and other NGOs, and teachers and students in universities that are already teaching social work.

The sample was stratified by location. A judgement was made to include both the North and South of the country and within each part to include the major city and a province. In the North the sample was selected from the city of Hanoi and the province of Lang Son; in the South the sample was taken from Ho Chi Minh City and Dong Thap province. All four locations were used for both quantitative and qualitative data collection.

A total of 329 people participated in the completion of questionnaires. These were distributed as shown in Table 2.1. From this it can be seen that the overall spread between the North and the South was even, and the distribution between the cities and the provinces was proportionately similar between the North and the South, for the quantitative survey.

**Table 2.1 – the distribution of questionnaire responses (per cent of column in brackets)**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Organization level</b>	<b>Practice level</b>	<b>Total</b>
Hanoi	39 (27)	56 (30)	95 (29)
Lang Son	32 (22)	38 (21)	70 (21)
Ho Chi Minh City	41 (28)	57 (31)	98 (30)
Dong Thap	33 (23)	33 (18)	66 (20)
Total	145 (100)	184 (100)	329 (100)

The distribution of the qualitative interviews shows a similar spread, but with a very slight bias towards the North, as shown in Table 2. (As will be discussed later in this report, however, no discernable difference was noted between the regions in the range of ideas that were expressed in these interviews.)

**Table 2.2 – the distribution of qualitative interviews (per cent of column in brackets)**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Number of interviews</b>
Hanoi	34 (30)
Lang Son	22 (20)
Thanh Hoa	2 (2)
Ho Chi Minh City	30 (27)
Dong Thap	24 (21)
Total	112 (100)

## **Research process**

Detailed preparation for the project began in early 2005. The international consultant prepared a background briefing and a draft of research instruments. As noted above the research design was then finalized at a workshop at ULSA on 22 April 2005 in which all the members of the research team and representatives from the participating organizations took part.

Data collection began on 25 April 2005. The international consultant conducted 17 of the 106 interviews/focus groups, four in Hanoi and eight in Ho Chi Minh City during the last week of April. Distribution of the questionnaires and further interviews and focus groups commenced after the

Liberation Day holiday, during the first week of May. The data collection took two months. The international consultant also undertook field visits to Dong Thap and Thanh Hoa provinces. The format for the interviews that were undertaken on these field visits was that of the qualitative interview schedule. However, in one case the participants had already been interviewed as part of the project. In this instance the international consultant used the format of the interview schedule to seek more in-depth information; this meeting is not included in the numbers stated above. Thanh Hoa was chosen because of its accessibility and the presence of a project that permitted the international consultant to gain an understanding of work at commune level relatively quickly. It was not otherwise used in the research – in this sense it constitutes a point of ‘triangulation by data and by observer’ (Padgett, 1998, pp. 96-98). (Triangulation is the technique of combining different points of view to increase validity and reliability in qualitative social research.)

Following this, the quantitative data were prepared for analysis and entered into SPSS for statistical analysis. The qualitative data were translated and sent to the international consultant for analytic inductive coding (Burgess, 2000). The findings that have been produced through these techniques are presented in the following chapters.

### **Limitations of the research**

In order to appreciate fully the value of any research it is important to note and understand its limitations (Hakim, 2000). In this case there are three particular points that must be made.

First, the sample, its size and locations, were selected by a deliberate selective process. There was no randomisation, but rather judgements were used to determine four locations according to pre-existing knowledge about the cities on the one hand and provinces with relatively high levels of social need on the other. This does not invalidate the procedures, but it should be noted. Careful attention was paid to the possible differences between the cities and provinces, but as will be noted in subsequent discussion, the major factor noticed was one that might plausibly be hypothesized about the gap between cities and the provinces, namely that the former showed a greater familiarity with professional social work than the latter. However, the difference was not so great as to affect the analysis.

Second, in many cases, and especially in the two provinces, the quantitative survey was delivered, and sometimes completed by the researcher with the respondent, at the same meeting in which the qualitative interview was

conducted. While this ensured a very good response rate on the survey questionnaire it also created a sense of repetition in the themes being pursued. It is highly probable, therefore, that the qualitative data is somewhat thinner than might otherwise be expected using open-ended questions. However, as this research is based on an inductive approach to the range of ideas and does not depend to any great extent on an ethnographic awareness of context embedded in the data this has not impacted unduly on the analysis.

Third, the qualitative analysis has almost entirely been undertaken with translations rather than the original words of the interviewees. Although this is standardized across all interviews (those conducted by the international consultant were done almost entirely through interpreters) there is a risk that some nuances may be lost in translation. Again, however, the inductive approach means that the loss of such subtleties does not appear to have created any difficulties in coding and analysing the qualitative data. As Padgett (1998, pp. 88-103) notes, validity and reliability in qualitative research are determined by the meanings that are elicited. In other words, if the findings make sense to the field in which the research has been done (in this case people involved in social welfare in Vietnam), even if individuals may disagree with particular points, then the data and the analysis have been sufficiently robust.

Points two and three together also mean that, in contrast to many qualitative studies, the use of extensive quotations to illustrate the findings has been more problematic than might be desirable. This is off-set by the extent to which the ideas that have emerged from the two data sets are quite consistent, as well as matching between the different locations. Briefer quotations, therefore, can be used in the presentation of findings without thereby limiting the depth of the presentation.

## **Summary and conclusion**

Working together, the consultants and the research team constructed a mixed methods approach that utilized a literature review and both quantitative and qualitative empirical data. While some limitations have been identified, the data produced is robust and provides a foundation for examining human resource and training needs in the development of professional social work.

# 3. The Current Situation of Social Work in Vietnam – the Quantitative Findings

## Introduction

The objective for this research project is to provide recommendations for the human resource and training implications of the development of professional social work in Vietnam. In order to do this it was necessary first to review existing information and note international comparative ideas about social work. This has been presented in Chapter 1. Then it was essential to collect data concerning the current situation in Vietnam, in terms of what is being done and what is thought to be needed. In this chapter the findings from the quantitative survey are presented; the qualitative interviews are presented in Chapter 4. The structure of the presentation here follows the ideas contained in the questionnaires, but has been divided somewhat differently into themes, so that in places answers are brought together in order to be able to address some complexities.

## Background information

The spread of the sample has already been noted in the previous chapter. To gain a full picture of the sample, some basic demographic questions were included in the questionnaires, concerning age, sex, type of job and employing organization.

In terms of age, the mean average of the organization (senior) levels was higher than that of the practice level. However, the practice level had a wider range, from 22 to 69, compared to 22 to 65 for the policy makers and managers (although it should be noted that more senior people were reticent about this information). These figures are shown in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1 – the age profiles of the sample**

	Organization level	Practice level
Valid answers (from)	124 (145)	173 (184)
Mean Average	45.94	39.76
Range	43	47
Minimum	22	22
Maximum	65	69

What this shows is that there is a tendency for the senior levels to be slightly older than the practice levels, which may not be surprising. However, the ranges show that this is not a trend that limits opportunities for individuals as relative youth is found at senior levels and more advanced years in practice positions. It should also be noted that there was no discernable difference in the age profiles between the cities and the provinces.

The next characteristic that can be shown is that of the sex of respondents. These figures are presented in Table 3.2.

**Table 3.2 – the sex profile of the sample (per cent of column in brackets)**

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Organization level</b>	<b>Practice level</b>	<b>Total</b>
Male	81 (56)	81 (44)	162 (49)
Female	64 (44)	103 (56)	167 (51)
Total	145 (100)	184 (100)	329 (100)

What this table shows is that the occupants of senior positions are somewhat more likely to be male than female, while the opposite is the case for practice level positions. The difference was wider in the provinces, with over 60 per cent of this senior level male; only in Lang Son did the sample have a majority of men at both levels (with 53 per cent of the practice level sample being male). This finding for senior levels is consistent with similar gender patterns in many other countries and across a wide range of professional areas, although there are somewhat more men in practice than might be expected (Hugman, 1991).

The job functions represented in the sample varied widely. These, effectively qualitative, answers were post-coded according to the indicated level of seniority as defined by where the respondent would be placed in terms of organizational hierarchy in relation to others completing the same questionnaire. In both the organizational and practice level questionnaires there was a gradient showing that the questionnaires appeared to be completed by more people in lower relative positions in each of the two levels. However, given the interpretive exercise used to generate these figures, this can only be taken as an indication. At the same time, given the normal shape of organizational hierarchies, it also suggests that the sample is not particularly skewed in this respect.

More robust figures are available to indicate the spread of employing organizations that are represented in the sample. Again, these figures have

been constructed by post-coding answers. However, in this case the answers are quite specific and can be accurately allocated to codes that do not require interpretation. These figures are shown in Table 3.3. From these figures it can be seen that respondents from MOLISA are more likely to be at the practice level, while in MOET, CPFC and Health there is a greater tendency for senior levels to be represented. However, these differences are not statistically significant. What is noticeable is that almost half the total sample comes from MOLISA and from the Other category combined.

**Table 3.3 – the distribution of organizations in the sample (per cent of column in brackets – variation from 100 due to rounding)**

Organization	Organizational level	Practice level	Total
MOLISA (DOLISA)	28 (19)	50 (27)	78 (24)
MOET	15 (10)	13 (7)	28 (9)
CPFC	19 (13)	19 (10)	38 (12)
NGOs	9 (6)	14 (8)	23 (7)
Mass Organizations	22 (15)	28 (15)	50 (15)
Health	17 (12)	15 (8)	32 (10)
Others*	35 (24)	45 (25)	80 (24)
Total	145 (99)	184 (100)	329 (101)

(\*Others includes religious organizations and small community based services that are not located in another organization, as well as official agencies not included elsewhere such as police and the courts.)

On this basis some caution must be exercised regarding how statistically representative the sample is. While the age and sex profiles, and to some extent the position level data, indicate a demographic that might be expected, the range of organizations that is included may tend to produce figures that reflect particular contexts more than others. Nevertheless, as one of the primary sponsors of the study it may also not be surprising that MOLISA has made a large contribution. It is also the case that this is the ministry, and the department under it, that has the major responsibility for social protection and social evils prevention (discussed in Chapter 1). This, too, may make it plausible that MOLISA would be significantly more represented than other organizations. With regard to the range of needs with which these respondents are concerned, the inclusion of a ministerial organization such as CPFC and mass organizations such as the Women’s Union adds to the extent to which it might be expected that child care and protection is the most

prevalent, as can be seen in the next table. For these reasons the sample can be taken broadly as a sufficient cross-section of the social welfare field in Vietnam for the data to be useful in understanding the present situation.

Within these organizations the people in the sample were involved in a range of tasks related to different social needs. The two questionnaires asked for respondents to indicate the main area of need with which they were involved through their organization. Table 3.4 shows the spread.

**Table 3.4 – the areas of work covered within the sample (per cent of respondents giving a positive answer in brackets)**

Type of need	Organization level	Practice level	Total
Child care/protection	105 (72)	91 (49)	196 (60)
Disability	76 (52)	55 (30)	131 (40)
Family breakdown	49 (34)	27 (15)	76 (23)
Prostitution	76 (52)	34 (18)	110 (33)
Mental health	49 (33)	17 (9)	66 (20)
HIV/AIDS	82 (57)	53 (29)	135 (41)
Drug misuse	90 (62)	37 (20)	127 (39)
Poverty	78 (54)	51 (28)	129 (39)
Isolated elderly	68 (47)	32 (17)	100 (30)
Other	47 (32)	51 (28)	98 (30)

As the questionnaires asked for respondents to indicate all areas of need covered, the total number of positive answers was 720 from the 145 respondents in the organization level group and 448 from the 184 respondents in the practice level group. This variation can be accounted for by the extent to which people at the organization level (central and provincial) are more likely to be responsible for a range of services, while at the practice level people are more likely to be focused on a much smaller range of needs. However, what is shown here is that many of the respondents are working across a range of needs. Child care and child protection is the largest category, well ahead of disability, HIV/AIDS, poverty and drug misuse. Of the pre-defined categories mental health is that in which there is least coverage, especially at the practice level.

## The current numbers self-identified as doing ‘social work’

The next series of questions sought information about the current situations in the organizations represented in the sample, in terms of the numbers of people and the type and level of their qualifications.

The answers that were received regarding the numbers of people working in an organization appear to have been interpreted differently by different respondents. In some cases respondents sought the full figures, so that they provided the entire number for a ministry or agency. Others gave answers that reflect the level at which they work, for example in a district office or a social protection centre. The figures stated varied from one person to 56,661 people. (As a comparison, if the number of employees of MOLISA are added to the number of employees and volunteers working for CPFC it can be assumed that over 191,000 people work in social welfare in Vietnam.)

The numbers of people identified as already having some ‘social work’ training are somewhat smaller. At the organization level these varied according to the area of work, as shown in Table 3.5.

**Table 3.5 – the number of trained social workers by function currently employed**

	Ha Noi	Lang Son	HCMC	Dong Thap	Total
Counselling	59	10	110	47	226
Individuals and families	528	22	389	55	994
Community development	377	24	130	27	558
Program management	96	37	123	33	289
Social policy	49	18	79	34	180
Social research	47	2	12	20	81
Administration	133	18	86	12	249
Other	217	31	8	25	281

Among the respondents at the practice level, we find that the majority describe themselves as social work trained, as shown in Table 3.6.

**Table 3.6 – the number of people at practice level with social work training (per cent of column in brackets)**

	Ha Noi	Lang Son	HCMC	Dong Thap	Total
Yes	38 (69)	15 (39)	40 (70)	17 (52)	110 (60)
No	17 (31)	23 (61)	17 (30)	16 (48)	73 (40)

In other words, 60 per cent of the sample described themselves as being trained in social work. Taken together with Table 3.5, these figures raise an interesting question about the definition of ‘trained social worker’.

In particular, the type of university level sustained education in social work theory and methods that is regarded internationally as the standard for social work training (IFSW/IASSW, 2004) has only recently commenced in Vietnam (following the MOET approved curriculum). So to understand the nature of the training to which reference is made in these responses it is necessary also to look at the *type* of training concerned. The figures given by the organization level respondents are provided in Table 3.7.

**Table 3.7 – organization level report on the types of training, by proportion of those deemed ‘trained in social work’**

	Ha Noi	Lang Son	HCMC	Dong Thap	Total
Short term training	21.69	57.14	35.71	12.86	25.49
Intermediate	37.35	14.29	21.43	85.71	39.22
College	12.05	14.29	10.71	0.00	13.73
Bachelor	24.10	14.29	17.86	1.43	15.69

Some interpretation of these figures is required, especially the meaning of social work training that was being used by the respondents. This is addressed in the qualitative data (see Chapter 4) where it is noted that the term social work (*công tác xã hội*) is used to refer both to those with formal professional social work qualifications and to others working in social welfare who have training that uses social work theories and methods.

This point is reinforced by the information that was provided that many of those doing ‘social work’ have qualifications in other fields, including medicine, nursing, teaching, law, sociology, accountancy and even agriculture. So it may be assumed that most of the figures for bachelor level qualifications do not refer to a Bachelor of Social Work.

This assumption looks stronger when the figures reported at the practice level are considered. Table 3.8 presents the self-reports of the types of training of those who said that they were ‘trained in social work’ and who completed the following fields in the questionnaire (30 responses are missing on this question).

**Table 3.8 – types of social work training as self-reported by practice level respondents (per cent of column in brackets – variation from 100 in total due to rounding)**

Type	Ha Noi	Lang Son	HCMC	Dong Thap	Total
Certificate	25 (76)	8 (80)	9 (36)	8 (67)	50 (63)
Primary	1 (3)	0 (0)	1 (4)	0 (0)	2 (3)
Intermediate	5 (15)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (17)	7 (9)
College	2 (6)	1 (10)	1 (4)	1 (8)	5 (6)
Bachelor	0 (0)	1 (10)	14 (56)	1 (8)	16 (20)
Total	33 (100)	10 (100)	25 (100)	12 (100)	80 (101)

These figures are inconsistent with independent data on the numbers of people currently holding formal internationally recognised social work qualifications at university level, which are nine in the North and 31 in the South. They show that, with the exception of Ho Chi Minh City (where the social work course in the BA offered by the Women’s Studies Department at the Open University has been established for several years), almost all ‘social work training’ in Vietnam up to the present has been certificated short courses.

These findings raise two very important points. First, there is a need for greater clarity in determining what is social work training and hence who is a social worker. The variation between these two sets of figures can be explained entirely in terms of different understandings of this definition. Second, although the position expressed by senior staff in the organizations that they have a trained workforce is correct, the nature of this training points to a continued need for greater emphasis on professional (that is, university level) education in social work in Vietnam.

The validity of these findings is further confirmed when the self-reports of the highest educational attainments by practice level respondents is considered. These are shown in Table 3.9. As has already been noted, the prevalence of university level qualifications is not related to the levels of

social work training, but this does have implications for the types of training that may be available in the future.

**Table 3.9 – highest level of qualification of respondents in the practice level group (per cent of column in brackets – variation from 100 in total due to rounding)**

Level	Ha Noi	Lang Son	HCMC	Dong Thap	Total
Ungraduated high school	0 (0)	0 (0)	3 (5)	1 (3)	4 (2)
High school	0 (0)	4 (11)	11 (19)	6 (18)	21 (11)
Intermediate	8 (14)	11 (29)	3 (5)	9 (27)	31 (17)
College	4 (7)	7 (18)	3 (5)	3 (9)	17 (9)
University	43 (77)	16 (42)	34 (60)	12 (36)	105 (57)
Master	1 (1)	0 (0)	3 (5)	2 (6)	6 (3)
Doctorate	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Total	56 (100)	38 (100)	57 (99)	33 (99)	184 (99)

At least in so far as this sample is representative, there appears to be a potential pool of experienced staff who might be offered additional educational opportunities at university level in order to meet the human resource needs of professional social work. In addition, the proportion of existing staff with higher level university degrees (master and doctorate) in all disciplines throughout the organizations (not only those people in the sample) was estimated at about 20 per cent, with 12 per cent masters and 8 per cent doctorate. So it may be expected that a similar proportion of higher qualifications in social work might be needed as the profession develops. If the requirement to ensure that university teachers in the field are appropriately qualified at masters level is taken into account, then this adds to the clear indication of a requirement to develop training at a range of levels. (This point will be developed in the later discussion and conclusions.)

## **How many social workers are needed in Vietnam?**

Human resource planning requires that the scale of the need for designated skills and knowledge be identified and, along with that, the types of training that are needed. Therefore the organizational level questionnaire included questions about the areas of work in which social workers should be employed, the types and levels of training and the numbers who need

training, as well as asking about the number of social workers that would be employed if they were available.

First, it appears to be widely agreed that there should be social work training for staff working in all of the areas that were listed in the questionnaire: child care and protection; disability; marriage and family; prostitution; mental health; HIV/AIDS; drug misuse; poverty and economic issues; isolated elderly. Indeed, although only child care and protection was stated by more than half (n=96; 66%), each of these categories was agreed by between 33 and 46 per cent of the respondents. Thus the need for social work across the range of social welfare contexts is recognized.

Second, for types and levels of training, there is a widely shared view that training predominantly needs to be in the form of in-service programs (n=78; 53%). Fewer respondents considered formal training (full-time programs) to be required (n=46; 33%). The levels at which such programs should be available, however, was more varied. There appears to be a relatively widely shared view that training should be both at high school/intermediate level and also at college/university level. (As the new MOET curriculum clearly locates social work degree programs in universities, this position can be seen as reflecting past practice.) However, the numbers indicated suggest that the numbers of training places that are needed is seen as greater in the high school/intermediate range than in the college/university category. This raises a very important point about the overall profile of the social welfare workforce, which will be discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters.

Third, in stating how many social workers would be employed if available, respondents appeared to focus predominantly on the area of their organization for which they have responsibility. This conclusion is reached by considering the median number, which in each case is just one or two, with the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile mostly occurring well below the top of the range (in other words the distribution is skewed very heavily towards the lower end of the range in most cases). These figures are presented in Table 3.10 (page 34). The categories provided in the questionnaire focus on broadly defined methods of practice, with answers more evenly distributed than

**Table 3.10 – numbers of social workers who would be employed if available, by function**

	Range	Median	95th %ile	N (of 145)
Counselling	1 – 400	2	20	69
Working with individuals and families	1 – 37	2	28	53
Community development	1 – 100	2	17	54
Program management	1 – 30	1	10	61
Social policy	1 – 30	1	10	63
Social research	1 – 15	1	5	41
Administration	1 – 20	2	10	49
Other	1 – 75	2	7	10

**Table 3.11 – desired areas of social work training at practice level (figures in brackets indicate percentage of sample)**

	Ha Noi	Lang Son	HCMC	Dong Thap	Total
Child care and protection	32 (57)	20 (53)	32 (56)	18 (55)	102 (55)
Disability	15 (27)	14 (37)	20 (35)	11 (33)	60 (33)
Family breakdown	18 (32)	14 (37)	15 (26)	19 (58)	66 (36)
Prostitution	15 (27)	10 (26)	9 (16)	9 (27)	43 (23)
Mental health	12 (21)	11 (29)	12 (21)	5 (15)	40 (22)
HIV/ AIDS	14 (25)	17 (45)	14 (25)	10 (30)	55 (30)
Drug misuse	17 (30)	11 (29)	10 (18)	4 (12)	42 (23)
Poverty	16 (29)	18 (47)	14 (25)	6 (18)	54 (29)
Isolated elderly	13 (23)	12 (32)	10 (18)	7 (21)	42 (23)
Others	8 (14)	5 (13)	12 (21)	9 (27)	34 (18)

other findings might have predicted (see, for example, Table 3.5 above, page 29). At face value this suggests that the largest numbers of social workers would be recruited for counselling and community development work. However, given the very large numbers of people already working with individuals and families (for example with MOLISA, CPFC and the Women’s

Union) this should be taken to represent areas of *additional* employment, pointing to current shortfalls in human resources.

For the practice level respondents, the questionnaires asked about the areas of practice for which they thought that social work training was required, looking both at those for which they wished for more training and those for which they thought that training should be necessary. The first of these, areas in which respondents wished for more training, are presented in Table 3.11 (page 34). The questionnaire invited respondents to indicate all the areas that they thought were relevant, so the total number of answers exceeds the number of respondents.

Again, child care and protection is noticeably the largest category, with family breakdown, disability, HIV/AIDS and poverty following. The remaining areas are then grouped together. (There were insufficient details about the 'other' category for analysis.) What this does not indicate is the extent to which the more highly sought areas are those in which there is an acute need for training because of current pressures of work, whether these are areas in which training is more difficult to obtain, or whether these are areas that are perceived to be more the core concerns of social work. Nevertheless, all the areas were seen by more than one-fifth of the sample as in need of further training opportunities. The particular point about child care and protection training will be addressed again in subsequent chapters of this report.

The other question asked of the practice level respondents in relation to training needs was that concerning what should be required for social work. This too used the areas of practice as the focus and the findings are presented in Table 3.12 (page 36). With the exception of the 'Other' category (for which sufficient data were not provided to comment in more detail) all these areas were seen by more than half the total sample as necessary for social work training. Only in Dong Thap was 'poverty' seen as required for social work training by less than half the sample and likewise for 'isolated elderly' in both Lang Son and Dong Thap. It can also be observed that in general the respondents in the major cities are somewhat more likely

**Table 3.12 – the areas of training required for social work as defined at practice level**

	Ha Noi	Lang Son	HCMC	Dong Thap	Total
Child care and protection	51 (91)	29 (76)	50 (88)	29 (88)	159 (86)
Disability	43 (77)	25 (66)	45 (79)	17 (52)	130 (71)
Family breakdown	42 (75)	24 (63)	39 (68)	21 (64)	126 (68)
Prostitution	40 (71)	25 (66)	38 (67)	19 (58)	122 (66)
Mental health	40 (71)	19 (50)	37 (65)	17 (52)	113 (61)
HIV/ AIDS	45 (80)	28 (74)	44(77)	30 (91)	147 (80)
Drug misuse	43 (77)	20 (53)	39 (68)	19 (58)	121 (66)
Poverty	40 (71)	25 (66)	35 (61)	15 (45)	115 (63)
Isolated elderly	35 (63)	18 (47)	30 (53)	13 (39)	96 (52)
Others	3 (5)	3 (8)	3 (5)	4 (12)	13 (7)

than their provincial colleagues to state that each category should be required, with the exceptions of ‘poverty’, which had a slightly higher level of recognition in Lang Son than Ho Chi Minh City, and ‘HIV/AIDS’, which was proportionately recognised as an area of work that requires training most clearly in Dong Thap. Again, ‘child care and protection’ is the most widely recognised area overall, but in this case the finding is less pronounced than in relation to other questions as it is only slightly more recognised than ‘HIV/AIDS’ which in turn is followed quite closely by ‘disability’.

What these findings indicate is that the skills and knowledge of social work are needed in all of these areas. This is not to suggest that social work is the only profession that is required for any of these categories of need. However, it represents a very clear affirmation from those who are involved in the provision of services at district and commune/ward level that the wider development of social work training will provide access to skills and knowledge that are not currently available to a sufficient degree.

Overall, these findings suggest that many more social work trained people in these areas are required in Vietnam. What is less easy to specify from these data is the exact figure of how many will be needed. What these data do provide, however, is a means of addressing the question of how such figures might be produced. When the findings about views on the levels of training are combined with the data on functions and areas of practice it becomes

possible to identify the key criteria that will enable planning figures to be produced. These criteria are:

- both university level (professional) and high school/intermediate level (para-professional) of training are required (para-professional meaning a level approaching the professional but below it in academic level);
- a wide range of areas of need are required – child care and protection is emphasised but many other areas are also recognised as part of social work;
- a range of functions, and therefore of practice methods, are required within social work.

So planning for both training and employment of social workers in Vietnam will have to address these criteria if it is to be effective. These points are developed further in Chapter 5 below.

The one question that these data cannot answer briefly is that of exactly how many social workers there should be in Vietnam. Because most respondents answered questions about the number of social workers who might be employed were they available in terms of their own immediate working environment these figures are indicative of areas of practice but not of total projected numbers. Therefore another method must be used to estimate the potential size of the social work workforce. This, too, will form part of the discussion in Chapter 5, after the findings from the qualitative data have been presented in Chapter 4.

## **Summary and Conclusions**

This chapter has presented the findings from the questionnaire survey. It began by reviewing the characteristics of the sample, which were seen to be quite consistent with comparative findings in that the organization level (that is, hierarchically senior) respondents were somewhat older and more likely to be male than the practice level respondents, who were on average younger and predominantly female. This, it was noted, is consistent with social work and other professions in many countries. The predominance of MOLISA (including DOLISA) officials in the sample was noted, but given the relative size of the ministry and department and its role in the field this was not seen as an undue bias. The proportionate weight in the sample of people involved in child care and protection work, likewise, was seen to be consistent with the current situation.

The majority of respondents (60 per cent) described themselves as being trained in social work. This refers to certificated short courses for the

majority, with only approximately between 15 and 20 per cent formally trained in social work at university level. (It appeared, from independent figures, that those with university level training may have been statistically over-represented in the sample.) Some of the people who described themselves as trained in social work and who have university degrees are in fact graduates in other professions or disciplines who have short-term in-service training in the social work area. The types of practice in which these workers are engaged were predominantly family casework and community development, with counselling, program management and administration being the next smallest types of work.

The scale of the demand for social workers in Vietnam was seen to be difficult to define. All areas (social needs) and types (methods) or practice were identified as being required, with child care and protection and disability being the most stated areas and counselling, program management and social policy being the most stated types of practice. Currently, training for existing workers was most widely sought in child care and protection. However, exact numbers cannot be accurately predicted using these data so a more appropriate methodology is developed later in this report.

These findings point to the need for training and employment at both professional and para-professional levels. A wide range of areas (social needs) are required, as is a range of functions (in terms of types or methods of practice). Human resource planning therefore will have to take account of these factors.

These data present the current situation of social work in Vietnam, as seen in the four study locations. In the next chapter the qualitative responses of interviewees will add to this picture as more in-depth ideas for the development of social work are considered.

## **4. Ideas for the Development of Social Work – the Qualitative Findings**

### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter the quantitative findings have been presented. These show the present circumstances with regard to the social welfare field in Vietnam and give a clear indication of the human resource and training situation. In this chapter we turn to the data from the qualitative part of the study. These data both provide a view of the current situation, providing a more in-depth picture than the quantitative data; however, they also enable the research to consider present thinking about the future. What is needed? What is desirable? What is possible? These are all questions that the qualitative material can assist in answering.

In this chapter the structure follows the main themes that are contained in the data. This means that it does not quite follow the exact order of questions (see Appendix C), but rather takes the material in a thematic order. For this reason some of the questions used in the interviews are brought together, while others are discussed separately.

### **The role of social work in Vietnam**

The ideas expressed by interviewees about the role of social work tended to vary according to the detailed knowledge about professional social work. Some participants have extensive knowledge, through their own training or that of colleagues with whom they work closely and through overseas visits. Others have a much more limited knowledge because they have had little contact with those who are involved in the development of social work. Three questions inform this theme. The first was the opening question:

‘What do you think is the role of social work?’

The second was question number five in the schedule:

‘With what social issues should social workers assist?’

The third was question number eight in the schedule:

‘What work can you think of that is not being done because a social worker is not available to do it?’

These questions complemented each other, in that where interviewees had addressed the first in terms of the skilled practices used by social workers, the

second and third ensured that they spoke about the areas of work for which social work is appropriate. For others, they referred back to their earlier answers but had an opportunity to add to their previous comments.

A major theme emerging with these questions was the types of needs for which social work is specially equipped to respond. These included children in need of special protection, families in crisis, disabled people including war veterans and elderly people who need social protection, rehabilitation of people who have been involved in 'social evils', poverty alleviation, social and community development and counselling in a wide range of settings (including schools and hospitals). These ideas are consistent with the roles of social work in many countries and reflect the international influence on thinking about social work in Vietnam, as well as on the recognition of the needs of the society.

There was a great deal of consistency in the view that social work has a major role in social protection for children who are at risk (that is, in the ten categories defined by Vietnam law).

For example, children in difficult circumstances. [...] Recognition of children at risk, early intervention. Many cases are at risk for a while before they leave their family. If we had early recognition we could have early intervention. There are a lot of abandoned children. [MOLISA official]

Children form the largest demographic stratum of the Vietnamese population and are regarded, perhaps as in every culture, as the 'future of the society' (UNICEF, 2005). In addition, many people accept that children are particularly vulnerable, depending on adult care for physical safety and growth, psychological and moral development and transition into adulthood. So, if the answers to the three questions that deal with the role and tasks of social work are taken together, the needs of children and families was the issue that was mentioned most often. Social workers were seen as the appropriate profession to be counselling and advising parents and children, intervening when children are at risk to make decisions about protective action and ensuring that when children are not cared for by their parents that acceptable substitute arrangements are made. Street children are a particular concern in this respect. In addition, social workers were also said by some interviewees to be the right people to provide community education on parenting and family life, although this idea was mentioned less frequently than the role of social protection.

Other issues were mentioned less frequently, but were still seen widely as important for social work. Social protection for disabled people including veterans and elderly people was also clearly an area in which many people think social work has a key role. Again, counselling, and planning and arranging direct practical care were seen as part of the social work role. Rehabilitation for people who have been involved with 'social evils' activity was similarly regarded as a role in which social workers would undertake the same sort of tasks. In addition, such work was also thought to necessarily involve a role as a social educator, in that social workers in this type of work are teaching people about ways of living in a more socially functional way:

[...] to do treatment, rehabilitation, education, teach general learning and personal development, therapy – working therapies, work as treatment.  
[MOLISA official]

Poverty alleviation work was another area that featured strongly. Social work was seen as the appropriate profession to be working with families and communities. Here too a social education role is most commonly seen as one major part of social work, in helping people to learn about how to manage resources as well as acting as an advocate for access to social credit banks and so on.

We are in the process of *doi moi*. Poor people, women, in the slums. Need to improve infrastructure and relocation. We need social workers to help the poor and disadvantaged, but now more and more people are affected. Social work now has to mobilise and protect the rights of people to participate in the process. To be subjects not objects. The right to make decisions.  
[Community development worker]

This quote gives an example of how this idea was linked also to a wider role in social and community development, with social work being seen as the profession that combines abilities to assist individuals and families with more structural knowledge and skills to assist communities. Other examples that were mentioned also included helping communities to represent their views in consultations about infrastructural development and urban planning. An extension of this was the suggestion that social workers might use social and community development practice to be involved in environmental work, including projects on clean water and sanitation, sustainable rural development and other large scale work. This came from a recognition that many other officials involved in such work have natural science or engineering qualifications and the involvement of social workers could

enhance communication and co-operation with people in the project locations.

Finally, within this theme, there was a smaller number of people who identified the role of social work in macro-level activity, such as policy and planning.

At central level to develop policy and management mechanisms. Provincial and down, to carry out policies and programs at district and community level. [MOLISA official]

The interviewees who included this role in their discussion tended to be those who either were involved in such work themselves or else those who also recognised other more structural roles for social work (such as social and community development).

All these areas of work were identified as central to the role of social work and as things that are often not being done because social work is yet to be developed as profession in Vietnam. In other words, it is not just that these are the areas in which social work may make a contribution, but that these are things that need to be done in Vietnam and for which a social work profession is necessary.

One particular idea, which reoccurred many times, was the negative definition of social work as ‘not charity’. Many of the interviewees, especially those in NGOs and at provincial level and below, thought that the public image of social work was still very closely associated with charity work and that this would hold back the development of social work as a profession.

We have to recover social work as a profession and not as philanthropy. To promote a Viet Nam approach so that people can participate. [Community development worker]

This is not only for the benefit of social workers themselves, in terms of their professional identity, but for what it can help social work to achieve.

The differences come from the charity perspective. In charity the benefit is for the client to be dependent. [Catholic Social Development worker]

Professional social work, it was argued, is based on the objective that clients should be assisted in such a way that they take on responsibility for the

solutions to their own problems. Charity work does things *for* people, professional social work should act *with* people and promote their capacities to act *for themselves*.

The other major theme that emerged under the heading of the role of professional social work is that of the approaches which it brings to the tasks that are involved. In other words, many interviewees as well as discussing areas for intervention also talked about the way in which social workers perform their role, using counselling, casework, social education, mobilization, empowerment, human rights and so on. This was also addressed as a separate question, so we now turn to examine ideas about the skills and knowledge of social work.

## The skills and knowledge of social work

For both skills and knowledge there was a very widespread agreement between the interviewees. Although a minority spoke, at least for part of their contribution on this topic, about personal qualities rather than skills and knowledge as such, the majority provided ideas about the sorts of skills and knowledge that are important for social workers. (Personal qualities are addressed in the next theme, below.)

The most frequently mentioned skills concerned interpersonal communication, such as listening skills. This meant being able to understand what is being said and being able to let the client, whether an individual, family or group, know that they were being heard. This was also seen as part of a more general idea of 'communication' as a core skill, which includes not only listening, but also being able to respond to people in an open way.

We have to communicate with many people who are in difficult situations.  
[Vietnam Red Cross official]

Being able to analyze situations and information and to make plans, in collaboration with service users, was a skill that followed from communication. Indeed, for some interviewees communication was only important if it enabled social workers to think critically and to act effectively in response through problem solving:

[...] listening and analysing problems [...] analytic skills here are quick [...] good at seeing solutions. [University lecturer]

The other interpersonal skill that was identified was that of empathy (which also featured as a personal quality for many interviewees):

Try to put myself in their position. [CPFC worker]

Also listed by most interviewees were the names of particular social work practice methods, such as counselling, casework, groupwork, community development and program planning. These types of practice were understood in relation to skills because social work is seen as having a specific range of techniques that can be learned that enable practitioners to perform these more effectively than people who have not been trained.

One skill that was mentioned by many interviewees has a particularly Vietnamese meaning, that of ‘mobilization’. The term was used frequently but without explanation or discussion and in that sense forms a ‘taken-for-granted’ concept within the everyday world of Vietnam social work. The term refers to the capacity of a practitioner to relate a client’s problems and the agreed course of action to the resources of the surrounding community, to link a person or group with others and with resources that are available. This differs from the concept of ‘case management’ as it is practised in western social work, where there is a greater reliance on formal service structures and an assumption of a large social welfare network. It has some parallels with the ideals of ‘community social work’, although this is not a common form of practice. Mobilization, in this sense, is the skill of connecting a person or group to their own community.

In terms of knowledge, the broad themes that emerged were those of the needs of service users and of the academic disciplines on which social work theory is built, such as psychology, sociology, law and economics. The former included knowledge of local areas, of the lives of poor sections of society, of children in need of special protection and other social groups or specific areas of need and of the social structures and systems of Vietnam. This is well summarized by one MOLISA official:

To understand laws and conventions [...] in line with Vietnam and international law [...] Problems arising in social development. Knowledge from the constitution. Also, they must have a macro-understanding of economic development, urbanization and so on. On trafficking they need to understand the situation in Vietnam and other countries. For provincial work they need to understand their own province; they have to fit in with the locality, for example the ethnic minorities in the mountains. For institutions

and the community it is concrete knowledge of the psychology of people, for example drug addicts, and to understand the WHO guidelines. [MOLISA official]

This theme appears to reflect the existing training that, as it has been heavily influenced by the advice and sometimes direct contributions of international experts, is identical to the constructions of social work that would occur in most other countries (see, for example, Payne, 1997).

## Personal qualities for social work

Here, too, there was frequent mention of ‘empathy’, usually without elaboration, but distinguished from ‘sympathy’ which was also stated on a few occasions. One person described empathy as:

Tuning in to another person’s shoes [Vietnam Red Cross official], a mixed metaphor which graphically combines the qualities of being able to appreciate another person’s situation without oneself becoming drawn into it. There was an almost unanimous wish to see ethics as a core quality of a social worker. For some people this was about having a desire to see social justice, even of being passionate about this. For others ethics was more a question of the social worker being trustworthy, of placing their clients ahead of their own interests and of ‘not being too important’ (as one Women’s Union official put it). These are the two foundational principles of the IFSW/IASSW *Ethics for Social Work: Statement of Principles* (2004a) and it is interesting to note that these ideas were expressed in the interviews as Vietnamese values, not as an accommodation to external influences.

The third idea that was frequently expressed was that of enthusiasm and commitment. Social work, in this view, is not suitable for people who simply want to do a job to earn a salary:

It is not as if it is just an ordinary job. [Drug rehabilitation worker]

Terms such as ‘having the heart for it’ were also used frequently, with a stronger version of the idea expressed as:

[...] someone with the blood for it [Open University graduate],

which is a phrase that relates well to many other cultures (and which, for example, translates into English as ‘having it in your blood’). In many instances people also spoke about ‘love’ as a key quality in a social worker.

This included 'love of life', 'love for the work' and 'love for humanity'. This is a concept that has often been written out of western social work thinking as implying condescension or indicating a problem with emotional over-involvement. However, in this context the idea was regarded as one that is positive.

It can be easier to identify the qualities that would make a person a 'bad' social worker, rather than listing those that define the 'good' practitioner (Davies, 1994). Negative qualities would be those that include being judgemental, wanting to exact revenge and wanting to force other to conform to one's own beliefs; the views expressed by the interviewees were the opposite of these. So it would appear that in Vietnam at the present time there is a strong agreement that positive qualities can be stated and used in thinking about how the social work role should be approached.

## **Social work training**

In talking about social work training, interviewees tended to address two particular aspects. The first of these was what might be called the academic level and the second was the mode of delivery. However, as will be seen, these ideas were also related to other factors, such as accessibility and the purpose of specific training programs.

To look at the question of the academic type of training first, this can be summarised in terms of whether training is at pre-university or at university level. Almost all the interviews contained some reference to the need for systematic training for the basic level workers in communes or institutions. It was emphasised that many of these colleagues have, or in some cases may not even have completed, high school education.

Short-term, in-service. We provide this for mass organisations. From one to two weeks. For example, we organise one to two weeks for drug rehabilitation staff, aiming to develop awareness and provide basic skills. The content is based on actual work. [University lecturer]

Then, in addition to this, there was also wide spread agreement that formal university level training will be necessary to equip people at the fully professional level. As a different university lecturer said, this training should be:

Formal at university or college, BA, masters or higher. [...] Because we need to design training as a profession. [University lecturer]

For most of the interviewees both these academic levels of training are required. However, there were many clear statements about the urgency of developing systematic social work education that tended to modify the ways in which people thought this might be achieved. For example:

For the staff working at the commune, they have little time so it is better to provide them basic short-term courses. [Vietnam Red Cross official]

This type of training was widely seen as something that should be available to commune level workers every year. However, many interviewees spoke about the lack of resources or training materials and at the same time emphasised the urgency in creating training opportunities for the people who are already doing this work.

University level formal training, such as bachelors degrees, was sometimes referred to as necessary for younger people entering social work. Older people, those with life experience, were seen by some interviewees as less likely to need formal training. Other interviewees were more concerned to balance the time older entrants would take to qualify with the view that if they are to be regarded as professional their training should be at university level. The answer here was to distinguish between the four year full-time programs for younger students at university for the first time and shorter university level programs, perhaps accessible on a part time basis, for those who already have degrees or who have other training that could be accredited.

[...] we should have diversity of programs, responding to variety. Different for young people at university and older people in the community. [CPFC official]

The shorter, 'top-up' degrees were also thought to be better offered in modules or as a series of short courses, so that established workers would not have to break their careers to become professionally qualified.

So, it can be seen that in terms of the mode of delivery of education, only part of the range of courses that were advocated by the people in this sample would be full-time university programs. There was a very strong sense that this view comes from the need to have large numbers of people trained rapidly and that the experience of established workers should be recognised and accredited in some way. For these reasons, also, a small number of interviewees mentioned distance education as a possibility.

There was also one other factor that was stated by many interviewees, that of the practice component to social work education. Internationally this is regarded as part of the standards of social work training (IFSW/IASSW, 2004b) and it was recognized by people in this sample as something that still needs to be developed. As one person who is currently training for social work put it:

Here we still focus on theory, but social work is a practical science or profession. So we should do more practice. [University student]

A more experienced colleague expressed the same point of view, stating:

Training contents should more focus on training skills and practice in community. Social problems should be brought into the syllabus for students to discuss with each others and find the solutions for those problems. Students should have opportunities of dealing with community. [Women's Union official]

Among those who identified the importance of practice as part of training, there was also a recognition that this presents a problem as at present there are insufficient trained social workers who have the necessary preparation to undertake practice instruction of students. This is potentially a circular argument for which a resolution is also urgently needed.

This point leads to the final observation about training, that Vietnam has a shortage of people who are themselves trained to train others. As the normal requirement for teaching at university is a masters degree, the problem, like that of field instructors, can appear circular. The way out of this so far has been for MOET to sponsor people to study overseas. This has produced 40 people with a masters degree in social work. However, many of these are not employed in the universities but hold senior positions in government departments and NGOs. For those interviewees who saw and commented on this problem there may be a continuing requirement to seek assistance from overseas social work academics in training the trainers in order to establish a body of Vietnamese social work educators qualified at a sufficiently high level.

## Social work in practice

Three questions in the interview schedule were designed to elicit ideas about the focus of social work practice. These were:

- With what issues should social workers work?
- Who should employ social workers?
- How many social workers should there be in Vietnam?

The ideas provided in response to these questions will be considered in turn. First, the range of issues that were seen as the appropriate concern of social work was large. As one interview put it, it encompasses:

All the areas in the field of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, medical care, education, police, courts, factories [...]. [Rehabilitation centre official]  
Another person simply said:

All the issues! [Rehabilitation centre official]

Other responses were more specific about the different issues to which social workers should be involved in responding, such as:

- children in need of special protection (CNSP) (almost all elements of which were stated separately by some of the interviewees);
- the social 'evils' of drug misuse, prostitution, women and children trafficking, HIV/AIDS and crime (again, mostly stated separately when mentioned);
- domestic violence and other family issues;
- alcohol abuse;
- disability;
- isolated elderly people;
- school counselling and youth work
- community development;
- poverty;
- homelessness;
- mental health;
- migrants (to the city from rural areas);
- ethnic minorities;
- sex education and other health education issues;
- sexuality (including homosexuality and pre-marital sex);
- forced 'marriage' and women 'marrying' foreigners;
- women's rights;
- social policy.

This is a comprehensive list of the areas that can be seen as the field of ‘social welfare’. Indeed, it does not appear to leave out any obvious problem or need. In other words, when all these views are taken into account, there is no one area of need that is seen as the sole preserve of social work. This is not to say that there are not some areas that are more widely cited than others. CNSP, family issues (of all kinds), social protection and work with those affected by ‘social evils’ were the most frequently stated. Nevertheless, none of the issues listed above were mentioned only by those who already worked directly with them, suggesting that there is broad support for the idea of social work covering many areas of need.

A similar breadth can be seen in the list of those ministries, departments, agencies and organisations that the interviewees said should be the appropriate employers of social workers. This list consists of:

- MOLISA and DOLISA (and their many component services);
- CPFC;
- Women’s Union;
- Youth Union;
- People’s Committees;
- Communes/wards;
- Mass organizations;
- Hospitals;
- Schools;
- Universities;
- NGOs, including international organizations;
- Community development projects;
- Labour unions;
- Private enterprises;
- Courts and police.

Again, some participants became quite expansive on this point, so that the person who said:

Social problems happen everywhere, so each organisation should have one [University student],

was speaking for many others. Fewer people mentioned the labour unions and private enterprises as potential sites of employment for social workers; the courts and police also were stated noticeably less frequently than the others, a point to which the discussion returns below.

As with the list of issues with which social work should work, this list of employing organizations is comprehensive. This reinforces the sense that may be gained from these interviews that social work is seen by those who are involved in the field as very wide in its scope.

The third question about social work in practice was that of how many social workers there should be in Vietnam. As with the survey questionnaires, this appears to have been understood very differently by various participants. Taken broadly, the responses can be divided into two types: those who addressed the question from the point of view of the country as a whole and those who talked about their own work context.

For those who understood the question of how many social workers would be required the question actually seemed too big. For example, one focus group with university students produced an interesting discussion in which the group attempted to construct a method by which the figure could be calculated. This was abandoned when the comparison was made with medical doctors (for which a population based ratio was known) because the figure looked so large. One member of this group concluded:

For me the real number is not so important, because in reality we mobilize other people to do social work. [University student]

Other, experienced, people considered ideas such as having a minimum of one social worker for each commune or ward. This was the most frequently mentioned way of thinking about numbers. Some interviewees added that institutions (such as social protection centres, warm shelters and rehabilitations centres) and hospitals would also each need a social worker.

The alternative approach to this question was for people to talk about their own work context. Everyone who did this said that their location needed at least one social worker, and some people calculated more than that. However, there was one consistent exception to this, which was in the area of the courts and police. Here the most frequent answer was to say that there might be a need for social workers in the future but not at the present time. By comparing these interviews across the questions it appears that in these cases the interviewees had little direct knowledge of social work. So it may be concluded that they could not see what role social work might play in their organizations and hence would not think any were needed.

## **The difficulties faced and supports required by social work**

In the interview schedule there were two successive questions, the first of which asked about the difficulties that are faced by social work in its development in Vietnam. The second, which was intended as a follow-up, inquired about the supports that people thought would be necessary for social work. In almost every instance the interviewees commented that it was effectively the same question, simply turning a negative tone into one that was more positive. Most answers were self-consciously repetitious (people used statements like ‘as I have just said’) and so these two questions will be dealt with together in this discussion, focusing on the specific points that were raised.

### **Job code**

The first point, and that which provides the key to all the others, is that at present there is no ‘job code’ for social workers in Vietnam. Although the Vietnam Government has approved a training curriculum, through MOET, it has not defined the place of social work within public sector employment. For example,

There is no recognition of social work as a job. Even under MOLISA [...] it’s not a secure job. [MOLISA official]

As a consequence of this lack, many organizations cannot employ people as ‘a social worker’ even though there might be informal agreement that the tasks being undertaken are those of social work. For someone with social work qualifications there is no defined career structure, which means either that such people are employed under other titles to do this work or else they seek employment elsewhere. It also means that many people with other professional qualifications (medicine, nursing, teaching, journalism, agriculture, engineering) find employment in what can objectively be seen as social work roles and then seek in-service training for their jobs.

Without a job code there are also problems in organizations obtaining budgets to pay all those people who are fulfilling social work functions. In many instances interviewees reported the extent to which social welfare services have to rely on volunteer labour. Where funds are available salaries are often very low. As one person who was training for social work expressed this view:

[It is important to] put SW at the level where they can manage their lives and focus on their jobs. If the salary is too low we cannot do the job well. [University student]

That this person is about to enter the workforce may have provided a very clear appreciation of the way in which such things affect career choices. This reveals the connection between the lack of a job code and various factors about training that were stated by other interviewees, such as the lack of popularity of social work as a university subject (see below). As another interviewee observed, social workers need:

[...] trust; assigning work; development; the chance for promotion. [Youth Union official]

## **Laws and policies**

Following from the lack of a job code, interviewees also spoke about the need for laws, policies and working conditions for social workers that would reflect acceptance by government and promote the professional role in the wider society. A particularly graphic example of this was provided by a community development worker, who said,

Sometimes people suspect they are involved in politics. Even if working in collaboration with a local authority, they are often followed by the police, but we are protected by the government. Even myself, when the police followed me in a community development project and asked about me from the Peoples' Committee. [Community development worker]

The point being that although there was support and protection from government authorities, this was not widely known because of the lack of laws and policies governing social work as a profession. In the words of another person, social workers can be limited in their effectiveness because they do not have,

[...] a right to act [CPFC official],  
that would be provided through laws and policies.

## **A common understanding of social work**

More generally, many people spoke about the lack of understanding of social work as a profession across Vietnamese society. It was not only that this could lead to the type of opposition described above, but more often a questioning of the role that a social worker might play in helping a person, a family or a group.

Social work is new, so we haven't received strong support from community and society. The work is sometimes seen as unnecessary or interfering. [University student]

As a problem for the development of social work as a profession, this goes beyond the lack of a job code. What statements of this kind were referring to was the way in which the wider community does not understand or accept the role of social work. For those who mentioned this point, problems of acceptance were largely seen as following from the lack of understanding. The solution to this, however, was suggested only by a few people who said that factors such as a job code, laws and policies, and so on, would also assist in being able to promote the idea of professional social work more widely.

Another factor, identified by a non-government organization worker, is that social work does not normally produce immediate and dramatic changes in people's lives. It is a slower process.

The results of social work are not always presented immediately, so [the public] do not know the importance of social work in helping people; we need lots of time, so the benefit of the activity is not economical. [Vietnam Red Cross official]

This can mean that unless others have experience of social work they often form inappropriate views about what can be achieved.

## **Budgets and material support**

A further factor affecting the development of social work that is associated with the lack of a job code was that of limited budgets and material support for social work and welfare services. Clearly this is part of the problem facing all the organizations in being able to provide proper salaries, but is also related to other material aspects of being able to provide services. Both in government and non-government organizations there are limits to budgets that affect the type of work that can be done and how many people there are to do the work as well as the facilities for the work to be carried out. A senior official in an NGO, for example, indicated the office in which the interview was being conducted and said,

The equipment – this computer is dead now, and we only have one phone for the whole department – and the same for the fax. [Vietnam Red Cross official]

A government social protection centre described how it was necessary to engage in economic activity (producing goods for sale) in order to provide for those service users who could not make a financial contribution themselves for their care.

## **Social work training**

Many of the interviewees considered the type and extent of available education and training opportunities to be a limitation on the growth of social work. Several factors were seen as part of this problem. First of all, despite the number of short courses that have been made available by organizations such as UNICEF, there are still many people working in social welfare either who have had only a very small amount of training or who have had no training at all.

Second, the forms of training that are often used were criticized as being too traditional and passive. This, it was alleged, reinforces bad principles in working with service users.

Passive ways of learning of students is not creative and we then give that to our clients. [Catholic Social Development worker]

It should be noted that staff at the universities that were visited raised the issue of appropriate learning models with the international consultant. This is a matter on which changes appear to be taking place, although these are slow and the rapid expansion of social work education has placed great demands on the universities in particular to find teaching staff who are equipped to run the new curriculum.

Third, there is a limited range of training materials, especially reading materials. Some overseas work is available, but this has to be translated and there is very little Vietnamese material that would enable learners to apply ideas to their own social context. Some materials are being prepared, both for short-term in-service courses and for the formal full-time university degree programs. The authorship of these materials includes both Vietnamese and international experts. Clearly, as they become available, such resources will be welcomed by those interviewees who emphasised this point.

Fourth, training tends to be theoretical and often lacks a practice dimension. This was seen as a weakness of the university degree programs, which up to this point have contained very little supervised practice.

There is a limitation on practice in learning and study. [University student]  
Although the new MOET approved curriculum does specify practice learning to international standards, this has yet to be implemented and its effects be seen in the field. Without this dimension to training, it was suggested, students struggle to make sense of the ideas with which they are presented and learning is harder. The idea of 'reality' in the classroom was questioned frequently.

Fifth, following from the previous point, there are very few social work educators in Vietnam who have formal training and significant experience in professional practice.

Teachers do not have enough experience in practice. It is common that we attend our teachers' graduation the year before they teach us. [Catholic Social Development worker]

This comment is also relates to the many times that interviewees simply stated that there are not enough teachers of social work for the scale of the task in developing a trained workforce.

Difficulties in training, there is a lack of teachers. [University lecturer]  
Also, it was recognised that this lack was itself based on a larger issue, that of who would teach those who are going to teach.

[We are] lacking of key resource people, trainers of trainers. When we need advice it is difficult to find people. [Rehabilitation centre worker]  
Without such people, it was implied, progress will be slow.

## **Professional organization and support**

The final theme raised under the questions of difficulties and needs was that of the connections between professional social workers through formal organizations and informal networks. Within this notion, interviewees were describing the need for ways of sharing skills and knowledge to ensure that they keep up to date and of supporting each other in their professional identity.

There are two ways in which keeping up to date might occur. The first of these is in systematic 'continuing professional education'. This concept links training, whether in-service or in universities, with the requirements of a profession. What these interviewees were saying is that once someone has gained their primary qualification they have to keep on studying throughout their career, to increase their skills and knowledge and to ensure that these are

the most current that are available. Keeping up to date might also be achieved informally, through a network of exchange between individuals or groups. This was described as:

A network of social workers so that we can have activities to strengthen our knowledge. [University lecturer]

In these terms, continuing professional education is a key responsibility that lies at the centre of any claim to professional status.

What was also being identified in this theme is a need for a professional association, that is a formal body made up of social workers that could both promote the continual development of skills and knowledge and could also represent the shared interests of the profession.

[We] should have a professional association. Then there can be the application of professional values and principles in actual work. [Community development worker]

So such an organization would enable appropriate standards to be set and thus help to improve the quality of social work. For others, the importance of a professional body would be in the way it could 'strengthen the voice' of social work in dialogue with other professions, government and civil society organizations. Comparisons were made with medical doctors and lawyers, noting the way in which formal associations helped these professions both in their maintenance of skills, knowledge and standards and the capacity to speak about their concerns and interests to the wider society.

## **Summary and conclusions**

This chapter has presented the findings of the qualitative interviews that were conducted between April and June 2005. It began by looking at the role of social work, which was seen to be defined in terms of skilled interventions with individuals, families, groups and communities to provide social protection, to help eradicate social 'evils', to promote community development, and to undertake program planning, social policy and research in relation to these areas.

The discussion then moved to the skills and knowledge of social work. Communication skills were seen as foundational, including listening and analyzing problems. The internationally recognized terms for social work practices, such as casework, groupwork and community development were all

mentioned frequently. Of particular note was the concept of ‘mobilization’ that, it was noted, has a particularly Vietnamese meaning in these discussions. Personal qualities that are desirable for social work were defined as empathy, commitment, being ethical and not being self-important. Having social work ‘in your blood’ was also noted, as well as having ‘love’ for the work and for humanity.

In the discussion of training some complexities emerged. Participants advocated both in-service short-term training and full-time formal university based education. These were seen as necessary for different parts of the social work profession, with in-service provision needed by existing practitioners, especially those in the communes and those who have qualifications, and university opportunities necessary for those who are entering social work. This raises the issue of professional social work in Vietnam developing with several ‘levels’ according to the type of training. It also reflects the combined needs of services to keep experienced people in practice while they do further training and of those people to continue to be employed while they train. There was also a widely acknowledged need to increase the amount of practice that forms part of social work training, to make it more ‘reality’ based.

In practice, the list of social need with which social worker should be working was extensive. It included all the areas of social welfare and aspects of society that create social problems. So the appropriate employing agencies, likewise, were seen to be extensive, including government, NGOs and other civil society organizations. The question of ‘how many’ social workers there should be, perhaps not surprisingly, proved very difficult to answer but attempts to do so highlighted the interests of the participants and their practical knowledge of social work.

Finally, the areas of difficulty and need for the development of social work were seen to be centred firstly on the lack of a job code, with all that follows from that, and secondly the need to create a professional organization. Without these two things, it was widely thought, there would be continuing problems with salaries and resources, with continuing professional education and standards, as well as with the public profile of social work.

All of these ideas provide a wealth of information for considering the human resource and training issues for the development of professional social work. So in the next chapter these implications of these findings will be brought together with those of the quantitative survey that were presented in the previous chapter. The discussion will consider in greater depth what needs to be done in order to achieve the growth of professional social work in Vietnam.

# 5. Discussion – A Framework for the Development of Social Work

## Introduction

In the previous two chapters the quantitative survey and qualitative interview findings have been presented. In this chapter the ideas from these findings are brought together in a consideration of what needs to be done in order to ensure that social work develops strongly in Vietnam. The chapter presents a framework for human resource planning that is based on an analysis of the ideas that have been generated by the research. So, in order to arrive at that framework, the discussion considers in more depth the key issues that have been raised by the participants.

## Implications for social work in Vietnam

In order to develop a model of professional social work that is appropriate for Vietnam it is important to recognise the distinctive culture, social and political structures and path to economic development of this country. Vietnam, as a country in transition, faces particular challenges from the impact of globalisation on the economy and the consequent effects of stress on communities, families and individuals, through poverty and changes in patterns of life that follow from modernisation. Thus, the current major developments in social work are taking place at a time when Vietnam is experiencing very similar changes to those that created a necessity for social work in other countries.

Although there is very wide-spread agreement between many of the people who are directly involved in social work developments about the nature and focus of the profession, it is also the case that it remains poorly understood by other people in the surrounding society. This even includes colleagues in some public services, such as the police and the courts. So, in order to be able to demonstrate and argue for the part that professional social work should play in Vietnam society, it will be necessary for all the stakeholders to reach a common understanding in respect of the following:

- What are the tasks that social work is required to do?
- What is the most effective way of organizing social work employment?
- At what level or levels should professional social work education be located and how is this to be facilitated (including the training of social work teachers and creating opportunities for extensive assessed practice)?

- How can para-professional forms of ‘social work’ be trained and organized (and should this be seen as part of or separate from social work)?
- How can professional social work share and develop its knowledge and skills collectively (for example, through the formation of an association)?

The answers to these questions will significantly shape the development of social work in Vietnam for the period of the next ten years.

## **The tasks of social work**

As a country in transition Vietnam faces many challenges. Social work can make a strong contribution in responding to these. In the background discussion of Chapter 1 the areas of social protection, social ‘evils’ prevention and social development were identified. The survey and interview data show very clearly that these are the areas that are seen as core sites of social work practice, both by those who are directly involved in them already and by others who have responsibilities for planning and policy.

First, social work should have a major role in services for children in need of special protection. This applies to families where children face neglect, violence or exploitation, where families are under stress from poverty or from the demands of the rapidly changing economy, and where they may also be at risk of trafficking or being forced into prostitution. Disabled children, too, have particular needs that may not yet be fully realised in the wider society. In these cases, as also with adults in need of social protection (such as people with mental ill-health, disabled people or elderly people who lack family care or where that care is under great stress), social workers can perform a range of functions that can promote the improvement of life for individuals and families as well as encouraging stronger communities. Social work practices, such as counselling, family casework, groupwork, community development and so on are already evident, having been introduced through the short-term courses and parts of university degrees that are already available. The knowledge base of this work is that of social work, so it would enhance these services now to have a fully trained professional workforce.

Second, a major role for social work in the existing responses to the designated ‘social evils’ can be identified. Provision of services to assist in the rehabilitation of drug users, commercial sex workers and those who have been convicted of crimes, and the care and support of people living with HIV/AIDS or of women subject to trafficking who have returned to their communities, are all areas in which social workers, collaborating with other

professionals and government officials, can respond to individual needs and work with communities to achieve change in the social environment that promotes these problems. As in social protection work, counselling, casework and groupwork, combined with program planning, administration and research are the methods that social workers can use in these situations.

Third, there are also a range of tasks that social work can perform in Vietnam that do not clearly come under the terms social protection or responding to 'social evils'. These include: the provision of counselling and casework in schools and universities for students who are under stress; counselling, casework and case management for people in hospitals, or sick in the community, who need assistance with the personal and family impact of ill-health; and in helping couples and families facing a crisis in their relationships using counselling and casework techniques. This research has shown that, although it has not necessarily been widely accepted by all stakeholders, many people in these areas already recognize the value of the social work contribution.

Fourth, on a wider scale, social workers in community development can bring program planning and administration together with groupwork and organizing skills, to assist communities to identify issues that face them as a result of rapid economic and social change. From the data, it is apparent that social workers have a role in urban renewal, and also in regional and rural areas in assisting communes with responding to the demands created by the modern economy. The impact of poverty and economic upheaval is experienced in urban, regional and rural areas. Social work can play this role in collaboration with economic development specialists and urban planners. Social workers can also assist families in such situations in giving advice and social education regarding access to social loan mechanisms.

In all four of these broad definitions of tasks social workers can also be used by government departments and non-government organizations in the development of policies and to undertake research.

## **The organization of social work**

The range of tasks for social work that has been identified suggests that social workers will need to be employed in many ministries and departments, non-government and civil society organizations. This includes all levels – central, provincial, district and commune. The range of tasks to be performed will differ between the levels, and this in turn will influence the forms of training that develop (a point that will be discussed further below).

The organizations that have been identified by the research as appropriate for the employment of social workers are:

- MOLISA, including DOLISA;
- CPFC;
- MOET (especially in schools and universities);
- Women's Union, Fatherland Front, Youth Union and other mass organizations;
- People's Committees (for example in community development);
- Hospitals and other health services;
- NGOs (noting that some international organizations may already be employing overseas social workers);
- Other government departments (such as the police and courts);
- Labour unions and private enterprises.

At the commune and district level there are many activities undertaken by all of these organizations that provide forms of social work services. A few people working at these levels have formal qualifications, at college or university level, but the large majority do not. In fact, in many places the direct interventions to assist individuals, families and community groups are often made by local volunteers or people who are employed part-time on very low salaries. Within the next ten years it is unlikely that sufficient social workers can be trained, or the resources found to employ them, in order to have all such work conducted by those who are professionally qualified at university level. In order to increase the professionalism and effectiveness of this work, university trained social workers will need to be employed to work alongside, and to support, these 'bare-foot' social workers. So, in this period it would be a realistic goal to have all 'bare-foot' social workers supported technically by those who are fully trained, as well as the university trained social workers providing training to those with lower levels of education. Appropriate forms of training for this para-professional level will also include more systematic access to short in-service courses and this should be seen as a necessity in ensuring good quality interventions at commune level.

In some contexts, such as schools, hospitals or the courts, social workers must be fully trained in order that they can collaborate effectively with other professionals. In many areas at present staff with a variety of other qualifications are conducting the tasks of social work. Some of these may appropriately seek to become social workers through additional qualifications, while others may prefer to be able to focus more on the tasks for which they were originally trained. Also, in services such as social protection shelters

some of the workers, most importantly directors and vice-directors, ought wherever possible to be fully qualified social workers.

At district, provincial and central levels, in addition to a specialized practice role, it will be advantageous to employ increasing numbers of social workers in roles that plan, support and administrate practical social work programs. Other expertise is also required in the provision of social welfare services, such as accountancy and economics, and these are not part of the social work skill base as such. However, at present there are very few, if any, people working in these services that have formal social work qualifications. In addition, a small number of trained social workers can contribute at these levels to program planning, policy development and research. Because of the distinctive skill and knowledge base of social work, people with university level qualifications that include substantial practice experience can provide a perspective to such tasks that complements those of colleagues whose training is in public administration, the social sciences or another profession.

## **Education and training for social work**

These recommendations on the tasks and organization of social work have implications for social work education and training in Vietnam. In particular, they lead to the view that there needs to be a series of connected levels that are appropriate to the tasks and organization of different parts of social work.

First, as has already been noted, the ‘bare-foot’ social workers at commune level need more systematic training. Some good models are already provided by organizations such as UNICEF and CPFC and these should be extended. Particularly in the qualitative interviews, there was a very strong view expressed by participants in the research that a great amount of training is required beyond current provision. At this level the training would have to be at the educational equivalent of high school to take account of the more limited previous opportunities that most of these workers have had. For those who are able to progress, this could provide articulation to college level training and above. This basic level of education, which should be considered as pre-professional, or para-professional, will be that which in the next ten years is provided to the largest number of people. Especially in the provinces, organizations such as DOLISA, CPFC and the Women’s Union will simply not be able to provide even their current level of services without this workforce. Such training will have to continue to be ‘in-service’ in the form of short courses and is likely therefore to be focussed on specific issues, such as the protection of children with special needs, the nature and care of disabilities, the impact of HIV/AIDS on individuals and families, and so on.

Second, the main level of training for professional social work will be the university degree at bachelor level. The training code for social work that has already been approved by MOET provides a national four-year curriculum for social work, with some capacity for variation according to the needs identified at a specific university. This is the level at which it should be expected that graduates will have studied all aspects of social work in sufficient depth to be able to make a professional contribution, to support colleagues with para-professional training and to take jobs in a variety of settings. At this level there might be some limited specialisation according to the interests and orientation of the different universities, as allowed in the code approved by MOET, and some discussion should take place to plan accordingly so that major areas of need are not missed out. The MOET curriculum specifies two subjects in social work practice and these should be seen as vital parts of the core to the degree programs. Along with subjects in counselling and casework, groupwork and community development, such subjects constitute the distinctive professional nature of these degrees.

Third, at the post-qualifying level continuing professional development will be very important. This will take two forms. One pattern will be that of 'in-service' short courses in highly specialised areas of practice, or attendance at major workshops and conferences. International standards are that professional social workers should maintain and develop their skills and knowledge throughout their careers, a position that is also reflected in the international ethical guidelines (IFSW/IASSW, 2004a). The other form of post-qualifying education will be in higher degrees, at masters and doctorate levels. These will not only provide a research base for the growing profession but will also equip an increasing number of qualified social workers to take a place in university level teaching. Initially these are most likely to be taken at overseas universities as has been the case to this point, especially where supervised practice is included, or for research training higher degrees might be supervised within disciplines other than social work but studying topics suitable for the growing knowledge and skill base of social work.

In summary, the structure of social work education that would be appropriate to the needs and current situation of Vietnam is presented in Table 5.1.

**Table 5.1 – Three proposed levels for social work training in Vietnam**

Professional type	Educational level
Para-professional	High school level (in-service short courses)
	College diploma
Professional	Bachelor degree
Post-professional	Continuing specialised professional education (in-service short courses)
	Higher degrees – masters and doctorates

Each of these levels should be articulated with the next level so that any person who enters social work can, if appropriate, advance through further study and experience.

In the para-professional, professional and some post-professional levels of training, experience in practice must be integrated with classroom learning. In the next few years of developing social work in Vietnam this is likely to be a significant challenge. The global standards on social work education (IFSW/IASSW, 2004b) expect that supervision in practice learning should be provided by professionally qualified social workers. Clearly in Vietnam such a situation will not be possible until there are sufficient qualified people in appropriate jobs. Therefore an interim arrangement would be suitable, in which people who are already undertaking work that is recognised as part of social work could provide the supervision for practical learning under the guidance and support of the universities. Where possible, as qualified social workers become available, it should be planned that they will be involved in the supervision of practice learning.

For those people who are already in jobs that might be considered as part of social work there will need to be an interim or transitional arrangement for the increase of skills and knowledge leading to professional qualification. One device used in many other countries is that where a person already has a bachelor level degree they might undertake either a qualifying masters course or else complete those parts of the bachelor program that they have not yet done (specifically those parts related to social work) for the award of a second bachelor degree. This type of training might be able to be done part-time, one subject at a time, offered in intensive short-courses, or even undertaken by distance learning. One factor that affects the provinces in particular is the tendency of trained personnel to move towards the cities. A finding from the survey that was not presented in Chapter 3 is that none of the 72 practice

level respondents from the two provinces came from families in the major cities. This compares to approximately 64 per cent of the practice level respondents in Hanoi and 37 per cent of those in Ho Chi Minh City having come from families in rural areas or small towns. This suggests that it will be vital to have access to professional education for people in the provinces. As almost all the degree level places are in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, part-time study and distance learning are the only ways this will be achievable for those who are already employed and will also avoid the possibility that those who go to the cities for education may not return to the provinces.

Developing a qualifying masters program would be very demanding of resources in a period in which the training of bachelor level social workers is a priority. Therefore the option of using a 'second degree' model would appear to be most appropriate for those who already have a university degree. The same teaching staff, textbooks and other course materials can be used and where possible people undertaking this model might join the normal classes. Of course, in some cases it may be possible for individuals with first degrees to take qualifying masters programs overseas and this should be recognised as part of the range of options. However, the advantages of second degree entrants to programs in Vietnam are that the costs will be lower and that they can access the programs part-time or by distance learning.

Finally, it should be noted that, as discussed in Chapter 4, interviewees were generally agreed that certain personal qualities are important for social workers. These include a high level of commitment, being focused on the needs of others, being ethical, and so on. It is difficult to devise objective tests for these in order to select students for training. However, educational programs at all levels can make one of their objectives to challenge students about the realities of social work as a career and to see it as part of their role, especially in university bachelor programs, to assist students in making an informed choice about professional social work. Strategies for assisting those who are clearly unsuitable to move into other disciplines or areas of work will need to be developed as social work becomes more established as a career.

## **Recognising para-professional forms of social work**

As already mentioned above, almost all the direct social work provision at commune level for individuals and families, as well as some community development work, is undertaken by people who have only short-term training which is at high school standard. Although it may be reasonable to expect that in a longer period of time many more professionally qualified social workers will become available to provide such services, because of the

many demands placed on Vietnam by economic growth and globalisation it is unrealistic to think that this would happen in the next ten years to the extent that a 'para-professional' level of worker will cease to be vital. The term 'para-professional' here refers to a role that is like the professional one, but is ancillary to it and requires only part of the same training. Planning should regard this as a long-term issue and not simply as a temporary one and so should seek to integrate this level into the overall structure for social work. So systematic training and technical support for para-professional practitioners will be a necessary part of the development of social work and a responsibility of those who are professionally qualified.

In many other countries it is possible to identify a relationship between professional social work and other closely related practices. In fact often the lack of suitably qualified social workers results in people with degrees such as psychology or sociology being employed to do some tasks that might normally be allocated to social workers. In Australia, Hong Kong and the USA, for example, this wider field is called 'human services'. Mostly in these countries human services workers have a three-year university degree or two-year college diploma. In the UK the wider field is now called 'social care'. Social care workers might have university degrees or college diplomas, or they might have systematic in-service training provided within their job. The UK structure makes the relationship between social care and social work more clear by giving a government body, the General Social Care Council, the power to register both social care workers and professional social workers, making social work the senior level of a connected range of skills and knowledge. This structure effectively acknowledges that the knowledge and skills of social care are those of social work, which strengthens the role of social care workers and provides a career path for those who wish to advance. In Australia, similarly, where the way for a human services worker to advance is to undertake a social work degree, either by articulation from college or through the 'second degree' model of additional university study.

## **Social work as a profession**

Professions require several things in order to be able to function and to serve the society of which they are part. One of these, relevant education and training, have already been dealt with in great detail. The others are to have a recognised place in employment with relevant organizations, to have wider public recognition and to have a mechanism for the development of the arts and sciences of their practices.

First, the importance of a job code for social work if it is to develop as a profession is very clear. In the system of Vietnam this must come from the government, as different organizations cannot create such a code on their own. Without a code it is not possible to employ social workers in designated positions in government departments and the non-government sector follows the lead of the government sector. The creation of a job code appears now to be one of the most significant steps that could be taken to ensure that social work develops as a profession. Such a code will enable organizations to locate social work appropriately in their employment structures, with salaries and career opportunities. This code will need to address the para-professional, professional and post-professional levels. In particular there is an urgency for this task as there are already approximately 900 places in MOET approved degree programs (including more than one intake at some universities) that will begin to produce graduates in 2007 leading to a potential mean average of 500 social work graduates per year. This will increase as the other universities that have been approved begin their intakes. Without a job code these graduates will not find employment in social work and many will be lost to the field as they seek to earn a living elsewhere.

Second, a job code and structured employment will also provide a basis for creating a better public profile for social work. In the research, we heard repeatedly how many people confuse social work with charity. Although historically there is a connection, in the modern world the profession has moved on and now has a scientific basis. In addition to the job code, therefore, it may also be necessary to consider appropriate policies so that social work can be explained better to the public.

Third, the role of professional associations in many countries provides the mechanism through which social workers can collaborate to continually update and develop their knowledge and skills by providing the means to share ideas, for example through workshops and conferences. A professional association will also enable Vietnamese social workers to be involved in international professional collaboration through organizations such as the IFSW and the IASSW. Government approval and support for such a body will enable professional social work to develop strongly.

A question that should be resolved immediately is who should be a member of a professional association. In Vietnam this relates to whether or not the para-professional level should be seen as part of the profession or separate from it. It is recommended that because of the importance of the para-

professional practitioners to social work provision that a mechanism should be found to include this level. Although people at this level are not professionally qualified at university standard, their knowledge and skill base is that of social work and practical social work in Vietnam will not be sustained at commune level without their contribution.

## Targets for the development of social work

In order to accomplish all of these aspects of the development of professional social work in Vietnam, plans need to be made for the numbers of social workers in different levels and employing organizations. The figures presented below represent a 'best estimate' that can be produced using the existing data. They take account of the numbers of social workers that are needed at each professional level, the training that is required and the supporting factors (such as opportunities for higher level study in Vietnam and abroad).

The numbers of social workers that are required can be calculated by considering the roles and tasks of social work in relation to the levels and the organizations in which they can be employed. Then the figures can be divided between the five and ten year projections to produce an indication for planning purposes. In some instances an assumption is made, based on current practice in communes, that more than two or more organizations might together make use of a particular individual by dividing their time between specific responsibilities. This assumption relates primarily to the para-professional category.

These figures also assume that, after 10 years there will be:

- One para-professional worker per 2,000 population full-time equivalent, employed at commune level, with an assumption of at least one per commune;
- Six professional social workers and two with post-professional education in each of the relevant organizations at district level;
- Three professional social workers and six para-professional trained staff as an average in each of the institutions (located in this order as they tend to come under provincial level organizationally);
- Four professional social workers and two with post-professional education in each of the relevant organizations at provincial level;
- Three social workers with post-professional education in each of the relevant sections of government ministries;
- All the university faculties having professional education and 50 per cent having post-professional education;

- A significant number of social workers employed in other sectors, such as hospitals (this figure is a rough estimate only due to lack of some data).

The estimates for the five-year goal, presented in Table 5.2 (next page) assume a continuous even growth towards the ten-year figures, in Table 5.3 (next page). In some aspects these figures may be highly optimistic. However, the purpose of these figures is to provide a benchmark, as progress in some areas may be more rapid in earlier years, while in others it may have growth that increases more rapidly towards the end of the ten-year period. The only category in which assumptions have been made about accelerating change is that of post-professional trained staff at the provincial and central levels and in universities, as this reflects the potential increase in the numbers of masters and doctorate degree qualifications with a corresponding decrease in the overall number with bachelor qualifications.

The question must also be asked as to how these figures might be achieved. For the para-professional level there are already short-term courses available, provided within organizations and by NGOs such as UNICEF. The CPFC training centre is also starting to provide courses and this provision will increase over the period under consideration. If to this are added the students currently enrolled on college diploma courses, then this figure should be achievable and may even be cautious. At the same time, an allowance must be made for those people who withdraw from this work, for example because they find other employment. However, if that factor is included then this figure is still feasible.

Of greater concern may be the professional and post-professional training at bachelor level and above. The number of programs that currently have students is five and a further six have been approved and will shortly recruit new students. If these figures are to be reached then these programs will need to produce numbers of graduates to least at the level of the estimate given above, so that by 2015 there are over 1,400 social work graduates per year. To reach this target there will need to be opportunities provided to enable experienced people already in the field to take short update and 'second degree' training so that they will be able to be recognised as professionally qualified social workers. Assuming an attrition rate of ten per cent on the numbers of younger graduates this would necessitate approximately 100 such opportunities per year, although this would phase out by around 2015 and could be weighted to the earlier years (that is with more than this number of places in the first year and a reduction in the number towards the end of the scheme). There are already approximately 100 people

in Vietnam with qualifications of this type, from the Open University and overseas. However, there is as yet no reliable data on how many of these people have remained in the social work field or have moved into other areas.

As already discussed above, in the next five years the number of post-professional degree opportunities is likely to remain limited to those who are able to study overseas and to studies under other disciplines that are able to focus on social work issues. However, as the number of people qualified to teach at the higher level develops then more opportunities will emerge for postgraduate work to be done in Vietnam. This is an aspect of professional education that has grown relatively late in many other countries, with possibly the exception of the USA where the PhD as a standard level for university teachers has been longer established. In this respect, therefore, Vietnam will find that the growth in the number of masters degrees should accelerate between now and 2015, especially towards the end of that time.

**Table 5.2 – Projected employment figures for social work in 2010**

Level		Organizations	Standard	Total
Commune/ward	20,331	DOLISA, CPFC, mass organizations	Para-professional	20,331
District	582	DOLISA, CPFC, mass organizations	Professional	5,238
			Post-professional	582
Institutions	373	Social protection centres, rehabilitation centres	Para-professional	1,119
			Professional	559
Province	63	MOLISA, CPFC, mass organizations	Professional	582
			Post-professional	63
Central	1	MOLISA, CPFC	Professional	12
			Post-professional	6
Universities	10	Teaching MOET approved program	Professional	50
			Post-professional	30
Others	N/A	NGOs, health, education,	Professional	600
			Post-professional	60

The totals in each standard are:

Para-professional-21,450 Professional-7,041 Post-professional-741

Cumulative total-29,232 (of which 7,782 would be at university level)

**Table 5.3 – Projected employment figures for social work in 2015**

Level	Number	Organizations	Standard	Total
Commune/ward	20,331	DOLISA, CPFC, mass organizations	Para-professional	40,662
District	582	DOLISA, CPFC, mass organizations	Professional	10,476
			Post-professional	1,172
Institutions	373	Social protection centres, rehabilitation centres	Para-professional	2,238
			Professional	1,119
Province	63	MOLISA, CPFC, mass organizations	Professional	756
			Post-professional	126
Central	1	MOLISA, CPFC	Professional	10
			Post-professional	24
Universities	10	Teaching MOET approved program	Professional	80
			Post-professional	50
Others	N/A	NGOs, health, education,	Professional	1,200
			Post-professional	120

The totals in each standard are:

Para-professional-42,900 Professional-13,641 Post-professional-1,492

Cumulative total-58,033 (of which 15,133 would be at university level)

The issues of the job code, public recognition and the possibility of a professional association were all discussed above. The targets for decisions on these matters will be required well before 2010 as, without the job code in particular, many of the graduates who are necessary for the above targets to be met will find employment in other fields. For this reason the job code should be formulated as soon as possible. Encouraging public recognition can then begin. A professional association should also be planned within the next five years. While this is not quite as urgent as the job code, it will provide a mechanism for the further advancement of social work and this also will serve to encourage those who enter the profession to continue their commitment.

## **Summary and conclusion**

In this chapter key themes from the findings presented in Chapters 3 and 4 have been discussed in depth. These are: the tasks of social work; the organizational locations of social work; education and training for social work; recognition of the 'para-professional' level of social work, and; social work as a profession. From the evidence of the research project it is clear that social work in Vietnam needs to be able to work across a wide range of social issues, using all its theories and methods. Although particular needs, such as those of children in need of special protection, are likely to form a greater part of the focus of social work, all must be addressed in workforce planning and in training. Consequently, education and training must be developed that will enable this to happen. This must include the 'para-professional' level of the 'bare-foot' social workers, who should be integrated into the developing professional structures. A vital step towards professional social work will be the creation of a job code. In addition to this, the formation of a professional association will also facilitate the effective development of skills and knowledge and promote high standards of practice.

From this discussion it can be seen that the challenge facing Vietnam in the development of professional social work is great. Yet, although there is much to be done, the foundations are already in place. With determination and leadership this task is achievable in the coming decade. In the concluding chapter the ideas that have been discussed here will be summarized in key recommendations that will enable this goal to be accomplished.

## **6. Moving Forward – Summary of Recommendations and Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

In Chapter 5 the implications of the findings from the two parts of the empirical research were discussed. The best possible direction for the development of professional social work in Vietnam was identified as being generalist, across a range of social needs and methods of practice, and well trained. A framework for planning the human resources that might reasonably be attainable was then proposed.

This chapter summarises that discussion in the form of specific recommendations. Each of these is presented with brief clarifying notes. They are numbered consecutively in order with no implications for a hierarchy of significance. The chapter then draws the report to a conclusion by looking at the overall implications of these recommendations for decision-making and action.

### **Summary of recommendations**

What should social workers do?

1. Social workers should be engaged in providing counselling, family casework, case management, groupwork, community development, program planning, social policy and social research in all areas of social need.

It is recommended that as a profession social work should be regarded as encompassing all the methods of practice that have been identified in the research. Although specific jobs will require specialization the profession as a whole should be understood in terms of its common knowledge and skill base, and its values, with specialties practised according to demand. (One implication of this is that proper training is necessary at all levels and for all types of work – see below.)

2. Social workers should be engaged in working with children in need of special protection, adults (such as isolated elderly people) who are in need of social protection, the treatment and/or rehabilitation of those who are involved in or affected by social ‘evils’, social care and support to patients in hospitals and other services and to students in schools and universities, social and community development, and in the planning and development of these services.

It is recommended that the social work role should be recognized in all areas of social welfare and social service. Many of the tasks already being performed in services that are provided to meet these needs are, in effect, drawing on the knowledge and skill base of social work. Following this recommendation would enable those who are undertaking this work to obtain appropriate training. It will also enable a more effective complementarity to develop with other professions working with these needs. Who should employ social workers?

3. Social workers should be employed in all the government and non-government organizations that provide services to meet the needs that have been defined above (see list in Chapter 5, page 62).

Different numbers will be required in different organizations. However, in both the quantitative survey and the qualitative interviews it was widely accepted, including by senior officials within these organizations, that MOLISA and DOLISA, CPFC, the Women's Union, Youth Union and other mass organizations, People's Committees, Vietnam Red Cross and other NGOs, hospitals and other health services, schools and universities, and the court system, should all employ qualified social workers as they become available. So it is recommended that all these organizations should plan to employ social workers.

What training do social workers require?

4. Social workers should be fully trained in programs relevant to the professional level at which they are working.

All forms of social work, including the para-professional as well as the professional levels, require appropriate training. While the profession continues to develop there will be a need to continue to employ people in some jobs who do not have the full training. However, as trained social workers become available they should be employed. Creating opportunities for those already in social work type roles will assist in the creation of a qualified workforce and the retention of experienced workers.

5. Social work training at different levels should be integrated and flexible, to enable sufficient numbers of people to become qualified and to promote opportunities for career progression. The university bachelor degree should be seen as the main professional level.

It is recommended that the model of social work training should form three levels. The para-professional level requires in-service short courses tailored to the nature of the work that is undertaken. The professional level, which should be seen as the main level defining professional social work, should be the university bachelor degree. This should be sufficiently general so as to prepare students for practice in a range of settings and areas of need, although some limited specialization may occur within the MOET approved curriculum. It is also recommended that a system of advanced entry, through 'second degrees', should be created through which a person already has a first degree could train in a shorter period than the normal four-year bachelor program requires. At post-professional level there should be a variety of courses to enable social workers to maintain and develop their skills and knowledge. These are likely to be specialized in terms of methods or areas of need. They may be in-service or at university, but they are also likely to be short-term. In addition, the post-professional level will include master and doctoral degrees, equipping the profession with advanced skill and knowledge, a research base and also preparing social workers as educators to train future cohorts.

6. Workers already in practice, or those who are resident in provincial and rural areas, will require flexible access, including modular and distance modes of learning.

Traditional formal full-time programs will not provide sufficient graduates at the professional and post-professional levels. At the same time, those who are already in employment or who live in regional or rural locations may not be able to access such programs. Therefore it is recommended that consideration be given to creating such access routes. This would also include having program structures that enable a student to take parts of the program on a modular basis, in order to build up credits towards the award of a degree.

7. All training in social work, and especially the para-professional and main professional qualifying levels, should contain a sufficient emphasis on practice.

It is recommended that particular attention be paid to the importance of training as a preparation for practice. To enable this to happen students require supervised practice as part of their education. An appropriately qualified and experienced instructor should supervise such practice. When social work is an established profession instructors would be expected to be

social workers. However, while social work is still developing it is important that field instructors will be experienced and that they will be supported by the universities where the students are enrolled. Planning should include the expectation that as qualified social workers become available they will take on this role. For para-professional training it may be appropriate that agency supervisors have the responsibility to ensure that practice learning is accomplished.

8. A system of articulation between levels, and between professional social work and other related programs of training, should be developed.

It is recommended that clear pathways be created so that a person wishing to move between levels, for example from the para-professional to the professional, should be able to have appropriate learning recognized in the form of credits or exemptions. Similarly, where a person has undertaken other training that delivers a relevant content, such as the child protection training being developed by CPFC, this should be recognized for credit at appropriate levels (which might be para-professional, professional or post-professional according to the position of the student and the specific content of a program).

Should the para-professional level be regarded as part of professional social work?

9. The para-professional level is vital to the possibilities of developing social work in Vietnam. This level should be seen as part of professional social work.

It is recommended that para-professional workers, with appropriate training, should be considered as part of the overall framework for social work. The social welfare system will not be able to manage without them. Therefore planning should ensure that they received appropriate training, receive 'supervision' (in the sense of consultation providing guidance, advice and support) from professionally qualified social workers and be recognized as part of the profession. Employers must also accept that this level is not a substitute for professionally qualified practitioners. Para-professionals should be employed at the commune level and in institutions such as social protection centres, where professionally qualified social workers will also have a role, including the 'supervision' of the para-professional workers.

How should social work be organized as a profession?

10. A job code is now a very urgent requirement for the development of professional social work in Vietnam.

It is recommended that the establishment of a job code for social work be regarded as of the highest priority. Without this it is not possible for organizations to employ social workers in a recognized role. Unless this is done the current students on MOET approved courses will not be able to make use of their training when they graduate and may be lost to other careers. In broader terms, all the other elements of the development of social work now hinge on this one factor.

11. The public profile of social work is low. Attention should be paid to this by all stakeholders.

It is recommended that everyone who has an interest in the development of social work should take whatever steps they can to challenge inappropriate ideas about the profession. It should be accepted that this will take time, but other recommendation presented here (especially Recommendation 10, see above) will assist in this process.

12. A professional association for social work should be formed.

It is recommended that a professional association should be formed to enable social workers to collaborate in continuing to develop their knowledge and skills, by providing formal means such as conferences and workshops, and informally through the support for professional networks. A professional association can also ensure the maintenance of standards, for example through the establishment and implementation of a code of ethics. This would also enable Vietnamese social workers to make links with the international professional community, in the IFSW and the IASSW. In line with Recommendation 9, a mechanism should be found to enable the para-professional level to be part of such a structure.

How many social workers should there be in Vietnam?

13. Planning for a social work workforce should be based on an optimum number that provides sufficient qualified people in the various organizations but is realistic in terms of the likely growth of the profession.

It is recommended that a framework be developed that will facilitate overall planning. This should take account of the needs for social workers in the different services, the sorts of training that is now provided and what is

already planned, and the actual possibilities for growth over the next ten years. Using evidence from the research, the following assumptions are stated in Chapter 5 (page 70):

- One para-professional worker per 2,000 population full-time equivalent, employed at commune level, with an assumption of at least one per commune;
- Six professional social workers and two with post-professional education in each of the relevant organizations at district level;
- Three professional social workers and six para-professional trained staff as an average in each of the institutions (located in this order as they tend to come under provincial level organizationally);
- Four professional social workers and two with post-professional education in each of the relevant organizations at provincial level;
- Three social workers with post-professional education in each of the relevant sections of government ministries;
- All the university faculties having professional education and 50 per cent having post-professional education;
- A significant number of social workers employed in other sectors, such as hospitals (this figure is a rough estimate only due to lack of some data).

The figures that are produced are to be regarded as optimum in the sense that they will deliver a functioning social work service, but they are not 'ideal' in that the research showed people in the services can argue a case for a larger number than stated here. Using these assumptions figures can be projected for the years 2010 and 2015. For 2010, this framework will require 21,450 para-professional workers, 7,041 professional social workers and 741 with post-professional qualifications. This is total of 29,232 (of which 7,782 would have training at university level or above). For 2015 the number required are 42,900 para-professional workers, 13,641 professional social workers and 1,492 with post-professional qualifications. This is total of 58,033 (of which 15,133 would have training at university level or above). It is recommended that human resource planning, including employment and training opportunities, be based on this scale of development.

## **Conclusion**

Professional social work has been developing in Vietnam for many years. Progress has been slow, but in recent years significant steps have been taken through the MOET approved curriculum. The support provided for the project reported here, from MOLISA, CPFC, MOET, the Women's Union, the universities and other organizations, is evidence of wide-spread acceptance that professional social work should be placed on a firmer

foundation and its growth accelerated. The needs of Vietnamese society as it undergoes economic development are such that strengthening social work would be timely in order to address the many social issues that accompany a growing economy.

This report has presented findings from the quantitative survey that provided data about the present situation and from the qualitative interviews that revealed many ideas about what is needed for the development of social work. It has used these findings to make recommendations that will enable action to be taken to ensure that planning for human resources and training can support this development. The scale of growth that has been suggested for the next decade is feasible, but will require support and action from many stakeholders. It is to be hoped that this will occur, so that Vietnam can benefit from an appropriately educated professional workforce as a central element in the provision of social welfare.

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# Appendix A

## The Quantitative Survey: Organizational Level Questionnaire

Senior levels (policy, management and supervisory in government and non-government agencies to be surveyed with the following questions (\*where starred select appropriate term):

1. In which ministry/department/ agency/organisation* do you work?		
2. What is your position?		
3. Gender?	Male Female	A B
4. What is your age?		
5. With which of the following areas of need does your ministry/department/ agency/organisation* work		
	child care child protection disability marriage/family prostitution mental health HIV/AIDS drug misuse poverty/economic issues isolated elderly Other (Please specify)	yes/no yes/no yes/no yes/no yes/no yes/no yes/no yes/no yes/no yes/no
6a. How many people are employed in your ministry/ department/agency/ organisation* in work related to these areas of need?		
6b. How many of these are managers?		
6c. How many of these are direct workers?		
6d. What is the number who are male?		
6e. What is the number who are female?		
7. What is the highest level of qualification of the staff? (Please give number for each level.)		
	Not yet graduated from high school High school Intermediate level College Bachelor Masters	
8. How many staff have social work training (by highest level of qualification)		
	Short-term training Intermediate College Bachelor Masters	

<p>9. What other qualifications or training do people working in these areas have and how many of each?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">teaching medicine nursing law sociology psychology other (please specify)</p>	<p>A B C D E F G</p>
<p>10. How many trained social workers in your ministry/department/agency/organisation* are working in the following areas?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">counselling other direct work with individuals and families community development program management social policy social research administration other (please specify)</p>	
<p>11. What is the number of social workers in your ministry/department/agency/organisation* who need training?</p>	
<p>12. In which types of work do you think social workers should be employed in your ministry/department/agency/organisation*? (Please state the number)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">child care/protection disability marriage and family prostitution mental health HIV/AIDS drug misuse poverty/economic issues isolated elderly other (please specify)</p>	
<p>13. What levels of training are required in your ministry/department/agency/organisation*? (Please state numbers)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Primary High school Intermediate College Bachelor Masters</p>	
<p>14a. What type of training is required? (Please state numbers)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Short course in-service Long-term in-service Formal general social work course Formal specialist social work course</p> <p>14b. What is the number of staff who need access to distance education programs?</p>	
<p>15. How many social workers do you estimate that your ministry/department/agency/ organisation* would employ if qualified staff were available?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Counselling Other direct work with individuals or families Community development</p>	

	Program management Social policy Social research Administration Other (please specify)	
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# Appendix B

## The Quantitative Survey: Practice Level Questionnaire

Quantitative questions for service level workers  
For direct services provider or social worker

1. Name:				
2. Place of work:				
3. Position:				
4. Are you male or female?				M/F
5. How old are you?				
6. What type of location is your family from? (select one)				
rural small town regional town major city				
7. What is your highest level of education? (select one)				
not graduate from school school intermediate College degree bachelors degree masters degree doctorate				
8. Where do you work?				
Ha Noi Ho Chi Minh City Lang Son Dong Thap				
9. What is your job or role?				
10. Do you have a social work qualification?				yes/no
11. If you answered 'yes' to question 10, Please let me know more about it by filling the table below:				
Content of training	Kind of social work qualification	Duration	Organization provide training	
1.				
2.				
3.				
12. Which types of practice do you do?				
counselling other work with individuals or families (please specify) community development program management administration social research Trainer other (please specify)				
13. With which of the following areas of need do you work				

	<p>child care/child protection  disability  family breakdown  prostitution  mental health  HIV/AIDS  drug misuse  poverty/economic issues  isolated elderly  other (please specify)</p>
<p>14. In which of these areas do you think social work training enhances or would enhance your practice?</p>	<p>child care/child protection  disability  family breakdown  prostitution  mental health  HIV/AIDS  drug misuse  poverty/economic issues  isolated elderly  other (please specify)</p>
<p>15. How many other people doing a similar job to yours are there where you work?</p>	
<p>16. In which of these areas do you think social work training ought to be a requirement?</p>	<p>child care/child protection  disability  family breakdown  prostitution  mental health  HIV/AIDS  drug misuse  poverty/economic issues  isolated elderly  other (please specify)</p>

## **Appendix C**

### **The Qualitative Interview Schedule**

1. What do you think is the role of social work?  
(Prompt: What tasks should or do social workers do?)
2. What skills and knowledge should social workers have?  
(Prompt: What should social workers be able to do?)
3. Who should become social workers?  
(Prompt: What type of person would make a good social worker?)
4. What sort of training should social workers have?  
(Prompts: At what levels should training be provided? How should training be organized? What should training include?)
5. With what social issues should social workers assist?  
(Prompts: Are there particular social issues that require social work help? What about children at risk? What about the isolated elderly? [Ask about other areas if relevant to organizational function])
6. How many social workers should there be in Viet Nam?  
(Prompts: Is there a great need for social work assistance? In what sort of locations are social workers needed?)
7. Who should employ social workers in Viet Nam?  
(Prompts: Government or NGOs? Market organisations?)
8. What work can you think of that is not being done because a social worker is not available to do it?
9. What are the difficulties which social workers are dealing with in their work?
10. What supports and help do social workers need in order to do their work well?
11. What else do you think we need to know about the need for trained social workers in Viet Nam?





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