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SDG-focused Social work education in Georgia

Abstract

This paper examines social work field education at two Georgian Universities in the context of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). After adopting the SDGs in 2015, Georgia integrated them into its national development plans. The Government declared SDGs as national priories. In collaboration with the relevant agencies Civil Society Organizations are progressing towards the achievement of the SDGs. There is a direct connection between SDGs localization in the teaching and learning space.

The role of social work programs needs to be highlighted in terms of maximizing their impact on the SDGs. In this article, social work field work teaching methodology is described ensuring SDG-focused processes within and outside the classroom. Case studies revealed students’ active engagement in accomplishing social projects leading towards the SDGs. They serve as an effective tool for enhancing social responsibility towards accomplishing their professional role within the wider social development context, promotion of social solidarity principles among people aligning with the first pillar of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development Framework for 2020-22 .

Keywords: HEI, Field Education, SDGs, Social Projects, Social Development, Social Work.

1. Introduction

Georgia is dedicated to the fulfillment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are integral parts of country’s development plan. All 17 goals and 93 objectives have been identified as national priorities within the timeframe stretched until 2030. The National agenda embraces 201 basic and target indicators against which the results will be measured and transformed into evidence based on which development of national strategies will be informed. The Government administration is in charge of nationalization process of SDGs in collaboration with the state and non state actors and international partner organizations (National Document of SDGs, 2019).

The National agenda embeds economic, social and environmental dimensions. To meet the SDGs Council has been established which with the support of secretariat underneath administers work of the following four working groups (National Document of SDGs, 2019): Social inclusion, Economic development, Sustainable energy-environmental defense, Democratic governance.

Quality of and accessibility to knowledge, education, healthcare and social services are key elements for sustainable development of the society. Health Care and Education are declared as national priority: universal health care program was introduced, social services have been retailored, education system underwent considerable reforms updating national curriculums, improving infrastructure of the education institutions, and popularizing vocational education in response to labor market demands (Governmental Decree on Human Rights National Strategy, 2014)[[1]](#footnote-1). This develops a holistic framework for social workers to intervene in the health and education domain – two core areas for sustainable development. An important news is the introduction of social workers in the educational system to support teaching and learning process, to make school environment healthier and more oriented to meet nonacademic needs of children, to accelerate social cohesion among school community and wider community as well therein responding to the cross-cutting SDGs, Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development (IASSW, ICSW, IFSW, 2016).

It is an appropriate stage for social work to address problems of children, youth, their families, communities, and become more “vocal” as public intellectuals (Jayasooria, 2016). Despite the fact that the proportion of total government spending on essential services such as education, healthcare and social protection is increased, the Pandemic will supposedly have a complex negative impact for Georgia as for the whole world. In response to this challenge social work has its say.

To ensure being on track with the 2030 agenda, SDGs monitoring is fulfilled yearly by the secretariat via specially run electronic platform[[2]](#footnote-2) (National Document of SDG, 2019),giving the monitoring entities a month period prior to presentation of the report in front of the council and thematic working group[[3]](#footnote-3). Georgia presented its first Voluntary National Review (VNR) in 2016 on High Level Political Forum-HLPF and is preparing reports yearly since then (VNR)[[4]](#footnote-4). Herein social workers have their say in ameliorating social and environmental injustices not only on the local level, but on international level as well. The profession has its responsibility to participate in global social and environmental movements (Lombard, 2015). It is of core importance that social workers realize the global dimension of problems that they see and encounter in their own countries (Ife, 2012).

Promotion of peaceful and prosperous life for people on globe SDGs agenda calls social workers together with other social development professionals to connect human and environmental dimensions of their work by linking with environmental and social justice. By doing so they will echo injustices faced by people they serve and advocate against “existing unsustainable order” (Raniga & Zelnick, 2014:393). Social Workers are crucial actors to meet most of the SDG targets and are dedicated to work on poverty alleviation, enhancement of well being, quality education, gender equality, decent work. They apply methodologies which support community empowerment, increase social cohesion, strengthen social relationships and align with the fourth pillar of The Global Agenda of Social Work and Social Development focusing on strengthening recognition of the importance of human relationships (Nhamo & Mjimba, 2020).

This paper examines social work field education at two Georgian Universities in the context of current needs of social work workforce of Georgian welfare system and the national sustainable development agenda in the country. It attempts to realize how local efforts contribute to the promotion of global initiatives to make the world fairer and more sustainable.

2. Need for qualified social workers in Georgia

Newly adopted Law on Social Work regulates direct social work practice (Parliament of Georgia, 2018). All professionals in the field have to be diplomised social workers. This is promising with regards to service provision quality and avoidance of harm to service recipients. In addition to child welfare and justice systems, where social work was institutionally developed initially, the law introduced social work in health and education domain, where the recruitment of first social workers started shortly after the adoption of the law by the Parliament of Georgia in 2018. However, sporadic work with various target groups such as Internally Displaced People, Women Victims of Domestic Violence, People with Substance Abuse problems and other groups. has started mainly by non governmental sector prior to the adoption of the law. The law presents a new sector of social work practice – municipal level. Prior to the adoption of the law, state social work service was provided by central agencies and non-state by NGOs (Shatberashvili, 2011).

Both newly introduced sector and domains are important social (health and education) service providers where social justice and equal opportunities are determinants of life chances and well-being. Therefore it is of crucial importance that young social workers are aware of national as well as international agendas for development in these directions as well as professional obligations within these frameworks. Especially important is to redirect social workers’ focus on global social and environmental problems.

The ongoing reforms in child welfare and justice systems requires from social workers pure knowledge of human relationships in social environment, between carers and those in care, imprisoned and those in charge of monitoring to identify the first signs of distorted relationships and address these impairments. The lawyer dominated system was not properly aware of the role of supportive professionals, especially of social workers. This appeared to be a great pressure for social workers employed by the system that time. Therefore non or less experienced social workers have to be prepared for real work life.

One of the drawbacks of another system which employs the majority of state social workers – child care system still remains misuse of the social work practice. Social workers are unable to act beyond the assessment stage. Though the work towards liberation and empowerment starts in post assessment phases – in intervention and monitoring phase. The role of social workers are diminished to the level of care management, gatekeeping, providing less opportunity for exercising their roles as change agents who need to form tight connectedness with colleagues and service recipients. Child welfare policy is not sufficiently informed by practice, though grassroot social workers have their hands on everyday social problems. Strengthening of “policy-practice loop”, enabling direct practitioners to collate and have access to data that can form an evidence necessary for the setting of the clearer goals and more impactful intervention plans, will support the process of implementation of evidence informed practice leading to more meaningful policy development (Shatberashvili, 2012).

Same challenges are anticipated in health sphere with over-represented doctors and limited understanding of social work function in the system. Given the positive experience, when social work started to appear prior to the adoption of the Law on Social Work (Parliament of Georgia, 2018), in the mental health centres, young social workers who were pioneer practitioners appeared to be plausible factor for transformation of purely medical perspective into socio-medical one (Georgian Association of Social Workers, 2014). However, the process was quite challenging for social workers: at start the system undervalued social work due to its professional role ambiguity in health system and it appeared as hindering factor for identification of clear-cut standpoint for solution when a monodisciplinary approach is not enough and when a multidisciplinary one may be more effective; therefore quite often shrinking autonomy of social workers in decision making and action. In parallel educated social workers started to enter the system with the explicit desire to acquaint themselves to the colleagues with medical background. For them it took quite a while until they succeeded to reflect on the relevance of social work perspective to mental health practice. Their appearance obviously impacted positively on internal relationships among patients, patients and their relatives, doctors and patients. Of course, the process was much supported by the pertaining recommendations of the international organizations to have social workers on board.

The role of knowledgeable social workers is of paramount importance, as is the building of firm bridge between theory and practice. Especially important is the practice during learning enabling young social workers to consult both with their supervisors in the field and professors at university, bring real cases for academic discussions, link the individual or local social problems with global problems and re-frame them within the framework of SDGs, Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development Framework for 2020-22 and in safe professional atmosphere, creatively consider how these goals can be met IASSW, IFSW, & ICSW (2012).

3. Social Work Education in Georgia

As in most Soviet Countries social work was not developed as a profession neither on practical or academic level in Georgia. Only the collapse of the Soviet Union and ratification of the Child Rights Convention (CRC) in 1994 urged introduction of the first cohort of social workers. They were trained to be able to launch the development of child care system in accordance with the CRC obligations (Shatberashvili, 2012).

This Process was followed by the development of social work programs at two universities of the country - Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University (TSU) and Ilia State University in 2006. Graduate, undergraduate and post doctoral programs in social work count more than 500 graduates for time of the writing of this article. However another 500 social workers are operating based on social work certificate courses prior to the development of academic programs in the country.

The academic programs were developed in accordance with the International Standards on Social Work Education (Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training, 2019) alongside with the experiences gained from the partner universities in Europe and the USA. The program curricula embed courses for micro, mezzo and macro practice and the practice teaching component. The practice teaching component comprises about 20% European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System **(**ECTS) of the whole programs, both on BA and MA level (Social Work Practice Placement Guide, 2021). It not only allows students to practice their theoretical knowledge but also provides young professionals with the opportunity to know social service providers, to get acquainted with the service delivery process, to realize the impact of the organizational culture on the service planning, provision and evaluation processes. They retain a critical awareness of the context in which they will be operating therein preparing themselves for the decision which sector, level, field of practice to target at after the graduation. In addition, they can reflect back in academic format what is hindering and supportive elements to implement social work the way they have learnt it within the auspices of academia. It helps young professionals to realize degree of connectedness needed for more effective policy and practice, to identify the emotional demands of the task, to form realistic expectations of self and the environment, to prevent burnout.

As social work is human rights profession (Ife, 2012; Staub-Bernasconi, 2009), social workers should set empowerment as the primary goal for practice. The SDGs call social workers to support people in participation on each level of their life, to monitor its implementation (Jayasooria, 2016). This provides opportunity to create local evidence on SDGs fulfillment and identification of the bottlenecks for accomplishment.

Below two case examples of teaching social work field education at MSW level will be discussed aiming at depicting the social work advocacy role under the fulfillment of the Global Agenda.

4. Case of Iv. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University

The social work master program at Tbilisi State University has both theory and practice components. For the purpose of this article we focus on the latter the primary goal of which is to enable students gain practical experience through effective field education.

The MA social work program at TSU administers field education consistent with program goals and objectives that emphasize importance of individual, community and professional empowerment in work on micro, mezzo and macro level for poverty alleviation, enhancement of well being, quality education, gender equality and so forth.

The field practice is ongoing under the professional supervision at spot and teaching under the guidance of university practice coordinators. The student is assessed by both the field supervisor (50% of assessment) by using a special practice assessment form and practice coordinator/course teacher (50 %). The assessment form is filled together by the field education supervisor and the student (Master of Social Work Program, 2021).

There are about 60 organizations (state and non-state, local and international) which based on the memorandum of understandings between the university and field placement organization implement non-fee field education component (Master of Social Work Program, 2021). The MA students at TSU have chances to practice at least in three field education organizations with various target groups in the following directions: Child Welfare Services, Justice System, Human Rights: cultural, religious and so forth. victims of violence, Mental Health, Addiction, Alcohol use, Disability, Developmental Problems, Contemporary social problems: Homelessness, poverty, unemployment, street work and so forth.

The first practice course named „Social Work Practice with Individuals“ is taught in the first semester and aims to develop students’ practice skills needed to work with individuals in direct contact with them. The second practice course named “Social Work with Families and Communities” is taught in the second semester and aims to develop student’s practice skills needed to work with families and communities. The third practice course named “Social Work on Macro Level” is taught in the third semester and aims to develop student’s competencies for work on macro level.

All students are mandatory to undergo field education however in recognition of prior learning, especially when MA student is graduate of BA social work program, TSU is considering to develop field education requirement from the next academic year. The plan is to launch social work practice evidence gathering process via field education component to inform policy and practice with the local evidence. Graduate students who are working and at the same time implementing the field education component will inform the practice with evidence under the supervision of TSU. Social work practice indeed needs to be grounded on rigor knowledge, experience and research. Vivid interaction between practice and research is critically important given the continual flux in social life. The students are supposed to take 5 ECTS of fieldwork in each semester, which equals 125 hours of work (90 in the field and 35 hours at the university classrooms and assignment preparation) (Master of Social Work Program, 2021).

Table 1: Distribution of practice hours per semester

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Topic | Hours |
| Lecture | 15 |
| Seminar | 15 |
| Field work | 90 |
| Preparations for assignments | 5 |
| Total | 125 |

Table 2: Distribution of field hours per semester

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Topic | Hours |
| Supervision | 10 |
| Practice Assignment | 56 |
| Practice Recordings | 12 |
| Seminars, trainings, conference, multidisciplinary meetings and other activities | 12 |
| Total | 90 |

Social Work Field Work Course students have to fulfill two components: a theoretical and a practice teaching course. A theoretical component requires 15 hours per semester for lecturing and 15 hours for seminar work, practice component 10 hours per week (in total 90 hours) during the nine weeks pure field work in one of the partner social service organization. The former embeds four assignments: preparation of presentation of their work in field education, case review on micro and macro level, fulfillment of social project. Students are free to decide to prepare The Social Project individually or in group.

Presentation of his/her own practice in front of the practice coordinator, who is a professor embeds introduction of the profile of the practice organization (history, goal, objectives, target groups, work methods, management structure, financing, current project/activities), self reflection on his/her own practice, critical analysis of own and organization’s expectations to student practice, strength and bottlenecks, challenges. Accordingly the assessment is based on the following criteria: Description of the organization activities, Description of the own practice, Critical analysis of the practice, Presentation skills. Case Review/analysis on individual or macro level provides opportunities for the student to reflect on the case based on their theoretical and practical perspective via the prism of professional mandate.

The idea of social projects was introduced later in 2011 behind which was the development of sense of social solidarity, aspiration to make real positive changes in lives of people to at least a bit enhance their subjective well being, to let young and less experienced social workers see with the eye of service recipients and develop their service planning, implementation and prioritizing skills. Also the implementation of the project will make them more familiar with the given social landscape, become more realistic when they enter the real world of social work service provision. At the same time this assignment lets them implement practical work, though under the umbrella of the academia providing for them wider space for autonomic professional work independent from field education organizational culture which often is rather limited in vision of professional social work, focused on procedural issues, efficient outcomes at the expense of disregarding process requirements. After the implementation of the project they have to present their endeavor, regardless of the fulfillment of the goal however explaining the reasons behind. In compliment to assessment they receive feedback from the practice coordinator.

Within this assignment the main focus is on human rights and advocacy of social rights. It is written task, though followed with the presentation in front of the whole class. It should include: explicit goal of the project, target audience, objectives, implementation plan and timeframe, results, supportive and hindering factors for the goal achievement.

Accordingly, the assessment is based on the following criteria: Consideration of social work specifics, Participation of service users, Innovation, Administration, Goal achievement.

Several extremely impressive social projects have been implemented by the students. Being it awareness raising projects for various target groups on our profession, on human rights and tolerance. The projects vary in outreach and coverage. Some are targeting only an individual, family, community or purposefully concrete group of people or react on certain social problem or events. To name but a few, however some were hardly forgettable. Below social projects responding to the SDGs accomplished by students from both universities are discussed.

*Social Projects*

Project 1: Increase Awareness about Differences and Feelings of Others

Responds to SDGs No Poverty #1; and Reduced Inequalities #10,

Short description: Minorities are often rejected by the mainstream society, differences are not sympathized, diversity is not recognized. These are hindering factors to form inclusive and just society. Sometimes empathy developed only if you can hear the story from the similar not different others. The more open people are to diversities and differences the more loyal and inclusive is the society we live in. The more opportunities all people have the more functional they are therefore poverty and inequality is decreased.

The project was prepared by the MA student within the practice education component echoing the feeling of the children who are siblings of children with disabilities. Though the inclusive education is not newly introduced approach to education system, school personnel, parents and pupils lack knowledge about the differences, disability, potential each individual has if circumstances allow to reveal. Due to these deficit in knowledge children with disabilities are not always welcomed and/or supported in educational system, leaving them without education and socialization opportunities. This will not be reflected positively on their life chances. The project was introduced to school children to increase their awareness about disability, people’s rights and feeling when not accepted or avoided, ignored or rudely rejected, or when your attitudes or conditions are falsely perceived. The project had made tremendous impact, as the voices of children without disabilities were echoing their pain due to no inclusive approach of their friends towards their loved ones by their lovely honest and childish explanations.

Project 2: How can We Support Children in Contact with the Street in Reality

Responds to SDGs No Poverty #1; Good Health and Well-Being #3 and Reduced Inequalities #10,

Short description: Children in contact with the street are often victims parental neglect or violence. They often are obliged to beg, earn money on living or risky activities for themselves or others. Whole day they are in the street under the dangerous conditions, missing the lessons and lessening their chances for life, automatically decreasing opportunities for inclusion with peers, in school or other extracurricular activities. Their health and well-being is under constant danger now and in the future.

The project was prepared by the group of MA students. It aimed at increasing public awareness about due and correct action when one sees a child in the street begging for assistance, missing the school, standing in the harsh conditions: in the crossroads, under the sun. The child welfare reform in the country struggles to increase society’s awareness about this issue. The students choose interesting manner and moment to let people know why not to pay child in contact with the street. Unfortunately, one can still find those who are giving money to these children, who are avoiding to report if they see child in the street. The implementers of this project prepared simply visualized material that they exhibit in subway in the trains. The rational behind was that people at least from one to the next train station will have time to listen and/or look at them/their material and will easily remember visualized and heard. The project, though not planned this way, caused interaction between the curious passengers and the students. The students saw how the vision of majority about what is right approach changed, and even if some looked skeptical they were curious. This appropriated the authors of the project that if well planned campaign is prepared people are not reluctant to learn more about this sensitive issue.

Project 3: Different is Interesting

Responds to SDGs Good Health and Well-Being #3, Reduced Inequalities #10,

Short description: Students attempt was to demystify fear to new, unknown, therein decrease barriers to participation for those who do not feel included. The performance not only increased the awareness of by passers about the particular culture, but also depicted their openness to something new. Witnessing this, the ladies in distinctive attire saw that sometimes there is no danger or indifference but ignorance and time constrains to stop and ask, get know something that is unusual though interesting. Feeling included and recognized ensures well-being and good health.

Two MA students in order to increase tolerance towards diversity in the society stood in the middle of the crowded street in Asian attire and were asking by passers what do they think of this image, attire, what might be the traditions of these people, how might they feel if they come out in this apparel. This way they were trying to aglow curiosity and tolerance towards “stranger” in quite diverse though quite traditional country. The passengers were curious about the stories the students were telling, learnt more about the traditions of the “stranger” and also similarities that we all share, how it is to feel as outsider, inferior. What is hindering to openness to differences, why we are sometimes anxious when someone different lives or walks beside. Are these feeling, attitudes, prejudices blocking out true selves, formalization of normal human relationships between us. The students were surprised when quite many people stopped at their spot.

Project 4: Eco social work

Responds to SDGs Good Health and Well-Being #3, Sustainable Cities and Communities #11, Climate Action #13,

Short description: Students realized importance of sustainable development, appropriate response to climate change, its impact on people’s lives. They felt responsible to act, promote green social work and therein well-being of each person on the globe.

The pair of students educated students from other faculties about eco social work. This is new perspective in Georgia, taught within the International Social Work Course. They tried to explain connections between social and environment justice, sustainable approach to development. They were promoting green city policy in the capital of our country and together with other students made the courtyard of our university greener by setting several fir trees. They disseminated their knowledge about eco social work, realized the potential of the profession in achieving ecological justice.

Project 5: Access to Social Services for Single Mothers

Responds to SDGs No Poverty #1, Good Health and Well-Being #3, Gender Equality #5

Short description: Students identified single mothers as one of the most vulnerable group in one of the regions in Georgia. They tried to increase women’s awareness about their rights and their social competencies in search of support for their basic needs. With this project they empowered those women who felt discriminated from the mainstream society.

Social Work students created group in social network for advocating for the rights of single mothers who due to the lack of support were isolated from the mainstream society. They were mainly at home, jobless, alone with their children. 18 single mothers got affiliated in the group. The students conducted social service mapping in the target region and introduced to single mothers. They invited experienced social worker to conduct social advocacy training for single mothers. The students conducted needs assessment and arranged roundtable meeting in the municipal social service unit where single mothers presented their needs. For the presentation women were prepared and supported by the students. The women confidently justified their needs and shared their stories with the municipal workers. They said it was the first time they voiced their personal stories on community level and felt heard. After this meeting women were often invited on community meetings and their level of participation in ongoing local activities increased. They felt included and their feeling of “otherness” disappeared.

Project 6: Access to Decent Employment for People with Disabilities

Responds to SDGs No Poverty #1, Good Health and Well-Being #3, Decent Work and Economic Growth #8

Short description: Students mobilized local employers to support young people with disabilities in employment. They educated employers and parents of these young people about their legitimate need to be employed and part of ongoing social processes.

Two students had their field placement practice in one of the day care centers for adults with disabilities. They learnt that several young boys and girls with disabilities were eager to work but their over caring parents were not willing to support them in this desire. They thought that their children do not need to earn as they are from well-off families and employers are not ready to offer decent employment. They were not doubting their offsprings’ employability but rather were not assured about such need. Besides, they were saying that they themselves do not have time to be with them during the working hours. They were not considering the version when their son/daughter independently go to work and spend working hours in the office without them. On the question form the students then how they were leaving them in the day care, the parents responded that in the day care personnel is specially trained and competent how to communicate with people with special needs. The students realaized the scale of the problem and reason for parents’ anxiety.

Two of the young people had physical disabilities and their transportation was not easy. The other two had mild mental problems. The social work students found several jobs, where employer were not confident how people with disabilities can perform on those positions but expressed eagerness “to try”. The students assured employers about candidates’ capabilities, informed them about expected working conditions and environment. They met with the parents of young people with disabilities with the efforts to advocate for their rights to work. They educated parents about the social and economic value of employment for their offsprings. They connected two people with physical disabilities with the NGOs who have special cars for people in wheelchairs.

Finally, the students supported four young people with disabilities to get employed, assured parents to respect their children’s independence and not accompany them to work. Meanwhile the young social workers were providing in-service trainings for employers and counseling for newly employed youngsters with disabilities and their families. After a month the employers recognized not only effective performance of the new employees but also increased awareness of the personnel about human capabilities, strength of togetherness. They even noticed positively changed working environment.

5. Case of Ilia State University

The social work master program at Ilia State University has both theory and practice components. The program has its practice conception that includes all details of organization of fieldwork for students. The primary goal of the practice component is to offer a quality of practical experience through intensive field education.

The social work program administers field education consistent with program goals and objectives that emphasize importance of community empowerment in the helping process to work on poverty alleviation, enhancement of well being, quality education, gender equality..

The fieldwork experience is an extension of the classroom. It is designed to provide a challenge to the student, exposing them to the myriad of social work practice opportunities. The fieldwork experience is designed to engage students in a supervised direct service at the macro, meso, and micro levels. The fieldwork experience provides students with the opportunity, under supervised conditions, to apply theories and knowledge learned in the classroom. Additionally, the fieldwork experience provides students an opportunity to reflect on their learning and to experiment and develop confidence in the skills they are developing during the experience. It is an integral part of the preparation process for students for entry into the social work profession and allows them to develop a range of intervention techniques and strategies suitable for use in diverse practice settings.

Practice component is accomplished through two formats: (1) Practice assignments that are built in the core and specialized courses. Courses require assignments that can be done only by using real practice cases from field education; (2) Independent practice component in which social work practice courses are offered to students.

Practice assignments that are built in the core and specialized courses are focused on topics that are implied in proposed courses. On the other hand, the practice component itself is comprised of four practice courses and are offered to students in parallel with field education. During the two years of study, student undergoes two different field education placements. The field education placements are in seven different directions. These directions are: (1) Child Welfare Services; (2) Justice System; (3) Human Rights; (4) Mental Health, Addiction, Alcohol use

(5) Disability, Developmental Problems; (6) Contemporary social problems: Homelessness, poverty, unemployment, street work.

In total, there are about 30 organizations. All above-mentioned state and nongovernmental agencies signed the memorandum of understandings with the University that covers details of practice teaching and learning, agencies and university’s responsibilities towards practice teaching. There are no fees to be paid by the students or university. All students are mandatory to undergo field education and there is no recognition of prior learning. In fact, prior learning of the prospective student is one of the selection criteria for enrollment in MSW program (Master of Social Work Program, 2019).

The first year (two semesters) students undergo one field education placement and the second year of study, students are supposed to undergo a different field education placement. The main idea is to spend longer time with the service agency so she/he can gain better and deeper understanding and expertise in working with the specific vulnerable populations.

In addition to field education, students undergo practice seminars. Each practice seminar is 32 academic hours per semester.

The first practice course named „Social Work Practice Seminar 1“ is a general practice course, taught in the first semester and aims to develop student’s practice skills in real contexts in direct contact with individuals. The second semester students are obliged to take the second practice course named practice Social Work Practice Seminar 2 „Homelessness, social housing and poverty“. In this course students are given theories and methods that are concentrated on homelessness. In addition, they continue their practice work that is concentrated in working with individuals and their families. Social Work Practice Seminar 3 „Children Rights, Harm Reduction and Reproductive Health“ is concentrated on issues of addiction, reproductive health and harm reduction. The student starts his/her second field education. Social Work Practice seminar 4 „Violence in the family: justice and social perspective“ is concentrated on issues of gender based violence, women issues and domestic violence.

In general, emphasis in the first year of fieldwork is placed upon developing appropriate foundation social work practice skills and knowledge. During the second year, the student is expected to develop increased insight and depth of understanding of agency and/or client systems and social work practice skills via exposure to a variety of experiences. Another area of emphasis is the student’s ability to develop diagnostic, leadership, and administrative skills, as well as increase their competency of their foundation practice skills (Master of Social Work Program, 2019).

In the first semester students initiate their assignments by becoming oriented to the agency placement. Students initially observe professionals in practice and later in the semester may begin to carry caseloads, case assignments, and participate in client, agency, and community activities. If students are assigned caseloads, they are expected to carry and manage them with the guidance of the field supervisor. The first year placement focuses on generalist social work practice skills (Master of Social Work Program, 2019).

In the Advanced, second year of Field Education, students continue to build upon the micro and macro knowledge and skills gained during the Foundation Year, and through advanced coursework, continue to expand their application of new skills in micro, macro, and meso settings. Some of these advanced practice skills consist of increased self-analysis and reflection, autonomy, constructive utilization of supervision, management of more complex caseload assignments and legal and ethical issues.

In the Advanced Year of Field Education students have more input on their selection of a placement site. The focus of the advanced-year field practicum is to provide the student with more advanced social work practice/hands-on skills. The focus of the second year field educations encompasses helping the student develop more advanced interventions and strategies that will help them work more effectively with all populations.

The students are supposed to take 6 ECTS credits of fieldwork in each semester, which equals 150 hours of work (118 in the field and 32 hours at the university classrooms and assignment preparation).

Table 3: Distribution of practice hours per semester

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Topic | Hours |
| Lecture Seminar | 13 |
| Seminar | 13 |
| Field work | 118 |
| Preparations for assignments (Midterm/Final E-portfolio and Social/Service Project) | 6 |
| Total | 150 |

Table 4: Distribution of field hours per semester

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Topic | Hours |
| Supervision | 14 |
| Practice Assignment | 78 |
| Practice Recordings | 13 |
| Seminars, trainings, conference, multidisciplinary meetings and other activities | 13 |
| Total | 118 |

In total, students required to get 24 credits (600 hours). During the two years of study, student undergoes two different field education placements (2 semesters for each placement). The main idea is to spend longer time with the service agency so she/he can gain better and deeper understanding and expertise in working with the specific vulnerable populations.

At the beginning of the field education a student, a Practice Coordinator (course teacher/The director of MSW program) and a field supervisor at field education elaborate an educational plan, which includes practice assignments that are assigned to the student during the semester. At the end of the semester the student is assessed by both the field supervisor (10% of assessment) by using a special practice assessment form and practice coordinator/course teacher (90 %). The Practice Coordinator who is a practice seminar course leader at the same time provides student’s assessment based on students’ mid-semester and final assignments. The student presents his/her electronic-portfolio (e-portfolio) of practice work as middle and final assessment. E-portfolios should include the following sections: Practice Journal (Self-Reflection Diary), Process Recordings, Bio-Psycho-Social Assessments, and an attendance form signed by their field supervisors. All assignments are designed to measure students’ by the fundamental social work competencies (Council on Social Work Education, 2015).

The students are also required at the 2nd, 3rd and 4th semesters to submit a social project/service learning projects (SL) that are concentrated on the specific topics of the social work practice seminars: Homelessness, Children Rights, Harm Reduction, Reproductive Health, Family Violence. These projects serve for accomplishment of the third mission of the university, which is to engage with society and address growing societal-economic challenges and SDGs.

Below we will discuss five SL projects accomplished during Covid-19 pandemics. All projects were accomplished by MSW students of Ilia State University from 2020 to 2021. All detailed information and illustrations of the projects are placed at the web-site of a social work resource center – the Research Center for Advancing Science in the Social Services and Interventions of Ilia State University, Faculty of Arts and Science[[5]](#footnote-5).

Project 1: Psycho-educational YouTube video channel for children

Responds to SDG #4 Education

Short description: The COVID-19 pandemic and associated response measures have led to unprecedented challenges for service providers working with vulnerable children and families around the world (Wilke, Howard, & Pop, 2020). Due to the lockdown, social service staff was unable to continue operating the day centers for street connected children in Tbilisi. Instead, the only option for street connected youth was to offer them newly formed 24-hour crisis centers located in the hotels. While being kept in the centers and not be able to be involved in the regular activities such as school, community events, work and other typical routines that were not available, creating a pattern of expected activity was helpful for street connected youth and staff as well. Continuing education, play and games in virtual formats were seen as important for both children who were isolated as well as for staff.

Social Work students prepared psycho-educational YouTube video channel[[6]](#footnote-6) aiming to make lives of street connected youth more productive and enjoyable while staying in the 24-hour centers. The videos had three different focus: (1) discussion on animation and teaching empathy and pro-social communication skills; (2) arts and crafts; (3) physical exercises and sport (Partskhaladze et al. 2020).

The videos were shown at all existing 24-hour crisis centers in Tbilisi, capital city, where most of the street kids reside. The children provided their self-reflection to the students in the YouTube comment section of the videos. The feedback was very positive and showed the children’s interest and motivation, promoted their informal education, psychological rehabilitation and enhanced their life skills.

Project 2: Needs assessment of social workers during pandemics and Information Hub development

Responds to SDG #16: Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies

Short description: Human rights are key in shaping the pandemic response. In order to build more effective and inclusive solutions for vulnerable people during pandemics it is important to equip service providers with the relevant information in a timely manner. It will result in better outcomes in defeating the pandemic, ensuring healthcare for everyone and preserving human dignity (United Nations, 2020).

Thus, in order to inform decision makers and employers of social workers about improving social work practice during the crisis, students were involved in needs assessment provided by GASW to study the challenges of social work practitioners and developed a set of recommendations for the state and non-state agencies working with homeless people, street connected children and youth, children in the residential care and other vulnerable children. Based on needs assessment of service providers, students has set up an information hub, serving as a forum for COVID-19 related information[[7]](#footnote-7). A group formed of more than 150 professionals to gather and share relevant research findings, professional handbooks, information kits, training and webinar links developed within Georgia and abroad (Partskhaladze et al. 2020).

Project 3: Online concert for the Tbilisi Municipality Shelter for homeless in Lilo settlement

Responds to SDG #16: Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies

Short description: Homeless people are the most severely impacted by the covid crisis as they are those who already face enormous challenges in a daily struggle to survive (United Nations, 2020). The restrictions directly impacted people’s enjoyment of the full range of human rights, including their freedom of movement.

Based on needs assessment of beneficiaries of Lilo shelter, students developed project that aimed to develop video-concert for beneficiaries. The video lasted about two hours. Students asked different artists (singers, poets, musicians and so forth) from different regions of Georgia to record videos of their performance and also addressed them with their kind wishes.

Students also made an introduction speech and welcomed them. This concert was very timely for people who were kept in the shelter and felt very isolated. The process of engagement of artists was very intensive and time consuming. This project also served as a way of increasing awareness of homeless people among famous artists. Prior to the project preparation, students form “student social workers club” at Ilia State University.

Project 4: Increasing awareness on gender-based roles

Responds to SDG #5 Gender equality

Short description: Gender equality is a necessary foundation for a peaceful and sustainable world. According to the National Study on Violence against Women in Georgia, one in seven women reported having experienced domestic violence in their lifetime (UN Women and the National Statistics Office, 2017). One of the ways of ending violence against women in Georgia is to change people’s behaviours, beliefs and structures that reinforce gender inequalities.

Students studied literature on gender-based violence, feminist theories, laws and bylaws on this issue existing in the country as well as the recent annual reports from the ombudsman office of Georgia. Based on the desk research study, students developed self-awareness raising videos. One video was about gender roles and stereotypes[[8]](#footnote-8). Another video was made on gender-based discrimination at work place[[9]](#footnote-9). Students disseminated these videos to pupils and their parents of one of the public schools in Tbilisi. Children were asked to reflect on these videos by writing a short note how it affected them and what do they think about gender based stereotypes and discrimination. Based on their notes students developed poster cards and shared for families living in the shelters. Both videos and poster cards aimed at raising gender based violence among families living in the shelters.

Project 5: Donate a book to the Municipality Shelter for homeless in Lilo settlement, Tbilisi

Responds to SDGs: Good Health and Well-Being #3,

Short description: Multiple services - housing, healthcare, professional development workshops and education should be offered at a holistic center to enable the gradual long-term development of a productive, healthy lifestyle for the vulnerable homeless population. Mitigation of the effects and prevalence of homelessness for the most vulnerable individuals is possible by the provision of free, localized, high-quality resources, support, and residence using a human-rights based approach.

The project comprised of different stages and its purpose was to increase awareness about homelessness among children, connect children with shelter and create library at the shelter[[10]](#footnote-10).

At the first stage of the project students arranged informational meeting with school children of one of the public schools in Tbilisi. Teachers as well as pupils received information about shelters and social housing and issues related homelessness and poverty. After this meeting pupils expressed their willingness to participate in the social action “donate a book to the shelter”. This campaign facilitated pupils’ empathy and charity towards homeless people. Pupils were asked to record welcoming videos for beneficiaries and also send messages expressing their kindness. For instance, these messages were: “do not worry, we can build future together”, “ I send you warmth”, “read the books, you will feel better”, “your life is good, do not worry, we are with you”. These videos and posters were presented at the final event that was organized in the shelter.

At the second stage, students started informational campaign “donate a book to the shelter” in the social network, in particular, Facebook. They created several posters and distributed among their social network members. As a result of this campaign more than 500 books for adults and children were collected.

At the final stage, students invited the general director of the [National Parliamentary Library of Georgia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Parliamentary_Library_of_Georgia) to provide a literature night at the shelter. The director gave a talk about literature and role of the book in a human’s personal life. The students treated beneficiaries with sweets and drinks.

Discussion

Social work programs have pivotal role in maximizing their impact on the SDGs which are national identified as national priorities. They carry fundamental role in the country with various socio-economic problems, which discloses itself even more explicitly day by day on the background of ongoing pandemic.

Two case examples showed that field work teaching can promote SDGs through SDG-focused teaching and learning processes within and outside the classroom. It is revealed that social work students’ active engagement in designing and accomplishing social/service learning projects could lead towards achievement of SDGs. Moreover, it serves as an effective tool for enhancing their self-awareness and social responsibility towards accomplishing their professional roles within the wider social development context of the country and the SDGs.

Though majority of social workers are state employees, social workers can not be defined in terms of statutory duties only, mainly focusing in controlling function of the profession, but should be focusing on intervention in the best scenario instead of strengthening and empowering their service recipients. Majority of social problems do not disappear simply by legislative changes. Even in the best legislative framework social changes are carried by or supported by professionals alike social workers. Changing social norms, therein increasing sense of solidarity, compassion, social justice, by increased awareness on various social problems and accountability to others, by self-identification about needs and desires, strengths and limits is not a solitary route. On this route people are struggling alone, to support them professionals are struggling even more if not clearly defined goals and frameworks, realization of obligations, responsibilities and sense of accountability in front of profession and service recipient. This route is leading way through Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development Framework (IASSW, ICSW, IFSW, 2016) in line with the SDGS. Over the next 8 years social workers can reorient their work towards social and environmental justice through their practice, social work education contribute to reaching this goal by preparation of specialist who can change world positively based on their education and practice.

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3. <https://matsne.gov.ge/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
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