NGOs in the Era of Empathic Civilization:
The Role of Social Work

Daniel Boo Duck Lee, DSW
Professor Emeritus
Loyola University Chicago School of Social Work/
Visiting Professor
Soongsil University Graduate School of Social Welfare
Seoul, Korea
dlee@luc.edu

Introduction

Is a new paradigm for the 21st century calling for proactive role of social work to mobilize NGOs in the field of international social welfare? To answer this question, the author attempts to apply the concept of 'the empathic civilization' articulated by Professor Jeremy Rifkin (2009) to international social work and social welfare. Critics of NGOs saw the residual issues of accountability in terms of transparency and the limited scope of NGOs to charitable activities (Jordan & Van Tuijl, 2006). Although more recent developments have sprung in the works of internationally oriented NGOs (INGO) in advocating for structural and behavioral changes of the major economic and political institutions (Rugendyke, 2007), more works need to be done in promoting human rights and dignity of people and in empowering the poor and the underprivileged for economic and social improvements (Baehr, 2009). Towards these goals, the paper will examine multidimensional approaches to both theoretical and practical applications of empathic caring with best practice with specific foci on relational and economic justice. Implications for social work education, practice, policy and research will be outlined for further discussions on the role of social work in global contexts (Lyons, Manion & Carlsen, 2006).

Emphatic Caring: Conceptualization

Empathy is a key to social work practice in establishing helping relationship with clients at various work settings. When social work began its professional training for practitioners, emphasis was placed on the process of helping whatever methods it takes- be it, then, casework, group work or community organization. The one of the cardinal practice principles that guided social workers from its onset to the present day has been not changed in their capacity building role for people—individuals, families, groups or communities.

The motto of "Helping people help themselves" reflects social work commitment towards 'empowering' clients in dignity, self-respect, and competence. Even in advocacy, social workers become aware of their boundaries of professional responsibility in maintaining the objective balance of self and others with respect to clients' rights and societal integrity. Biestek (1977) in his globally read book,

the Principles of Casework Relationship, underlined social work practice principles in terms of individuation, purposive expression of feelings, controlled emotional involvement, acceptance, the nonjudgmental attitude, client self-determination, and confidentiality. These principles uphold social work value in treating clients not only ethically, but more pointedly, with regards to human dignity. If the today's technology replaces an empathetic quality of humanness with its mechanic functioning, bureaucratic structures, and numerical identities, the globalization of politics, economy, military weapon systems, mass communication, and other profit motives may become dominant forces even in the field of social welfare. The recent rises of NGOs locally and globally can also be seen as buffering realities to many forms of injustice and dehumanization both governments and corporate world as well as other entities of hostility and violence have committed to humanity and nature under various slogans and justifications. As many casualties or victims of both man-made and natural disasters challenge global communities to respond more effectively in their crisis managements, preventive measurements and evaluative feedback systems. In this line of thinking, then, one wonders what can be a unifying conceptual tool for social professionals including social work to use in engaging NGOs and global communities of helping in multidimensional ways.

In this paper, the concept of empathy is further conceptualized in the light of global contextualization of social welfare issues and challenges for social work profession in the era of rapid globalization. Professor Jeremy Rifkin (2009) who articulated a new perspective of empathic civilization' and it appears to the author as an answer to the critical problem Alvin Toffler insightfully predicted in his 'Third Wave,' the coming era of post industrial societies in losing the essence of human relationship from technological infiltration into all fabric of society.

Concept of Relational Justice

Comstock et al (2008) discuss the relevance of relational-cultural theory (RCT) as a framework in counseling multicultural people. The core tenets and assumptions of RCT are explicated in reviewing the notions advanced by relational justice theorists including Miller (1976), Jordan (2006), Townsend, K.C. & McWhirter, B. T. (2005), Coy & Kovac-Long (2005), Birrell & Freyd, 2006; Ivy et al. (2007) and others. The authors note the importance of creating and participating in growth-fostering relationships as essential dimensions of human development and psychological well-being. The RCT model involves *identifying and deconstructing obstacles to mutuality that individuals encounter in diverse relational contexts and networks*" (279). They also recognize the contribution Miller and others have made in addressing the following points:

- o Identifying how contextual and sociocultural challenges impede individuals' ability to create, sustain, and participate in growth-fostering relationship in therapy and in life; and
- o Illuminating the complexities of human development by offering an expansive examination of the development of relational competencies over the life span (p. 279).

Relational justice as a core framework in the profession social work still needs to be conceptually articulated. There are several dominant themes in the s

ocial justice literatures including human rights and feminist practice perspectives. Reichert (2007) acknowledges that *"the social work profession, by any standard, has a commonality with human rights that should guide the profession in both p olicy and practice"* (p. 1). She proposes several steps to balance universalism a nd cultural relativism by examining the history of the cultural practice, the power brokers who determined the cultural norm, and the cultural norm in the contemp orary human rights (p. 10). Dominelli (2007) stresses an inclusion of new narrat ives in reconfiguring human rights and the promotion of human rights in social w ork curriculum. Wronka (2007) notes the disparities existing between the worlds of rich and poor and advocates global distributive justice as human rights. Ife (2007) advances his position to go beyond the tension between cultural universal ism and relativism by thinking human rights as universal aspiration. Midgley (20 07) links development to human rights by harmonizing social policies and econo mic developments. He noted that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent covenants on human rights still remain as pillars of governing huma n rights globally. Mohan (2007) ties human rights to globalization and democrati zation from universal social justice perspectives.

From the feminist practice perspectives, the issues of power imbalance, a nd ways to promote partnership rather than dominance are addressed in the boo k, Feminist practice edited by Nan Van Den Bergh (2007).

The Role of Social Work

The proactive role of social work to mobilize NGOs in the field of internat ional social welfare, for instance, with a special regard to the global phenomena of population mobility in terms of displaced and vulnerable populations. Theorists explain global move of people in terms of its dynamic forces of 'push and pull'. Pushing comes from various backgrounds of political, economic, social, educati onal, religious, and other causes including disaster, war, famine, difficult and rest ricted conditions of living, unstable environments of external threats and internal anxiety, and the like. Individuals and groups chose exodus involuntarily or under involuntary forces. Such movers seek more secure and protective environment s - be it working, living, or studying. Others seek spouse, adoptive families, fam ily reunification, job training, or political asylum. Migration as listed above takes many forms. Puling also occur to fill the needs of people in labor forces and ot her sectors of society to meet the demands of time, in addition to, sometimes, f or humanitarian causes. Such trends have been continued through human histo ry, but more obviously to free from poverty, oppression, threat, disaster, war, dis ease, and unsecure environments. This flow of migration requires not only extern al protective and intervention measurements for both individual and collective sur vival and growth as UN and many INGOs have been active, but also advocacy f or human rights, social and economic justice, recovery of humanity, and metaphy sical realms of securing human identity and aspiration (Cox &.). The United St ates, for instance, has taken more migrants, refugees, immigrants from all corner s of the globe including more people of the Third World and diverse ethnic, raci al, faith and cultural backgrounds than any other nations combined.

Here, social work needs to incorporate her emphatic caring role by proactively engaging in the process of helping, advocacy and constructive feedback in global contexts with multi-dimensional perspectives in order to claim the credibility of relevance for what the professionals stand. NGOs in the field of international social welfare should become another resourceful revenues for social workers to participate in, and collaborate with, the works of relational and economic justice in the light of empathic caring for the vulnerable and poor people and in uplifting the dehumanizing conditions of socio-political-cultural-economic systems and surrounding environments they dwell.

Global Challenges to Civic Societies in the 21ST Century

Gloabization has two edges of its direction—one towards building a progressive civic society horizontally, while the other, moving towards an escalation of destructive and unsustainable disintegration of human races. It has several dimensions including economic, political, cultural, environmental, health, military, technological, and ecological. According Miaz Murtaza (2012), globalization can either help or hurt developing countries. There are competitive edges as interest groups tend to seek their own motives, be it economic, political or military, by enhancing certain transnational flow of people into developed countries and technology and aid to developing countries. For instance, "the green globalization which will benefit developing countries and actually all humankind is very different from the neoliberal globalization template which today is globalization's most actively marked brand" according to Murtaza, a political economist at the University of California, Berkeley (2012).

Challenges to civic societies in the 21st century call for social professionals, including social work, to re-prioritize their foci on education, research and practice toward proactively optimizing of human resources and social capital from a new vision of 'empathic civilization' as advocated by Rifkin (2009) and others. Emergency of international non-government organizations is another sign of global involvements in advocating for poverty reduction, human rights and social justice, and environmental sustainability of natural resources and community development for better living conditions (Baer, 2009; Lyons, Manion, & Carlsen, 2006; Regendyke, 2007).

Global networks (e.g., SNS) among civic-minded individuals, groups and organizations are growing phenomena in this era of information technology. The rise of welfare states in developed North in the post industrial period has contributed to the role of governments in responding to the basic and special needs of their population, however, recent economic downturns and recessions have led to rethinking of the scope of public welfare system. Demographic changes, massive refugees, magnitude of natural disasters, epidemic breaks of diseases, and other demands continue challenging the welfare systems in terms of supportive revenue shrinkages

Implications for Global Social Work Education and Practice

Even all of the aforementioned promises have been suggestive of progress in promoting welfare and well-being of people on the globe, still many of residual forces of political domination and socio-economic structures make it difficult for NGOs to overcome the barriers of relational injustice across cultures and regions. Social work must play a pivotal role in advocacy and caring for the poor and the afflicted. From the beginning, social work made its commitment towards charity and social justice while attending to the needs of local and global communities for development and sustainability. The major role for global social welfare should continue to empower people and community to use their internal strengths and external resources in meeting the challenges of today's global economy, climatical changes, technological inventions, and social network systems. Most schools of social work and social welfare worldwide have recently incorporated courses on culturally sensitive social work practice, international social welfare and diversity. It is important for social work education and practice to embrace the concept of relational justice (Lee, 2008) in training social work practitioners and voluntary organizations as human right issues for children, women, elderly, refugees, incarcerated,, ethnic and religious minorities, LGBT, and migrant workers are becoming global issues across all cultures and regions. Today, NGOs are forerunners of global fields of social work and social welfare as they engage peoples and organizations at multi-levels of collaboration including the United Nations, major human services sectors, multi-national corporations, international networks of social workers and social welfare associations as well as other professional organizations. While promoting global social work education, the following principles must be realized:

1. The principle of respect and diversity;

2. The principle of global awareness;

3. The principle of cultural transcendence;

4. The principle of social responsibility;

5. The principle of advocacy for the poor;

6. The principle of service, and

7. The principle of shared community.

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