

THIRD NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EXCHANGE OF PERSONS

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Report of Workshop #I - 15: SOCIAL WELFARE AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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The Workshop discussed community development and exchanges in the social welfare field.

"Community development" is coming into usage throughout the world as a technical term applied to the effort of man to improve his condition. It is described by the United Nations as the process by which the efforts of people are joined with governmental efforts for the purpose of helping people help themselves. It is the result of the upsurge of people who are determined to improve life for themselves and their countrymen.

The community development worker starts by finding out what troubles people, finding different problems from place to place. The problem may be hunger, lack of dignity, lack of schools, or health services, etc. The concerns can not be measured by the U.S. scale of values. Once the concerns are identified the next steps are to find out how to involve the people and what the resources of the area are. The effort to help people help themselves may be slow, but it is sound.

The American social worker who goes to work in a less developed country should be cautioned that he will work in a situation very different from what he has known. Discussion of social welfare exchangeees who come to the U.S. for study or observational programs led to the following suggestions: 1) persons selecting exchangeees should know the social welfare problems of the country; 2) U.S. sponsors (schools of social work and social welfare leaders) should know as much as possible about the area from which exchangeee comes; 3) knowledge of the individual exchangeee's background is essential; 4) advance orientation about the U.S. before the exchangeee comes is important; 5) the U.S. program should be in communities where problems are somewhat similar to those in the worker's own country, and material should not be too technical.

One panel member questioned whether U.S. schools of social work in metropolitan areas can provide useful experience to social welfare workers from less developed countries. A Conference delegate from India stated that her social work education in the U.S., though not entirely applicable, had given her knowledge of how to work with people. This has been useful in training social welfare workers in India, many of whom are now in community development projects.

The question was raised about the value of the one-year exchange for social welfare workers. Assumption was that U.S. workers would be improved by this experience. Whether U.S. agencies would credit the work was more questionable. Foreign workers who study social work in the U.S. will, it was said, gain a broader perspective, some adaptable techniques, and learn that the U.S. also has problems. The disadvantage may be confusion from the multiplicity of experiences.

The age at which an exchange experience is most valuable was discussed. The assumption was that exchange programs involve different age groups for varied purposes. Experience indicates that age alone is not an adequate criterion. Social welfare workers seem to benefit most when they have had enough work experience to know what they want to learn, and work to which they will return.

Among significant contributions of American social welfare to the process of community development the following were mentioned:

1. Concern with and skill in motivating people to utilize their own abilities and community resources to work toward goals they themselves have set.
2. Experience in social planning and in mobilizing community resources toward social objectives.
3. Skill in the process of helping groups of people assess their needs and resources and develop a plan on which they will work together.
4. Skill in organization and administration of social welfare services.
5. Skill in development of both paid staff and volunteers in social welfare programs.

Recommendations growing out of the Workshop discussion included the following:

1. That the contribution of social welfare to community development should be the subject of a real study by a responsible committee. The contributions should be identified, documented, clearly stated, and publicized. Points of uncertainty, such as age, sending vs. receiving, the retired dedicated worker, etc., should be examined.
2. Social welfare workers should be added to the staffs of all U.S. embassies to increase understanding of the value of social welfare exchanges and to ensure knowledge of the social welfare needs of the country.
3. An increase in the number of social welfare workers in I.C.A. was recommended both to increase exchanges in this field and to keep the importance of social progress in balance with economic progress.
4. Pending the achievement of the above recommendations, it was suggested that material be prepared for embassy staffs which would interpret the values in the exchange program as experienced by social welfare workers who have been exchangees in the past.

Finally, it was said that the U.S. has many problems of its own. By a serious effort to solve them, experience might be gained which, in all humility, we might offer to share with workers from abroad. We must ask their understanding because we do not have all the answers.