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# SOCIAL WORK MODELS IN ADDRESSING STATE AND AUTHORITY-BASED VIOLENCE

IN DENMARK AND THE PHILIPPINES

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*Praxis paper on social work in poor urban neighbourhoods: Social models in addressing state and authority-based violence in Denmark and the Philippines*

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# SOCIAL WORK MODELS IN ADDRESSING STATE AND AUTHORITY-BASED VIOLENCE

## IN DENMARK AND THE PHILIPPINES

A praxis paper prepared in collaboration between Balay & Dignity for the Global Alliance

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## Foreword

In this paper, which is a collaborative project between Balay and Dignity, we focus on the importance of social work in human rights projects. As we have worked together, we have realized that social work is an indispensable part of human rights work because it addresses the relations between victims, perpetrators and interventions in a holistic manner. We also know that people who are included socially are less likely to be targeted violently and if they are, they cope better with the traumatic events. At the same time, social work is often an invisible discipline and profession, squeezed, as we show below, between other 'legitimate' professions (medical, legal and psychotherapeutic for example) on the one hand and people who simply 'help' others in a less professional way on the other. In this paper we insist that social work *is* a profession, that it *is* indispensable and that human rights work *must* place greater trust and resources in developing appropriate social work models. This paper is our small contribution to this larger advocacy agenda.

The paper is the product of the collaboration between four like-minded organizations: Balay Rehabilitation Centre in the Philippines, The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSV) in South Africa, The Liberian Association for Psycho-Social Services (LAPS) and Dignity, the Danish Institute Against Torture in Denmark. The collaboration was formalised under the heading 'The Global Alliance Against Authority-Based Violence' in 2014. The premise of the Alliance is that around the world and across different contexts, groups of people are deemed 'victimizable' by the powers that be – either state or non-state – and hence legitimate targets of order-maintaining – or authority-based – violence. The risk groups might include young, indigent and criminalized men in slum areas, suspects of terrorism, migrants and refugees, sexual minorities or alleged carriers of disease. Their alleged transgressions might be based in a legal framework (like drug peddling) or in moral norms (like sexuality). However, all are likely victims of state or non-state violence. At the time of writing, the Philippine 'War on Drugs' provides a chilling example of the legitimacy of violence against such groups.

As a central element in the collaboration, we produce a number of cross-cutting analyses of a variety of different issues while employing different methodologies. All topics emerge out of our common discussions on our different contexts and include linking human rights, development and violence in the city, legal frameworks for policing poor urban neighbourhoods, psycho-social interventions that transcend the prevention-rehabilitation divide, community organizing strategies and partnership models.

## Executive summary

This paper explores the value and contribution of social work models and approaches in the prevention and alleviation of the consequences of torture and ill-treatment in poor, urban communities. Historically, addressing torture and ill-treatment has often been perceived as a job for highly specialized lawyers and social scientists (prevention,) or doctors and psychologists (rehabilitation). While the importance of these disciplines is undeniable, their privileged position has obscured the value and contribution of social work, both as a discipline and as a method. In practice, social workers have constituted one of the main professions with feet on the ground. Often this has been deplored as a result of resource shortages, with social work framed as the cheaper, but less effective intervention. Yet the social work discipline is particularly important in interventions situated outside clinical and legal settings, in urban areas characterized by high levels of unemployment, social marginalization and different forms of state and non-state violence. Such settings require us to rethink how to deal with the prevention and rehabilitation of torture and ill-treatment. In these circumstances, social work practitioners are often the only recourse for assistance, particularly in terms of rebuilding relationships shattered by (the risk of) violence. This is not simply because they are available. In such contexts, social work models, theories and approaches are promising with their focus on relational work, empowerment, creating and facilitating community development, combined with their understanding of socio-economic factors as both influenced by and predictors for violence.

These reflections led Balay and Dignity, as part of the Global Alliance, to engage in an exchange project. The purpose was to engage in a co-production of knowledge and reflections about social work methods *with* social workers, rather than for researchers to evaluate the impact of social work interventions. One of the aims was to explicate the implicit theoretical assumptions and models that guide everyday social work practices in the two organizations. Hence, we worked with a matrix of social work theories and approaches against which we reflected on our different practices and assumptions. We found that while the two contexts are very different at first sight, we should not overlook significant parallels. Additionally, sometimes differences were primarily a matter of degree rather than an entirely different approach/reality. Overall the exchange resulted in the exploration of key topics including:

1. The invisibility and misrecognition of social work/ social workers,
2. Implicit assumptions guiding social work practice,
3. The informality of social work and
4. The conditions of work and the paradox of volunteerism.

The exchange and imbedded reflections proved beneficial to all those directly involved, providing inspiration and illustrating the centrality of social work in both contexts.

The process of exchange and collaboration between Dignity and Balay, illuminates what social work models and practices are identifiable in human rights work, as well as the challenges facing social workers and their practice. We argue that social work is a profession that is indispensable and human rights organizations would do well by placing greater trust and resources in developing appropriate social work models. We, in fact, suggest that social work in itself can and should contribute to preventing and countering the consequences of torture and ill-treatment. However, social work practices as well as ethical and theoretical foundations

often remain strangely invisible. Hence, it is a matter of urgency that we become more aware of the conceptual and ethical expertise that goes into social work. Furthermore, we need to become better at systematically documenting social work, as well as at developing relevant impact indicators.

The exchange produced a number of interrelated recommendations, which could serve as a point of departure for reflections and discussions on how social work can become more visible. These recommendations emerged from context-specific social work interventions in Mjølnerparken and Bagong Silang, and thus cannot be generalized. They are, however, of relevance to social workers engaged in human rights work and community organizing, and may inspire future endeavours in the field of social work:

1. Model development and model awareness
  - Raise awareness among social work practitioners of how social work theories and models inform / could inform their practice.
  - Enable reflections and discussions on how everyday social work practices can feed into the development of social work models.
  - Provide supplemental courses as a venue for in-depth reflection, analysis, and planning of social work methods and interventions. To complement the supplemental courses, which may be conducted using mixed methodologies, regular supervision and mentoring as well as individual processing would be helpful.
2. Learning, monitoring and evaluation
  - Develop new, innovative documentation tools to capture the informality of social work.
  - Use social models and theories as a stepping stone to develop indicators that can systematically evaluate the impact of social work without losing sight of the contextual parameters of the work.
3. Exchange and fieldtrips
  - Develop field trip methodologies to enhance reflection and possible cross-fertilization between different organizations.
4. Short courses and mentorship
  - Develop short-term courses in social work theories and models for volunteers and others without professional training.
5. Self-care and mental health
  - Focus on self-care practices and mental health issues in relation to social work practices.

# 1. Introduction

This paper explores the value and contribution of social work models for and approaches to preventing torture and ill-treatment in poor, urban communities and alleviating the consequences of it. Asking about social work models in relation to torture and ill-treatment may seem counter-intuitive at first. Addressing torture and ill-treatment has often been perceived as a job for highly specialized lawyers or social scientists (prevention) or doctors and psychologists (rehabilitation). This division of work, and the privileging of certain professions, has a long history born of the global anti-torture struggle, in which the disciplines proved their value. They helped put torture and ill-treatment high on global political agendas and delivered results in documentation and rehabilitation. While the importance of highly specialized disciplines is undeniable, the privileging of them has potentially obscured the value and contribution of social work both as a discipline and as a method, at least in theory. In practice, social workers – along with paralegals and lay counsellors – have constituted the bulk of the feet on the ground. Often this has been deplored as a result of resource shortages – both financial and in terms of people with the ‘appropriate’ qualifications in the global South. Hence, social work has been framed as the less effective, cheaper form of intervention in the absence of medical and legal intervention.

Against the grain of such assumptions, this paper suggests that social work in itself can and should contribute to prevention and addressing the consequences of torture and ill-treatment. In terms of rehabilitation, two follow-up analyses of mental and physical health, each carried out at Dignity (then RCT), concluded that important predictors for both mental and physical health were social relations and employment status (Carlsson, Olsen, Mortensen, Lykke and Kastrop, 2006; Olsen, Montgomery, Carlsson and Foldspang, 2006). This suggests that relational and social work approaches are central in rehabilitation. Likewise, our own research suggests that prevention – which is often seen as the domain of lawyers and legal experts – is as much a question of forming and cultivating relations between risk groups, communities and state institutions as working with legal and convention frameworks (Jensen, Kelly, Christiansen, Sharma and Anderson, 2017). In both cases, social works approaches can and must be central to the work.

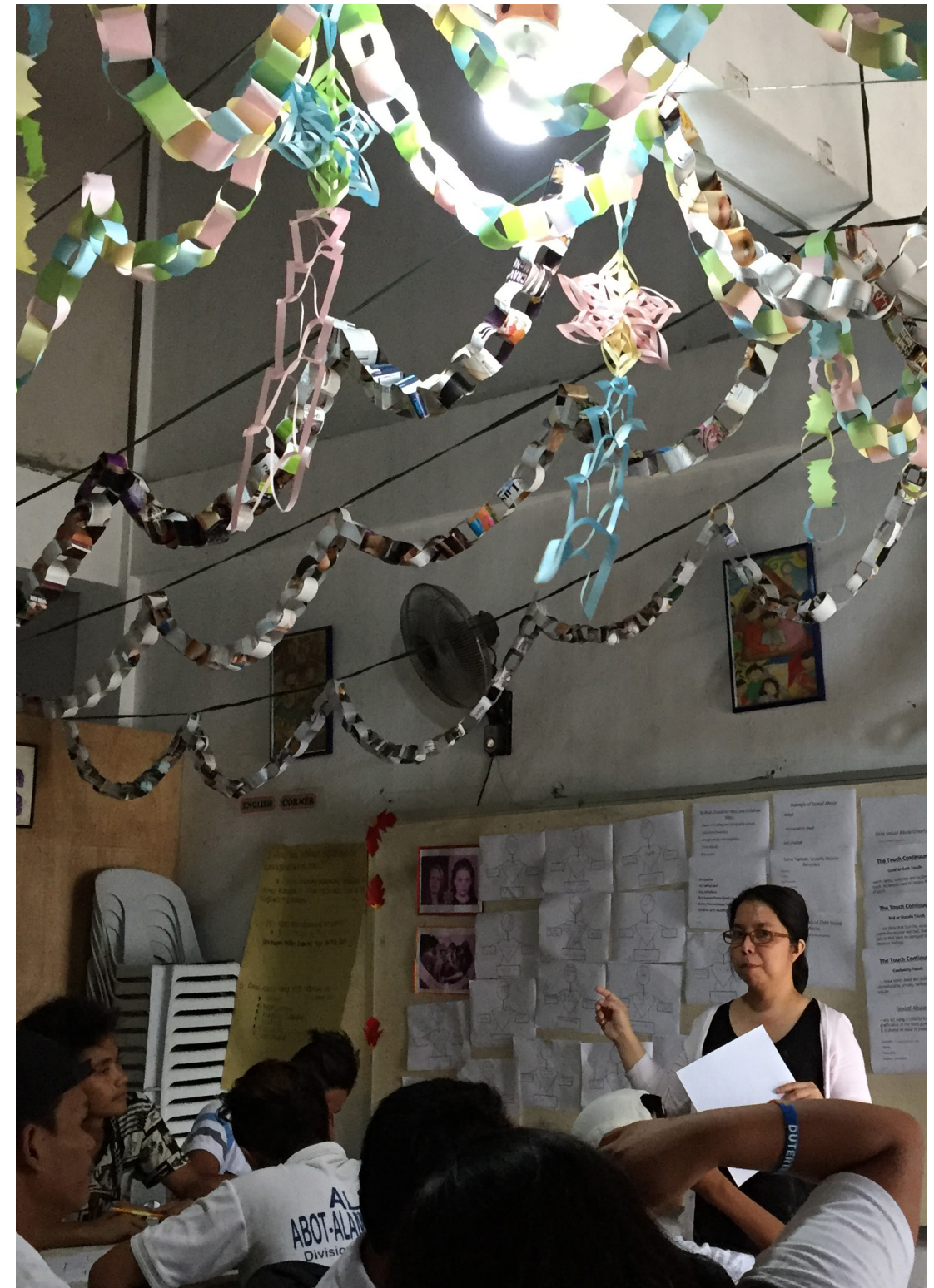
Working with social work models becomes even more imperative when we attempt to work in large urban contexts marked by high levels of state and non-state violence. Much work to counter torture and ill-treatment begins from the assumption that violations take the form of police or public officials torturing and ill-treating political activists in dark dungeons. However, as we show elsewhere, the urban poor fall victim to many forms of violence from many kinds of authorities – state or non-state – determined to uphold a certain kind of order, often their own (Global Alliance, 2016; Jensen, Kelly, et al, 2017). We refer to this kind of violence as authority-based violence. And while the state is not always the prime instigator, such violence often happens with the consent or acquiescence of the state, as stipulated in the Convention against Torture and Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment. This form of violence, often legitimized in strong moral claims such as preventing terror and drugs, is often seen as legitimate by large parts of the population, indeed sometimes even by those who fall prey to it. Hence, they rarely report police violence (Kiama et al, 2016); they rarely seek legal assistance, and if they do, seldom with the purpose of holding perpetrators accountable, something that comes with huge risks for the unprotected. In these circumstances, social workers and other people on the ground are often the only recourse to assistance and establishing or rebuilding relationships shattered by the (risk of) violence. This is not only because they are there, but also because social work is about empowerment and rebuilding relations in a way that addresses the needs of the people in question. However, social work is often described as “merely helping people” – something that many feel that they do. It is seen more as a practice than as a conceptually and ethnically informed profession. Hence, in this paper we aim to explore and explicate social work approaches and models as part of a human rights practice. We ask: *What social models and approaches can we identify in practical human rights work and what are the challenges facing social work practices on the ground in poor, urban communities?*

## Context, methodology and outline

Empirically, the paper builds on collaborative data collection in Denmark and the Philippines in, respectively, a public housing estate (labelled a “ghetto” by the Danish government) and a poverty-stricken relocation site. Some readers may legitimately ask why and how it makes sense to compare the two contexts. It is true that one of the areas is located in a hyper-developed welfare state and the other in a rather dysfunctional state run by a president who, at the moment of writing, has justified the killing of more than 5.000 people, primarily poor urban residents, in the name of his declared war on drugs. Such differences in context obviously result in differences in interventions, which we will touch on in our analysis. However, as we hope to show, during our collaboration over the past several years, and especially during the exchange, we have come to realize that in many ways the two contexts are quite comparable. Take the war on drugs in Manila as an example, in Denmark a comparable war against terror is being waged where the casualties may not be counted in dead bodies, but in high rates of incarceration. Furthermore, and more to the point, in both contexts, social work and social workers are central in addressing the same problems of families and residents: high unemployment, marginalization, violence, crime and family disintegration.

Methodologically, the project has been organized as an exchange where social workers from Balay and Dignity visited each other for periods of two weeks each. Each data collecting visit was organized with the host social worker sharing her work context with the visitor, allowing for interviews with stakeholders and partners as well as a first-hand impression of the work context. After each day (sometimes every second day), extensive debriefing sessions were organized, sometimes with resident researchers, in which social workers were offered a space to reflect on their practice – something that normal days rarely afford the chance to do. By employing a data collection template to ensure a certain level of systematisation and facilitating discussions across the two contexts and organizations, we ensured that the data was generated in collaboration between the researchers and the social workers. This exchange methodology sought to afford the social workers the chance to reflect on their practice in relation to an outsider’s perspective, and specifically from an academic perspective, by engaging in a conversation framed by scientific renditions of social work models and approaches. Put differently, the aim has been to co-produce data and analysis with social workers rather than about them.

We organize the paper in six short chapters. After this introduction, we introduce a brief state of the art of social work theories and models (Chapter 2). This is followed by two chapters describing the context, the approaches and the everyday challenges of social work interventions in Denmark (Chapter 3) and in the Philippines (Chapter 4). In Chapter 5 we explore the exchange as it unfolded and tease out the lessons for social work in relation to work in poor, urban neighbourhoods. In the final chapter, we provide some concluding thoughts and recommendations for further work.



## 2. Social work theories and models

What is social work? Which methods and models guide social work interventions? In this chapter, we address these questions in order to provide a background understanding of the social work discipline. Based on a literature review of social work, we outline five central theories, which inform current social work models. Social work, we suggest, is a discipline which is characterised by a gap between theory and practice. By way of providing an overview of social work theories and models, we aim to explicate the implicit theoretical assumptions that guide everyday social work practice. In later chapters we use these different theoretical propositions to explore the practices used in the work in *Balay* and *Dignity* respectively. In order to do so, we elaborate in some detail on the different models, theories and approaches, not least because the theoretical foundations are rarely discussed in relation to human rights work.

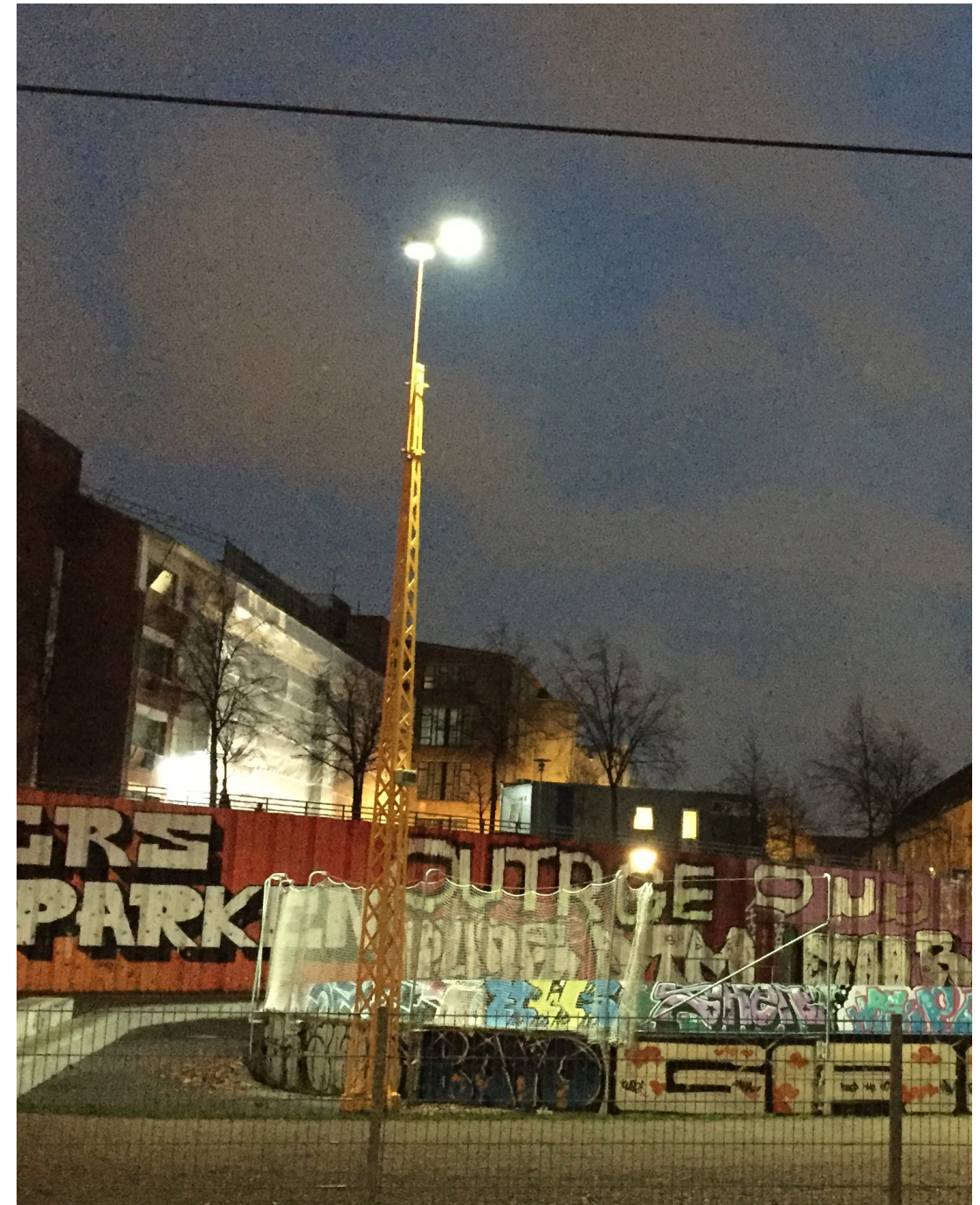
### What is social work?

“The social work profession facilitates social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.” (IFSW & IASSW, March 2013)

The above definition of social work, which is jointly approved by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of School of Social Work (IASSW), is one out of several recent attempts to define the social work profession and social work practice. Yet, there is no clear consensus on what social work implies. Consequently, social work theories and models are varied, and there is a wide range of understandings of the social work framework due to the dynamic and complex processes in which it takes place.

However, there are certain characteristics that are consistent across practices. As an academic discipline social work is more broadly characterized by emphasizing the relational aspect, having a holistic and eclectic approach to the practice and working in a domain between society and individuals (Hutchinson & Oltedal 2006: 14-17). Additionally, social work is a practice-oriented and action-demanding practice, which takes place under pre-defined conditions, i.e. social workers are required to apply their practice in a specific political and organizational context (Eskelinen et al. 2008: 21).

The literature on social work consistently suggests that the purpose of social work is to deal with the discrepancies between the needs of people and the provision of resources to meet those needs (Mackey & Zufferey 2015: 645). In other words, social work stems from the desire to help individuals and alleviate social problems in order to enhance social mobility (Eskelinen et al. 2008: 14). In this sense, the purpose of social work is informed by a universal set of core values that defines and differentiates the discipline from other helping professions by emphasizing values such as social justice, dignity, respect, integrity and competence. These values, it can be argued, are the basis of practice, yet they continue to be disputed (Mackey & Zufferey 2015: 645-646).





## Levels of social work

Social work draws on theories of human development, behaviour and social systems to analyse situations of practice and to facilitate socio-cultural change in individuals, groups and communities (Azeez 2013: 2). As such there is a necessity to work on different levels and to be able to distinguish between and connect these levels. In American literature it has been common to use a three-way division into individual, group, and community levels, where social work models distinguish between levels of practice, e.g. individual case-work, group work and community organizing action (Bergmark & Lundström 2007: 157). This way of distinguishing between different levels of practice is widely used in social work literature, and is also reflected in the typology of models.

The individual level is the most common level of social work practice. It is characterized by individual casework based on the psychodynamic theory, and by seeking to alleviate the psychological and social conditions that caused the problems. The general aim is to make clients more self-sufficient, psychologically stronger and less dependent on help from the outside. Typically, casework is a clinical approach focusing on the relationship between social worker and client which is based on confidentiality (Schwartz 2006: 69-70).

Group work brings people together in a more intimate setting surrounded by peers. People are brought together for different reasons: to learn new skills, seek help with facing problems, to organize collective action, etc. (Schwartz 2006: 70). Group work seeks to facilitate intellectual, emotional and social development through activities, which makes it a good tool for learning and experiencing, both in terms of treatment and more practical tasks (Azeez 2013: 9). Group work is an effective way of developing a critical consciousness and increasing a sense of self-efficacy as clients become involved and may identify with others in similar situations, thus supporting each other (Turner & Maschi 2015: 159). In this way, group work can help solve individual problems, alleviate psychosocial issues and enhance a sense of empowerment, while at the same time also working as a form of more holistic community development by facilitating a 'community' and a shared space.

The work at the community level deals with social problems themselves rather than the specific individuals who suffer under their effects. This level of working focuses on community organizing and social reform addressing social and legislative action, the development and distribution of resources, intergroup collaboration and organization of collective community problems (Schwartz 2006: 70).

## Social work theories

Part of the confusion that surrounds social work methodology is due to unclear terminology. There is a lack of distinction between methods, models, and theories, partly due to the many different approaches to social work. Hence, concepts are often used interchangeably, e.g. theories and models are used in the same way as methods to describe the content of practice (Bergmark & Lundström 2007: 158). When they are separated, it is usually theories on one side and methods and models on the other side, where the latter is derived from the first (Thorsager et al. 2007: 20-21).

Most social workers do not approach their practice with a specific theory or model in mind; however, their practice is, in most cases, unconsciously based on theoretical assumptions, as it is theoretical considerations that guide the focus of intervention (Healy 2016: 46-48). Social work models are so many and varied that it makes no sense to discuss common features (Thorsager et al. 2007: 9-13). Instead, we present a typology and overview of existing literature on selected social work models below. It is important to keep in mind that these social work models can be perceived and

approached differently depending on the constitutional framework, the context and the background of the client and social worker.

The typology of social work models takes its point of departure in five central theories, which form the basis of social work models and approaches. These theories represent the tradition of social work both in applied practice and in a theory-based educational setting, and they originate from aspects of the psychology, philosophy and sociology disciplines that have over time been added and adapted to social work (Hutchinson & Olstedal 2006: 15-16). Whereas all the theories address relations between individuals, groups and communities, the first three theories outlined below are focused mainly on the individual level, and the last two theories mainly on the level of society.

### *Psychodynamic theory*

The focus of the psychodynamic theory is the individual's relationship with society, where the unconscious and the concealed are highlighted. The social worker is given an expert role and expected to reach an in-depth understanding of the client that will help disclose unconscious trauma experienced by the client. The criticism of this theory is that it is easy to foreground psychodynamic processes at the expense of issues and structures rooted in society that also create problems for the individual in the first place, hence ignoring other levels of practice and, crucially, the social worker's mandate in society. Social work models emerging from this theory are centred on individual casework and task-centred casework (Hutchinson & Olstedal 2006: 288-290).

### *Interactional theory*

The interactional theory tradition has an active, meaning-seeking subject at the centre, where the social work practice is often directed towards micro situations with a comprehensive view of the individual. Interpretation and construction of the situation in the interaction between people is emphasized and the world is only experienced in an interpreted version. In this theory, the purpose is for each individual to experience life as meaningful, and to find a purpose and a connection in their life. The critique of this theory is that in its emphasis on the individual's free will, it underrates or even ignores society's impact on the individual. Social work models based on this theory include treatment-oriented, individual case-work, social group work models and existential models (Hutchinson & Olstedal 2006: 291-293).

### *Learning theory*

The focus of the learning theory is behaviour, including how it can be changed and how the environment influences it. Behaviour is seen as something that is learned in a context. The emphasis is more on visible behaviour than unconscious processes. The interaction of the social worker and the client does not happen until problematic behaviour from the client has manifested, from which point on the social worker addresses the behaviour with a goal-oriented strategy, namely that the client has to be able to live with other people without his/her behaviour causing difficulties. With this theory, there is a risk of a simplified and mechanical perspective on individuals. Social work models emerging from this theory are task-centred casework and problem-solving models (Hutchinson & Olstedal 2006: 294-295).

### *Conflict theory*

In conflict theory, society is seen as characterized by conflict, oppression and inequality in a context with clear positions and alliances, and where class is a deciding factor in power allocation. The foundation of conflict is embedded in society due to external factors and it works as the driving force of societal

development. The goal is to create a decent human life with others, where action and reflection are seen as one side of the matter. The role of the social worker is to be the organizer and enable clients to achieve emancipation, self-improvement and establishment of a life connected to the overall conditions of society. A critique of the conflict theory is that there is a risk of focusing so much on macro-level social change that the individual and relational aspects become diminished. Social work models based on this theory are the empowerment and community action models (Hutchinson & Oltedal 2006: 296-298).

### Systems theory

Systems theory is a dominant tradition within social work. The focus is on the relationship between people and the environment that they create among themselves, i.e. the totality is something different than the sum of the separate parts. The point of departure is the macro level, where everything can be divided into systems. The systems theory is helpful in perceiving more complex situations and promoting holistic approaches to social work, which exemplifies itself in a focus on different levels, e.g. individual, group and community work including communication between people and across levels of working. The purpose is to establish a state of equilibrium. The critique of the theory is its lack of focus on the individual and power relations. Specific models developed from this theory are system- and network theories, systematic casework, problem-solving models and communication theory (Hutchinson & Oltedal 2006: 298-299).

### Social work models

Today, social work models are ever-expanding in all areas of practice. Social workers can draw selectively on diverse models when integrating various domains of knowledge into their practice; an increasing demand in today's professionalized climate (Cameron & Keenan 2010: 64). However, more often than not in social work practice the employment of these models is implicit, with the strategic aim being to maintain the emphasis on professional expertise (Roscoe et al. 2011: 47-48) while at the same time making the use of such models intangible. In an attempt to get an overview of how social work models function across different theories and levels of working, a matrix of a selection of models is presented.

Theory	Psychodynamic	Interactional	Learning	Conflict	Systems
Individual			RELATIONAL MODEL	COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT MODEL	
Group	PSYCO-SOCIAL MODEL	NARRATIVE MODEL		ADVOCACY PRACTICE MODEL	
Community				EMPOWERMENT MODEL	

INTEGRATED PRACTICE MODEL

It is important to keep in mind that the systematized form of the matrix is a simplification of the models. In practice, social work models are used as a point of departure for intervention after which they usually blend together, interact and overlap across disciplines and frames of reference (Al-Ma'seb 2015: 820). Below, a more detailed description of these models is presented.

### Psychosocial model

The psychosocial model has underpinned social work from the very beginning and has formed much of its foundation. This model emerged from the psychodynamic theory. Consequently, the psychosocial model focuses primarily on micro practices with individuals and their relationships such as family and community support. However, the approach also emphasizes the link between psychosocial wellbeing and structural factors such as social class, power struggles and oppression, which aids an understanding of feelings and interpretation of behaviour as socially constructed (Allan 2015: 1700-1706).

The psychosocial model for intervention primarily takes its form in a casework method, but still incorporates the dimensions of social suffering and socially constructed feelings to emphasize the relationship between psychosocial wellbeing and societal structures. Furthermore, it is a model that is widely recognized in an interdisciplinary setting (Payne 2005: 73-74). Examples of more specific models based on a psychosocial approach are the trauma and recovery model, which aims to address reactions of traumatized individuals and families by using therapeutic services in a recovery-oriented approach; and the model of healing, which adopts a broader perspective and in which the client needs to engage actively in creating a meaningful social context for themselves based on the resources of culture and community (Allan 2015: 1707-1709).

### Community development model

There is a wide range of social work models for doing community work, but what they have in common is a focus on developing social capital, social inclusion and capacity-building (Payne 2005: 209). In other words, community-oriented social work is seen as the planning, organizing and changing of a community based on addressing social problems (Austin et al. 2005: 13). In this process, there is usually a distinction between community development, i.e. community work that seeks to engage people with shared interests and bring them together to identify shared concerns and collaborate to overcome them, and social development, i.e. community development in resource-poor or developing countries as an aspect of overall economic and social development (Midgley 1995: 15). Both of these approaches focus on the social and collective rather than the individual, and they are often reflexive-therapeutic in their objectives as they seek the development of smaller groups within the social order or improvements in the social order rather than overall change (Payne 2005: 208). As such, community development models operate on the micro, mezzo and macro levels with interventions aiming at empowering, rehabilitating, preventing, protecting and developing. Hence, it is a combination of individual work and broader development perspectives (Patel & Hochfeld 2012: 695). An example of a specific community development model is the social action model, which involves local action by oppressed groups in which they identify local interests that are not adequately provided for followed by a campaign or negotiation for appropriate provision (Payne 2005: 215).

### *Advocacy practice model*

There is long tradition of advocacy in social work, and today social workers are still advocating for vulnerable populations (Bliss 2015: 57). There is a clear distinction between two forms of advocacy: cause advocacy and case advocacy. Cause advocacy has a broader scope of development and social justice, and promotes social change for groups and their causes, while case advocacy seeks individuals' and families' welfare rights (Payne 2005: 295). It can be argued that the anti-oppressive practice is part the advocacy framework as it is an approach directly informed by both human rights and anti-oppressive social work in order to expose unjust policies and practices, promote institutional and organizational change and advocate for non-oppressive alternatives (Pittaway et al. 2010: 246).

### *Empowerment model*

There is often a lack of clarity when using the term 'empowerment' in a context of social work models, as it not only has different connotations for different users, but is also often used on different levels of working. However, it is used as a model primarily within the social welfare field (Yip 2004: 480), with the aim of increasing the personal, interpersonal and political power of oppressed and marginalized groups for individual and collective transformation (Turner & Maschi 2015: 152). In other words, as a model it is meant to help people take control of their lives. On the one hand, it is used when working on the individual level, where the aim is to help individuals from a state of helplessness and confusion to one where they can reclaim control their lives, discover an 'inner strength' and make changes, as well as strengthen supportive social networks. In this way, the empowerment starts from the individual's self-awareness and desire to change. Individuals are thus empowered through defined social roles, structures and responsibilities that facilitate social transformation (Yip 2004: 482). On the other hand, empowerment is used on both group and community levels to signify mutual support and collective action by disadvantaged and marginalized groups (Tew 2006: 34) to influence government decisions and increase their own political power to improve their situation. The empowerment model is underpinned by an understanding that it is not something that is 'done to' individuals or communities; rather, the role of the social worker is to work with individuals and communities to create environmental and social conditions that build community capacities and enable self-determination (Pittaway et al. 2010: 246). It is used by practitioners in counselling, case management and mental health therapy (Yip 2004: 480).

### *Narrative model*

The narrative model focuses on story-based accounts of happenings or events, and has roots in the psychodynamic theory. The narrative articulates and situates itself in a particular reality that reflects the social and political context of the client. In this way, the narrative model is a form of intervention which helps clients make sense of and understand their struggles through the reflexive and indexical accounts of what happened, to whom it happened and where it happened. More specifically, the reflexivity means that the narrative constructs a particular reality, while the indexical refers to the context that the narrative articulates and situates itself in. Consequently, narratives make a claim about the context and the reality (Roscoe et al. 2011: 49-50).

The narrative model is used in both individual therapy and casework settings as well as group settings, where the element of sharing, listening and trust building can enhance psychosocial healing and have an emancipatory and empowering effect. This can lead to development not only in clients, but in social workers as well. It is a reminder of the value of developing meaningful relationships and mutual respect when employing any form of practice model. Furthermore, viewing things from a different perspective enables gaps and inconsistencies to surface in any narrative, and hence a development and challenge of professional knowledge or reality (Roscoe et al. 2011: 52). In other words, the process of narrative

social work can be perceived as a conversation that starts with engaging a client and proceeds with a deconstruction of their narrative and a re-authoring of it that leads to new understandings, which in turn improve the quality of their life. In this way, the narrative model is not so much theoretical construction as a conversation between theory and practice; certain tools are employed that make the structure and process of the practice more open-ended and inclusive (Roscoe et al. 2011: 52).

### *Relational model*

The relational model is the practice of using therapeutic processes as a driver to affect change for the client. In social work practice, the relational model is relatively broad as it includes intrapsychic, interpersonal and systemic dimensions. It is necessary to consider not only the internal, objective relations, but also the individual's internalization and interface with the macro level such as cultural, economic and political institutions and structures. However, implicitly the relational model is based on the idea that the client is the point of intervention and not the larger system in which the individual interacts, but rather the meaning the client assigns these interactions and how it influences internal processes. The distinguishing features of the relational model are that the therapeutic relationship is an essential catalyst for client change, it is contextually based, and it remains open to new knowledge, dialogue and transformation (Tosone 2004: 481-485).

### *Integrated practice model*

An integrated practice model of social work implies using a combination of approaches to deal with different social problems. Such an integrated approach allows for innovative forms of intervention using a variety of skills, techniques and activities that both respond to everyday personal and social problems and present a more holistic development perspective. There are two dimensions to the integrated practice model: (1) it facilitates a combined application of social work approaches to a specific area and (2) by integrated forms of practice the target groups get a holistic development scope that encompasses all their needs. In this way, different methods and models are employed under the same system, which accentuates a sustainable way of practicing social work (Azeez 2013: 3).

## **Conclusion**

The use of social work models, it can be argued, is problematic both due to the variety in approaching them and the simplistic nature of models (Hutchinson & Olstedal 2006: 15). By using one model, one is forced to look into certain aspects of social work and neglect others, and thus there is a risk of ending up with one-sided generalizations (Meeuwisse & Swärd 2007: 212). Additionally, relational aspects of social work, and thus the very core of the practice, are at risk of being forgotten in the focus on theories and models (Healy 2016: 335). However, on the other hand, an awareness of how theories and models guide social work interventions may enable social workers to more clearly articulate the rationale behind these interventions and the implicit assumptions that guide them. As this is rarely done in relation to human rights work, we explored in some detail the different models, theories and approaches. In the following two chapters, we will describe the practices of first Dignity and then Balay in relation to these conceptual frameworks.

### 3. Social work practice in Denmark

In this chapter, we explore Dignity's social work practices in the context of a community-based intervention targeting traumatized refugee families in a Copenhagen public housing area. As we illustrate, social workers switch between multiple roles as they engage in varied types of social work activities. These roles are often characterised by the intersection of the professional and personal, which makes it difficult to identify the boundaries of the social work interventions. Taking our point of departure in this proposition, we conclude the chapter with a section addressing some of the challenges of social work.

#### Community-based social work in public housing areas

While Dignity's primary rehabilitation efforts in Denmark take place in the context of the clinic, there have recently been attempts to move rehabilitation efforts out of the clinic and into the communities in which Dignity's target groups conduct their daily lives. One such attempt is a four-year project focused on traumatized refugee families living in public housing areas located in Copenhagen and Aarhus called Project FLYV. With a locally-based and contextualized approach to the treatment of trauma, the project is part of a larger effort to increase collaboration between municipal, residential and non-governmental social work actors, for the benefit of traumatized refugee families, local communities and relevant municipal departments. Additionally, the aim of the project is to inform and expand Dignity's already established treatment capacity. The primary target group of the project is traumatized refugee families with intertwined social problems, characterised by high levels of conflict with their surroundings. Studies show that some of the families in the target groups have regular interactions with multiple social services, and have interacted with up to 50 different state employees including social workers, teachers and after-school care staff (Johansen, 2013). Yet, the multiple interventions lack coordination and represent different, sometimes conflicting models and methods, as well as different professional attitudes to the families' complex problems. Simultaneously, the target group has ambivalent relations with and perspectives on the welfare state. Therefore, the project seeks to reposition people in the target groups in such a way that they can regain agency in their own lives. The aim is to empower the primary target group of people with traumatic refugee experiences, to boost the functional capacity of its surrounding community and to mobilize them for action. Secondary target groups include professional agencies and actors working in the neighbourhood, as well as the local community, such as volunteer groups and associations.

The theory of change underpinning the project is that the quality of life of traumatised refugee families can best be improved through a holistic approach to social work, which augments the efficacy of existing services and strengthens both civil society efforts and the capacity of the primary target group. This involves a community-based approach to social work.

#### Mjølnerparken: An overview

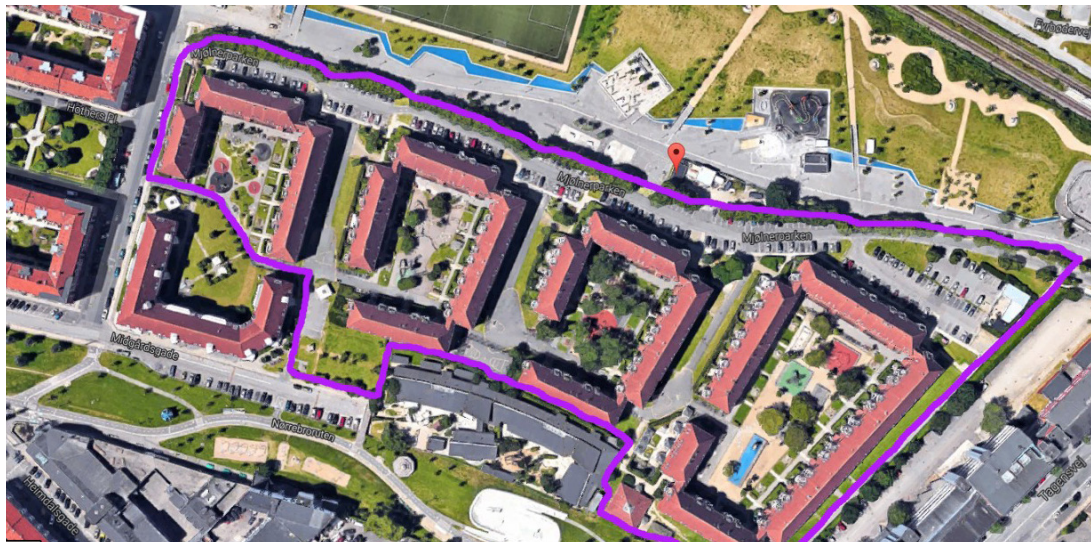
In Denmark, the vast majority of immigrants and refugees live in public housing areas that are categorised by the government as disadvantaged neighbourhoods, or 'ghettos'. Mjølnerparken – a public housing area in Copenhagen composed of 560 apartments with about 1,790 residents – is amongst the most infamous of the 'ghettos,' and attracts regular national-level media coverage. The area has 'qualified' itself for the government-defined 'ghetto list' due to the fact that (1) 82.6% of its residents are first or second-generation immigrants or refugees



from non-Western countries, (2) 43.9% of its residents are neither employed nor studying, (3) 53.7% of its residents have only a basic level of education, and (4) the average gross income is less than 55% of the average gross income of the rest of Copenhagen (Transport-, Bygnings- og Boligministeriet, 2016). As such, it is an area that is characterised by intense political and public scrutiny, multiple state interventions and comprehensive monitoring and surveillance by state authorities. It is an area characterised by quasi-state interventions, such as the Social and the Physical Master Plans, which are collaborations between the municipality of Copenhagen, the self-owning 'National Building Fund' and social housing corporation Lejerbo, which aims to improve the area with a focus on the physical infrastructure and the social dynamics.

When Mjølnerparken was constructed in the mid-1980s, the primarily industrial area was considered to be on the outskirts of Copenhagen. As such it was not a particularly attractive area to live in. Over the course of the past thirty years, Copenhagen city has expanded and the municipality has invested heavily in renovation/ gentrification projects to make the capital more attractive. Over the course of the past ten years, the previously abandoned freight train areas that Mjølnerparken was sandwiched between have been converted into the attractive urban Nørrebro and Mimers Parks. There are several ongoing construction projects in this part of Copenhagen such as the expansion of the metro and the creation of youth housing. Most significant for the residents of Mjølnerparken is the Physical Master Plan, which seeks not only to renovate all apartments in the area, but also to fundamentally reshape it, in order to attract more 'resource-rich' residents and visitors. Such urban renewal projects, combined with the recently introduced financial caps on unemployment benefits, are further marginalizing and pressuring many families in Mjølnerparken.

Map of Mjølnerparken:



## Social work approach

What are the principal theories, models and methods that guide social work approaches in the particular setting of Mjølnerparken? And in which ways are these related to the rationale behind the effort to develop a community-based rehabilitation intervention outside of the Dignity clinic, thus complementing established treatment capacity?

At the Dignity clinic, social work interventions are informed by a particular framework and funding conditions that make it difficult for social workers to employ a holistic approach. The possibility of conducting home visits or doing work in the community, for instance, and hence engaging with clients in their local environments, is limited. Moreover, assessments no longer cover the client's experiences prior to arrival in Denmark, which may result in a limited understanding of how significant events and experiences inform the client's current situation. In the setting of the clinic, there is consequently a tendency for social workers to rely heavily on the psychosocial approach and individual case-work.

In Mjølnerparken, the principal social work approaches are informed by the community-development model, the empowerment model and the relational model. In this setting, social work interventions are informed by a framework that makes it possible for social workers to engage in relational work and to employ a more holistic approach, based on the observed needs of the individual, the family and the community.

In contrast to the social work at the Dignity clinic, social work interventions in Mjølnerparken are often relatively informal – sometimes to the extent that it can be difficult to tell where the intervention starts and where it ends. Here, social work is a long-term process, constantly evolving in accordance with the observed needs of the target group. However, as is the case in the Dignity clinic, the political environment and the available funding also shape and limit what interventions are possible. As we elucidate below, the informality of social work must be understood against the background of the centrality of volunteerism and in the context of a setting dominated by actors who have no educational background in social work. Most importantly, however, the informality of social work is a reflection of what works when seeking to mobilise local communities and empower target groups. While more formal and structured social work interventions, like the treatment on offer at the Dignity clinic, are effective, experiences with social work interventions in Mjølnerparken demonstrate the need for enduring, flexible and informal interventions which take their point of departure in trust-building activities. In terms of models and theories outlined in Chapter 2, the work in Mjølnerparken is implicitly informed by a systemic theory where different spheres impact the lives of people and the purpose is to create a kind of equilibrium. Similarly, experience suggests that there are sometimes important hierarchical power relations at play. Hence, while there is a need to work across different levels, social work efforts must be cognizant of insights from the conflict theory. Hence, there are still important elements of the psychosocial model. However, there is an increasing focus on relational work and the importance of networks as well, which suggests a community development model.

## Social work activities and actors

When Dignity began working in Mjølnerparken in the fall of 2015, the first steps were to map the many different actors working in the area as well as the many hierarchies and power relations at play. In terms of social work interventions Mjølnerparken is saturated, with initiatives and projects ranging from individual counselling and group-based activities to community organizing and mobilisation efforts initiated by a host of state and civil society actors. Some examples are an after-school project called Sjakket, the women's club Café Nora, the men's club Café Ali and a job preparation initiative.

1. Sjakket is an after-school club for children and youth aged 8-13 that was started in a basement of Mjølnerparken based on the realization that many children were hanging out on the street. The project seeks to prepare second-generation immigrant and refugee children to become included and successful members of society, while also actively involving their parents in the process.
2. Café Nora is a women's club that offers a multitude of activities such as cycling courses, Zumba, job application workshops, Danish language training and field trips. The rationality behind the club is to break the isolation many immigrant and refugee women experience, while also preparing them for the labour market.
3. Members of Café Ali meet on Friday evenings to socialize and meet their neighbours. This activity also seeks to combat isolation, which is recognized as a serious challenge, especially in refugee and immigrant communities, and to build sustainable and self-supporting networks.
4. The job preparation initiative is a one-year after-school job programme for 14-15 year olds to help prepare them for the requirements of the Danish job market.

These four initiatives represent only a fraction of the efforts being carried out in Mjølnerparken, but are suggestive of the diversity of community-based interventions present. These interventions are coupled with individual social welfare case work, which is primarily conducted by the different departments of the municipalities (school, primary health, social welfare, employment initiatives, etc.). It was this complex social field that Dignity entered in 2015.

It has been important for Dignity to map out this complex terrain, both to understand the environment that the project was entering and to develop an intervention that complements and supplements what is already in existence. The premise of the project was to combine two areas of Dignity-expertise: the clinical rehabilitation work with torture and war-related trauma and the international partner-based community work, including with Balay, since 2004. Our initial analysis of the social work scene in Mjølnerparken highlighted that although millions of Danish Kroners are spent annually in the area on many varied, often highly competent interventions, the social issues remain in place. Hence, rather than proposing yet another intervention, which may compete with an existing intervention, Dignity has been working to enable, strengthen and supplement collaboration between current interventions.

Concretely, the project seeks to address these family, community and societal-level challenges through a model that intervenes on different levels. Competency development courses for mixed groups of professionals and semi-professionals, who work with traumatized refugee families, are used to disseminate knowledge about the target group and to strengthen network-based approaches. The family interventions that are currently being developed seek to provide

psycho-education and psychosocial sessions, and to facilitate the creation of local support networks. On a community level the project is disseminating knowledge about PTSD and trauma specifically, as well as how Danish society works and what resources are available to residents. Additionally, the goal is to support initiatives generated by the residents themselves to take on the social problems they consider most pressing. The learning generated by these activities in both Copenhagen and Aarhus will feed into the development of a model that can be used by actors other than Dignity when working with traumatized refugee families.

One of the main interventions that the project has initiated has been the capacity-building programme called the competency development course. It is a ten-month course consisting of training days, supervision sessions, field visits and take-home assignments for mixed groups of professionals including paid residents within social work, public health, education and child care. Although a core component of the training has been to pass on knowledge about PTSD and trauma, we have come to realize that the more central and powerful component is working with and teaching the network method, with the goal of organizing and coordinating the different actors and interventions. Already during our needs-assessment workshops, professionals expressed feelings of being alone with insurmountably complex cases and a lack of knowledge – in part due to a sheer lack of time – about other interventions happening in the area. As such, though knowledge about the target group was necessary to create common ground, meeting other actors working in the same field and exploring areas for collaboration has led to new mind-sets and approaches to praxis.

During the initial project period, much time was spent exploring potential collaborations with actors already present in the area. We sought to co-construct with other actors, hoping to create an activity that was both more sustainable and more innovative than if we acted on our own. The central collaborative intervention that the project has entered into is the Resident's Academy, a monthly information and dialogue event hosted in the Mjølnerparken Residents House. The events, which were launched in September 2016, are hosted with the Social Master Plan and three local volunteers. The purpose of the Resident's Academy is to create a space for information-sharing about Danish society and the resources available to residents, as well as for dialogue between residents and the welfare state. The involvement of volunteers is intended to help ensure that the events are informed by actual interests of the residents, to harness the energy and competencies available locally, and to build a sustainable foundation for the activity. This component developed in dialogue with residents and local professionals about where there was a need, and also served to provide project FLYV with a non-stigmatizing foundation to meet more residents and build trust.



## Challenges of social work

Community-based social work in the setting of Mjølnerparken contributes to Dignity's established treatment offering in a number of ways. First, it allows for an expansion of the concept of 'rehabilitation' – the idea is to explore non-clinical forms of rehabilitation work that can be conducted by the many non-clinicians who interact with the target group of traumatized refugees on a daily basis. Second, practising social work in the community of the target group enables a more holistic and context-specific approach, and a better opportunity to engage in relational work. Social work in this setting, however, is also influenced by challenges.

### *The role of social workers: 'Using' oneself'*

The roles social workers enact in Mjølnerparken are diverse, including 'connector', 'facilitator', 'counsellor', 'mobiliser', 'negotiator', 'advocate', and 'change agent'. Yet, there are a number of common characteristics that cut across various social work activities – the most significant being that of 'using oneself'. There are many people employed to conduct social work in Mjølnerparken who are 'insiders' to a certain extent, whether they are actually residents of the area or participants in the social networks of the area in their free/ personal time. Using more 'resource-rich' members of a target group to access and conduct social work in a certain area is called working with 'peers' in the Danish context. These local social workers make use of their personal experiences and social relations to succeed with their work. Utilizing 'peers' who are willing to 'use themselves' in their work, it is argued, nurtures the trust-based relations which are critical to community-based social work. Often such peers are hired without a formal social work background, because their personal experiences and knowledge of the target group are considered equally if not more valuable. Often peers will be given a basic course to equip them for the job - this and their informal skills will usually be the main guiding framework of their work.

### *Blurred boundaries between the personal and the professional*

One of the challenges relates to the intersection between personal and professional endeavours. As we have shown above, social workers in Mjølnerparken make use of their personal backgrounds and experiences in professional social work activities, often to such an extent that boundaries between the personal and professional become blurred. In many cases, this is a result of the fact that residents are employed to do social work in their own community. Furthermore, they are employed precisely because they share similar backgrounds and experiences with their target group, and hence can take up the position of an 'insider' or a 'peer'. Put differently, social workers in Mjølnerparken are employed to be themselves. Whereas professional social worker identities are often perceived as being dependent on a degree of distancing to the target group, the personal is constitutive of the social worker professional identity in Mjølnerparken. Although the intersection between the personal and the professional is one of the strengths of community-based social work in this setting, it is, at times, experienced as a challenge by social workers. For instance, some social workers experience being stigmatized as a result of their interventions, and such stigmatization comes to interfere with their personal lives in the community. Others experience that it is not possible for them to be 'off-duty' – their neighbours expect them to be available to help at all hours of the day.

The intersection between the personal and the professional is further complicated by blurred boundaries between social work interventions and personal engagements, and between paid and unpaid social work. As pointed out, volunteering is key to most social work interventions in Mjølnerparken. While social work actors enlist volunteers – for instance in the capacity of role models who can enable mobilisation – social work actors also tend to take up the role of volunteers

themselves. This ambiguous position may be one of the triggers of the 'burnouts' that social workers in Mjølnerparken experience, and simultaneously it may be difficult for the target group to distinguish between, for instance, professional counselling and personal advice based on subjective values.

### *Between exposure and misrecognition*

The flexibility and adaptive nature of social work is a key strength when developing context-specific, community-based social work interventions targeting torture survivors and traumatised refugee families with diverse backgrounds and needs. Yet, for social workers, sometimes it is exactly this flexible and adaptive nature that triggers a misrecognition of the value of their profession. This is just one of the difficulties social workers experience when seeking to explain to other professionals which theories and models guide their interventions. When social workers are not able to clearly articulate and explain *how* they work, it is sometimes challenging to document, justify and legitimize their interventions. This further perpetuates the perception of a hierarchy of professions, in which social workers are often positioned at the very bottom.

While social workers experience being personally exposed when engaging in community-based activities, as they are 'using themselves', they simultaneously experience being 'kind of invisible'. This relationship between personal exposure and professional invisibility triggers tensions among social workers. This tension is further fuelled by the lack of recognition of social work. In Mjølnerparken, the value and contribution of social work is not recognised. As such, the position of the social worker is vulnerable and threatened.

### *Competing interventions*

Social work in Mjølnerparken is challenged by a multitude of overlapping interventions. Inspired by diverging social work models, methods and rationalities, and funded by institutions with different social, political and economic interests in the community, social work actors sometimes end up competing with each other in defining how – and for whom – social work should be practiced. This results in processes of inclusion and exclusion, but also in a competition over resources and capacities. Some social workers, for example, feel that new social work initiatives have 'stolen' their volunteers. As a result, the organising and network-building that they had spent several years building feels undermined. Moreover, residents of Mjølnerparken are becoming increasingly difficult to mobilise as they experience 'intervention fatigue'. Some social workers describe the most tiring and overwhelming part of their job as communicating and coordinating with other professional actors.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explored social work models as they have been implemented in Mjølnerparken by Dignity and other actors. As having recently arrived in Mjølnerparken, which has become the object of multiple interventions, Dignity was faced with the problem of positioning itself in a saturated field – and yet, a field where despite the proliferation of interventions, the social problems seemed to persist. Hence, it decided not to establish yet another intervention but instead worked to coordinate activities there. This led to the establishment of competency development courses. Rather than teaching staff and volunteers exclusively about PTSD, the intervention focused on relational and network approaches, implicitly inspired by the systemic theory and community development models.





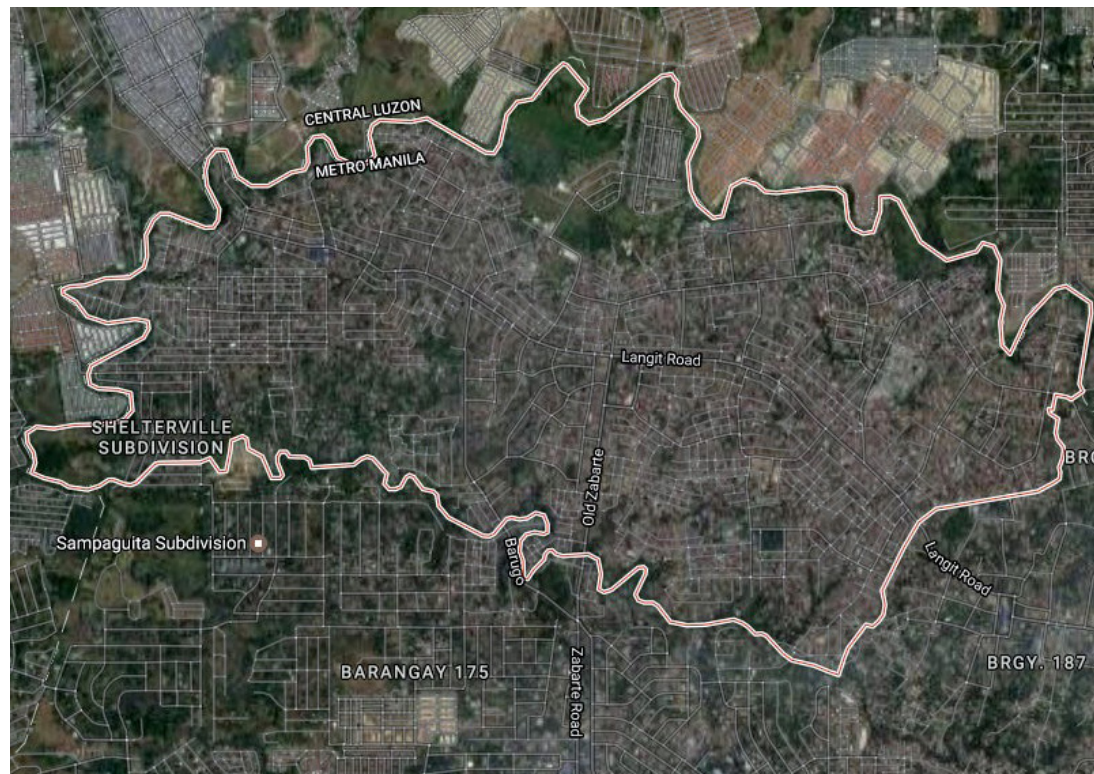
## 4. Social work practice in the Philippines

This chapter explores social work practice in the Philippines using as a lens the work of Balay Rehabilitation's programme in Bagong Silang, Community Empowerment and Mobilisation for Torture Prevention and Rehabilitation in an Urban Setting. Data was culled from different sources and means, including meetings and informal conversations with the staff of Balay and other NGOs in Bagong Silang and nearby, with community members, and with local and national government agencies working in Bagong Silang or involved in programmes for children in conflict with the law, community and home visits, and shadowing of community activities.

### Bagong Silang, Caloocan City: An overview

Bagong Silang (literally 'New Birth') is a relocation site where slum dwellers from different parts of Metro Manila were relocated. It was established in the 1970s but only began filling up from the mid-1980s as part of a last-ditch effort by then-dictator Ferdinand Marcos and his first lady Imelda to create the beautiful City of Man as a cornerstone of their 'New Society'. Bagong Silang is a very large municipal entity (called a barangay) both in terms of land area and population of approximately 240,000. It was initially referred to as 'La Kubeta' or the toilet. The name was given because at its construction, it basically consisted of roads, 90m<sup>2</sup> plots and toilet bowls as far as the eye could see. However, it does not take much imagination to see that Bagong Silang became the place where all the human waste of Manila ended up (Jensen and Hapal, 2014).

Map of Bagong Silang:



Like most relocation centres, Bagong Silang is beset with a plethora of social, economic, and political problems (Jensen, Hapal and Modvig, 2013). Interviews with various actors and stakeholders combine with observations to highlight overwhelming social problems like teenage pregnancies, various forms of child abuse, children in conflict with the law, health problems related to sanitation and hygiene, and drug addiction. There is a high incidence of human rights violations involving both state and non-state forms of violence, something made more pronounced by the recent spate of killings related to the newly elected Philippine president's war on drugs. Pressing economic problems include lack of employment opportunities and the wide gap between the residents' income and the cost of living. On the political front, there is little continuity when it comes to programmes and projects, and human resources are unreliable due to the political dynamics at both local and national levels. Priorities and staff in the various barangay service units change every three years in relation to local 'winner takes all' elections.

On a positive note, Bagong Silang has come a long way from what it was about 30 years ago. With support from different civil society groups, various support services are now in place. Vibrant and organised groups among parents (largely women) and the youth actively address the needs of the community. Hence despite the often rampant stereotypes from the outside of a disorderly, chaotic and violent place, many residents express a degree of pride in Bagong Silang.

## Balay response

Balay's programme in Bagong Silang is part of a bigger programme on rehabilitation and healing for torture survivors. In line with Balay's other work, the original primary target groups were to include torture victims as many residents were known to be political activists. In the course of initiating activities in the community, however, Balay realized that there was a need to work with different target groups and the focus shifted to children in conflict with the law. Education was seen as one of the means toward rehabilitation. It was in this context that the Alternative Learning System was introduced as a key intervention in the community in partnership with the barangay.

The programme has evolved over the years, and the current programme's main objective is to establish and consolidate human rights interventions and rehabilitation programmes that are sustainable and that can withstand political changes through advocacy, support services, and action-oriented knowledge generation. Identified as target beneficiaries are young people, their parents and caregivers; youth at risk and survivors of torture and violence; service providers under the auspices of the Barangay Council; and police and community peacekeepers. Balay also works with the following stakeholders: parents, relatives or supporters of youth partners; key individuals and institutions of governance, public order and service delivery; and NGOs or civil society organizations.

The programme is anchored in Balay's theory of change: *If we work with the youth at risk and raise the capacities of stakeholders to effectively engage with mandated authorities to exercise their responsibility, using knowledge-based strategies and approaches, then torture prevention and rehabilitation mechanisms and services could be put in place.*

Taking off from this theory of change, Balay integrates violence prevention in a wide array of projects and services around research and documentation, education and training, psychosocial support, family-level interventions, community advocacy groups and self-help networks, and promoting child-centred governance.

## Social work approach

Balay's work in Bagong Silang Kalookan (BSK) is constantly evolving and has always aspired to take root in the context of the community and to stay based on strong praxis. Although no direct reference to a particular theory or model is made, a close look at the work points to a number of social work models and reflects a particular theoretical framework. Following the models and theories presented in Chapter 2, social work, as practised in Bagong Silang, follows an integrated practice approach. Balay and the various actors in the area employ a combination of models and methods of social work, with the community development and empowerment models seemingly the ones most in line with its work.

Guided by a community development model, Balay organises community members of BSK to tackle problems that the community members themselves identify. This approach is highlighted in the active participation of different groups organised by Balay, such as the group of parents connected with the Alternative Learning System (ALS) and the Teatro Balangay, a community youth theatre group which has spun off from Balay but which continues to be an active collaborator in various education and advocacy activities both within and outside of BSK. This community development approach is also central to the work of strengthening state authorities in their obligations to protect citizens, especially children and young people.



The empowerment model is also strongly ingrained in Balay's development initiatives in BSK. The use of the term 'partner' rather than client to refer to beneficiaries is an indication of this approach. Balay supports development in communities by staying attuned to the context of the groups and individuals that comprise the community, providing interventions that are both flexible and constantly evolving. Violence-prevention initiatives always take into consideration the deep-seated causes of violence, many of which include structural problems in the wider Philippine society as well as personal problems within the family or community. This approach addresses all three levels: individual, family/group, and community. In the empowerment model, human rights awareness is integrated in all areas of work in the community, including with the young students enrolled in the ALS centre. Efforts are geared towards raising the capacities of youth at risk and torture survivors to mitigate their suffering and to lessen their vulnerability to violence and to the predatory behaviour of authorities. One way of doing this is to build support groups and a network of human rights defenders who can engage duty bearers and other members of the community in the protection of human rights and prevention of torture and other forms of violence. These efforts echo the advocacy practices outlined in Chapter 2.

While much focus is on community work and group empowerment, Balay also follows a psychosocial approach in its rehabilitation and healing work with torture survivors, children in conflict with the law, and other target groups. This involves case management with interventions in counselling, expressive therapy, testimonial therapy and psycho-education.

In terms of a theoretical framework, two theories in social work underpin the work of Balay in BSK – the conflict theory and the systemic theory. The current situation in the Philippines in general and Balay in particular – where there is a wide gap between the small number of rich people and the poor who comprise the vast majority – reflects structural problems in the economic sphere. The poor have limited access to resources in all spheres of life and therefore become vulnerable in the face of abuse, violence, and criminality. Following the conflict theory, the work of Balay in BSK has a strong organising component towards empowering the community and the individuals within it to improve their living conditions – a life where basic needs are met, a community that is free from violence of all forms. The systems theory is evident in Balay's interventions which cover the individual, the family/groups, and the community, including the barangay council and other relevant government units. The network of relationships within the community is factored in, creating initiatives that view development holistically.

### Social work activities and actors

Whilst social work as a discipline is practised by trained and licensed social workers, the expanse of work and activities covered means that tasks need to be shared among other individuals or groups who may not be licensed social workers but have the commitment and basic skills for social service delivery. In the case of Balay, a social worker has functions ranging from individual case management to community organising, awareness raising and advocacy.

### Therapeutic activities for the youth

Balay's work with the youth in BSK has children in conflict with the law and youth at risk as primary target groups. Social work interventions include counselling sessions, psycho-

education sessions, testimonial therapy, and theatre arts. The social worker is the single point of contact during assessment and in the rest of the case management process unless they are referred to professionals from other disciplines by the social worker.

Educational and developmental support for the youth comes in the form of the ALS, vocational and technical educational support, social entrepreneurship (livelihood support), and theatre arts activities.

Development of human rights awareness, as well as of organizing and leadership skills, begins with orientation toward the basic concepts and principles of human rights (highlighting children's rights). There are also workshops on the laws protecting children, paralegal skills training, organizing and leadership seminars, and participation in human rights forums, symposium, lectures, and film showings.

Mobilizations to contribute to the prevention of torture include participation in children's alliances and human rights advocacy activities.

The ALS is one of the key projects of Balay in BSK. The ALS centres were set up by the government in collaboration with NGOs as a response to the limited educational opportunities for out-of-school youth. There are many ALS centres operating in the country, each following a standard curriculum, but what sets the Balay-operated ALS centre apart is the inclusion of life skills training, such as leadership training, and orientation and awareness raising on social issues, including human rights. This makes for more holistic development. Likewise, at Balay-operated ALS centres, it is not only the students who benefit from capacity building activities, but also groups such as the parents' association. It is not just the teachers at ALS who contribute to the learning process but also the students and their parents.



### *Activities with parents, relatives, community leaders and service providers*

Aware of the importance of an enabling environment to sustain the work with the youth, Balay has built a parents' group and a community support group. Through this group, human rights awareness raising seminars, community dialogues, parenting sessions and family enrichment seminars are facilitated. Strengthening of a human rights defenders network is another key intervention to protect and support the youth. Activities include the establishment of the Caloocan Civil Society Coalition, working with the Alliance Committed for Children and Youth Development, and joint human rights advocacy activities.

Some torture survivors who were helped by Balay during their incarceration, or while they were in transition from life in prison to reintegration with society, have now become partners of Balay in providing support to other political prisoners. Many had found a job or are engaged in income-earning activities and continue to be a support system to one another, helping those who need medical attention, livelihood support, or social support. They often work in coordination with Balay for support in accessing support services from different service providers. One torture survivor reported having gone beyond the concerns of his community of torture survivors and is now actively organising his community around concerns such as electricity and water supply and garbage disposal.

It is noteworthy that, as more and more members of the community become empowered and recognise that they are stakeholders, dealing with social services needs no longer rest solely with the licensed social worker. Ordinary members of the community contribute toward community development by taking the lead in issues and problems relevant to them, truly becoming partners rather than beneficiaries or clients.

### *Activities with the Barangay Council and other authorities*

Lobby work and other activities to engage the Barangay Council and other offices constitute the efforts to ensure government support to a violence-free community and to maximise available government resources. Current activities include: strengthening of the Barangay Human Rights Action Centre, strengthening of the Barangay Council for the Protection of Children, engagements with other barangay offices, advocacy engagement with police at the national and local level on human rights-based policing, seeking redress for victims of torture from law enforcement authorities and other government agencies, and engaging with the Yakap Bata Holding Centre of the Department of Social Welfare and Development.

By building and maintaining a healthy working relationship with the local government, in this case the barangay officials and workers, NGOs like Balay become more efficient at tackling social issues in the community. In the same way that Balay's team in the area refers cases to barangay officials and workers and takes advantage of available resources, barangay workers also reach out to Balay for referral when necessary. In addressing pressing issues such as the growing number of extra-judicial killings in BSK and in the country as a whole, knowing where the barangay officials stand on the issue and how they implement directions cascaded to them by higher agencies informs the response and approach that NGOs like Balay take.

### **Challenges of social work**

As is evident from the above, social work practices are central to the work that Balay is doing in Bagong Silang. While mostly implicitly, it draws on specific models, especially community development and empowerment models. An important part of the work consists of relational work to strengthen volunteers and other partners in civil society as well as strengthening and supporting the state to work for the development of young people rather than targeting them violently. However, implementing social work models and practices is a complex and often contradictory endeavour, especially in a volatile and poor place like Bagong Silang.

### *Organizational sustainability*

Sustainability is a concern that cuts across different players and interventions. In the face of limited funds and shifting priorities of funding partners, how can organisations like Balay and services like the ALS and Social Development Centre stay afloat in the long term? Sustainability concerns are often a consequence of a lack of commitment from politicians to programmes and services for children and the youth as their approval does not translate to votes come election day. Even within government units with such initiatives, oftentimes the support for programmes and projects is only as good as the electoral term of the incumbent leaders.



After elections, when new leaders are elected, priorities change and so do the people they bring into office. It is not just the commitment of the leaders that changes but also key staff members working in the government units. While NGOs help in building the capacities of partner government agencies, the sustainability of such efforts cannot be warranted with the turnover of staff after elections.

An equally important aspect of sustainability pertains to human resources. Social workers, teachers, and other direct service providers do not get adequate remuneration for their hard work. ALS teachers, for example, do not receive a standard salary but an allowance as they are considered volunteers rather than employees. Whilst social workers may be employed by government and non-government institutions, the compensation package they receive is seldom commensurate with their work and sometimes does not provide support to manage the hazards inherent in their occupation, such as vicarious traumatisation, fatigue, and medical conditions and accidents. Sometimes they even dip into their own pockets to supplement the financial resources necessary for the conduct of their work. Yet this level of commitment of social workers and social service providers does not guarantee employee or volunteer retention.

### *Workload*

Social work entails multidisciplinary support and often leaves social workers and social service providers multitasking among competing priorities. This situation poses questions as to the capacity of social service providers to actually implement their action plans, as was raised about the case of the lone social worker in a barangay as big as BSK. Balay's social worker explained that the demands of organising an active group of parents and sustaining their interest were too much vis-à-vis the reality that this component was just one among many tasks. The heavy workload leads to overworked workers and in some instances to burnout or compassion fatigue, making them less effective in their work and leaving a gap in the service for the community.

### *Depth of impact*

Whilst the interventions are generally comprehensive, it seems that some interventions may not have sufficient depth of impact or quality. For example, the barangay's drug rehabilitation programme is geared towards providing alternative activities for drug addicts, but it does not deal with in-depth internal issues of individuals, or with the social structures that create and reinforce illegal drug use. Similarly, while the ALS is a good support system for those who do not have access to regular education, it is highly unlikely that the academic ground covered in a one-year curriculum will be on par with the standard six-year curriculum. Neither does ALS create new jobs in a society with an unemployment rate above 50 per cent.

### *Confidentiality and data protection*

Easy access to information about partners has its advantages, the most significant being a swift and in-depth assessment process. What could be a source of concern, though, is the care with which information is handled and the hands in which this information eventually lands, a situation that can lead to breach of trust.

### *Social worker and service provider training and support*

It was brought up that most social workers in the Philippines have a generalist training, such that many come out of school and begin to work with limited skills. For example, interviews revealed that few social workers are equipped with the necessary orientation and skills to handle children with challenging behaviours, and yet they handle such children in their work. It helps that there are organisations like Balay to provide continuing learning opportunities for staff members and community workers; yet compared to the need, the opportunities for learning and development are limited.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter we have described the social work interventions of Balay in Bagong Silang, where it has been working for almost a decade. From the original concern with identifying torture victims from earlier political conflicts, a renewed focus on youth at risk and children in conflict with the law emerged around 2008, simply because of the context in which the organization found itself. This initiated a transformation not only in Balay but also in Dignity. Taking their point of departure in psychosocial models and individual treatment, socio-economic issues including education have become increasingly important. Hence, community development modelling has taken center stage. However, Balay has not abandoned its more political nature, and empowerment models and conflict theories are still important in its social work practices.



## 5. Social work exchange

The social work exchange programme between Balay and Dignity was initiated as a result of observations that social work as a discipline and intervention tends to be overlooked in the whole gamut of interventions and approaches to state or authority-based violence. By bringing together selected social work practitioners from the two organisations for a collaborative exchange of ideas and experiences, it was hoped that the richness of the contribution of social work would be brought to the fore.

We organize the chapter in three parts, first outlining the methodology used in the exchange and the benefits produced. Then we move to a more conceptual level, outlining a select few models and approaches. We conclude by assessing the observed challenges of social work and exploring the phenomenon of its invisibility.

### Methodological exchange

To facilitate an experiential learning process, the exchange programme involved actual field visits and interviews with various social work practitioners and stakeholders as well as reflection sessions and detailed write-ups of activities following a template specifically designed for this exchange programme. Concretely, this translated into one social worker from Balay visiting Denmark for two weeks and working with a social work practitioner from Dignity, and two social work practitioners from Dignity visiting the Philippines for two weeks and working closely with the social worker who had visited Denmark. Reflection sessions and template write-ups were shared with the rest of the team for this write-up.

In the end, the exchange programme provided an opportunity for both organisations to spend time reflecting on the work they do to counteract torture and violence. The potential that exchange visits provide is both a break from hectic daily work being carried out in communities, as well as the experience of receiving questions and input from an 'outsider'. Often outsiders are able to articulate questions about fundamental, but often unspoken elements of the work, allowing the host to reflect and even re-evaluate. Answering questions about one's own practice is also a way of honing and reflecting on one's own discipline, approaches and underlying assumptions. Visiting and observing another professional at work is a process that allows for inspiration and innovation. In project FLYV, the participants on the Competency Development Course were all required to both visit and host one other participant, a micro-version of the exchange that Dignity and Balay carried out, in order to facilitate new perspectives on the participants' own work. In fact, the Dignity-Balay exchange helped all those involved to deepen their understanding of social work as it is practised in both their own and their hosts' contexts. It was not necessarily the concrete details about the social work interventions explored that led to the greatest revelations, but rather the discussions and reflections that followed. While the interviews and field visits were necessary aspects of the exchange, the central empirical data are the discussions and reflections produced within the group. The exchange programme highlighted that whilst there are basic differences in social work practice in the two settings, the similarities far outweighed the differences. In fact, some of the differences, when considered more deeply, were in fact not so different after all.

## Social work approaches

Dignity and Balay both use an integrated practice approach to social work, where different models and methods are applied. The work is dictated not by a particular model or theoretical framework but by the context and assessed needs of the client. The work is therefore fundamentally client-driven. Since meeting the holistic needs of clients is central to their work, they use a multidisciplinary approach that involves an active referral system with other relevant professionals and institutions. The primary models used by both Dignity and Balay are: (1) the community development model, (2) the empowerment model and (3) the relational model.



Balay, however, leans more heavily on the psychosocial and narrative models. Within project FLYV, the analysis of individual, family and community needs are particularly inspired by conflict theory.

The two organisations differ in how and when they developed their intervention models for addressing torture and violence. A work in progress, Balay's model was developed over time from its inception in 2009. It initially focused on torture survivors and training of barangay social workers, but eventually decided to expand its target group to include at-risk youth and to organise and train community members in handling various social issues. This model was deemed a more effective one as appears to have brought about more sustainable change. Participants in the project testified that they saw benefits beyond the original moment of violence, not least in relation to their educational training, and said they were willing to stay on board the project after their benefits were over to help other young people. Dignity, on the other hand, developed and employed its intervention model for project FLYV



prior to validation in praxis, due to its funding and reporting requirements. It is yet to be seen how much flexibility the project will have in adapting according to the knowledge and experience culled from its communities. Furthermore, Dignity's intervention is much younger than that of Balay.

## Empowerment

Social work is sometimes misconstrued as being synonymous with simply 'helping'. Many social workers find themselves faced with the dilemma of either offering direct and immediate help or providing people with the knowledge and resources to handle the issues on their own – "we don't give them fish, we teach them how to fish." This approach is based on the empowerment model. In the ideal world, social workers would focus on preparing clients to be self-reliant as this approach results in more sustainable outcomes. Simply helping to solve clients' problems directly may in fact foster dependency on the social worker. In reality, however, social workers are faced with competing priorities, pressures from colleagues and superiors for a swifter process, and expectations from clients for more immediate and tangible results. Such a situation makes it more difficult to resist the temptation to engage in direct service delivery which is less time-consuming instead of providing the client with the knowledge and skills to manage their problems on their own. Raising this topic caused us to reflect on the constraints that certain contexts – including workplaces and political and financial systems – imposed on social work, while reminding us about the importance of standing our ground in terms of using the empowerment approach. Perhaps high-turnover deliveries appear useful in the short-term, but ideally our social work interventions should seek to produce long-term change.

Balay, Dignity and other organizations aspire to the empowerment approach – giving their clients/partners the skills to become self-reliant, which is an indicator of sustainability. Throughout the exchange, we met several individuals who themselves had previously been recipients of social work support, and were now doing voluntary or semi-professional social work to support others and help develop their community. For instance, in Café Nora, residents who had arrived in Denmark as refugees were now the central employees of the social master plan, and in the Teatro Balangay, former beneficiaries of Balay projects now ran the association. In the Danish context there was debate about whether it was professional to hire local residents to conduct social work in their own community, while this was not an issue in the Philippines. Therefore, it seemed that part of the healing process and a final state of empowerment involved former partners giving back to their community by conducting social work. Seeing this difference led us to reflect more deeply on both the potential and the drawbacks of residents conducting social work in their own communities and the paradoxes this raised.

## Client and partner-centred

One of the differences between Balay and Dignity is how beneficiaries were labelled. For Balay, key to the empowerment approach was using the word 'partner' rather than 'client'. The overarching idea was that they were partners in finding solutions to their own problems and moving towards development as they envisioned it. In many ways, this label refers to the political history of Balay and how it emerged from a political struggle against right-wing dictatorship. In the Dignity clinic, there had been a transition from the medical term 'patient' to the more social work-inspired 'client', which clinicians across professions are expected to use today. Though the FLYV intervention project had emerged from the Dignity clinic, the group involved

in it were primarily non-clinicians. Here, rather than ‘client’, the term ‘resident’ was used. The different terminologies adopted in the different settings revealed some of the underlying perceptions about and aspirations for the relationships between social work and the individual being helped. Though different terminologies can be used to describe similar interactions, we nonetheless reflected on the power of word choices on our ways of thinking and approaches to our work.

Despite the differences in terminology, all the social work interventions explored are anchored in an in-depth understanding of the contexts of their clients or partners – whether they be individual, family/group, or community. Assessments are one of the ways that Balay and the Dignity clinic work to gain this nuanced understanding of the individual or family at hand. For Balay, this includes home visits to help the social worker better understand family dynamics as well as the socio-economic factors contributing to their predicament. Whilst home visits are appreciated by Dignity’s clinical social workers, budgetary constraints limit their capacity to do home visits. In project FLYV, however, it is expected that the local social workers be available for home visits if/when the need arises – that is part of the rationale behind developing a community-based intervention. In Balay’s work, understanding the context involves digging into their partners’ childhood histories, whereas in the Dignity clinic the assessments focus on refugees’ lives post-arrival in Denmark. Social workers may, however, decide to ask additional questions about childhood and home country experiences to nuance their understanding of the client. In project FLYV, there are ongoing discussions about whether assessments should be used, and if so, which ones and in what context. This is in part due to a debate about whether assessments are the most effective and comprehensive way of collecting information and how such information can be used to enhance the work being done. Despite the differences in how each project collects information about the individuals, families, groups or communities it works with, the common thread is the understanding that a holistic picture and assessment is necessary to determine what to focus on and what approach to use.

### *Building trust, building relations*

No matter what model and intervention tools are used, building trust is considered the key to establishing a working relationship, whether with individuals, groups, or communities. In the Danish context, trust is necessary to even gain access to the client. There is a deep mistrust of authorities amongst many public housing residents, in part due to misunderstandings, and in part due to the very real fear of state intervention in their lives. A key fear is that if they open up and let a social worker into their lives, the social worker may remove their child. In the Philippine context, working with partners is described as ‘co-journeing’, and ‘emotional release’ is highlighted as part of the healing process. Trust is necessary for creating an atmosphere and a relationship where a partner feels safe enough to release emotion. As such, trust is always central to social work, but in different ways in different settings. The centrality of trust also means that interventions can be deeply impacted if there are changes in the staff – it is not possible to transfer the trust that residents have in one social worker to another.

Many social workers we talked to emphasized the importance of demonstrating a genuine caring about a given partner, a feeling that ‘comes from the heart’. Yet there are many different ways of building relationships and trust. Some social workers say they build trust by being straight-talkers and always keeping their promises. Others

share information and stories from their own personal lives to create a sense of equitable vulnerability. What and how much they choose to share depends on the given person and situation. Yet others would perceive such an approach to trust-building as completely inappropriate and unprofessional. No social worker was able to give us a clear-cut answer with regard to building trusting relationships with their partner, but the discussions we had reminded us that it is important to always reflect on the choices we make and our own comfort zone.





## Challenges of social work

Based on our reflections, we identified some key challenges to explore that arose in our two contexts. Some of them relate to the framework, others to the specific contexts and others to the inner world of the social worker.

### *Common issues confronting the clients and the partners*

In keeping with a context-based, holistic social work practice, neither Dignity nor Balay treated torture and violence in isolation from other pressing concerns in their societies. It was striking that, despite the disparity in the economic and financial standing of the two countries, there were many common issues among the clients and partners supported by Dignity and Balay. Illegal drugs and their impact on families and the wider community, waste management and garbage disposal, dysfunctional families due to marital separation or other causes, and source of livelihood were the topmost common concerns. On the psycho-emotional level, loneliness was observed to be a shared experience and concern. Beneath the differences in manifestations, there was a common longing for family and a support system.

The need for livelihood support was perhaps the chief presenting problem for most clients and partners in both settings. Basic survival needs will always take precedence over other concerns. It was also recognised that other interventions could not be sustained if they continued to struggle with survival needs. However, dealing with livelihood concerns was different in the two countries. In Denmark, or at least in the case of Dignity, such support was normally provided by the government. In the Philippines, however, NGOs played a key role in helping people with their livelihood needs. Torture survivors were supported by Balay in accessing loans and grants from both government and non-government agencies.

### *Dealing with external forces*

Institutions like Dignity and Balay do not work in silos, and their social work practices were vulnerable to the constantly changing environments, particularly the social, political, and economic structures. This required adaptability in their approach to social work and demanded a more strategic and proactive approach to ensuring the sustainability of their work.

A government is one of the major forces affecting the practice of social work. Differences in how governments operate must then logically manifest in social work practices. The Danish government provides a well-ordered support programme for refugees but also imposes restrictions that limit refugees' choices and may, at times, hinder their full development. For example, progress in rehabilitation could mean losing one's state pension. With the government playing a key role in financing, running, evaluating, and enforcing social interventions, it is imperative for social work practitioners to be up-to-date with legislation and processes to help their clients make well-informed choices. In the Philippine context, government support to communities like Bagong Silang was quite limited. They merely provided resettlement sites which until very recently were mostly in remote places, thus often removing residents from their livelihoods. Basic support services were insufficient to say the least. Left to fend for themselves, residents were expected to engage in whatever livelihood options arose with hardly any government regulation. Some would operate small businesses without proper government registration. NGOs therefore contribute to the development of such communities by establishing livelihoods, basic education, and health programmes.

With the rise in extra-judicial killings (EJK) resulting from the president's war against drugs, there is a need to be proactive in educating poverty-stricken communities about human rights as these are where victims of EJKs come from. Balay had been actively conducting education sessions, one of which was witnessed by the Dignity social workers. As observed by the participants in the exchange programme, Balay was more explicitly political in their work than Dignity. In the Danish context, addressing human rights issues is subtler and more focused on human rights pertaining to basic social services. There is an apparent disconnect between daily rehabilitation work and human rights advocacy in spite of high levels of incarceration, institutionalization of youth and surveillance in relation to the diverse wars on drugs, gangs and terror.

One factor that could possibly explain the variance is that Dignity is a state-funded organisation and therefore has to be more prudent in dealing with political issues. At Balay's end, its relationship with the local government is more interdependent as its funding comes largely from international donors. It is worth considering how much influence international donors' policies would have on the recipients of their funds.



### *Confidentiality and data protection*

There is a marked difference in handling confidentiality issues in the two contexts. Guided by the Danish Act on the Processing of Personal Data, social work practice in Denmark follows strict processes in gathering data and managing this data compared to the Philippines, where no such law exists. In Denmark, written consent is required from the main clients before other sources of information about the case can be interviewed. This practice is meant to give clients a sense of assurance that information shared will not be divulged to anyone without their permission, thus creating a safe emotional space for the clients and facilitating trust building. In the Philippines, social workers and community workers consider it acceptable to speak to family members, neighbours, friends, and other potential sources of information, even without expressed consent from the client or partner. The justification for this practice was that it allowed the social work practitioner to gather more information and develop an intervention programme that was tailor-made for the actual needs and situation of the client. Amongst community workers in the Philippines it was common practice to share with others what in the Danish context would be confidential information, thus translating to dangerous breaches of trust that would leave negative perceptions of both the individual social worker and NGOs in general.

Aside from the Act on the Processing of Personal Data, another context factor at play was the difference in the living conditions of the two contexts. In Bagong Silang, where houses are mostly shanties right alongside one and separated only by thin walls, neighbours know almost everything that is happening in the other households. Private matters therefore become common knowledge. Though the architecture in Mjølnerparken is such that there is much more privacy than in Bagong Silang, it is still a relatively small area where people know a lot about each other. Generally, there has been discussion in Denmark about the social control that may play out in public housing areas and its impact on individuals, families and groups. Overall it is important to protect the confidentiality of the people one is working with, particularly in settings like the current one in the Philippines, where many barangay residents may become targets of EJK. Hence, ethical evaluations need to be at the heart of the social work discipline.

### *Caring for the social worker*

The three participants in the social work exchange programme recognised the importance of caring for the needs of the social worker. As multiple-burdened workers who are constantly exposed to stressful conditions, they need to be sufficiently compensated at the very least, as well as recognised for the value of their contribution to the overall work of community development. They need to be supported in managing the occupational hazards of their work. They are caregivers but they need care as well, and shouldn't be perceived as being weak when they express vulnerability. Support in terms of supervision, counselling, and different therapeutic activities would go a long way in helping social workers be more effective in their jobs.

Care cannot come from others alone though. Social workers need to recognise their own needs and to tune into their holistic needs in the same way that they try to minister to the holistic development needs of their clients. Attentiveness to inner wellbeing and self-awareness are basic foundations required in the practice of social work. Lack of awareness of one's inner dynamics often gets in the way of the helping process.

### **The invisibility of social work**

To a certain extent, there is truth to the observation that social work is an invisible discipline and method in the full range of responses to state or authority-based violence. Placed vis-à-vis the very concrete contributions of professionals from other disciplines, like medicine, physiology, law, and psychology, the role and contribution of social workers are not as clear-cut. Social workers respond to a wide range of concrete needs, often bringing together a variety of approaches, methods, and interventions in a single response. Consequently, there is a perception that their work is not as grounded in concrete theoretical models as the work of other professionals.

There is also some confusion resulting from a haziness of boundaries among some of the interventions in social work and those of other disciplines. For example, social workers conduct counselling sessions, which psychologists would claim as their remit in the rehabilitation process. Similarly, there are people who perform social work functions but do not consider themselves as social workers because they do not have a degree and/or license as a social worker. This is true for social work practitioners involved in the Social Master Plan for Mjølnerparken, for some staff members at Dignity, and for many of the community workers in Bagong Silang. Most of them tend to identify with the specific area of involvement they have rather than with the more general field of social work. Their outputs may therefore often be overlooked when evaluating

the contribution and impact of social work. Furthermore, many of the functions of the social worker may be difficult to differentiate from the humanitarian / helping work conducted by volunteers. As a result, when they are performed by social workers they are not captured by the documentation instruments and monitoring templates.

Lastly, even amongst themselves, social workers do not always have a common understanding of their role and therefore sometimes cannot as vigorously assert the necessity of their specific interventions for the client vis-à-vis those of other professions. Sometimes lost in the breadth and depth of the work that needs to be done, social workers tend to undermine their contribution so that they themselves fail to value the work that they do. As one participant aptly put it: *"It is not just about making the outside environment appreciate the value of social work. It is also about reminding social workers about the importance and validity of their own work."*

In summary we might say that social work practices map out a field between other professions and the practices of helping and volunteering. Social work is then a specific practice that works on relations between people and between the authorities – welfare or police – and residents, civil society and volunteers. As in the case of Dignity, the relational work of the social workers is about a particular kind of facilitation with a focus on building relations horizontally between residents and vertically with the state institutions.

## 6. Conclusion and recommendations

In this paper we have explored the value of social work models and practices in our work of counteracting the consequences of torture and ill-treatment in urban communities. Based on a process of exchange and collaboration between Dignity and Balay, we have illuminated what social work models and practices we can identify in human rights work, and the challenges facing social work practices. In this final chapter, we pull out what we consider the most important conclusions of the study and discuss possible implications and recommendations for future social work practices and modelling in relation to torture, ill-treatment and what we have referred to as authority-based violence; that is, violence perpetrated in the name of a community in both legal and moral terms.

Our basic argument is that social work *is* a profession that is indispensable and human rights organizations would do well to place greater trust and resources in developing appropriate social work models. Along these lines, we suggest that social work in itself can and should contribute to preventing torture and ill-treatment and countering the consequences of it. However, social work practices are often strangely invisible. It is not as highly regarded in human rights work as the legal and health professions, and the practices are often regarded as mere 'helping' and hence something anyone can do, rather than a profession with its own ethics and theoretical foundations. Hence, it is a matter of urgency that we become more aware of the conceptual and ethical expertise that goes into social work, and that we become better at documenting systematically what it is that we do, as well as at developing indicators for its impact.

Social work is important for counteracting torture and ill-treatment, as the Dignity clinic has shown over the years. As we quoted above, research shows that social relations and employment are two of the keystones for coping with torture and ill-treatment. Furthermore, as we have argued here, the discipline attains even more importance once we move our interventions from clinical and legal settings – the trauma clinics and convention-based forums – to urban settings with high levels of unemployment, social marginalization and different forms of state and non-state violence. The urban setting has been the point of departure for the Global Alliance and its work against authority-based violence. In such settings, we need to think in new ways about how we deal with torture and ill-treatment (in terms of both prevention and rehabilitation). Here, social work models, theories and approaches are promising with their focus on relational work, creating and facilitating community development and empowerment, and focusing on socio-economic factors that are both influenced by and predictors for violence. Being a victim of violence often leaves people poorer, and poverty puts people at risk of authority-based violence.

It is these insights that led Balay and Dignity, as part of the Global Alliance, to engage in the exchange project. The purpose of the project was to engage in a co-production of knowledge and reflections about social work methods with social workers rather than for researchers to evaluate what social workers did. Hence, the purpose has not been to assess the impact of the social work practices but to engage in a process of mutual learning and reflections. One specific aim has been to explicate the implicit theoretical assumptions and models that guide everyday social work practices in the two organizations. Hence, we introduced a matrix of social work theories and approaches against which we reflected on our different practices and assumptions. This exercise suggested that while the two contexts were very different at first sight, we should not exaggerate the differences. To give just one example, both organizations

built implicitly on what we called a community development model though Balay, not least because of the difference in context, would be more focused on empowerment. Further, both organizations worked with systemic theories of interconnections and dependency but Balay thought more in terms of conflict. These differences are, however, a matter of degree. Similarly, in terms of context, social isolation, marginalization and high rates of incarceration characterized both Bagong Silang and Mjølnerparken, as did high levels of unemployment and relative poverty. In this way, the exchange and subsequent reflections proved beneficial to all those directly involved in the exchange and it allowed a very different kind of reflection across context, illustrating how central social work practices are in both places.

It serves no purpose to repeat all the conclusions from the study. Suffice it to highlight and elaborate on a few of the key conclusions:

### *The invisibility and misrecognition of social work / social workers*

In both contexts, but maybe more pronounced in Denmark, social work is not highly regarded and the practices are often invisible as contributing to the work against torture, ill-treatment and authority-based violence. Social work practices often end up in a field that falls somewhere between other professions like doctors, psychologists and lawyers on the one side and the practices of helping and volunteering on the other. This renders invisible all the relational work so crucial for advancing human rights concerns and for highlighting other concerns of people in poor, urban neighbourhoods.

### *Implicit assumptions guide social work practice*

While there are strong social work theories, there is a tendency that these theories are not put to use in everyday work. Social work practices are often context-driven and incremental in nature. Only when we start considering and reflecting on what models, theories and assumptions guide our work do they emerge with any clarity. Social work hence appears ad hoc. This is probably one of the main reasons why the discipline often appears invisible.

### *The informality of social work*

The study also shows that much social work is inherently informal, consisting of unstructured conversations and smaller ad hoc interventions, resembling sometimes even just acts of kindness or help. However, this is at the very core of what we can call relational work. As we were reminded in the course of this exchange, most social work is predicated on the trust established between the social worker and the given individual. This means that there are certain aspects of social work that it is not possible for outsiders to witness/observe – i.e. individual sessions dealing with sensitive matters. There is also much social work that exists outside or between formal activities like group sessions or individual counseling. Demonstrating what was described to us as the 'authentic' or 'heartfelt' interest necessary to build trust with an individual requires investing in informal talks and interactions. Such informal work seldom fits into the documentation templates social workers use. Only by facilitating and nurturing the possibility of these forms of informality can social work practices have impact. To reduce social work to managing bureaucratic procedures, as is especially pronounced in Denmark in relation to welfare rights, is to invalidate the discipline and its potentials.

### *Conditions of work and the paradox of volunteerism*

The exchange highlighted the fact that social work remains a career path that is not particularly respected. However, there is a need to distinguish between those hired as professional social workers and those who carry out much of the social work in practice. The latter are often volunteers or hired as community organizers. In the context of the Philippines, the ALS teachers employed by the barangay do not receive a real salary, only an 'honorary stipend', which mainly covers transportation costs. This means that they need to have side-jobs in order to be able to afford to do social work. In the context of Denmark, there are many residents who do nearly full-time voluntary social work, yet are unable to find employers willing to pay them a full-time salary. This is a fundamental tension in much social work! Volunteers are integral to empowerment strategies and community development. They are included – and sometimes remunerated – as community members and residents but they carry out work that they consider employment. Often they will contemplate the possibility of later, 'real' employment. Rarely are these individual projects not part of their volunteering in the first place. This is a tension that needs addressing in all community work.

### *Recommendations*

Below we outline a number of interrelated recommendations, which could serve as a point of departure for reflections and discussions on how social work can become more visible. These recommendations emerged from context-specific social work interventions in Mjølnerparken and Bagong Silang, and can thus not be generalized. The recommendations are, however, of relevance to social workers engaged in human rights work and community organizing, and may inspire future endeavours in the field of social work.

### *Model development and model awareness*

- Raise awareness among social work practitioners of how social work theories and models inform / could inform their practice.
- Enable reflections and discussions on how everyday social work practices can feed into the development of social work models.
- Provide supplemental courses offering a venue for in-depth reflection, analysis, and planning of social work methods and interventions. To complement the supplemental courses, which may be conducted using mixed methodologies, regular supervision and mentoring as well as individual processing would be helpful.

Social work practice is often guided by implicit theoretical frameworks and models, which can at times make it difficult for social workers to articulate and thus legitimize their interventions. In order to explicate these implicit assumptions, and thus contribute to the understanding of the value of social work interventions, the social work profession would benefit from a stronger awareness of the theories and models that guide its interventions. This will, in turn, help close the gap between theory and practice; i.e. between social work as an academic discipline and as a practice-based profession.

### *Learning, monitoring and evaluation*

- Develop new, innovative documentation tools to capture the informality of social work.
- Use social models and theories as a stepping stone to develop indicators that can systematically evaluate the impact of social work without losing sight of the contextual parameters of the work.

The absence of standardised models and methods in social work makes it difficult to monitor and evaluate the impact of social work interventions. Developing documentation templates and monitoring tools to capture the breadth and depth of social workers' activities, competencies, and experiences and provide evidence-based assessment of their contribution could help anchor advocating for social work interventions and thus enhance the impact of social work. Yet, standardised models tend to focus on particular types of activities, and hence risk losing a focus on the informality of social work (the social workers' subjective competencies, experience and sense of their clients' needs). Hence, a balance must be struck between model development and the need to be contextual and flexible.

Innovative and relevant documentation tools are needed to help expose the content of social work in a given context – both for the sake of outsiders and for the social workers themselves. The templates need to encompass the wide array of activities that social workers conduct. When asked about documentation, many social workers will say that the templates do not match the reality they are working with and because there is a lack of time, documentation is deprioritized. In order to ensure their relevance and usability on the ground, it is essential that such documentation tools are developed in collaboration with social workers. Documentation is more likely to be prioritized if social workers see the value coming from their documentation in terms of developing and honing their intervention. Moreover, employers need to earmark time for documentation, reflection and development, to make sure that during busy times, these vital activities do not get cut.

### *Exchange and fieldtrips*

- Develop field trip methodologies to enhance reflection and possible cross-fertilization between different organizations.

The exchange between Balay and Dignity has in itself generated a wealth of reflections on social work practices and models, as well as on the differences and similarities in contexts. Such an elaborate exchange programme is clearly out of reach in most situations. However, the model of exchange – that is, having someone reflect on one's practices who comes from a different context but shares similar concerns – is not. Inspiration for this might be drawn from Dignity's practice of 'field-trips' where people unrelated to the project are invited to comment on the practices.

### Short Courses and Mentorship

- Develop short-term courses in social work theories and models for volunteers and others without professional training.

We have observed and met with a variety of people who conduct social work in the contexts of both the Philippines and Denmark. A large proportion of these individuals lacked a social work background, despite having been in the field for many years. Some had backgrounds in education, psychology or politics, while others had no professional degree at all. In order to counteract what some call a de-professionalization of social work, and to ensure that such professionals have a structured framework to guide their choices, actions and reflections, employers should offer short social work-based courses, as well as offering mentorship programmes with experienced social workers. This would ensure a higher quality of work being conducted as well as a certain degree of standardization in approaches chosen. It would also help ensure that the mixed group conducting social work in a given area have a common language and framework guiding their interventions. Ideally this would help improve communication and collaboration across the multitudinous interventions and actors engaged in social work. Even for social work professionals, such short courses and mentorships would be a good idea, given that it is a generalist profession, where people specialize through work experience. The onus of such programmes would be on a given employer, who would get higher quality and more effective interventions as a result.

### Self-Care & Mental Health

- Focus on self-care practices and mental health issues in relation to social work practices.

Social work is an exposed discipline, in the sense that social workers and others doing social work like volunteers are frontline staff who both use themselves and their own experiences in the work, and are simultaneously the recipients and support system for many individuals, groups and communities facing serious social, financial and political stress. Secondary traumatization is a real risk for social workers given the content of their work. As many of the social workers we have talked to through the exchange have expressed, one can only help others if one is mentally and physical healthy. This means that self-care and mental health are vital. Nonetheless, there are some social workers who see it as a weakness, or as selfishness, to care for or invest time in themselves. Most people we spoke to openly acknowledged the issue of social worker burnout as a serious problem, yet almost all seemed to be deprioritizing it in their own lives. Burnout is both a serious health problem for the individual, and a human resource problem for the organization, which loses an experienced and knowledgeable staff member. When social workers (as is the case with humans generally) are overwhelmed with their workload, it becomes difficult for them to set boundaries and ask for the help they need. The work can become all-encompassing. To protect social workers from burnout, employers need be aware of how their employees are faring, and they need to normalize the concept of seeking help (such as counseling) when it is necessary. Ideally self-care should be institutionalized within a given organization for the benefit of the individual social workers as well as the organization as a whole.

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Illustrations

*Maps are courtesy of Google Maps*

*Photos are courtesy of Anna-Sofia Olesen Yurtaslan*

## Appendix: Data collection template

<p><b>PREPARATION FOR THE ACTIVITY</b></p> <p>(An activity can be an interview, an observation of a particular event or process, a meeting, community visit, etc.)</p>	
<p><b>Date of the activity</b></p>	
<p><b>Name of the activity</b></p>	
<p><b>Purpose of the activity</b></p> <p>(What do you hope to gain by engaging in this activity? If the activity is an event or meeting, note down the purpose or agenda.)</p>	
<p><b>Location/ organization/ institution</b></p>	
<p><b>Preparations made</b></p> <p>(Note down concrete preparations you've done, e.g., before attending a meeting of a particular group, did you read about the group and the work they do; or before an interview, did you do a little research about the person you will interview?)</p>	

<p><b>ABOUT THE ACTIVITY</b></p>	
<p><b>People present</b></p> <p>(Identify the names of people involved and their roles. Note down any relationship dynamics you noticed in the course of your interactions with them and based on feedback you might have received from other people you encounter.)</p>	
<p><b>Key activities undertaken</b></p> <p>(Note down what transpired, including changes from the original schedule or purpose and the reason for the changes. Were the original objectives of the activity achieved? What role did you play in the activity? Include photos as appropriate.)</p>	
<p><b>Key messages delivered</b></p> <p>(What messages were communicated by the people you interacted with in this particular activity? Try to capture key messages verbatim and/or give concrete illustrations when appropriate.)</p> <p><b>What key messages did you put across and to whom, if you interacted with several people?</b></p> <p>Note down any language or other cultural barriers you might have experienced in communicating.)</p>	

<p><b>Perceptions about social work &amp; the role of social workers</b></p> <p>(From the end of the people you encountered: what are their thoughts about social work and the role of the social worker?</p> <p>From your end based on initial impressions and your own analysis of their work, what is the role of social workers in this particular context? Anything that could be done differently?)</p>	
<p><b>How are social work methods and models employed - and in what context?</b></p> <p>(What social work methods and models are employed by the organization or people you encountered? How are these adapted to suit their particular context?)</p>	
<p><b>Social work methods / models: potentials</b></p> <p>(What are the strengths of the social work methods/models as applied to this particular context? What works well? In what way do they add value to the work they do?)</p>	

<p><b>Social work methods / models: challenges</b></p> <p>(What methods/models, if any, are not working well or do not add value to the work of the organization? What would you consider as limitations or challenges of the methods/models you observed in terms of supporting the target "beneficiaries"/partners?)</p>	
<p><b>Personal reflections</b></p> <p>(Overall, what are your general feelings during and after this activity? Anything that struck you in a special way – positive or negative? Is there anything that you could have done differently? Any thoughts about adjustments in your behaviors and preparations as you approach the rest of the activities of this SW exchange?)</p>	
<p><b>Good ideas / recommendations</b></p>	



The Global Alliance is a strategic alliance established in 2014 between likeminded civil society organisations working towards building a global alliance of communities against torture and urban violence. We conduct country-based, as well as collaborative research and knowledge generating projects across partners, focusing on countering authority-based violence in urban neighbourhoods.

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LAPS – Liberia Association of Psychosocial Services, Liberia;  
[www.lapsliberia.com](http://www.lapsliberia.com)



DIGNITY – Danish Institute Against Torture, Denmark;  
[www.dignityinstitute.org](http://www.dignityinstitute.org)