Interactions between Social Work and International Development: Specific Points of Connection

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Abstract. *The fields of social work and international development appear to be linked at the level of their theoretical and methodological approaches, areas of activity, types of intervention, and end goals, with important implications for practice and social justice. Despite these apparent similarities, the interest towards understanding the interactions between social work and international development has been scarce within scholarly debates and the subject is yet to be addressed in a systematic manner. This paper aims at contributing to filling this gap by analyzing the interactions between social work and international development using a scheme of classification based on two criteria of analysis: (a) the area of connection or the main social issues addressed, following the main issues reflected in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): poverty, health, gender, environmental sustainability, global cooperation, and education, and (b) the level at which the interaction occurs, i.e. the theoretical/methodological, practical/professional and ethical/deontological levels. The multilevel analysis of the interaction between social work and international development led to the identification of several points of connection, which were constantly weighted against four related phenomena: internationalization, politicization, westernization, and professionalization. The analysis revealed very strong interdisciplinary ties between social work and international development, as well as a marked overlapping between the activities of international development professionals and those of social workers, geared by strikingly similar value bases. The interplay between the professionalization and internationalization phenomena creates a push towards transformational approaches in social work which appear to be strongly intertwined with international development.*

Keywords: Social work, international development, Global Development Agenda, Millennium Development Goals, Sustainable Development Goals

Introduction

Globalization[1] played an essential role in modelling not only modern societies, but also the scientific processes used to understand them. Each social science, whether on theoretical,

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practical or ethical levels, mirrors these changes to a certain degree and must undergo a process of adaptation. The division of labor also changed dramatically as professions diversified and became more complex through increased specialization and cross-field collaboration (Buzducea, 2009 ; 2015). Modernization, widely understood as the process of transition from traditional to modern societies, is another global process which has triggered multiple transformations of all social sciences faced with new inherent challenges (e.g. the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor, the unequal access to resources, issues arising from environmental degradation etc.). In its later forms, modernization is intrinsically linked to international development. After the end of World War II, economically developed states started offering development assistance to less economically developed ones, which often implied the transfer of modern western technologies, programs, ways of living, and day-to-day behaviors to the so-called 'underdeveloped', 'Third World' states. The processes, policies, politics and theoretical approaches associated with this endeavor came to be known as international development. In recent years, the underlying philosophy of international development has evolved from economically-centered to more humanistic approaches (Gaba, 2014a).

As all social sciences are challenged to reposition themselves within the scientific and practical realms, by virtue of their mandate to explain the dynamics of social realities, social work too witnesses important changes against the backdrop of the growing economic, political, and social interconnectedness at global level. A vivid example of this is the recent emergence of international social work as a new sub-field within social work. The nature and defining characteristics of this new field of study and activity have been theorized and documented in several papers available in the scientific literature (e.g. Healy, 2008 ; Dominelli, 2002 ; Dominelli, Bernard, 2003 ; Burkett, McDonald, 2005 ; Lawrence, Lyons, Simpson, Huegler, Eds., 2009 ; Jayasooria, 2016). For the purpose of the current paper, out of the multiple transformations taking place in social work in the context created by modernization and globalization, I have singled out only those transformations directly related to international development.

The recognition of the existence of certain links between social work and social development has been implicit, and sometimes explicit, in social actions aimed at improving people's lives, whether coming from social work or other helping professions. This link has also been an assumption of several specific social work theories, particularly those that focus on community social work and social development ideals (Payne, 2005). Notwithstanding all these, the link forged between social work and international development is still at an incipient level of understanding in the scientific literature. One of the reasons why the connections between social work and international development are not very clearly addressed neither in scholarly debates nor in practice settings is that, by virtue of the social work's nature (and the ways in which its role in society has been conceptualized over time), its overall focus is on issues pertaining to local contexts and individual and family support. However, there have been several periods of time during the twentieth century (particularly during the 1930s-1940s, and again during the 1960s) when social work parted from the mainstream narratives of the profession (Reisch, 2013) embracing broader, more holistic views about its own role in modern societies and distinctive approaches to practice[2]. These earlier critical social work efforts were fueled by a deep awareness of the issues which dominated international development in the post-Second World War period.

Within this context, this paper's main concern is with understanding how the fields of social work and that of international development interact in current times. For this purpose, I have used a framework of analysis of the interaction between social work and international development, based on two selected criteria :

1. *The common areas of connection or the social issues addressed*, which were identified based on the mains issues underscored by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), i.e. poverty (MDG #1), health (MGDs #4, 5, and 6), education (MDG #2), gender equality (MDG #3), environmental sustainability (MDG #7), and cooperation for development (MDG #8) (United Nations, n.d.-a).
2. *The level[3] at which the interaction occurs*, i.e. the theoretical/methodological, practical/professional, and ethical/deontological levels.

In order to ground my discourse into the larger context in which the interaction between social and international development takes place, this multileveled analysis of the interaction between social work and international has been constantly weighed against the implications that four main phenomena visible today in social work have on the interaction between social work and international development, i.e. the *professionalization*, *internationalization*, *politicization*, and *westernization* phenomena. The result of this multilevel analysis is a series of specific *points of connection* between social work and international development, i.e. punctual programs/types of strategies/approaches where social work and international development crossroads.

Phenomena influencing the interaction between social work and international development

Professionalization

While there is no unanimously accepted definition of the term 'professionalization', in the context of the present paper, I will refer to it as the process through which an occupation gains a higher statute among the wide spectrum of occupations, by developing quality standards, regulatory mechanisms (most often through the input of professional organizations), and a distinct professional identity. There has been a rapid increase in the number of professions once intellectual disciplines started diversifying through university training. More and more professions started appearing together with the increase in the number and social power of higher education institutions in Western societies (Jackson, 1970, 3-4).

Professionalization is not an uncontested process. Because it involves varying degrees of social power and competition and it is essentially based on a process of categorization of people, professionalization is prone to encounter very pertinent critics. Professionalization is sometimes regarded as an indicator of higher levels of self-esteem of the members of that particular profession (Harries-Jenkins, 1970). The concept of self-esteem as it is used here is strongly linked to professional identity. The way that the process of identification with the profession takes place can be a good indicator of the level of professionalization of a certain profession.

There are several processes or attributes that describe professionalization in social work. In a cross-national study, Weiss-Gal and Welbourne (2008) compared the level of professionalization of social work in ten countries with distinct social policies, economic, historical and political contexts. Their analysis was based on eight professional features : public recognition, monopoly over other types of work, professional autonomy, the knowledge base, professional education, professional organizations, the existence of codified ethical standards, and the prestige and remuneration of social work. Among these, more interesting for the present paper are the *public recognition* that social work enjoys (which is closely tied to prestige and remuneration) and the *monopoly over other types of work* (which, to a certain extent, overlaps with professional autonomy).

One of the reasons why the public recognition of social work is quite low in many countries is the lack of understanding by the general public of what social work is and does. It is very common for people to confuse social work for other human service professions, such as personal care workers or nurses. An important part of the professionalization efforts in social work were geared towards correcting this type of common misconception. As for the monopoly over other types of work, „there is evidence […] of increased competition in several countries from other professionals over fields of practice that traditionally were the preserve of social workers. The competition comes from other 'helping professions' as well as non-professionals" (Weiss-Gal, Welbourne, 2008, 284). It is, then, unsurprising that social workers tend to want to distance themselves from other professions, in an attempt to strengthen and preserve their professional identity, by clearly defining the scope of their professional activity. This is where professional associations and specialized education come in place, along with regulations, codes of conduct/ethics and strict practice methodologies. However, there is a subtle threat associated with this process, i.e. that of limiting social work ahead of its true mandate in society through 'professional closure'.

The professionalization of social work is hardly a uniformed process across the world. There are marked differences in the ways it took place in the Global North, as compared to the Global South, which find explanation in the historical, economic and political context of each national social work system. It is considered that professional social work has been expanded in developing countries by the developed ones. This happened in the post-World War II period, through the agency of the United Nations, which „became the largest contributor to the spread of professional social work throughout the world, taking responsibility for starting schools of social work in a number of developing countries" (Younghusband, 1963 *apud* Healy, 2008, 152).

At the present time, the professionalization process in social work is ongoing. There are still many developing countries in the world today in which social work is not legally recognized as a profession, such as Nepal and Bangladesh. We see that in the cases of these two countries, the level of development as measured by the Human Development Index[5] (HDI rank) corresponds to lower levels of national social work professionalization. For example, in Nepal, a low-income country which ranks 145 in the latest Human Development Index[6], social work is not yet officially recognized as a profession, although in recent years several educational programs have been included in the curricula of major higher education institutions through the efforts of a handful of social work scholars, some of which have received formal social work training in developed countries (Nikku, 2012).

Unlike social work, which benefits from the effects of over two centuries of professionalization struggles, international development represents a diffused body of professionals. The people working in development come from extremely diverse educational backgrounds and bring to the field eclectic knowledge, skills and expertise from economy, journalism, accounting, mathematics, international relations, humanities (particularly foreign languages), politics, philosophy, to name just a few domains. This is, in fact, what makes international development such an ambiguous and difficult to grasp field. Notwithstanding this high diversity of backgrounds (or perhaps precisely because of it), international development imposes itself more and more as a distinct field and occupation within the wide spectrum of human service professions.

Internationalization

It is difficult to trace back in time the exact moment when the internationalization of social work started. There are accounts of international exchanges among social workers since the

time of the founders of the profession in the U.S. (White, 2008). However, while some elements of internationalization are very old to the profession, the real interest in the process itself among the representatives of the profession dates back much closer to our times, at the end of the twentieth century. Social work's internationalization process fast-forwarded when the forces of globalization took over all areas of life and social problems started internationalizing (Khan, Dominelli, 2000).

As new challenges such as the HIV/AIDS epidemic, human trafficking, and terrorism called for increased involvement of social work on the international arena (Buzducea, 2010 ; 2015), the internationalization process, in turn, influenced social work at the level of theory, practice, and values, the overall result being the emergence of international social work.

Politicization

Perhaps the most enduring and most relevant critique of social work is that it bears the risk of becoming a tool for *social control*. This idea comes in line even with more recent ways of understanding social work, such as the view of social work as a social construct and of the existence of politics of social work, as highlighted by Payne (2005) and others. In the process of constructing social work it is easy to lose track of the underlying assumptions which relate to individual and institutional ideological options. Social workers reflect not only the philosophies of the agencies or organizations that employ them but also the political ideologies that these institutions share. Most often, the dominant socio-political paradigms are the ones that prevail, particularly in state agencies, where the majority of social workers (at least in the global North) function. At this point in time, the world economic and political system is dominated by the neo-liberal paradigm, which in social welfare translates into overemphasis on individual responsibility and resilience[7], at the expense of social responsibility and anti-oppressive approaches (Dominelli, 2012b). The same emphasis is seen in much of the western social work practice, be it domestic or international.

The most challenging thing about this situation is that the social control function of social work, when present, operates at a subtle, even unconscious level in the profession (Reisch, 2013). That is why greater awareness among social workers, particularly those in developed countries, about the underlying politico-economic tensions and pressures, arising from the current global context, and about the ways in which they influence social work becomes imperative. The same applies to international development ; if fueled by the wrong philosophy and geared by elitist social actors, it risks losing track of its end goal, i.e. the promotion of social well-being. These are in fact the underlying ideas of the neoliberal critique currently unfolding in development theory.

While the politicization of both social work and international development is unavoidable, the degree to which it influences social interventions depends to a great extent on the level of awareness that those involved in direct work with individuals and communities at the grassroots have about issues pertaining to politicization.

Westernization

In the context of the current paper, westernization is a wide concept which refers to the process of channeling western approaches and ways of thinking (on issues of social work, social welfare, political ideology, social policy, practice models etc.) to non-western settings. In international development, the westernization phenomenon, as it is conceptualized here, relates to the broader debate involving issues of neo-colonialism, dependency, and the South-North divide which have dominated the critical development discourse in the last

decades of the twentieth century and continue to arise in current times critiques of neo-liberalism. In social work, the westernization phenomenon played out in the way that professional social work has been expanded in developing countries through the agency of the United Nations, as previously mentioned.

Poverty points of connection

Perhaps the most evident area of connection between social work and international development is the one related to issues of poverty alleviation, which has been the primary focus of welfare states for a long time after their emergence. Over time, there has been a gradual shift in welfare thinking from an over-emphasis on issues of deprivation (poverty seen as a static concept) to increasing concern shown to issues of multiple deprivations (poverty seen as a dynamic concept). During the '90s, social work theory has transitioned from an extensive use of the concept of poverty to a marked preference for the one of *social exclusion*. The idea that the latter is a multi-dimensional concept is widespread among social scientists (Daly, 2006 ; Levitas, 2006). The concept of social exclusion „has become a lynchpin of recent EU social policy and a foundational idea for the reform of some national welfare states in Europe" (Daly, 2006, 2). Following the Nice Summit in 2000, EU Member States were required to develop biennial National Action Plans for Social Inclusion. Although these plans need to address the four key-objectives specified at the Nice Summit, Member States are allowed sufficient space for maneuver, in the sense that they may interpret these objectives in various ways through the 'open method of coordination' (Levitas, 2006, 124).

International development has experienced a similar shift, although under the disguise of a different terminology : the focus on economic development has been replaced with one on sustainable development (or human development, capabilities etc.), which aims at examining and considering the larger social context in which people live, as well as at assessing their real needs. These similar tendencies in the two fields do not mean that the concept of poverty is now futile. On the contrary, both fields remain committed to their mandates of intervening for the poor and most marginalized members of the society, but the theoretical and methodological frameworks through which poverty is addressed has been expanded and refined.

Social work addresses poverty at the national level, where it usually plays an important role in developing national strategies for poverty reduction (such as the National Action Plans implemented by the EU Member States), while international development strives to alleviate poverty within a global focus, for which the Global Development Agenda sets the tone. The first of the eight MDGs adopted in 2000 by the UN Member States was to *eradicate extreme poverty and hunger*. Even though this area of concern has known remarkable progress until the deadline year 2015, with extreme poverty rates being cut „by more than half since 1990", still, „one in five people in developing regions live on less than $1.25 a day" (United Nations, n.d.-b). That is why, in the new post-2015 Development Agenda, ending poverty remains the primary goal, but this time, it refers to poverty in all its forms, everywhere (*idem*) an approach which mirrors the new theoretical and methodological perspectives of poverty.

From an ethical point of view, this is an area where social work and international development values collide perhaps the most. The solidarity, equity, the promotion of equal opportunities and social justice are just a few of the values which, when referring to the poorest and most vulnerable people, make the two fields strong allies both on the national and international arenas.

Table 1. *Poverty points of connection between social work and international development*

Theoretical/ methodological level	Practical/professional level	Ethical/deontological level
• The shift from a static to a dynamic view of poverty : the concept of social exclusion • Increased focus on quality of life research • The emergence of 'happiness research'	• Eradication of poverty : primary goal of both international development and social work	• Solidarity • Equity • Equal opportunities • Social justice

Source : data generated by the author.

Health points of connection

Social work has a tradition of addressing health issues from the point of view of their social implications. In countries where social work has reached higher levels of professionalization there usually exist sub-specializations for medical social workers and even mental health social workers (e.g. in the United States, or in the United Kingdom), who usually become employed in, but not limited to, public hospitals and clinics. In recent years, the world has witnessed the emergence of new health issues against the backdrop of globalization (such as drug use, HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, different types of cancer, as well as a plethora of new mental disorders). Social work did not delay in answering these new health issues, especially through various projects/programs run in the nongovernmental sector, as well as through an increased concern for them, as reflected in the scientific literature and academic settings.

While social work has always had an awareness of the intertwining between health and social issues, for international development this is a more recent realization. Along with the shift of focus in development from economic growth to social well-being, health issues started being addressed in the larger contexts in which they appeared. Today, health is seen as a strong predictor of economic growth, as well as an important predictor of development (Geneau *et al.*, 2010). The experiences of many of the countries which are now considered to have high levels of development show that economic growth cannot lead a country toward sustainable development all on its own, as the economic and political forces involved often impede the attainment of high living standards even in thriving economies. It thus becomes imperative that economic performance measurements do not exclude welfare, but rather they should start their analysis from specific social indicators.

Social work and international development have a shared meaning of health as incorporating a social dimension, and programs and projects focused on health are (or they ought to be) driven by this awareness. The challenges encountered by both fields in addressing health issues are, thus, very similar, as social workers and development workers act according to, and advocate for the same values, i.e. the right of all people to live long, healthy lives, equal access to health care, and the respect for human dignity.

Throughout their work in the health sector, social workers and development professionals alike encounter the often opposing interests of public health schemes and individual health needs. Public administrations are anchored in a macroeconomic view of health issues. Because the decisions they make affect entire populations, large or small, and have long-lasting effects

which span across generations, health becomes a *public construct*. From the perspective of the individual in need of health care at a certain time in life, health is (and always will) be a *personal asset*. Just like an individual has the right to decide upon his or her own health, so too public administrations have a duty to protect public health and to intervene when it is in danger.

The tension between individual rights and public responsibilities becomes very evident in the way decisions regarding public health care are made from the top level. „Increasing evidence about how decisions are made [...] shows that the system resembles the elite model, in which a small group of powerful individuals decide which diseases are relevant and the criteria used to make those decisions [...]" (Geneau *et al.*, 2010, 1691). At the same time, though, national public health administrators expect the civil society to fully engage in the promotion of public health agendas, as it is recognized that „many factors influence health status and a country's ability to provide quality health services for its people. Ministries of health are important actors, but so are other government departments, donor organizations, civil society groups and the communities themselves" (World Health Organization, n.d.). Indeed, initiatives for raising the public priority of certain health issues is more successful if the civil society is engaged in the process, as it has been the case with HIV/AIDS (Geneau *et al.*, 2010, 1691).

Yet, even when assuming full support from the part of the civil society[8], raising awareness suddenly becomes more difficult in regard to other more sensitive health issues, where public health concerns clash with individual health needs, such as in the case of drug use (particularly injecting drug use). This leads to a failure to adequately recognize and diagnose emerging health threats and the web of social problems associated to them. This failure is accentuated precisely by the lack of a deeper understanding and analysis of nuanced cause-effect links between larger (macroeconomic) issues and local social phenomena. The result is that important segments of health care are drastically sub-financed as compared to their potential social impact. Usually, these marginalized health problems are taken into consideration and donors begin to redirect funding to them only in times of health crises, when it is already too late to successfully fill the funding gap. A vivid example of this was the slow global response in regard to the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Gaba, 2014b).

This is where social workers and development workers step in, by addressing health issues which are exiled from national and international public health agendas and, thus, risk leading to unseen, unspoken human rights violations. The underlying principle of their similar efforts is the *prevention* of health problems, as opposed to the treatment of symptoms. A good example of a health area in which the two fields come together is the *harm reduction approach* to drug use. The idea behind this approach is that the complete eradication of drug use may very well be an utopist goal, thus efforts should focus as much as possible on reducing the risks associated to such behaviors, rather than on punitive actions against drug users. Also, this approach is based on the observation that traditional services for drug users (such as counseling and psychotherapy) are sometimes too selective or that they use strategies oriented towards mandatory abstinence, thus leaving aside a wide range of active consumers, who actually find themselves at the greatest risk of blood transmitted infections (Gaba, 2014b).

Table 2. *Health points of connection between social work and*
international development

Theoretical/ methodological level	Practical/professional level	Ethical/deontological level
• Emerging global health issues (HIV/AIDS, new health risks associated with modern life-styles etc.) • Shared meaning of health as a having a social dimension.	• The tension between public health concerns and individual freedom : health as a public construct vs. health as a personal asset. • Facing conflict arising from the politics of health : public interests dictate which health issues penetrate the global and national public health strategies. • Mutual focus on prevention, rather than on treatment.	• The right to live long, healthy lives. • Equal access to health care. • Respect for human dignity.

Source : data generated by the author.

Gender points of connection : Feminist perspectives in social work and international development

Even though gender cannot and should not be limited to women's issues, a discussion of feminist perspectives on gender is useful in the context of the current paper from at least two points of view. The first point of view is the historical one. Feminism, in its many forms, can be considered one of the largest most controversial social movements of modern times. Women's enfranchisement sparked debates spanning from the highest to the lowest ranks of society, particularly in politics and in academic environments. After years of friction, deliberations, advocacy and scientific research in the area of men's domination over women, the feminist movement still has not come to a rest. Although feminists take the concept of gender equality as the hallmark of their work, they are usually focusing on women's side of the equation. This is one of the reasons why feminism, as both a social movement and an academic field of investigation, has been marginalized from mainstream debates (even in the academia), for a long time. Needless to say, feminism's focus on women's issues does not justify entirely dismissing feminist thinking from socio-political, socio-economic or scientific endeavors, particularly the numerous well-documented and sound arguments that it brings to the table. However, there is more to point toward considering feminist thinking as an important historical element, i.e. the tangible influence that it had on the evolution of both social work and international development.

Elements of feminist thinking have been present in both modern social work and international development since their beginnings – the nineteenth century and the post-Second World War period, respectively. However, gender issues really gained ground in these fields with the emergence of the second feminist wave in the 1960s. While the first organized forms of feminism (what is now known as 'the first feminist wave'), which emerged in the nineteenth century and reached their peak in the period following the Great War, focused on improving women's civil rights, particularly their voting rights, the 1960s witnessed a refocus of the feminist discourse from a mainly suffragist one to one based on the larger more complex concept of gender equality (Bates, 2008). The latter is embedded in the deontological structures of social work and international development alike, as it is given great importance and sometimes precedence over other aspects at the level of intervention in both fields.

Because women are present in virtually every area of social life, feminist thinking was prone to penetrate all of them in its quests to reframe the dominant paradigm of men-women relations in society (such as the breadwinner-homemaker, strong-vulnerable divides). While social work and international development were no exceptions from this trend, in their case, due to their common grounding in social justice ideals, it can be said that feminism played an even more important role than in other fields. Feminist thinking was specifically instrumental in remodeling the practical and theoretical frameworks of social work and international development.

This leads up to the second point of view which makes feminism an important element to consider in the present research, i.e. the theoretical one. In the second part of the 20th century, the feminist movement inspired a rich body of theories, some of which reached deep levels of understanding of the causal strains, mainly socio-political and culturally (re) enforced mechanisms, which underscore gender inequality in modern societies. As the „second feminist wave" progressed from a social movement to a field of study in its own right, several distinct and at times contradictory theoretical perspectives started taking shape inside the field : liberal, radical, Marxist, psychoanalytic, etc. The first perspective that was articulated was that of liberal feminism, which was based mostly on an understanding of gender as a combination of individual attributes (biological or psychological) and socially transmitted sex roles. Liberal feminists argued that gender inequality was embedded in the intergenerational processes that perpetuated sex roles which were inherently disadvantageous for women. Sex-roles theories were later on highly critiqued even in their own field. While liberal feminists argued for change and progress, they accepted and relied their understanding of gender on psychological and individual attitudes and attributes, which pointed toward an inherent contradiction of liberal feminist theories (Lorber, 1994, 2). During the 1980s radical feminism emerged as a reaction to liberal feminism. Radical feminists argued that gender is created worldwide through the systematic, deliberate oppression of women by men through the manipulation of women's sexuality and reproductive rights. They highlight and denounce the existence of complex social control mechanisms operating at every level of modern society (economic, cultural, political etc.), through very strong agencies (the school, mass media, religion, etc.). Marxist perspectives joined the radical ones in their critique of liberal feminism by reinforcing the idea of women's oppression being embedded in the structure of the society. However, Marxist feminism parts ways with radical feminism in that it does not focus on sexuality, but on the gendered division of labor and the ways in which, similar to class oppression, gender oppression is structured through two main institutions – the economy (capitalism) and the family (patriarchy) (Lorber, 1994, 2).

The different feminist perspectives which emerged over the last forty years influenced the social work field in many ways, particularly in the area of practice, where social workers are very often involved with work with women and families in different settings. The adherence to one or another of these broad feminist theoretical perspectives on gender inevitably leads to specific types of structuring the social work process, i.e. the actual intervention at the grass-root level. At social work's theoretical level, radical feminist ideas have been adopted and contributed to the emergence of radical social work (Payne, 2005). In international development, different feminist perspectives are reflected in the way that the global agenda evolved over the years, from a limited, narrow focus on women as either direct or indirect passive recipients of development aid, to a strong focus on gender issues, as reflected in the current global agenda for development. Perhaps the most vivid example of the importance that gender issues receive today in international development are the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Two out of the eight MDGs adopted in 2000 target

women directly (no. 3 – gender equality and no. 5 – maternal health), but all the other objectives are also linked to women, although indirectly.

At the theoretical level gender is seen as an amplifier of other potential vulnerabilities, which relates to the concept of multiple disadvantages. Thus, the shared view in social and international development is that gender adds vulnerability to situations such as human rights violations, poverty, poor health, scarce access to education, environmental degradation, aging, and migration in such a way that the overall resulting deprivation is more than the sum of the parts. In other words, if one is a woman, then that person is more likely to be poor, to have her rights violated, to have lower access to education, and so on.

At the methodological level, there is a tendency of convergence between social work and international development. This convergence manifests mainly through social work's adaptation (particularly in the non-governmental sector) to certain international legal requirement and provisions from international development underscoring the conditions for accessing foreign funding from international donors. As for state social work systems, although gender issues on the global development agenda are formally included in most national social work strategies, the link between policy-implementation-outcomes is still rather weak. This points to the need to foster more the collaborative efforts between national social work state agencies and international organizations.

At the practical/professional level, a strategy adopted by both social work and international development in the sphere of gender equality is the focus on women's empowerment, on making women active players in the social justice process. The focus on women's empowerment is understood as a shift from the image of women as vulnerable and multiply disadvantaged to the image of women as strong and capable of becoming self-reliant. An example of a new type of intervention aimed at turning vulnerability into strength and difference into opportunity is that of helping women become risk managers. Traditionally, women tend to become more vulnerable than men in disasters because they may encounter other types of limitations due to their gender : (1) limitations in mobility, segregation, social restrictions which require women and girls to be accompanied by males, (2) less access to warning information and poor ability to respond, (3) greater risk of sexual and domestic violence, (4) childbirth and pregnancy-related factors, (4) higher illiteracy rates, lower levels of schooling and training, (5) socially assigned role of caring for the young, elderly and the sick within the family (Enarson, 2009, xv). The general goal of the interventions that focus on making women risk managers is to foster women's contributions to preparedness, mitigation, emergency relief and sustainable recovery. In recent years there have been many new initiatives arising with this goal (grassroots women's groups partnering for prevention, response and recovery), new networks (such as the Gender and Disaster Network [GDN] and Gender and climate change Network), new resources (such as the Gender and Disaster Sourcebook and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee [IASC] Gender Handbook), and new institutional initiatives (for example, pre-positioned gender expert teams active in the aftermath of disasters) (Enarson, 2009, xvii).

The gender areas of connection between social work and international development are more evident at the ethical level. Some of the shared values of social work and international development which relate directly to gender equality are social justice, social change, and respect for diversity. These common values are a base for collaborative efforts on the part of social workers and international development professionals toward the achievement of greater levels of gender equality at the grassroots.

Table 3. *Gender points of connection between social work and international development*

Theoretical/ methodological level	Practical/professional level	Ethical/ deontological level
• Gender as an amplifier of other potential vulnerabilities (theory of multiple disadvantages). • Focus on cross-cultural studies and participatory methods. • Tendency of convergence of legal frameworks, but slow adaptation of global to local provisions.	• Intervention models focused on women's empowerment (transforming vulnerability into strength and challenge into opportunity). • Women's deeper engagement at the grass-roots encouraged ; focus on women's leadership.	• Social justice • Human rights • Social change • Respect for diversity

Source : data generated by the author.

Environmental points of connection : From environmental social work to green social work

Since the idea of environmental sustainability has emerged on the global agenda for development, with the release in 1987 of *Our Common Future*, the groundbreaking report of the Brundtland Commission (Brundtland Report, 1987), there has been growing concern among social workers to revisit and reincorporate environmental issues in their knowledge base. The efforts made in this regard came to be known as environmental social work, their main goal being to bring back the physical environment into mainstream social work discourse. However, these efforts have been scarce and limited in scope by the breadth of the meaning that social workers, their agencies, and their clients give to issues related to the environment.

A more complex concept that aims at bringing back the focus on environmental issues in social work is that of 'green social work'. The concept was recently proposed by L. Dominelli (2012a) as a more holistic understanding of the environment in social work. As stated by Dominelli (2012b) herself, the concept of green social work implies that looking at the physical environment (housing, buildings, roads structures, communication systems, bio-systems, ecosystems, the flora, the fauna of the Earth etc.) is not enough, but rather social workers must look at the structural inequalities underpinning people's relation with their environments and link them to the contemporary environmental agenda. Thus, green social work invites social workers to a critical dialogue amongst themselves, with their clients, the officials, and all other stakeholders, on the structural causes and ramifications of environmental degradation and on the ways it relates to issues of poverty, deprivation, oppression and marginalization. In fact, this calls for a revival of critical social work (be it radical, feminist, or Marxist) against the negative social welfare consequences of the prevailing neoliberal global economic system.

The 'person-in-the-environment' paradigm has been extremely influential in social work, as emphasized in the first global definition of social work. The concept of environment used to define social work is rather generally addressed, without specifying what kind of environment social workers are supposed to relate to in their daily practice (Dominelli, 2012b). A great part of social work's efforts in the past century were geared toward solving *issues of availability of resources* between individuals/communities and their immediate physical environments (e.g. housing conditions, local infrastructures, access to utilities etc.) and less towards addressing *issues of human-environment connectivity*, in terms of developing an

awareness not only of own needs, but also of the strains put on bio-spherical environments. In this sense, Dominellli (2012a ; 2012b) calls for alternative models of social development and economic development, in order to put people and the needs of the planet first. The big question of environmental sustainability is how to live in harmony with our environment, rather than exploit it ? Undoubtedly, the answer to this pivotal question is situational and dependent on people's understanding of how environment relates to politics and the global economy, but also to culture and tradition.

At the global level, the way that social workers can contribute to creating environmental sustainability is by helping create a *shared meaning* of *environment as a common good*, rather than a personal asset. This implies a push towards the de-commodification of natural resources that are scarce (such as water) and strong *advocacy* directed at governments, private companies and other managers of these resources to stop implementing policies that are advantageous only for small elites, at the expense of the world's poor. Green social work, thus, means not only achieving greater awareness of the environment but also taking concrete steps to ensure that the person-environment connectivity is active and creatively responding to complex social problems of our times.

The relevance of green social work becomes more prominent within the frame of the North-South divide. In the global South, many social workers are still involved with issues of availability of natural resources, housing, and basic infrastructure, which countries in the global North have overcome long ago. It is in these lower-income countries than the centrality of the environment in people's day-to-day life becomes most evident. There is perhaps no greater proof of the irreversibility of global interconnection than the visible effects that simple daily habits of people in developed countries (e.g. waste and water management, consumer behavior etc.) have on the level of environmental security that people in developing countries enjoy. Possessing a shared meaning of environment as a common good means reaching *shared responsibility* of every single human action that has the potential to negatively influence the environment. Placing sustainability at the core of global agendas for development is only the first step towards accomplishing such a goal. There is still much to be done in order to bring sustainability to the people, i.e. to genuinely link individual ideals and principles to collective ones. The question that arises from a social work perspective is how can social workers maximize their contribution to this process ?

Table 4. *Environmental points of connection between social work and international development*

Theoretical/ methodological level	Practical/professional level	Ethical/deontological level
• Increased concern for environmental sustainability (the 'greening' of social work). • The revival/reframing of the 'person-in-the-environment' paradigm.	• Increase of the number of NGOs active in the field of environmental protection. • Higher availability of funds in the area of environmental protection. • Greater emphasis on awareness raising and education for sustainable development in social projects/ programs.	• Sustainability • Intergenerational solidarity • Environment as a common good – shared responsibility • Corporate social responsibility

Source : data generated by the author.

Cooperation points of connection

Global cooperation for development is an overarching focus of international development. The eight MDG was dedicated to it, and now the 17th SDG aims at *revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development*. Obviously, if it needs to be revitalized, then it must mean that it is considered that global cooperation din not function at the peak of its potential during the 2000-2015 period, while the MDGs were in place. Cooperation can always be improved, by creating new avenues for concentered action, with a multi-stakeholder drive. The complex web of institutional structures and agreements (whether legally binding or not) between various stakeholders across the local-national-regional-global axis created in the context of international development, represents a valid basis for such a revitalization. However, while the structure of these multileveled global connections becomes incrementally sophisticated, the inherent communication challenges also diversity a great deal. In order for the 'global fora' to avoid becoming a place void of any true meaning for the social realities of people(s), sustained efforts are needed to embed the 'voice' of these people(s) in the creation of global cooperation schemes.

The idea of global cooperation is of particular importance in international development because it relates to the main mobile which legitimated emergence of development as an overarching global process in the aftermaths of the Second World War, i.e. the elimination of disparities in incomes and social standards, both regionally and within the borders of the same country. Thus, it can be said that cooperation is a pre-requisite of what is nowadays known as international development and that its focus is by default a global one. By contrast, in social work, the idea of cooperation has a more local (sometimes national) focus. Social workers foster the importance of cooperation (usually referred to as 'collaboration') within the borders of their own countries and, sometimes, within those of their own profession.

When particularizing the process of cooperation at the level of the interaction between social work and international development as distinct fields, one cannot avoid the many issues arising from limits of professionalization. Social workers have a great respect for cooperation within their own profession (internal, peer-collaboration) and are professionally tied to cooperation outside of it (external cooperation, e.g. the multi-disciplinary teams). The latter is usually limited to interactions with representatives of professions which are traditionally considered to have a high proximity to social work and which, at some point, have direct, instrumental roles to play in particular social cases (e.g. psychologists/ psychiatrists, lawyers, medical professionals, police officers etc.). The emergence of new social problems, however, calls for the extension of the spectrum of external cooperation to other key-fields, among which international development reveals itself as a promising 'candidate'. In the context of social work's growing engagement in dialogue over global social issues within the global fora, it remains an important question whether or not issues of external cooperation for reaching global objectives are sufficiently discussed among front-line social workers.

At the theoretical/methodological level of the interaction between social work and international development, there are some signs of an increased cooperation between the two fields. There is an increasing focus on cross-cultural studies and the growing preference for participatory research methods in both social work and international development.

Table 5. *Cooperation points of connection between social work and international development*

Theoretical/ methodological level	Practical/professional level	Ethical/ deontological level
• Growing focus on cross-cultural studies and a marked preference for participatory research methods • Some interdisciplinary research projects and research methodologies.	• External professional cooperation as an overarching driver of practice efficientization. • Engagement in dialogue over global social issues in the 'global fora' (e.g. with the U.N). • Some evidence of a holistic approach to social intervention. • Emphasis on the use of multidisciplinary teams of intervention in social work. • Interdisciplinary project management teams in international development.	• Knowledge and expertise sharing • Efficientization • Sustainability • Reflexivity

Source : data generated by the author.

Education points of connection

I left education last in my discussion of the point of connection between social work and international development because I consider it to be one of the focal points of the interaction between the two fields. I am basing my current discussion on two approaches to education :

First, education can be seen as *a 'place of meeting' of social work thought with international development theory*. Although this 'place' is usually limited to small academic circles, the growing interest shown in the scientific literature for issues of common interest for social work and international development creates the potential for stronger theoretical/ methodological interactions between the two fields. However, it should be noted that this interest comes mainly from social work's side and much less from development scholarship. A quick advanced online search of the Sage Journals[9] database for published works that have both the terms 'international development' and 'social work' in the title and, at the same time, have the terms 'international' *or* 'global' in the abstract, reveals only ten relevant entries, out of which three are book chapters and the rest are articles. Out of the seven articles found, six are published in *International Social Work*, a journal published in association with IASSW, ICSW, and IFSW (Sage Publishing, n.d.). Although this might suggest that social work's theoretical openness towards development is, at this point, greater than the one of international development towards social work, caution should be given to this type of interpretations. International development scholarship is very rich in the analysis of development in relation to social welfare, which in many ways overlaps with issues specific to social work. In order to draw clearer conclusions about the 'meeting place' of social work and international development in the academia, further research, perhaps in the form of systematic literature reviews, is needed. At best, what can be concluded from this fast experiment is that there is *some* theoretical openness toward interdisciplinary approaches of the two fields.

My second approach to education is that of *a generator of a 'global community of educators'*. Specialized social work education is now available in most countries, even in those countries in which social work is not yet recognized as a profession (e.g. Nepal) or in which holding a social work diploma is not a requirement for practicing social work (e.g. Bangladesh). As it was mentioned earlier, as part of the internationalization project, social

work associations at international level developed a set of documents meant to give a global identity to the social work profession. Amongst these, the *Global Standards for Education and Training in the Social Work Profession* deal with identifying „certain universals, [which] may be used as guidelines to develop national standards with regard to social work education and training.‟ (IFSW/IASSW, 2004, 4). While keeping and open eye for the valid „skepticism about the possibility of identifying any such 'universals'‟ (*ibidem*, 13), the approach that international professional organizations take on the internationalization process of social work reveals their optimism in regard to the possibility of creating what can be called a 'global community of educators'. This vision is consistent with the growing importance that international development organizations give to the concept of *education for sustainable development* (ESD). The latter is defined by UNESCO as the process which enables people „to constructively and creatively address present and future global challenges and create more sustainable and resilient societies‟ UNESCO (n.d-a). Essentially, ESD „means including key sustainable development issues into teaching and learning ; for example, climate change, disaster risk reduction, biodiversity, poverty reduction, and sustainable consumption. It also requires participatory teaching and learning methods that motivate and empower learners to change their behavior and take action for sustainable development‟ UNESCO (n.d-b). Such a global community of educators is bound to lead to future generations of social work graduates who are already socialized into international social work or at least more aware of the global ties between social problems, as well as of the systematic oppressive forces which influence these ties (a critical approach). At this point, there are reasons to assume that a great part of social work students is indeed open to the idea of 'globalizing' social work education (Lalayants, Doel, Kachkachishvili, 2013), i.e. including in the social work curricula elements of international social work, diversifying study's programs target groups and social issues according to students' interests, accepting and increasing the number of inter- and transdisciplinary specialization, double degrees etc.

Table 6. *Education points of connection between social work and international development*

Theoretical/ methodological level	Practical/professional level	Ethical/ deontological level
• Some theoretical openness toward interdisciplinary approaches. • Social work education goes global. • International development education programs incorporate training in social welfare.	• International professional social work organizations engaged in creating a 'global community of educators'.	• Lifelong learning • Self-improvement • Knowledge sharing

Source : data generated by the author.

Conclusion : General points of connection between social work and international development

Viewed together, the points of connection resulted from the analysis of the interaction between social work and international development form a complex web of characteristics which link the two fields[10]. *Table 7* highlights some general points of connection which can be derived from the more specific ones.

Table 7. *General points of connection between social work and*
international development

Theoretical/ methodological level	Practical/ professional level	Ethical/ deontological level
• International social work as an emerging sub-field of social work becomes better contoured if analyzed through the interactions with international development. • Very strong interdisciplinary ties between social work and international development. • Focus on transformational practices.	• Social workers' activities overlap to a certain extent with the activities of international development professionals. • Communities tend to become the preferred focus of both social work and international development.	• Strikingly similar value bases. • In social work, a stronger explicit focus on human rights in recent years (the increase in the use of human rights vocabulary).

Source : data generated by the author.

Several concluding ideas about the nature of the interaction between social work and international development can be drawn from the analysis of the connection points identified, with regards to the four related-phenomena identified. Clear theoretical evidence exists that the professionalization and internationalization phenomena are strongly connected in contemporary social work. The internationalization of social work takes place on a conflicting background given by the effects inherent to the westernization and politicization phenomena. International social work as an emerging subfield of social work becomes better contoured if analyzed through the lenses of social work's interactions with international development. The interplay between the professionalization and internationalization phenomena creates a push toward social work approaches which are transformational in scope, slowly but visibly taking the focus away from approaches geared at therapeutic and/or maintenance social work as identified by Payne (2005 ; 2006).

Some of the avenues for further research that arise are : To what degree are these approaches consciously interiorized and implemented at the local level, in the work of frontline social workers ? Are reflective practice and critical thinking sufficiently included in the process of transition from therapeutic/maintenance approaches to transformational ones ?

Notes

1. I refer to the concept of globalization as the growing economical, technological and informational interdependence among the states of the world, the main result being a global economy, characterized by free markets, free capital flows and the commoditization and migration of the labor force beyond national borders.
2. These views and approaches were holistic because they were based on critical thinking about the structural determinants of social inequality, and they were broad in the sense that they extended this type of structural analysis from local to national contexts and beyond.
3. The concept of level, as it is used here, refers to a great extent to the elements of the common structure of a domain as highlighted by L. Darden, N. Maull (1977), but without following the exact differentiations the authors made between these elements.
4. I.e. Chile, Germany, Hungary, India, Mexico, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, the UK, and the USA.
5. The HDI was created by UNDP in order „to emphasize that people and their capabilities should be the ultimate criteria for assessing the development of a country, not economic growth alone. The HDI can also be used to question national policy choices, asking how two countries with

the same level of GNI per capita can end up with different human development outcomes. These contrasts can stimulate debate about government policy priorities. The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development : a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and have a decent standard of living. The HDI is the geometric mean of normalized indices for each of the three dimensions" (UNDP, n.d.).

6. http ://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi-table

7. Resilience can be defined as „the capacity for successful adaptation, positive functioning, or competence despite high risk, chronic stress, or prolonged or severe trauma" (Henry, 1999, 521 *apud* Glicken, 2007, 285).

8. This situation is, obviously, highly unlikely, and it is purposely exaggerated here only for the sake of argumentation.

9. It should be noted that none of the references to certain publishing companies or scientific journals used in this paper have any commercial purpose whatsoever and are used solely for scientific purposes.

10. I call it a 'web' because each point of connection is linked to virtually any other one when analyzed in the broader context in which they emerge. This interconnectedness of meaning was, in fact, an expected outcome of my research, as the areas of connection used in the current framework of analysis are organically intertwined. In fact, in development, the progress (impact) of the MDGs is analyzed holistically. Cross-sectoral interpretations such as „progress toward gender equality over the past two decades is most evident in education goals" (Parsons, McCleary-Sills, 2014) represent the very essence of MDGs impact evaluation reports.

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