

# Ideas in action: ICSW at the forefront of conceptual thinking, social practice and transnational advocacy

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## Abstract

Looking back over its past 90 years of history, the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) is keen to recognize the changing objectives and associated strategies in policies set up and consistently pursued. Improving the human condition and well-being on the basis of holistic policies and comprehensive social agenda stays paramount in all its transnational activities.

## Keywords

Civil society, integrated approach to social policy, interdisciplinary policy efforts, social work and social development, transnational activism, universal social protection

## History highlights

Established in 1928, the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) is one of the oldest international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) aimed at promoting social development, social justice and social welfare everywhere in the world. Its history is closely linked to the history of social work and social development, unfolding across geopolitical borders and aimed at improving the human condition and well-being in the face of socio-economic uncertainties and risks generated by market-driven societies. These humanistic values have been at the core of ICSW activities through the years. The two-pronged approach linking international social work and social development has been a hallmark since its inception, but the emphasis on social development in a broader sense has become much more pronounced recently.

The immediate predecessor of the ICSW – the International Conference on Social Work – was convened in Paris in July 1928. That ground-breaking event became possible following the dedication and vision of several extraordinary personalities willing and capable of assuming leadership in the preparation of the Conference<sup>1</sup> in the aftermath of World War I, which brought devastation and suffering to many nations. Preparatory work for the International Conference began in earnest with several meetings of the Preparatory Committee being held over a 3-year period. These

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culminated in a meeting in Prague in 1927, where the guidelines for the organization of the first Conference were elaborated and adopted.<sup>2</sup> The stated goals of the Conference were fostering discussion and idea-sharing between social workers and social welfare organizations from around the world, assisting with dissemination of ideas and professional information, and establishing personal contacts. The country reports highlighted the developments in the social welfare area, including welfare work at the national level. These efforts promoted horizontal international cooperation within the social work profession and beyond, bringing on board numerous activists, experts and practitioners.<sup>3</sup> The first International Conference of Social Work signified a revival of international cooperation in the field of social work, reinforcing the tradition of international conferences in the 19th century.<sup>4</sup>

The novelty and significance of the first International Conference on Social Work convened in July 1928 in Paris was that this meeting, unlike international health conferences of the time, was not a state-sponsored but a bottom-up initiative, reflecting the efforts of civil society representatives from several countries to coordinate their activities in order to improve the human condition, promote techniques for philanthropic practices, as well as shape organized charity.<sup>5</sup> Important technical and financial support was provided by the League of Nations and the International Labour Organization, as well as several national and regional foundations.

The additional significance of the Conference was that it gave birth not only to the ICSW but also to two other 'sister organizations', as they have been termed, active in the area of social work, namely, the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW). There is a natural division of their prime interests and fields of activities among the three. For example, the IASSW brings together social work educators and focuses on the social work education programmes and pertinent research in the field, and IFSW is keen to represent the interests of social workers around the world. While the emphasis placed by the ICSW on international social work and social development, nationally and internationally, has been shifting in favour of the latter, the balance between these has evolved, having impact on its multiple activities. The ICSW is an NGO focused on advocacy, knowledge-building and technical assistance projects in various areas of social development carried out at the country level and internationally.

The first International Conference helped to establish a thematic approach as a preferred method of work; the priority theme in Paris was 'Social Work and Industry'. The Conference also considered issues of public health, organizational and personal training challenges, and social case work. Four years later in 1932, the Conference convened in Frankfurt, Germany focused on the topic 'Social Work and the Family', and in 1936 in London the priority theme was 'Social Work and the Community'. After the interruption caused by the Second World War, the ICSW International Conferences were revived and were convened every 2 years. The first post-war meeting of organizational nature was convened in 1946 in Belgium, while the fourth International Conference was held in Atlantic City, USA in 1948 concentrating on Urban and Rural Social Work as a priority subject.

From then onwards – until 2010 when ICSW started to convene Joint World Conferences in close cooperation with its partners IASSW and IFSW – the ICSW International Conferences were convened on a biannual basis.<sup>6</sup> The scope of issues varied – from the discussions of sectoral policies to issues of general significance related to social justice, social welfare and human well-being. In the wake of the adoption by the United Nations (UN) in 1966 of two International Covenants on Human Rights, the human rights dimension was considered at the Helsinki Conference in 1968. Strengthening the family and the community, delivery of social services and mobilization of resources were the cross-current issues, but they also figured prominently as priority themes.<sup>7</sup>

In the 1970s and 1980s, the ICSW made a deliberate move to widen its social development agenda in its global and regional activities, going beyond discussions pertinent to social work alone. The need to adopt the interdisciplinary approach to development thinking was also

emphasized. The high status of ICSW as an organization geared at promoting social development has been widely recognized. The ICSW representatives were invited to participate in numerous expert meetings, conferences and research seminars, and other events of international significance, to share its experiences and provide substantial inputs.

The ICSW was always emphasizing the acknowledgment of 'social' as an important dimension of development, strongly connected to the macroeconomic framework. In the light of promotion of the integration of economic and social policies as part of the macroeconomic package, advocacy of a holistic approach to development has been a recurrent concern, both at the International Conferences and in the publications and the statements delivered at the UN. Lately, the interlinkages of economic, social and environmental dimensions in the context of sustainable development have been firmly put on the ICSW agenda.

## **World Summit for Social Development**

The global image of the ICSW got a major boost during the preparation of the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD), which convened in Copenhagen in 1995. In many ways, it became a pinnacle in the ICSW activities in the 1990s.

The preparatory process started in 1993, providing the ICSW with an opportunity to capitalize on its institutional achievements, presenting its vision of the world social situation and ways to address multiple challenges to influential global audiences. First of all, the ICSW actively participated in the work of the Preparatory Committees for the Summit, promoting in accordance with its constitution forms of social and economic development that aimed to reduce poverty, hardship and vulnerability throughout the world, and making specific suggestions regarding ways to ensure the progressive realization of all human rights, including economic and social rights. Apart from discussions at intergovernmental meetings, deliberate efforts were made to link closely the activities of the ICSW with the preparatory process for the Summit. For example, the Tampere Declaration adopted by the 1994 ICSW Global Conference advocated 'an integrated and integrative approach to social development', promoted rights to equal opportunities, supported grassroots initiatives and strongly condemned violence, intolerance and xenophobia. It also addressed the priority themes of the WSSD – poverty eradication, employment promotion and social integration – and was submitted to the Preparatory Committee.<sup>8</sup>

The decision to convene the World Social Summit and to allow the civil society organizations (CSOs) to take an active part in its preparation individually reflected significant changes in the political environment as well as ongoing efforts to improve human well-being undertaken by the international community.

The WSSD became one of the major world conferences convened by the UN in the 1990s shaping international development agenda. The key documents used in the Summit preparation, including NGO statements, as well as critical statements of the member states made during open discussions, reflected a widespread dissatisfaction with socio-economic policies based on the prescriptions of the 'Washington Consensus' and promoted by the international financial institutions (IFIs). The resulting cutbacks in social spending and social services were very painful and had long-lasting negative consequences for many countries, particularly poor developing countries. The ICSW spoke strongly against compartmentalization of public policies, advocating a holistic, comprehensive and integrated approach to development. ICSW members, especially from developing countries, were strongly committed to changes to the structures and policies of key global bodies such as the UN, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) and to the amount and terms of financial assistance provided to developing countries by wealthier partners.<sup>9</sup>

The WSSD represented an important political threshold for the ICSW, not only in terms of opportunities to contribute to the outcome documents but also because it became an important benchmark for ICSW-affiliated organizations during the implementation phase; in many ways, ICSW activities in the post-Summit period became aligned with the 10 commitments made in Copenhagen and the recommendations of the Plan of Action adopted at the Summit. The principles of social justice, equity and equitable societies – high on the WSSD Agenda – are shared by the ICSW, which has been striving for many years to put these principles into practice on the ground and promote them in high-level international forums. Creating an environment to enable the achievement of social development, eradicating poverty through decisive national action and international cooperation, promoting full employment as a basic priority and fostering stable, safe and just societies to promote social integration – all those commitments that emerged at the Summit have been taken on board as guiding principles by the ICSW in its own activities.<sup>10</sup>

The global consensus reached at the Summit that poverty eradication should remain a priority goal for development was a crucial element that gave a forward momentum to several new post-Summit initiatives, including the elaboration and adoption of the Millennium Declaration approved on 8 September 2000 and the elaboration of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) a year later based on the Millennium Declaration where the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger was put on the top of the list.

The ICSW also actively participated in the preparation of the 24th Special Session of the UN General Assembly convened in Geneva in June 2000, where the commitments of the WSSD were reviewed with respect to further action and initiatives. As a follow-up to the WSSD, the ICSW has participated in all of the annual sessions of the Commission for Social Development (CSocD) – one of the functional commissions of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) which reviews the outcome of the Summit every year. The written and verbal statements made by the ICSW representatives at the UN highlight the efforts of the ICSW-affiliated organizations in the context of the implementation of the Summit commitments and increased priority that social development has assumed vis-a-vis other policy objectives.

One of the key ICSW priorities in the 2000s was focusing on activities related to strengthening the capacity of national and regional CSOs in order to have a constructive and targeted impact on policy debates at the regional level. Conducting Regional Civil Society Forums under the ICSW auspices filled a niche in providing viable interaction between CSOs. Participants were enabled to increase their knowledge base on pertinent issues, exchange experiences and ideas, and develop priority proposals for action. Thus, the ICSW strived to equip its members – the advocates for progressive social policies – with the skills necessary to have a meaningful impact on shaping such policies and often establishing a common standard of achievement of proclaimed goals, but taking into account the local conditions and priorities of national socio-economic development.

Having a long history of advocacy and policy action on social protection, the ICSW at numerous forums has consistently advocated for ‘social protection for all’ and access to social protection schemes guaranteed to anyone who needs such protection. Social protection is seen by the ICSW as a productive investment as well as a human right. Promoting universal education and health care and ensuring social protection for all could create a win-win situation where such social spending could accrue long-term social and economic benefits.

## **Shared values, lessons learned and new challenges**

In order to commemorate its 90-year anniversary, the ICSW organized a symposium on 5 July 2018 in Dublin during the Joint World Conference on Social Work and Social Development. The symposium brought together speakers from around the world to discuss the complexities and

challenges faced by social development scholars and practitioners in broad fields such as poverty eradication, employment promotion, social inclusion, social protection and others, profiling the ICSW's role as a major global organization committed to improving human well-being. Its main purpose was to highlight achievements of the organization over the years, contemplating at the same time future strategies and options.

The list of speakers at the symposium included: *Eva Holmberg-Herrström*, President of the ICSW (opening remarks); *Isabel Ortiz*, Director of the Social Protection Department, International Labour Organization (ILO); *Christian Rollet*, scholar and author, past President of the ICSW (France); *Michael Cichon*, scholar and author, immediate past President of the ICSW (Germany); *Driss Guerraoui*, Regional President, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Secretary-General of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council of Morocco (Morocco); *Cheng Lai-Ling, Crystal*, Business Director, the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (Hong Kong); *Sandra Carla S. Mirabelli*, Technical Assistant, Management Studies and Social Programmes, Serviço Social do Comércio (SESC) (Brazil); *P.K. Shajahan*, Regional President, South Asia, ICSW, and Professor, School of Social Work, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, (India); *Cassandra Goldie*, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) (Australia); *Chinchai Cheechooen*, National Council on Social Welfare of Thailand (NCSWT) (Thailand) and *Ronald Wiman*, Regional President, ICSW Europe, and Visiting Scholar, National Institute for Health and Welfare (Finland).

The discussion was moderated by *Solveig Askjem*, past President of ICSW (Norway). Brief summaries of several statements made at the symposium are presented below. Fuller versions of the respective presentations have been published on the ICSW website – [icsw.org](http://icsw.org).

In her opening remarks, *Eva Holmberg-Herrström*, President of the ICSW, underscored the important role that the ICSW has played throughout the years in promoting the ideas of social justice, progressive economic and social development and human rights. The adoption of Agenda 2030 by the UN reflects the scope of the daunting new challenges, but it also provides new opportunities for CSOs to move forward their agendas and to make their voices heard. The ICSW has been a beacon for several generations of social development practitioners, and we should live up to the high expectations that many of our members will continue to have in the years to come.

*Isabel Ortiz*, Director, Social Protection Department, ILO, thanked the ICSW for its consistent position and active support in the ongoing struggle to implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors. The ILO will be 100 years old in 2019, and both institutions have successfully helped to advance social justice and extend social security/protection systems over the past nine decades. Achieving increased coverage of the poor and the vulnerable through universal systems during the next 12 years, as envisioned by Agenda 2030, is hardly possible without the active role played by civil society. Among the steps required to extend social protection floors (SPF), she mentioned a need for national dialogue in order to formulate national social protection strategies for all. Some essential pre-requisites entail identifying gaps in coverage, determining appropriate social protection schemes – whether contributory, non-contributory or both – as well as the time frame and sequencing for progressive achievement of the objectives. The costs, resource needs and options for fiscal space should be discussed with national Ministries of Finance. It is often argued that there are no resources for social protection or – worse – that austerity cuts are unavoidable. This is not correct; options to extend the fiscal space exist, even in the poorest countries, ranging from re-allocating public expenditures, increasing tax revenues, increasing contributory revenues, tapping into fiscal and foreign exchange reserves to fighting corruption and illicit financial flows and other measures. Adopting a more accommodative macroeconomic framework (e.g. tolerance of some inflation or

fiscal deficit, restructuring debt obligations and lobbying for increased aid transfers) could provide another set of options in the context of the obligatory national dialogue aimed at expanding social protection coverage across the life-cycle. The ILO looks forward to continued collaboration with the ICSW to advance social justice.

Reflecting on the past and future roles of the ICSW, *Christian Rollet*, Distinguished Fellow of the ICSW and past President of the ICSW, underscored a specific, proactive role for the ICSW as a knowledge-based organization in the global debates on social policy. At the same time, we maintain close links with our national organizations on the ground, getting permanent reality checks and updated, very current knowledge of the challenges existing in the field. It is our common responsibility to maintain a 'two-way' street regarding the information flows, both bottom-up and top-down, making sure that our global thinking is closely aligned with local actors.

In his view, the ICSW Global Cooperation Newsletter is an established tool at our disposal to increase our influence and global reach. Addressing audiences beyond our membership, such as politicians, civil servants from international organizations, journalists and social activists at large, is most important, and it must be done professionally, with high research standards and with invitations to well-known people, scholars and leaders in various fields to present their opinions and views. It is crucial to rely on strong networks of global experts, bringing them on board when necessary. The introduction of the new category of membership, namely Distinguished Fellows, was a good innovation at the global level, but it may be equally important to have similar innovations on the ground.

The format of the global conferences that we convene may also be subject to re-consideration. We do not want to become victims of our success in terms of conference participation only to lose at the same time the ability to debate acute topics, even if difficult or even controversial, that are highly relevant for contemporary societies. Rather than concentrating on micro-issues, we should promote debates on the cross-cutting issues. The high level of the debate – without shying away from 'hot', even controversial issues – may become an additional attraction for participants, along with the interactive approach used in the sessions. Opposing views and their respective arguments by well-known speakers could be presented in such a way as to stimulate the engagement of the audience. An 'open microphone' after the session should become standard practice, encouraging participants to present their views, engage in discussion with each other and learn from each other. Sharing information better within the organization and using various means, including effective contemporary electronic means, are also important.

*Michael Cichon*, Distinguished Fellow of the ICSW and immediate past President of the ICSW, stressed that he looks forward to the challenges of the next 10 years for the ICSW, after which the organization will celebrate its 100th anniversary. In 1928, our predecessors thought globally and acted locally. The ICSW was a unique NGO in social development and social work long before the term NGO was coined. In acting locally, our member organizations made a difference for people.

Globalization has changed that fundamentally. Countries and societies are no longer social islands. They are interlinked by a multitude of economic and political ties, alliances and – as the case may be – adversary relationships. It no longer suffices to *think* globally; we also have to *act* globally.

By 2012, we were responding to that challenge rather well, but the biggest challenge is still to come. We became one of a handful of founding organizations of the Global Coalition for the SPF. We were the first global NGO to adopt the SPF concept, and we helped to push the SPF Recommendation through the ILO. Later, we helped to get the SPF into one of the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of Agenda 2030. And just recently, as a member of the Global Coalition, we persuaded the IMF to listen to civil society as they now develop their own social protection strategy. The latter development epitomizes our major policy challenge.

While we have forced them to listen to us, we cannot force them to hear and heed what they are told. The IMF is one of the most powerful international organizations and has so far pursued a residual, minimalistic, neoclassical doctrine in their social protection policy ‘recommendations’ to countries – just as the World Bank has done in many cases. There is little reason to believe that it will change fundamentally. Phillip Alston, the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, indicated in his recent report on the IMF that ‘to date, the IMF has been an organization with a large brain, an unhealthy ego and a tiny conscience’.

We must try to counteract the neoclassical attacks on welfare by using the international normative and ethical instruments that we can promote, influence and use. We should campaign together with our brothers and sisters in the Global Coalition for an *ILO* or *UN Convention on Social Protection* or *on the SPF*. And once it is accepted, we should campaign for national ratification. Once ratified, a convention is almost as good as national law. The IFIs should have to respect international law and national law. Unfortunately this is not a magic bullet, but it is one of the very few tools we have.

*Driss Guerraoui*, Professor at Mohammed V University of Rabat, Secretary-General of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council of Morocco and President of the ICSW MENA Region, touched in his presentation upon several burning issues that CSOs, including the ICSW, are facing in the world of today.

The increasing inequalities within societies, along with their consequences, represent huge social challenges; demands for addressing the structural drivers of inequality with more equitable distribution of wealth are growing in many countries. When economic growth brings benefits only to the wealthy, feelings of injustice and frustration are rampant, with inevitably negative social implications. The digital revolution and instant communications make people better aware of their rights and their power. People expect to be treated with dignity and demand respect, justice and freedom.

One of the lessons learned by CSOs is that if the root causes of extreme inequality and other social pathologies are not addressed, they could exacerbate tensions between society and the state, spur hate behaviour among the various classes of society and thereby foster a climate of insecurity and instability that can lead to anarchy.

Various factors complicate the situation: first, the existing crisis in the representativeness of elected bodies owing to the continuing decline in the unionization rate, low political party affiliations and mistrust in institutions and elites, and second, the emergence of new actors *Convention* with the assistance of the collaborative Internet networking that links isolated individuals and amplifies possibilities offered by the digital revolution. The emergence of various social networks brings greater visibility to individuals who can easily be digitally united around various protest movements. These campaigns can be spontaneous, autonomous and independent, or carefully organized and manipulated by hidden or open political forces in search of a political legitimacy that is rooted in the street.

In this light, the quest for more effective national civil dialogue in various areas becomes indispensable for maintaining social cohesion. The structures and mechanisms of such dialogue should be up to date and be made more effective for businesses, more equitable for employees, more just for citizens and institutionally more sustainable for the state and society. The ICSW has vast experience in this area, and it should be used in the future. Governments, civil society and other stakeholders are facing several major challenges that should be addressed.

The creation of effective and people-oriented governance is the number one priority. In addition to putting the citizen at the heart of its concerns, this type of governance must be more responsible and sustainable at the central and territorial levels.

The second challenge is political. It requires all actors to build a new institutional culture driven by a systemic approach to economic and social issues and an engineering of consultation, negotiation and mediation based on the principle of 'effort sharing' in order to achieve common goals that require shared sacrifices and reciprocal concessions.

Promoting digital technologies for mass communication and developing appropriate methods of securing their IT infrastructures represent another crucial task.

Finally, establishing mechanisms to promote participatory democracy practices within the community at all levels of economic and social governance is essential. This choice should result in strengthening the role of mediation, consultation, dialogue and regulatory bodies at the central and territorial levels so as to promote mutual listening and responsible and calm debate among citizens, with wider social participation.

*Dr Crystal Cheng*, Business Director of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service, focused her presentation on capacity-building issues, in particular on challenges and lessons learned regarding the two pillars of NGO activities embracing governance and leadership. The Hong Kong Council of Social Service (hereinafter 'HKCSS'), being the main association of social service organizations in Hong Kong, is working to develop a strategic focus on strengthening the governance and management capacity of NGOs in order to enhance their accountability and the quality of their services. In order to achieve this aim, the HKCSS launched two projects in recent years: the Governance Platform Project and the Executive Leadership Development Programme.

The Governance Platform Project seeks to encourage NGO board members to engage in professional exchange and mutual learning. The project encompasses various initiatives, such as seminars, board visiting, networking activities and non-profit governance knowledge portals. The Executive Leadership Development Programme, however, brings chief executives, deputies and senior managers together to build the capacity and networks of the sector's emerging leaders. The Programme consists of workshops, seminars, a reflective leadership camp, peer-learning cases and leadership coaching, in which senior executives can exchange and learn from cross-sector professionals, the government, policy makers and opinion leaders.

The HKCSS believes that NGOs that seek to serve effectively in the community need robust collaboration and development of the two pillars of NGO leaders, not only for a single organization but also for the social welfare sector and society at large.

*Sandra Carla S. Mirabelli* (Brazil), speaking on behalf of her organization Social Service of Commerce (SESC São Paulo) referred to the innovative experience of her organization in various social and cultural fields. These initiatives are, in many ways, similar to organization-wide activities of the ICSW and are based on the defence of human rights, continuous knowledge building and a commitment to social protection in the broadest sense, including the neighbourhoods where people and their families live.

In order to succeed with this approach, an encompassing effort is required, aimed at the inclusion of initiatives, projects and programmes, that is based on a top-notch analysis of 'social topography', with attention given to a wide set of relationships existing in the places where people live. As societies become more complex and urbanization more entrenched, the level of safety has decreased. People tend to depend more on social protection schemes and programmes because the protection bonds that were normally found in small communities and strengthened by family have become weaker.

In this context, institutions such as the ICSW and the SESC play an extremely important role in helping people to find new meaning in life with wider access to culture, leisure, healthcare, education and welfare. A process of permanent/non-formal education as the basis for social transformation has become most important.



Our initiatives are based on the principles of education conceived by the educator Paulo Freire, which seek to break down the barriers between education and culture, highlighting their communal, transformative and libertarian side. A context-based learning system, process-based assessments and collective knowledge building are seen by the SESC as a path to the pursuit of self-empowerment. Culture is seen as a transformative and empowering tool; this dimension permeates every programme offered by the institution.

The work carried out by the SESC and the ICSW follows these principles and aims to reveal and debunk a reality that creates and reproduces inequalities. It seeks to empower and emancipate individuals while increasing their participation. The existing complexity in society should not be seen as a difficulty, but as a challenge to be faced by all in the light of the countless needs arising from all segments of society, even if changes are small and happen slowly.

We extend our heartfelt congratulations to the ICSW for working with such humane conscientiousness and connecting people so that we can realize that the future is already in the present and that time is something we plan to build for others.

*P.K. Shajahan*, Professor of Social Work and Vice President, ICSW, called his presentation 'A multi-stakeholder approach to social protection: Leaving no one behind'. He underscored that Agenda 2030 mandates us to take everyone on board in achieving the SDGs. More than a third of those goals are directly related to the scope of social protection, which is one of the main focuses of the ICSW. Hence, the ICSW with its avowed goals of promoting social protection through engagements with social policies and a multitude of actors has been able to articulate the need for social protection in achieving the SDGs.

Rather than passive protection against contingencies, addressing structural roots that keep people in poverty and inequality is to be the focus of universal and sustained social protection. It is believed that no meaningful sustained economic growth can be achieved in the absence of social protection. Social protection is not an expenditure on welfare but an investment in economic development itself. Thus, it combines rights as well as development perspectives with an aim to reduce the risk and vulnerability of populations. Hence, social protection needs to be located at the intersection of human rights, human development and vulnerability/risk reduction. Within the actions aimed at achieving the SDGs, the ICSW believes that striking a balance between social, economic and environmental growth aimed at reaching everyone, especially the poor, is possible, if the roles of various stakeholders are understood and their efforts are synchronized. While the state remains the primary responsibility holder for ensuring universal social protection (USP) by devising and implementing the necessary social policies and programmes aimed at reducing vulnerabilities, other stakeholders such as international actors, civil society and the market/industry need emphasis.

International actors, including the ICSW, could engage in creating the global environment for USP through global campaigns, devising policy frameworks and engaging in networking and advocacy. Various CSOs and collectives play a very important role by remaining as pressure groups and providing ground-level implementation support to state agencies. Furthermore, they can also provide legal support and engage in national and local campaigning for rights and justice. As practised in India, CSOs engaging in legal recourse, such as public interest litigation as well as conducting social audit, have resulted in bringing transparency and ensuring better access to social protection programmes for the marginalized. Finally, the market/industry is quite often out of bounds in discussions on social protection, except in areas such as social insurance schemes. However, the market too can play a significant role through corporate social responsibility initiatives, where the resources and expertise required for social protection programmes can be augmented by such collaborations with the industry.

Considering the specific focus of the ICSW on social protection, a renewed engagement could include the following:

- developing a global strategy to promote USP;
- infusing energies into member organizations and partners in bringing USP into the areas of their operation;
- developing and disseminating working models of multi-stakeholder collaborative approaches;
- bringing out periodical status reports on USP;
- establishing global, regional and national networks/platforms involving multiple stakeholders.

In her presentation, *Dr Cassandra Goldie*, Executive Director of the ACOSS, underscored the importance of the work that the ICSW is doing globally and regionally. The fight for social justice and human rights has never been more acute than it is today. The ICSW has an established reputation and name recognition as a preeminent international civil society organization, providing a voice for people facing poverty and exclusion. She acknowledged past Australians who had contributed to this great history, including Julian Disney, Denis Correll and Michael Raper. But she urged that the ICSW should not become complacent – it should continue striving to be relevant for its members and stakeholders, most importantly showing courage and leadership. The promotion of USP is an important political and socio-economic endeavour and it is supported by our organization at large. Civil society should hold governments accountable for their commitments. In this light, the monitoring of attacks on social protection and advocating for progress should become one of the important directions for the future work of the ICSW. It may strengthen existing partnerships and create new alliances.

*Chinchai Cheechoeroen*, Regional President, South-East Asia and Pacific region, NCSWT (Thailand) stressed in his remarks that celebrating the 90th anniversary of the ICSW and the 57th anniversary of the establishment of the National Council on Social Welfare is an opportunity to reflect on social developments in Thai society and, more broadly, in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) community.

The quest for appropriate social welfare models should be seen as a way to address and reduce inequalities in society and build social security for all people; it is essentially a way to encourage hope. The Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development, with its four core themes, is particularly important to all partner organizations focusing on issues of shared significance. Working together is essential in exploring emerging issues and addressing common challenges, bearing in mind the Sustainable Development Agenda and the shared vision of the ASEAN countries. Thailand also recognizes the importance and active role of the private sector in building empowerment and fighting poverty and inequality.

Support provided by government agencies gave a boost to collaboration between the public and private sectors when the Council on Social Welfare Organization of Thailand was established in 1958. The name of the organization was changed to the National Council on Social Welfare of Thailand (NCSWT) in 1960. The NCSWT became a member of the ICSW in 1968. We are particularly pleased to note that during the 1988–1991 term, Khunying Amporn Meesuk, a representative from the NCSWT, was elected as President of the ICSW.

At its establishment, the National Council originally had only nine member organizations, but in 2017 the membership increased to 958. The NCSWT plays an important role in numerous initiatives at the national level, supporting member organizations in many ways. Some examples include the launch of the National Social Work Conference, the establishment of the National Social Work

Day, the creation of Outstanding Volunteer Recognition and proposing an effective mechanism for the National Social Welfare Commission.

As a regional cooperation platform, ASEAN focuses on emerging issues and facilitates the achievement of pertinent social welfare goals crucial for countries and people. In collaboration with government structures and with the support from the ICSW, the NCSWT has been instrumental in organizing, since 2006, an annual international event sponsored by the government and the NGO community – *GO-NGO Forum* on Social Welfare and Development. National Councils on Social Welfare in each member country working together with ICSW and with assistance provided by the ASEAN Secretariat contribute directly to this activity. Among the main issues that have been addressed are the issues of social protection, the consequences of ageing, preventing human trafficking and other matters. The GO-NGO Forum provided an important platform for the elaboration of the ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection.

Addressing the participants of the Symposium, *Ronald Wiman* (Finland), Regional President, ICSW Europe, made a strong pitch for the promotion of comprehensive social policies.

The ICSW has a coherent history of advocating for a comprehensive approach to social policies. While also addressing more specific issues, the ICSW has made sure that these would be seen as integral parts of broader societal and developmental challenges. Our contribution to the World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995 (The Tampere Declaration adopted in 1994) strongly promoted the concept of ‘A society for all’ as the vision for social development. This idea was then well integrated into the Copenhagen Declaration and respective documents.

Now, again the ICSW has a great window of opportunity. The implementation of the SDGs call for advocacy and expertise in order to integrate the ethical and the social dimensions into the implementation strategies of the Goals. The ICSW and its members have the expertise to bring in a comprehensive societal perspective that will balance the ethical, social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainable development – in this order, sustainable development is an agenda of equity within and between generations. We need to build societies for all within the limits of one globe for all. There is no plan B because no Planet B exists.

Opportunities for the ICSW to get involved again in major global and European processes are coming up next year. For instance, at the UN the Commission for Social Development focuses on inequality, the Commission on the Status of Women deals with social protection, and in Europe, the follow-up of the Gothenburg Social Summit on the European Pillar of Social Rights calls for a wider social policy perspective. Doors are open for us provided that the ICSW can make available the right kind of expertise – in time and on time and in the right place: in New York and in Brussels.

## Concluding remarks

ICSW is a global NGO with a long and rich history. As the debate during the commemorative symposium vividly demonstrates, it has consistently emphasized the importance of policy design and appropriate implementation to achieve long-lasting improvements in the human condition and well-being. Working through multiple partnerships on the ground, it strives to reduce poverty and hardship, overcome structural inequalities, and promote social inclusion and justice. Through the years, the ICSW has become one of the central players among the CSOs in international and regional development debates.

Striving to enhance its reputation as a knowledge-based organization with a global reach, the ICSW has succeeded in creating a network of experts on social policy and social development issues, able and willing to come forward with innovative solutions to the existing social challenges and working at the forefront of conceptual thinking, advocacy and training. Technical assistance projects have been added to its portfolio recently.

ICSW's monthly publication *Global Cooperation Newsletter*, published in English, French and Spanish, is an important tool of information for ICSW members and beyond about ongoing debates in the social area, new issues and challenges. Along with the global edition, the ICSW regional publications are seen as an organizing and binding medium for members and indispensable platforms for communication.

Going beyond sectoral concerns and consistently advocating for an integrated approach to development, the ICSW strives to mobilize intellectual capacity and practical skills of its members towards achievable goals without losing sight of the most pressing issues of our times, such as poverty eradication and climate change, seeing measures pertinent to mitigation and adaptation as necessary for immediate social action. Integrating sustainability with a social policy framework has become one of the crucial contemporary priorities for the organization in its efforts to find a strong global response to the threats associated with climate change.

The challenges of multiculturalism and social diversity, raising inequality within and between countries, and the need to increase work opportunities and ensure social protection, equity and social justice – all these issues attract the attention of ICSW members and require proactive responses. Policy implications of these processes for civil society are enormous. The ICSW sees itself as a connector, convener and knowledge broker operating on a global scale, working with multiple partners to expand the boundaries of the possible.

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## Notes

1. Among these, the name of the Belgian doctor, scientist and educator René Sand (1877–1953) stands out. In 1921, he became Secretary-General of the 'League of Red Cross Societies', which was created in 1919. Sand endorsed the idea of a large-scale world forum on social welfare in 1923, thereby reviving a proposal floated earlier by Dr Clotilde Mulon at the 46th US Conference for Social Work. Julia Lathrop, the President of the National Conference for Social Work, invited René Sand to address the 50th American Conference on the issue of international cooperation, where he was able to generate a positive reaction to the idea. The foundation of the 'League of Red Cross Societies' proves to be indispensable for boosting international cooperation in social work; this new organization was established to provide humanitarian and social aid in times of peace, in contrast to the International Committee of the Red Cross which was established for times of war (Eilers, 2007).
2. Le Conseil international d'action sociale (ICSW) (2008c).
3. The European participants came from Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Spain, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Norway, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Sweden, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, Turkey and the Soviet Union. From outside Europe, organizations from Egypt, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, the United States, Japan, Peru, Siam, South Africa, Uruguay and Venezuela were represented (Eilers, 2003).
4. See Eilers (2007).
5. For more details, see Zelenev (2018).
6. The same 2-year periodicity was adopted for the Joint World Conferences as well.
7. Le Conseil international d'action sociale (ICSW) (2008b).
8. Le Conseil international d'action sociale (ICSW) (2008a).
9. See Disney (2019).
10. Summing up the ICSW's contributions and addressing the Plenary Session of the World Social Summit in Copenhagen on 7 March 1995, ICSW President Jarré (1996: 60) indicated that the Council

has been actively and constructively involved in every phase of the preparatory process leading to the Summit. 'We have mobilized our global resources – in personal, intellectual, organizational and financial terms – to inform NGOs about the Summit and to motivate them to participate in the endeavour, to contribute ourselves directly to the Summit's content and to give support to the process itself.'

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