

Discussion Paper on the Social Service Professions Policy

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Introduction

The Children's Act sets out the range of services that needs to be provided to children and their families in order to give effect to the constitutional rights of all children in South Africa family care, social services and protection from abuse and neglect. The Act provides for:

- partial care facilities (crèches)
- early childhood development programmes
- prevention and early intervention services
- drop-in centres
- protection services (including a support scheme for child-headed households)
- foster care and cluster foster care
- adoption
- child and youth care centres (children's homes, places of safety, schools of industry, reform schools, secure care facilities, and shelters for street children)

These services require a range of social service professionals including: social workers, auxiliary social workers, child and youth care workers, early childhood development practitioners, home and community based carers, community development workers, magistrates, family advocates, volunteers for example child line counselors, and probation officers.

The social service professions are currently regulated by the Social Service Professions Act (110 of 1978). The Act establishes the South African Council for Social Service Professions and allows for the establishment of Professional Boards, and the registration of professionals. The Council is responsible for writing codes of conduct and ensuring discipline within the professions.

¹ For more information on SSPAN, visit:

http://www.ci.org.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=543&Itemid=29

Additionally, the Council has a mandate to 'protect and promote' the interests of the social service professions.

The Social Service Professions Act is now outdated and needs to be replaced. In 2008 the South African Council for Social Service Professional's (SACSSP) produced several drafts of a replacement Bill. The last draft was entitled the Social Service Professions and Occupations Bill. Some of the significant features of this last Bill were its title and the distinction it made between social service professions and social service occupations. During consultation on the Bill concerns were also raised on its provisions regarding the functions, powers and composition of Council and the professional boards and also the relationship between council and the professional boards.

In March 2010, the Department of Social Development presented their Strategic Report to the Portfolio Committee on Social Development and postponed the tabling of the Social Service Professions and Occupations Bill until 2014. The reason for this was to allow time for the Department, in conjunction with the SACSSP, to develop a Social Service Professions Policy. This was done in response to a cabinet directive requiring all new Bills to be supported by a policy document that outlines the vision of the legislation, and its intended impact. The postponement of the Bill for consideration in 2014 will thus allow time for the development of a draft policy, consultation on the policy and the redrafting of the Bill in line with the vision set out in the final policy.

Due to internal consultation in the department, a draft Policy is not yet available, but the department has indicated that interested stakeholders may already send submissions on the challenges they are facing, and what they would like to see contained in a Social Service Professions Policy.

TIMEFRAMES FOR ENGAGING IN THE POLICY/BILL PROCESS

2010: Informal comments on the policy (DSD)

2011: Formal consultation (DSD/ Council)

2012: Redraft/review of Bill (DSD/ Council)

2013: Consultation on the Bill (DSD)

2014: Revised Bill introduced in Parliament

The Social Service Professions Policy is meant to respond to the needs of all social service practitioners. There is now an opportunity shape the policy from the beginning stages of its development. As indicated earlier, informal consultation will take place this year since the

policy should be completed by the end of 2010. Informal consultation means sectors can send information to the department now on issues that needs to be addressed in the policy. This discussion document highlights key questions for sectors to consider when making submissions on the policy. To assist members in giving effective contributions to the drafting of this Policy we first highlight what is the general information contained in any policy and why do social service practitioners need this particular policy.

What should be in a Policy?

- **Problem Statement:** The Policy must indicate clearly what it is meant to address.
- **Framework:** The Policy must be framed within a particular context (i.e. it must be framed in the existing legal or political context aimed at meeting legal or political objectives or it can be framed to function within a national, local or international context.)
- **Comparative Research:** A Policy is strengthened by comparative research finding guidance on how other countries have addressed a similar problem statement.
- **Vision, values, principles and definitions:** A Policy has a vision (i.e. goals that must be met by the policy). It contains values and principles under which it would operate and defines concepts to promote equal understanding amongst those responsible for applying the principles of the Policy and to achieve consistent application of the Policy's vision.
- **Clarified roles and responsibilities:** A policy clarifies roles and responsibilities of state departments, institutions, spheres of government, practitioners and professionals.

Why do social service practitioners need this Policy?

These are some possible rationales – you might have other ideas

- This policy is necessary to promote effective multidisciplinary team working amongst social service professionals and the lack of coordination of services to communities.
- To promote and embrace a different vision for social services, which put the needs of the clients first and addresses the needs of the social service workforce. Such a vision that accepts balances the needs for self-determination of each profession and encourages dialogue with other sectors. This Policy must be guided by common vision of a single workforce driven by integrated multi-disciplinary teamwork.

- To develop a comprehensive welfare workforce with clear roles and responsibilities set out.
- New services and practices have been developed.
- The policy is needed to provide services promised by new legislation e.g. Children's Act, Child Justice Act, Older Persons Act, the Prevention of and Treatment for Substance Abuse.
- To address the needs of the service recipients – children, persons with disabilities, elderly, families, substance abusers, youth.
- To address the needs of the social welfare workforce in relation to working conditions and consider the historical disadvantages faced by women in poor rural communities.
- To promote the use of a genuine developmental approach that is empowering both of the clients and the practitioners and professionals, and the providers.
- To achieve recognition by the Department of Labour of the value of the workforce.
- To address issues around the education of the welfare workforce relating to integrated and flexible career paths , the recognition of prior learning and the promotion of education that matches the needs of the clients.
- To promote a representative social service council that would include equal opportunities for all categories of social service practitioners including current and emerging professions and occupations.

What are the implications of the policy for your sector? What recommendations would you make to ensure that the specific needs of your sector are covered by the policy?

Use the following questions to guide your responses:

- What problem is the policy trying to address? The situational analysis should include the societal problems that practitioners in your field are working to address, and the challenges they face in doing their job.
- What are the goals that must be met by the policy? What are the values and principles that should guide the delivery of social services and the work of practitioners?
- The legislative framework is defined broadly. The framework should include all the laws covering the services that social service practitioners provide i.e. the Children's Act, the

Prevention of and Treatment for Substance Abuse etc. Which laws guide the delivery of services in your field?

- National Policies and Legislation (references to sector specific policies e.g. the Community Care Worker Policy)
- Regional Instruments
- International Instruments

[Participants should look up specific reference before the meeting – please bring a copy of the references or if possible the policy document]

- What happens in other countries? How do they structure services? How is your profession/occupation defined internationally?
- How should this policy address issues around categorization of social service practitioners? How can the policy highlight the roles of different social service practitioners in a multi-disciplinary social service workforce? How do you envisage working with others in a multidisciplinary team?
- How should the policy address issues around career-pathing for social service practitioners?
- What principles should be used to guide the implementation of the policy?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of state departments, institutions, spheres of government, practitioners and professionals? How should the powers and functions of Council be set out in the policy? How should the powers and functions of the professional boards be determined in the policy? Issues to consider:
 - Governance Structures
 - Supervision and Management
 - Professional Associations
 - Training and Professional Development
 - Monitoring and Evaluation
- What strategies should be employed to ensure that the policy and law is implemented in line with the values and principles?

These questions serve to merely guide consultation and discussions amongst different sectors to effectively engage in the process of creating this important policy.

What to do with your responses?

1. Consult with your own members
2. Send draft documents to SSPAN network for review and comment – the purpose is to identify common messages and ensure a coordinated response
3. Present papers at SSPAN content meeting
4. Send comments/submissions to Civil Legodu at Department of Social Development

Draw on existing resources – lessons from practice, research and policy e.g. ISDM