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The Routledge Handbook of Social Work Field Education in the Global South

Edited by Rajendra Baikady, Sajid S.M.,
Varoshini Nadesan and M. Rezaul Islam

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Swastyayan, a Commitment Fieldwork through Community Engagement

*Victor Narzary, Bibharani Swargiary, Riju Sharma,
and Alice K. Butterfield*

Fieldwork is an essential component of social work education. It places the students in real-life situations providing them with opportunities for growing as professional social work practitioners. In the process, students are able to understand the complexities of society, learn the modalities of intervention for social change and development, network and liaison with practitioners in the field, and thereby, attain adequate preparation and skills for engaging in social work practice. While fieldwork education places primacy on students' learning, growth, and development, it also provides social work educators with the space and the scope for networking and collaborative engagement with communities.

Social work education in classrooms is inadequate as generally, it imparts only conceptual and theoretical knowledge. It is important for social work learners to be able to 'feel' and 'do' (Parasuraman et al. (2021). Fieldwork provides the avenues for continued feeling, doing, reflection, and critical thinking. The fieldwork component of social work education is essential in that it exposes the students to institutions and systems that liberate or oppress people. In this regard, social work education also aims at enabling students to 'enhance problem-solving, coping, and developmental capacities of people', promote humane systems, and link individuals to 'resources, services and opportunities' (Minahan, 1978, p. 183). Within the Indian context, bodhi (2014, p. 9) posits that the context holds primacy, and as such students need to learn, as part of their fieldwork, 'theoretical frames (emerging from a context) coupled with ... concomitant practice skills (both macro and micro) in relation to the identified context'. This approach draws attention to the dangers that preplanned projects and programmes could harm rather than liberate groups and communities. Fieldwork education has to be organised as per the needs of a given context.

In the light of the dilemma and questions social work encountered at the turn of the 21st century, Powell (2001) suggests that social work practitioners need to be equipped with theory, skills, and values that draw a balance between consumerist social work practice on the one hand, and the uncertainties of radical social work practice on the other hand. This, he proposes, can be done by directing social work education and practice towards civic social work practice. For engaging in civic social work practice, students need to imbibe 'civic values based upon principles that are democratic, inclusive and communitarian' (p. 161). In line with this view, community engagement projects of the Assam Don Bosco University (ADBU) have the participation of people in the community at the core – from conception, throughout implementation, and