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Pacific Social Work and Its Functional Alternative

Introduction

The intent of this paper is to clarify "(professional) social work" in the USP region, and identify its "functional alternative work" if there are few or even no professional social workers in a community.

The Social Work Programme at The University of the South Pacific (USP) is located in the School of Social Sciences, Faculty of Arts, Law and Education. USP is a regional higher educational institution owned by 12 member governments: Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Samoa. The University has campuses in all member countries. The Social Work programme is coordinated from the main campus, Laucala, in Fiji. The programme is offered by flexible learning through blended delivery mode (online, paper and face-to-face tutorials), students may study social work from any of the 12 countries of the USP region. The Bachelor of Arts with a major in Social Work at USP began in February 2007. Previously, a Diploma in Social Services was offered that provided education and training for para-professionals mainly in Fiji. The bachelor degree has now attracted students from most of the USP member countries.

The profession of social work is emerging in the region, with Fiji being the most advanced. The Fiji Association of Social Workers (FASW) was established in 1995 as "...a professional organisation to provide cohesion, support, professionalism and training for its members"(Kuruleca, 2005:1). It membership in 2005 was reported as being 140 with members working in a variety of fields of practice including "...generic welfare service delivery, housing, young offenders, domestic violence, disability, children's homes, from policy making to working at a grassroots level directly with people in the community"(Kuruleca,2005:1). FASW became a dormant organisation in 2008 and was revived at a Special FASW General meeting held at USP in July 2012.

Traditionally in the Pacific Island Countries (PICs) functional alternative social work theories and models of practice "...are based on Pasifika cultural values of collectively, kinship, spirituality and interdependence through balance and harmony in relationships" (Passells (2006) cited in Beddoe and Maidment, 2009: 18). Examples of frameworks for practice might include: acknowledgement of spiritual dimensions; integration of respect for and connection with the environment and the universe; and incorporation of cultural strengths and practices, underpinned by values such as faith, humility and love. The Pasifika perspective of social work stands in stark contrast to "professional social work" based on what might be termed 'Western' concepts based on an individual rather than collective self-identity.

This diverse cultural and emerging social work professional context provides the framework for this paper. The first chapter will discuss professional social work as it is emerging in the Pacific focusing on three perspectives: 1. Social Work Education at the University of the South Pacific; 2. Social Work from the Fiji Association of Social Workers' perspective; and 3. Professional social work from a non-government organization (NGO) and Government point of view. The second Chapter will focus the discussion on the functional alternative social work and elaborate how society members view social work. The third Chapter will make a comparison between professional social work in the Pacific and its functional alternative work.

Pacific Social Work

The University of the South Pacific (USP) Region has many unique characteristics that influence the teaching of professional social work. As mentioned in the Introduction above, USP is a regional university with twelve member governments and the students who take up social work as a profession potentially come from twelve different educational systems. It means also that when they graduate as professional social workers they will work in twelve different jurisdictions and governmental systems. We also have to recognize the multi-cultural and multi-faith aspect of the Pacific. The region is

characterised also by small populations on many islands and atolls, spread across thirty-three million square kilometres of ocean and covering five time zones. Climate change, particularly sea level rise is an imminent social and environmental issue for the Pacific Island nations. The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (2011) view poverty in the Pacific as 'poverty of opportunity 'rather than 'extreme poverty' as defined by The United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). A further aspect is the Pacific Diaspora, which sees many Pacific Island peoples living in Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, North America, and Europe. The Diaspora contributes significantly to the economies of households and the economies of the countries (Jayaraman 2012).

Students can take social work at USP from any of the fourteen campuses based in the twelve member countries. A satellite communications network, USPNet (see Diagram 1) allows students to study through a variety of deliver modes including print, face-to face, blended and online, links the campuses. Professional social work is defined by the set of attributes, competencies and graduate outcomes that are expected of a social work graduate after completion of a three - year degree.
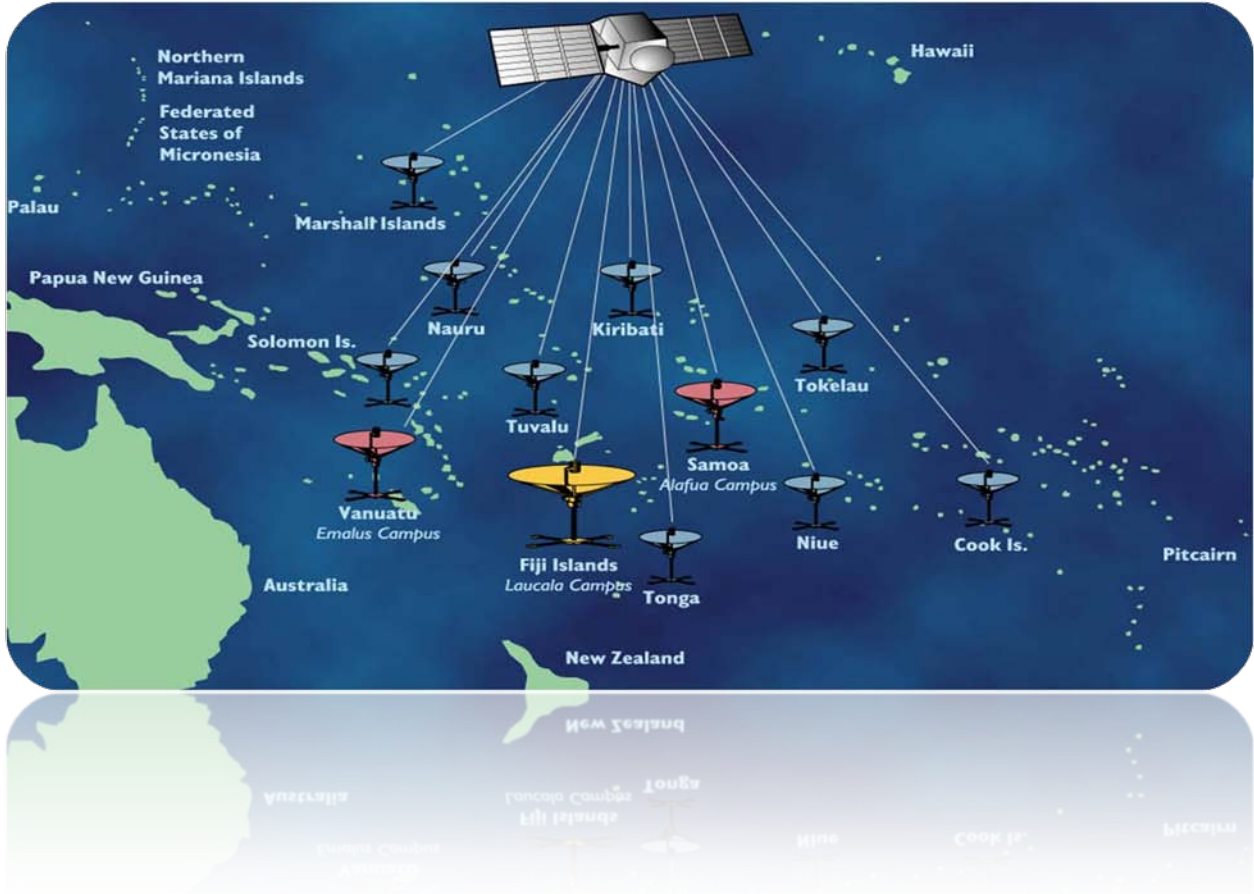
Image 1: USPNet (Koroivulaono 2012)

These graduate outcomes consist of seven University graduate outcomes and three Social Work Programme specific graduate outcomes (see Table 1). These graduate outcomes are embedded in the content of each course in the social work programme and students are assessed on their knowledge, skills and attitudinal attributes throughout their studies. Further students must complete field placements that are professionally oriented and supervision is by a qualified field educator – but finding qualified field educators is a very real issue facing the field education component of the programme.

Table 1: University and Social Work Graduate Outcomes

University Outcome	Clarifying Statement
Professionalism	Apply professional principles, values and ethics to their work
Critical Thinking	Evaluate ideas and opinions before formulating a conclusion
Communication	Choose appropriate language and modes of communication to share ideas & create understanding
Pacific Consciousness	Recognise the cultural heritage, and diversity of Pacific societies
Ethics	Apply ethical reasoning to their actions and decision-making.
Team Work	Collaborate with people of diverse perspectives to achieve goals
Creativity	Generate new ideas and approaches to solve problems
Social Work Outcome	**Clarifying Statement**
Advocacy	Advocate social and ecological justice in the Pacific and beyond
Methods	Use appropriate methods of social and community work practice to strengthen and empower the disadvantaged in diverse Pacific contexts
Policy	Formulate culturally appropriate policy options for diverse Pacific contexts.

(Yeates 2012.)

From a professional social work educational perspective social work is about working with individuals, families, living groups and communities in Pacific Island Countries and beyond to: resolve personal and

social difficulties, improve the quality of their lives and community, and advocate policy options which provide a better environment in which to live (Social Work Programme 2013).

A professional social work graduate is expected to be able to do the following work in society:

- Work with people to overcome problems.

- Work with people by finding resources for people.

- Develop programmes to assist in meeting the needs of people.

- Work with people to make plans for the future.

- Propose policy to government agencies (Social Work Programme 2013).

The USP Strategic Plan 2013 – 2018 'Objective 2: Ensure programmes continue to be relevant and responsive to the needs of the region' states that international accreditation should be sought for all programmes (The University of the South Pacific 2013: 23). This initiative will mean that the Social Work Programme will be moving to develop a professional programme that meets international accreditation standards. Ife (1997) has indentified four discourses that shape the social work profession and the work that professionals do in Australia. These discourses are managerial, market, professional and community. Beddoe and Maidment (2009) point out that the professional discourse shapes the profession and universities with regard to social policy – and this trend to professionalize the education of social workers in the Pacific poses a dilemma particularly in relation to 'Pasifika cultural values' mentioned above.

The Fiji Association of Social Workers' (FASW) Code of Ethics (n.d.) provides the following definition of social work:

This code is based on the fundamental values of the social work profession that include the worth, dignity and uniqueness of all persons as well as their rights and opportunities. Social work promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance their well-being.

The FASW Constitution (2004) and By-Laws (2004) provide a further perspective on the definition of professional social work. The By-Laws(2004) specify that membership of the Association is open to any person who qualifies under the following categories:

    i. Is involved in the provision of social, probation or community services privately or in person and may be employed by a registered institution or establishment and committed to the purpose, goals and objectives of the association.

    and/or

    ii. Is a scholar, researcher, policy maker, manager, writer, academic, student or trainee who is involved in the enhancement of the social, probation and community work profession and practice, is committed to meeting the goals and objectives of the association and has contributed and shall continue to contribute towards the professional standards of the association. (FASW 2004:1 (a)).

Both the FASW Constitution and By-Laws further qualify membership to persons who are employed "...in the area of Welfare, Probation, Social or Community work (sic) in any government or Registered Civil Society Organizations (sic) establishments or Institutions". Screening and approval of membership as prescribed in the Constitution is by the Executive. The 2000 – 2006 membership lists for FASW indicates that there were a total of two hundred and four members - one hundred and ninety – four members based in Fiji and an additional ten members who were listed being from other countries. Of

the total membership, nine are listed with a social work qualification while fifteen are listed with other qualifications such as counselling, sociology, education, divinity and nursing (FASW Membership Lists). The membership of FASW is very diverse and includes persons with both formal professional social work qualifications and 'functionally alternative work' qualifications.

Empower Pacific is a non-government organisation (NGO) based in Fiji. The organisation provides individuals and communities with "...professional holistic health and social development services" (Empower Pacific, n.d.). Programmes that are run by Empower Pacific include: counselling and social work, HIV/STI gender based violence, support services for people who are marginalised in society, income generation projects, local and regional training, psychosocial support in disasters and research. Social work from this organisation's perspective is a distinctive profession. Social workers who are employed with Empower Pacific need to have a specific social work qualification and should be eligible for registration with the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) or the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) and membership to the Fiji Association of Social Workers is encouraged (Empower Pacific 2012:6).

The Social Work Service Provision Policy demarcates the roles of social workers, counsellors, community services workers by the qualification an Empower Pacific employee may have, and the specific role they have in social service provision services of the organisation. In addition the definition of social work used by the organisation is quoted from the Australian Association of Social Workers' definition - "Social work is the profession committed to the pursuit of social justice, to the enhancement of the quality of life and to the development of the full potential of each individual, group and community in society" (Empower Pacific 2012:2). The practice of social work is conducted within the context of a "...holistic service provision (emphasising) the need to look at the whole person and consider their physical, environmental, emotional, social, spiritual and lifestyle situation" (Empower 2012:4).

Government perspectives about social work in the South Pacific region vary and focus on specific functional areas of social welfare with related statutory regulations and UN Conventions. For example in Vanuatu the Ministry of Justice and Community Services is responsible for social welfare with regards to women's affairs, child rights and protection, disability, correctional affairs, civil society, custom institutions and religious institutions (Government of Vanuatu 2011). In Kiribati the Ministry of Internal and Social Affairs, Social Welfare Division has responsibility for disability, youth, women and domestic violence, child and family welfare services (UNICEF and AusAid 2009 (a): 2). In the Division assistant social welfare assistant officers are responsible for the operational aspects of the Division. The Ministry also manages the Elderly Fund, which provides a monthly payment to persons 70 years and above (Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID 2012: 37 – 38). Similarly in Fiji, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Women and Poverty Alleviation is responsible for the administration of the Poverty Benefit Scheme targeting 13,000 low - income households, women empowerment and gender equality, child protection services, and developing an inclusive environment for senior citizens and disabled persons (Empower Fiji 2013).

In all the Ministries cited above, the civil servants are not required to have a social work qualification per se to carry out the statutory obligations entrusted to them. Many of the personnel in Vanuatu, Kiribati and Fiji are studying Social Work at USP and the Ministries in those countries have employed a few USP Social Work graduates. There is no legislation in Pacific countries recognizing the role of professional social workers in society and requiring the registration, licensing and accreditation of social workers in order to practice social work as a profession.

One respondent from a preliminary survey on the definition of social work made this statement about the professional social work that is done in Government service:

> Currently I am a paid Civil servant. And our work involves a wide range of programs within our core area of responsibility [Child Services programs – Residential Services, Court Reports, Adoption Services etc; and Family Services Programs –

Family Assistances Allowances, Care and Protection, Income Generation Projects, Bus Fares, Expanded Food Vouchers etc]

The respondents to the survey from both NGOs and Government further indicate that social welfare officers and social workers need a professional social work qualification to perform their duties.

This section has provided an overview of professional social work in the Pacific from four different perspectives: professional social work education, professional association, an NGO employer of social workers and governmental provision of social welfare services. The next Chapter will focus on 'functional alternative social work' in the Pacific.

Functional Alternative Social Work

This section will explore in a descriptive way functional alternatives to professional social work in the Pacific with examples from Fiji. As mentioned above in the Introduction, Pasifika oriented theoretical constructions of alternative social work are based on Pasifika cultural values of collectively, kinship, spirituality and interdependence through balance and harmony in relationships. The notion of self and self-identity is shaped and created through relationship and interconnection with the collective. Examples of frameworks for practice include acknowledgement of spiritual dimensions; integration of respect for and connection with the environment and the universe; and incorporation of cultural strengths and practices, underpinned by values such as faith, humility and love (Passells (2006) cited in Beddoe and Maidment, 2009: 18). Given this theoretical orientation, it is not surprising to observe that many of the alternative forms of professional social work are community-based and emphasize community participation and ownership rather than provision of professional services. Three examples are provided – the use of social media in building communities of interest in the USP region, community responses to the reduction in harm caused by domestic violence and violence against women, and the empowerment of people living in informal settlements.

Social Work Students – USP Region Facebook page has 126 members. Recent posting on the 'Social Work Students – USP Region' Facebook page highlight the issue of domestic violence and violence against women and children. One of the postings disseminates information on the global comparable survey conducted by the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre. The nationwide Fiji survey conducted between 2010 and 2011 using World Health Organisation methodology, involved 3193 women aged between 18 and 64 years. The survey found that " ...more than three in five (64% of women) who had ever been in a relationship have experienced physical or sexual violence or both by a husband or intimate partner" (Fiji Women's Crisis Centre 2013). Twenty –seven social work students and others have seen this post sent by mobile phone. This post was shared from One Billion Rising Pacific Facebook page with 485 'likes' indicating that number of people have seen that Facebook page. Other posts on Social Work Students – USP Region share posts from other organisations indicating actions that are being taken with regard to domestic violence. Share the Love on the UNICEF Pacific Facebook page, seen by 22 people on Social Work Students – USP Region, has 6,308 likes · 269 talking about this on their page. A further post links to a youtube video Break the Chain, a video advocating through song and dance, the end to violence against women. Thirty-six Social Work Students – USP Region have seen this post. The most recent post, seen by 18 people, is again a Press Release that highlights a conflict between The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre NGO and the Government of Fiji with regard to the work done by Government and NGOs in curbing and tackling domestic violence.

The discussion above about the postings on the social media Social Work Students – USP Region Facebook page is indicative of functional alternative social work. Anyone can be involved in the online community by sending a friend request. Through the postings people are networking - sharing information, advocating through people signing online petitions, and taking real life action. This research paper has also used the Social Work Students – USP Region Facebook page to solicit views on the definition of social work and the role of a social worker. Through social media communities of interest are created and maintained. The membership is fluid and can be exclusive or widely inclusive.

Another form of functional alternate social work can be found in the many community-based programmes that are found in Pacific Island countries. The Facebook postings above about domestic violence and violence against women note the 'Zero Tolerance Violence Free Community' initiatives begun in 2008 by the Fiji Department of Women in which the villagers themselves take responsibility to resolve and prevent domestic violence. Newland (2009) in assessing the impact of these programmes noted that in Fijian villages the *turaga ni koro* or administrative village head and the *talatala or* ordained Christian minister are the people to whom people go for advice and in the case of domestic violence are often the first people that people go to. Newland also notes that matters are taken to village meetings and the villagers work together to resolve issues. Where there are difficult cases, the matter is referred to the police and the Department of Social Welfare. The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (2013 (b)) has facilitated training, support, monitoring, and evaluation of the villages that have been designated Zero Tolerance Violence Free Communities.

Another example of a community-based approach is the Peoples Community Network of Fiji (PCN). The PCN grew out of the work of the Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy's (ECREA) Economic Justice Programme working with squatter or people's settlements in the Suva area (Peoples Community network of Fiji 2010). A process of building communities evolved overtime that begins with workshops on Social Analysis within squatter settlements. Individual settlements were then brought together to share their stories and it was decided to form a more independent network run by the people themselves. The PCN became an independent organization in 2009 and is now funded by aid money from the Australian International Development Agency (AusAid). Community committees are formed in each community after a series of workshops on social analysis, empowerment, and economic literacy. Following the workshops community facilitators from the PCN visit the communities on a regular basis and encourage the formation community committees and support the committees on their action plans. The programmes of the communities are quite comprehensive and include: education, kindergarten, environment, health and hygiene, care of the elderly, youth and employment,

women, savings, security – law and order and inter-cultural and inter-religious (PCN 2010). There are 115 communities being supported by PCN (Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) 2012 (b)).

The people see the facilitators and consultant for PCN as social workers and the work that they do is seen as social work. The primary consultant for the PCN is a Roman Catholic priest and all news media reports use the terms social work, social worker and social justice advocate to indicate his standing in society (Lewis 2013).

The Pacific Diaspora is an integral part of functional alternative social work. Morgan Tuimaleali'ifano (personal communication), a Samoan by nationality and Associate Professor of History at USP speaks of the importance of his own family's Diaspora in the case of funeral arrangements. Family members living in Aotearoa New Zealand and not those living in Samoa made the decision-making for one particular funeral. Communication was through email and mobile phone with those living in Fiji, Aotearoa New Zealand, Samoa and the United States of America.

The Pacific Diaspora also contributes significantly to the well-being of family members in Pacific Island countries through the sending of remittances. Jayaraman (2012) notes that remittance inflows are important to Pacific Island countries, as they are three times greater than foreign aid. These inflows from family member to family member are an alternative form of social welfare. It should be noted also that the transfer of money using mobile phone devices has increased the channels available of sending remittances and enabling people in remote areas to receive them in contrast to the Government schemes that rely on Bank or Post Office access.

This section has examined functional alternative social work using a Pasifika oriented theoretical construction of alternative social work and examining cases of alternative social work that were community-based. The final Chapter will compare professional social work with the functional alternative social work.

Comparative Analysis

This section will compare professional social work and functional alternative social work in the Pacific. Findings from a preliminary survey on the definition of social work and the difference between professional social work and functional alternative social work will help to illustrate the analysis.

In the survey, social workers and social work students were asked to define or describe social work from their point of view. The responses were varied and reflected the definitions of professional social work as discussed in the first chapter of this paper. Some of the responses are below.

> The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.

> Social Workers provide a holistic psychosocial assessment and support service which addresses the obstacles that are preventing people from achieving their potential and life goals.

> Social Work is from my own personal perspective "providing assistance [support and guidance] to a person who needs assistance by using other alternatives and available resources within your area of responsibility. This will need constructive interview, counselling and tapping resource avenues that could be seen as sources of support towards the assistance required by the clients.

> Pacific Social Work should offer a wide range of social support and appropriate services to address the profession, organizational management and community needs.

Using Human rights as a legal framework to address community empowerment, meeting basic needs and facilitating our freedom of servitude. We as professional social workers should work alongside communities at all times and able to accommodate the two types of journey. One is the journey where the aim is to arrive at our destination as quickly and as comfortable as possible. The other sort of journey is the journey of discovery.

Themes from the responses were the provision of service, working with communities, using human rights as a framework for practice, adhering to the values of social justice, empowering people, and utilizing theories of human behavior and social systems – the latter indicating the need for a qualification. We can see similar ideas expressed in the examples of Chapter 1 from the Social Work Education, FASW, Empower Pacific and Government perspectives. One response posted on Social Work Students – USP Region Facebook page seemed to support a non –professional perspective:

uhmm can it be thing about helping a community working with the society and people to improve them to be resourceful and can contribute to the country's welfare.

Respondents to the survey also recognized that there are alternative or support mechanism in society such as culture and spirituality that support professional social work and networking. Social work was seen as important in Fiji. One respondent echoed the Pasifika oriented theoretical constructions of alternative social work stated above –

It is important as we are still very much in groups of people with strong collective support together with their own available resources where we can capitalise to fully complement within our area of work for our own people.

From this survey and the cases of professional social work and its alternative functional work some preliminary conclusions can be garnered. A professional social worker is seen as a person who has a professional qualification and who has acquired the competencies and specialized social work knowledge that is recognized for registration in a professional association of social workers. What is not so clear is the fields of practice that require these qualifications. A perusal of social work student field placements at USP reveals varied and diverse fields of practice. These include but are not limited to corrections, disability, youth and women's work, counselling, social welfare, self – help housing, child protection, domestic violence shelters, faith based –work, environmental work, hospital social work, mental health, human rights, community development work, care of the elderly, disaster management and relief, micro-finance and consumer rights. In each of these placements there are few people holding social work qualifications.

People who do volunteer work in the community are seen as social workers by the community and regard themselves as doing social work. They do not have formal social work qualifications. In a discussion, group about the membership of the FASW one member remarked that if formal qualifications were required for membership more than half the current members would leave the organisation and find another organisation to support them.

Professional social work is also associated with paid employment and very specific statutory responsibilities such as child welfare and protection. UNICEF (2009 (a) and (b) for example, identify the need for social workers in the Pacific Island countries dealing with child welfare and protection to have formal training and education in social work. Newland (2009) states that the people running women's crisis accommodation across Fiji are not properly trained and qualified to manage the organisations and provide proper support for the women and children in their care.

A major distinction between professional social work and functional alternative work is the level of community involvement and participation. In the community-based alternatives, the people of the community take responsibility for their own decision-making. In professional social work, the participation of the community is through invitation of the organisation providing the service or in the case of the Fiji Poverty Benefit Scheme qualifies for the scheme after an assessment by welfare officers on specific criteria set by the Department.

Similarly, the strategy of service delivery by the professional social work organisation is either centre-based, where the client comes to the service, or community-oriented where the service is taken to the client of community. In some instances, both strategies are in use. Community-based alternatives by their nature use a bottom-up strategy.

In conclusion, it can be stated that professional social work has begun to define itself in the Pacific with the establishment of the Social Work Programme at USP and the revival of the FASW, but the challenge will be as one survey respondent noted:

> The association needs to protect the professional integrity of the role of a social worker, and advocate for national understanding and respect for the role. It needs to remain clearly differentiated from other professional support roles, and assist people to better understand the work that social workers do. It also can be a vehicle for accessing training and resources for continual quality improvement of social work in Fiji.

Functional alternative work will continue to be important in the Pacific. Community-based work is in some people's view not compatible with professional social work and this will be a further dilemma that will need some resolution in the future.

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