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Role of Social Workers in Environmental Protection and Development

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Abstract

Environmental degradation threatens not just the quality, but the very existence of life on earth. Hence environmental social work has become the need of the hour. In the current article, the author begins by shedding light on the concepts and causes of environmental degradation, and then goes on to describe the prevalent strategies and prominent international and national efforts towards environment protection. The role of the social worker in Indian environmental practice is also analyzed based on a study conducted by the author and literature review. Environmental issues are very important for all the people thorough the world. They impact the quality of human life. Each of us must protect the environment and must take part in preventing problems. The social workers have a great role regarding environmental issues. The paper aims to obtain opinions of students of the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Social Work branch, Bachelor degree, third academic course regarding environmental issues. The research question are : “What are the perceptions of students of the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Social Work branch, Bachelor degree, third academic course about environmental issues?” and ““What are their perceptions about their contribution to environmental protection as future social workers?”. It is used the focus-group method and technique of interviewing the students of Social Work branch, Bachelor degree, third academic course. In the study, we had the participation of 39 students of the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Social Work branch, and third academic course. There are given the appropriate conclusions. All the students consider very serious thes issues related to the environment. They accept that environmental protection is very important. Regarding the quantity of information that the students have about environmental issues, 10 students accept that they are very informed and the rest of the respondents said that they are less informed. The students affirm that they must contribute as future social workers in the environmental protection and they list a lot of actions for solving environmental problems, including: a)recycling, b)choosing the best products for the environment, c)avoiding travelling by car, d)the use of public travel, e)saving electricity, f)becoming a member and contribution to environmental organizations, g)giving donations for environment protection.

- Key-words: environmental issues, environmental protection, pollution, environmental Law, social justice, social action



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• INTRODUCTION

Environmental Protection refers to those measures taken by individuals, groups, communities and Governments to prevent the degradation of environment and protect the environment for the future. It also includes activities aimed at undoing the harm already done. It includes the following components:

- ✓ Prevention of pollution through specific bans and restrictions
- ✓ Controlling the quantity of pollutants by setting standards, where prevention is not fully possible
- ✓ Preservation of wild life and cultural monuments
- ✓ Conservation of water, energy and other natural resources
- ✓ Repletion of lost resources through afforestation, cleaning, treating, recycling, reusing, water shed management, reclaiming degraded land etc
- ✓ Discovering alternatives for non-renewable resources
- ✓ Promoting sustainable lifestyles.
- ✓ Arresting climate change



Environmental degradation is not experienced by all populations equally; dangerous and toxic waste sites, resource corruption (e.g., exposure to pesticides), air pollution, and numerous other forms of environmental degradation disproportionately affect low income and minority communities. The communities most affected by environmental injustices are often the same communities where social workers are well-established in service provision at the individual, family, and community level. In this article, we use a global social work model to describe practical ways in which environmental justice content can be infused in the training and education of social workers across contexts in order to prepare professionals with the skills to respond to ever-increasing global environmental humiliation. We discuss ways for social work educators to integrate and frame environmental concerns and their consequences for vulnerable populations using existing social work models and perspectives to improve the social work profession's ability to respond to environmental injustices. There are important social work implications; social workers need to adapt and respond to contexts that shape our practice, including environmental concerns that impact the susceptible and exploited populations that we serve.

Protecting the natural environment is a key feature to promoting economic and social justice,



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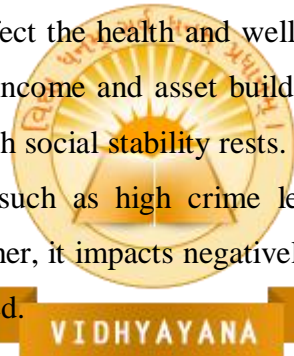
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particularly for poor people. It necessitates an emphasis on sustainable development. Nature will continue to provide humans with resources in the future only if they use them wisely in the present. Sustainability thus means that we have to meet the needs of current and future generations without exhausting either physical or human resources. When humans care for the earth, the earth will care for us.

Climate change and the rapid depletion of natural resources are affecting the lives of people in general. Large-scale drought is one of the effects of climate change. Drought means no water for agriculture, which in turn threatens food and nutritional security. Drought also causes ecological degradation including soil erosion, loss of animal and plant life, and loss of livelihoods. Natural resource depletion and the adverse impact of environmental degradation and pollution undermine the ability of communities to develop and grow. From a social justice perspective, sustainability denotes social and environmental interdependency. Clean air and water are important for reliable, sustainable food production, which in turn affect the health and wellbeing of humans and animals. Human and animal health directly influences income and asset building, which are critical in promoting social and economic inclusion upon which social stability rests. Social instability, exacerbated by structural inequalities and social concerns such as high crime levels, poverty and substance abuse, fuels political and armed conflicts. Further, it impacts negatively on the physical and human environment, especially when ordinances are used.



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Climate change and environmental degradation affect all populations across the globe, but differently. For instance, people in some small island states, such as the Maldives and the island states in Micronesia, are being displaced by rising tides. Many of them lose their homes and lands, regardless of economic, social or political status. However, research shows us that the poor and marginalized are most vulnerable to the effects of climate change (UNISDR, 2014). People who are poor, typically live in socially and economically excluded communities lacking adequate infrastructure especially in water, sanitation, power and communications. They may also be affected by high crime rates and violence. The effects are particularly pernicious for children, women and older people, and those displaced by such crises (e.g. (im)migrants, asylum seekers and refugees).

Sustainable development is about building healthy and inclusive societies, based on principles of social, economic and environmental justice. It recognizes the need to protect the environment and its



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resources for generations to come. Sustainable development initiatives are diverse in nature. They encompass policies, programs and services aimed at counteracting, or at least mitigating, the impact of climate change and environmental degradation. Some initiatives focus on improving access to water and sanitation, renewable energy for all, inclusive and safe housing and food security. Other initiatives address conservation of natural resources, halting and reversing air and land degradation, and halting loss of biodiversity. All of these advances are relevant to the sustainable development goals of building communities' resilience and capacities, while simultaneously protecting the environment and combatting the negative environmental impacts of industrial development that treats resources as expendable.

Social work and social development educators and practitioners are well positioned to contribute significantly to the promotion of environmental and community sustainability. The profession is largely a human rights profession. Many of our existing perspectives, models, theories and practices focus on challenging structural injustices, advocating for peoples' socio-economic rights and influencing policies. However, there is minimal attention to climate change and environmental degradation in our teaching, research and practice. For instance, social work contributions in areas such as disaster prevention, preparedness and recovery are inconspicuous. Ironically, even when we operate within an ecological theoretical framework, we tend to focus on interactions with the social environment, ignoring the natural environment. In order for us to remain steadfast in our commitment to human rights, a change is needed. It requires a political agenda within a human rights-based framework, and a holistic model which is rooted in social, economic and environmental justice.

• Indian environmental Law:

- ✓ Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981[2]
- ✓ Biological Diversity Act, 2002
- ✓ Environment (Protection) Act, 1986
- ✓ Forest Conservation Act, 1980
- ✓ Hazardous Waste Handling and Management Act, 1989
- ✓ Indian Forest Act, 1927
- ✓ National Green Tribunal Act, 2010
- ✓ Noise Pollution rule



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- ✓ Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act of 2001
- ✓ Public Liability Insurance Act, 1991
- ✓ The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006
- ✓ Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution), 1974
- ✓ Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2002
- ✓ Wildlife Protection Act of 1972

Renewable technologies are considered as clean sources of energy and optimal use of these resources minimize environmental impacts, produce minimum secondary wastes and are sustainable based on current and future economic and social societal needs. Sun is the source of all energies. The primary forms of solar energy are heat and light. Sunlight and heat are transformed and absorbed by the environment in a multitude of ways. Some of these transformations result in renewable energy flows such as biomass and wind energy. Renewable energy technologies provide an excellent opportunity for mitigation of greenhouse gas emission and reducing global warming through substituting conventional energy sources. In this article a review has been done on scope of CO₂ mitigation through solar cooker, water heater, dryer, biofuel, improved cookstoves and by hydrogen.

Environment policies of the Government of India includes legislations related to environment. In the Directive Principles of State Policy, Article 48 says "the state shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country"; Article 51-A states that "it shall be the duty of every citizen of India to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife and to have compassion for living creatures."

India is one of the parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) treaty. Prior to the CBD, India had different laws to govern the environment. The Indian Wildlife Protection Act 1972 protected the biodiversity. It was amended later multiple times. The 1988 National Forest Policy had conservation as its fundamental principle. In addition to these acts, the government passed the Environment (Protection) Act 1986 and Foreign Trade (Development and Regulation) Act 1992 for control of biodiversity.



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