



ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN ZIMBABWE: A SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The relevance of social work as a helping profession in Zimbabwe is under threat because its major purpose remains cramped within social issues devoid of environmental concerns. The key functions of the profession revolve around the restoration of coping capacities and enhancement of social functioning in the upkeep of an individual's well-being. From the ecological point of view, these dynamics are drawn from the micro, mezzo and macro levels of the societal structure. The most salient feature in the promotion of a sustainable system is the prevention of problems that occur as a result of a bad rapport between man and his environment. This article argues that social work needs to incorporate environmental issues so that it nurtures sustainable development in its praxis. Hitherto, social work has been relegated to become a cure for social ills and not an active player in the prevention of social problems in Zimbabwe. These are the problems faced by the social work clientele in their daily lives but little attention is paid to their implications in the social environment. In this paper, the author reaches a conclusion that the inclusion of environmental issues in social work promotes sustainable socio-economic development in Zimbabwe.

KEY TERMS: environment, environmental sustainability, sustainable development, social work, Zimbabwe

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

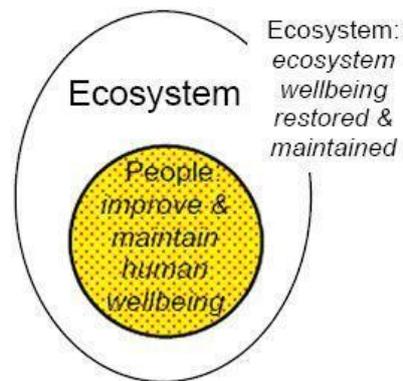
Environment is a combination of all natural resources both living and non-living that plants and animals depend on for their living. In Zimbabwe, Environmental Management Act (Chapter 20:27) defines “environment” as all natural and man-made resources found in the lithosphere and atmosphere which include water, soil, minerals and living organisms. The same piece of legislation also states that environment includes the socio-economic and other conditions that contribute to its sustainable usage. However, environmental crisis is one of the cancerous problems that have affected both flora and fauna of the 21st century. According to Rockstrom et al. (2009), climatic change is just the tip of an iceberg of global ecological crisis related to biodiversity, availability of fertile land, sustainable food production and finite water and energy resources. United Nations (2013) notes that environmental crisis is one of the worst problems faced by people because it has resulted in the depletion of the ozone layer and development of the “greenhouse effect” due to unmanaged industrial growth, massive urban concentrations and increased emissions. The existence of alarming statistics on the ecological devastation of planet Earth and the global social and economic crisis have raised fundamental concerns about the relation between ecological crisis and social problems leading to a situation called ‘social-ecological crisis’ (Peeters, 2009). According to the Living Planet Report (World Wide Fund for Nature, WWP, 2010), in 2007, the global ecological footprint had already exceeded the natural coping mechanisms of the planet by 50 per cent. As a result, there is the destruction of habitats for native species, discharge of polluting substances into the environment and emission of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere resulting in climatic change.

Zimbabwe is one of the countries that are suffering from the worst consequences of environmental crisis that involve water pollution, land pollution, air pollution, illegal mining, veld fires and deforestation. The country is still experiencing a lot of tragedies that occurred as a result of climate change and the depletion of the ozone layer. A good example is the Tokwe-Murkosi floods 2013-2014, which led to the displacement of thousands of people in southern Masvingo to the Chingwizi camp. According to Chikodzi and Mutowo (2014), natural disasters such as the Tokwe-Murkosi disaster in 2013-2014 could have been mitigated by timely dissemination of relevant information concerning climate change and natural disaster. Mangizvo et al (2015) found that certain practices such as burning of solid waste can lead to the emission of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide. In addition, Environmental Management Agency (EMA) recorded 2575 incidences of veld fires in 2014 which destroyed 1, 653,822 hectares and claimed the lives of 12 people. Accordingly, there is an estimated loss of 100,000 to 320,000 hectares due to deforestation. Hence, based on the above mentioned evidence, it is problematic for social science to ignore the environmental component that contributed to the socio-economic situation of today. It is within social work ethical obligation and foundation that every citizen is safe from any life threatening forces. As Muzingili (2016) argues, the time has arrived for social workers in Zimbabwe to embrace environmental issues in their academic and professional practice. Therefore, this paper strives to emphasise the need for social work in Zimbabwe to integrate environmental sustainability agenda within their practice.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Great strides being made towards sustainable development present tremendous challenges for man and his environment. According to the Center for Environmental Education (2007), man has all that is necessary to achieve sustainable development but fails to understand the need to adapt to nature and not vice-versa. Center for Environmental Education (2007) presents some of the constructive models for understanding sustainable development (SD) which include the Three Pillar Basic Model, Egg of Sustainability Model, Atkisson Pyramid Model, Prism of Sustainability Model and Amoeba Model. This paper was informed by the Egg of Sustainability Model which was designed by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, IUCN (Center for Environmental Education, 2007). Utilizing this model is very important in understanding the relationship that exists between people and their environment. It is also important to conceptualize the core tenets of the Egg of Sustainability Model because they help in articulating the role those social workers should take in implementing green social work in order to reduce poverty among the poor.

The Egg of Sustainability Model illustrates the relationship between people and the ecosystem as one circle, just like the yolk and white of an egg, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: *The relationship between people and the ecosystem*

From J. Peeters (2011)

The figure, above, illustrates the interdependency of people and the ecosystem, where the yolk represents the people and the ecosystem the white. According to this model, the social and economic development can only take place if the environment offers the necessary resources that comprise raw materials, space and conditions for good health. Hence, ecosystem is perceived as a super-coordinated system that takes into consideration social, economic and institutional dimensions. In summary, the Egg of Sustainability Model perceives sustainable development as the sum of human well-being and ecosystem well-being. This explains the necessity of people in both rural and urban areas in Zimbabwe to take responsibility for the prevention of environmental disasters.

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIAL WORK

Ramsay and Boddy (2016) discuss the environmental social work and related terms that have been used to describe an approach to social work that focuses on ecological justice principles. There are many non-Western traditions that have integrated the natural environment into social work practice. According to Dewane (2011), the first mention of the importance of natural environment to social work practice is found in 1995 Social Work article, "Habitat Destruction Syndrome", written by Berger. Accordingly, Park also discussed the role of social workers in the environmental movement in his 1996's article titled, "The Person Is Ecological: Environmentalism of Social Work." However, Ramsay and Boddy (2016) argues that several authors (Kemp, 2011; Peeters, 2012; Rambaree, 2013; Shaw, 2011; Zapf, 2010) talk about the inclusion of environmental issues in social work in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Zapf (2010) notes that, in 1981, Germain raised alarm complaining that social work was distorting its core values by omitting the physical environment unexplored. She argued for the understanding of the physical environment in both the natural and built worlds. Thus, from a critical perspective, social work was mainly focusing on the immediate causes and effects of the social factors without looking at the long-standing environmental forces that affect human metabolic activities and the way they respond to social hassles.

Environmental social workers seek to create a society in which ecological and social justice are valued and people live in peace with their natural ecosystems (Gray and Coates, 2013; Gray et al, 2013; Jones, 2013). This field of social work was proposed because it promotes human well-being, compassion and an understanding of systematic discrimination and respect people's right to exist (Ryan, 2013). Proponents of environmental social work argue that the core values and skills in social work can be used to promote social change, mitigate environmental degradation and maintain a biodiverse planetary ecosystem. In the past, social workers were failing to understand the sociality of the physical environment despite the availability of social aspects in it. Early social workers such as Mary Richmond believed that the goal of social work was to ensure a balance between the realities of a person's capabilities and his/her social situation. In that regard, the inclusion of environmental aspects was also highlighted by Pincus and Minahan when they proposed four basic systems to consider when assessing an individual's problem (Zapf, 2010). In 2004, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) called on all social workers and their agencies to recognize the utility of the natural and built environment to the social environment and develop environmental responsibility and care for the environment in the social practice for the benefit of current and future generations (Zapf, 2010). The organization also emphasized on the need, for social workers, to work with other professionals to increase their knowledge and work with community groups to

advocate for a healthier environment and ensure that the presence of environmental issues in social work is increased.

In order for social workers to be effective in the restoration of people's functioning, they need to incorporate environmental issues into the social work curriculum and this requires support from a school of social work (Council for Social Work Education, 2015). To promote social change, it is essential to include environmental values and practice throughout the curricula (Dominelli, 2011; Dylan and Coates, 2012; 2010; Jones, 2013; Kemp, 2011). In 2010, the NASW Delegate Assembly proclaimed that environmental exploitation violates the principle of social justice and NASW Code of Ethics (Dewane, 2011). This means that human dependence on the physical environment sits behind social work's goal to help create sustainable environmental conditions for the flourishing of the human and natural world (Hannis, 2015). According to Dominelli (2013) and Gray et al (2013), environmental justice in social work should encompass theoretical framework that incorporates an understanding of environmental issues and their impact including extinctions, pollution, habitat destruction and natural disasters. According to Dewane (2011), environment involves both the social and physical facets as well as local services. Hence, if ecology contains all these aspects then social work has been off the road in excluding issues to do with the built environment that includes housing conditions, pollution, sanitation, hygiene and other environmental services that forms the core of social problems people face in their own communities. In 2010, the Council on Social Work Education declared that sustainability is the new form of social justice in the 21st century but the profession is making relapses. Thus, there is need to change how environmental issues are taught to social work students so that the curricula include "the person-in-environment" aspect.

The historical background of social work training in Zimbabwe can be dated back to the colonial era. According to Chogugudza (2009), social work education in Zimbabwe started with the establishment of the School of Social Work in 1964. The School was established by the Catholic Jesuit Fathers to train group workers for clubs and welfare centres. In 1969, the School was turned into an affiliate of the then University of Rhodesia and offered university diploma in social work until 1975 when it introduced the bachelor's degree (Chogugudza, 2009). It is important to note that social work education in Zimbabwe was mainly focusing on structural poverty and not considering the sole causes of the existing social problems that emanated from the environment. Hitherto, the indigenization of social work and the incorporation of environmental social work into the curricula have been a tough sell for many countries, Zimbabwe included, because the foundational assumptions of the much existing social work scholarship is heavily dominated by the Anglo-American scholars whose perspectives are influenced by individualistic therapeutic approaches (Gray and Coates, 2015). Thus, the inclusion of the indigenized environmental issues in social work training and practice in Zimbabwe is long overdue.

THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable Development is a concept that defies a precise definition because it is viewed by people using different lens. According to Peeters (2011), sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It also implies economic growth together with the protection of environmental quality, each reinforcing the other (Center for Environment Education, 2007). The gist behind this is to ensure that intergenerational equity and solidarity are realized for continued existence of human beings on planet Earth. In line with Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, people need to embrace growth that is characterized by environmental resilience. The United Nations (2013) discusses the changes required in local, national and global policies for the achievement of post-2015 sustainable development. The survey noted the importance of addressing unsustainable consumption and production patterns and their environmental impacts through the "greening" of their economic activities. The upholding of sustainable development, in Zimbabwe, is supported by the provisions of the Zimbabwean legislation. This starts with the conservation of natural resources and protection of the environment as espoused in both Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No.20) of 2013 and the Environmental Management Act (Chapter 20:27). Section 73 subsections (1) (a) and (b) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No.20) of 2013 guarantees every individual a safe environment. The provisions of these sections urge the Zimbabwean citizenry to prevent pollution, ecological degradation and promote natural conservation as well as economic and social development that respects ecological sustainability.

Roome (2008) presents three dimensions of sustainable development which include the economy, society and ecosystem. Accordingly, there is a mutual relationship that exists among the environment, economy and the society which affects how individuals survive on earth. This entails that the contribution of economy to sustainable development results from the relationship that exists between the society and environment as shown in the Figure 2.

Figure 2: *The relationship that exists between the society and environment*



From Roome (2009)

According to United Nations System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda (2012), sustainable development post-2015 entails progress in four dimensions that include inclusive economic development, inclusive social development, environmental sustainability and effective governance and peace and security. The level of environmental crisis bedeviling planet Earth calls for the need to have principles that nations should follow to achieve sustainable development. These principles should act as guidelines to start and improve assessment of activities of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), corporations, community groups, governmental and international institutions (Center for Environment Education, 2007). Accordingly, there are about 9 principles that define sustainable development which are explained as follows:

- Encouragement of consumption within the bounds of the ecology.
- Meeting essential needs to achieve full growth potential and promoting sustainable development where such needs are not being met.
- Achieving sustainable development that is in harmony with the changing productive potential of the ecosystem.
- Protecting the natural systems that support life on Earth.
- Equitable distribution of constrained resources to relieve the planet Earth of ecological disaster.
- Taking into account system-wide effects of exploitation.
- Reducing the depletion of non-renewable resources.
- Conserving of flora and fauna.
- Minimizing adverse effects of human activities on the quality of natural resources.

SUSTAINABILITY AND SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE IN ZIMBABWE

Phillip and Reisch (2015) argue that social workers should understand the ‘person-in-environment’ perspective and become more active in addressing the prevailing environmental crisis so that sustainable development is attained. Many researchers have already begun to explore the relationship that exists between social work and the natural environment (Gray and Coates, 2013; Pulla, 2013). For example, deforestation in Zimbabwe deprives people of their land and toxic pollution and emissions of waste into water bodies result in health problems such as asthma. In Zimbabwe, EMA has been put in place to ensure that any person who causes pollution or environmental degradation should meet the cost of addressing the resultant adverse health effects. Mary (2008) proposed that there is need to expand social work values to include transpersonal elements and demands that social work education, coursework, fieldwork. According to Mary (2008), social work students have been introduced to

the “person-in-environment” paradigm in their courses but little can be found about the natural or physical environment. Thus, to make a paradigm shift from the socially-oriented to environmentally-based thinking in the social work practice, social workers need to understand the linkages among environmental crisis, sustainable development and the role that they play in the promotion of an environment-friendly socio-economic development. Hence, the table below shows the link between social work and sustainable development.

Table 1: *The link between Social Work and Sustainable Development*

Social work	Sustainable Development
Focuses on enhancement of human well-being and has a broader focus	It is concerned with satisfaction of human needs
Respect for Earth's finite resources depends on how notions of human beings are understood across locations.	Accepts ecological limits- the Earth's finite resources
It holds people accountable for their actions but believes the state has a role in the provision for its citizens.	It entails common but differentiated responsibilities among individuals.
Social Work is aligned with the goal of global justice.	Upholds global justice despite divergent conceptions
Social Work extols social solidarity, diversity and empowerment, especially with marginalized populations	Promotes intergenerational equity and solidarity
It is compatible with social people's futures.	Stresses that responsibility for future generations is an innovative principle
Active participation of service users is highly valued in social work.	Active participation of citizens is seen as crucial to sustainable development
Social work promotes equality and respect for diversity	Gender equality and respect for diversity

From Peeters (2009: 33)

The Environment Management Act (Chapter 20:27) of 2005 argues that development must be socially and environmentally sustainable. This means that social workers in Zimbabwe should declare a focus on person-in-environment and play a leadership role in interdisciplinary efforts to deal with environmental threats to human well-being and continued existence (Zapf, 2010). In developing countries, Zimbabwe included, the poor are found in rural areas where they rely on subsistence farming and destroying their natural surroundings is akin to committing culpable homicide. The most important thing that social workers need to take seriously is the fact that poor people are mostly affected by environmental destruction and climate change (Hetherington and Boddy, 2013). The rate at which world resources are depleting and how the environment is being degraded is affecting the environmental sustainability which translates to further impoverishment among the poor (UNDP, 2010). It is a common trend that whenever resources are exploited, the poor are the ones who bear the brunt of environmental crisis yet the rich accumulate wealth for themselves. This does not only heighten the vulnerability of the poor and net consuming households but also increases the level of poverty in developing countries. For example, the poor who live in mining areas in Zimbabwe, such as Chiadzwa and Marange seldom get any benefit from the minerals extracted from their locality (Chifamba, 2014). Accordingly, Manicaland Provincial Minister, Chris Mushowe, castigated diamond mining companies in Chiadzwa of not doing anything to ensure that the locals benefit from their resources. This situation is worsened by the prevalence of environmental tumours from the wreckages of mineral operations and heavy mining activities taking place in the area. Hence, many African countries have, for the past two decades, witnessed a growing movement to empower rural communities with rights and responsibilities with which to manage forest resources (World Bank, 2009). Thus, it should have been the role of social workers, in Zimbabwe, to be actively involved in these diamond mining activities so that poor people would benefit from their natural resources.

The situation presented above shows that Zimbabwe is still lagging behind in the promotion of pro-poor sustainable development like other countries. A village-based approach in Madagascar, through technical assistance and support from local NGOs planned and implemented household tree plantations for charcoal production in Madagascar. This project have seen the planting of more than 4, 500 hectares and an annual increase in income for more than 20% for more than 1,500 rural households (Sepp, 2008). It is interesting to note that 34% of the poorest and landless people became involved and 22% of the women were engaged as woodlot holders. According to World Bank (2009), the contribution of Tanzania's charcoal sector to employment, rural livelihoods, and the wider economy is estimated to be in the region of US\$650 million per year. This sector has become the

source of income for hundred thousand people in both urban and rural areas at the production, processing, marketing and distribution levels of the value chain. The above case study from Madagascar and Tanzania should give social workers in Zimbabwe some lessons on why they should be involved in environmental management. It also shows that participatory approach to environmental sustainability is very important to economic growth and forms the core of sustainable development in developing countries and for this to happen, the poor should be actively involved and take a leading role in implementing and benefiting from environmental sustainability programs. This entails involving them in the planning, implementation and evaluation of programs run by both governmental and no-governmental organizations. Thus, for Zimbabwean social workers to succeed in sustainable development, they need to ensure that the poor are participating in the conservation of natural resources in their own communities.

CONCLUSION

The above discussion deduces that environmental social work is the way to go in addressing the social problems that clients encounter in this 21st century. The problems that they face in their daily lives divorce the importance of remedial social work in the alleviation of social ills in Zimbabwe. The Egg of Sustainability Model makes it clear that there is a strong correlation between people and their environment. With the existence of pathetic environmental degradation in Africa and Zimbabwe, at large, it is high time to understand that it is a global problem that causes challenges which fall heavily on the poor to whom social workers are most accountable. From this paper, it is promising that if environmental issues are incorporated in the training of social workers in Zimbabwe, there are high chances that students can be able to examine the connections between environmental justice and problems faced by the poor and design a strategy that address them using ecologically-oriented community development. This calls for practically-based lectures that expose social work students to systems thinking whereby they reflect on the nature and its relationship to the social lives of the poor. The prevalence of social problems that emanate from the environment shows that social workers have a great task to accomplish in their practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Having noted some loopholes in social work training and practice, the author of this paper recommends the following:

- Revamping of the Social Work Curricula in Zimbabwe to embrace the inclusion of environmental issues in taught courses and fieldwork assessments. This helps them to understand the link between climatic change and its impact on people and animals.
- The National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) executive should arrange periodic lecture series where they present on the symbiotic relationship that exists between social work, environmental sustainability and sustainable development among the poor.
- Social workers should focus on specific environmental issues that grab students' attention rather spending too much time on complex science. All social workers in Zimbabwe should know that environmental justice is the only avenue to sustainable development in the country and failure to do so has negative effects on the delivery of comprehensive care to their clientele.
- Social workers also need to advocate for the promotion of environmental sustainability among NGOs implementing various pro-poor activities. This should focus on pro-poor participation in all programs that affect their environment and social lives.

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