FORCED MIGRATION, DISPLACED PERSONS, AND OUR CLIMATE IN CRISIS: A CALL FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION AND PRACTICE

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Climate change is a major challenge of our time, requiring immediate action. We have seen and experienced the impact of increased global warming and climate change worldwide, requiring a coordinated global response. The time period 2010–2019 was the warmest decade on record, with 2016 being the warmest year, followed by 2019 (United Nations [UN], 2020a). Consequently, during 2008–2018, 90 percent of the people displaced by disasters (approximately 23 million people) have had weather-related triggers (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [UNOCHA], 2019). In addition, out of 33.4 million newly displaced people in 2019, 70 percent were as a result of climate-related disasters (UNOCHA, 2019). Worldwide, we have experienced shifting weather patterns, frequent and stronger hurricanes, droughts, and accelerating rising sea levels, which have resulted in massive devastation, including loss of lives and livelihoods.

This chapter will underscore the importance of environmental justice and the impact of climate change, especially on climate-induced forced migration and displaced persons. I refer to climate-induced migration largely to describe the "slow-onset impacts of climate change on livelihoods owing to shifts in water availability and crop productivity, or to factors such as sea-level rise or storm surge" (Rigaud et al., 2018, p. 11). I will provide select examples of climate change and its adverse effects in communities and on the planet. This chapter discusses an operational definition of environmental justice and why environmental justice is a natural fit with the professional responsibility and practice of social work. The social work profession has recognized the need for including the physical environment by taking

a stand and by adopting position statements such as the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development in 2010 and Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Curricular Guide for Environmental Justice. Global standards such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals provide the profession with a framework for intervention. Later in the chapter, I recommend strategies for social work intervention and discuss a social work model for environmental justice.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Environmental justice as a concept was established during the 1960s civil rights movement, and it linked issues of racism with socioeconomic justice (Gray & Coates, 2012). At its core, "environmental justice guarantees that all people have equal access to a healthy, safe, and sustainable environment, as well as equal protection from environmental harm" (Greenpeace, n.d.). Environmental justice recognizes how privilege, power, and oppression are essential to our understanding of how we are impacted by climate change and our environment (Gray & Coates, 2012). It also acknowledges First Nation indigenous peoples' knowledge of the environment and its importance. In the United States, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines environmental justice as the "fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, culture, national origin, income, and educational levels with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of protective environmental laws, regulations, and policies" (EPA, Office of Environmental Justice in Action, 2021, para. 1). In addition, the EPA further explains the disproportionate impact on minority populations as "communities of low income and/or color in the presence of high-risk environmental hazards. These communities in the presence of environmental and human health hazards are more at risk of developing chronic health problems or experiencing environmental racism due to their surroundings than other parts of the country" (EPA, Office of Environmental Justice in Action, 2010, p. 1). Environmental racism is the disproportionate impact of environmental hazards on marginalized communities.

Because of the power abuse related to environmental injustice and environmental racism, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) suggested adding a legal component to fight discrimination against the poor and to empower an agenda of environmental justice. Central to the UNDP mission is the inclusion of environmental justice as a legal transformation aimed at limiting or restricting the abuses of power that result in the poor and vulnerable suffering disproportionate impacts of pollution and lacking equal opportunity to access and benefit from natural resources (UNDP, 2014). The UNDP recognizes the need for a shift in policy to protect the natural assets for the public good and to have more accountability through legal means for long-term sustainability. In addition, pressure must be applied through social movements, peaceful protests, and community organizing by civil society as a means for holding the state and local governments accountable and creating equitable change in human environments.

Change in human environments can act as "push factors," especially when they infringe on people's survival. Historically, political, ethnic, and religious oppression, economic downturn, and demographic pressure are among the factors that "push"

migrants from their place of origin; whereas economic opportunities, sociocultural representations, and individual hopes "pull" migrants toward particular destinations (Mayer, 2016, p. 8). When people's sources of livelihood, such as agriculture or fishing, are reduced or depleted, then people are forced to find other means to support themselves and their families. This results in movement of people. In essence, environmental justice aligns with social work values and practice because of the profession's emphasis on the person-in-environment theory. This theory maintains that people are heavily influenced by their environment, and problems and issues that ensue need to be understood in the context of their environment. Social work norms, values, policies, and decisions support the well-being of the communities and their natural environment.

As social workers, we need to respond to environmental crises with focus, intention, and resolve to mitigate their impact. Social workers are called to partner and to actively get involved in working toward environmental justice; in essence, this is a call for a response to environmental racism. It is only through the sustainable management of ecosystems, the environment, and its resources that inclusive economic growth and human well-being can coexist and thrive. The inclusion of environmental justice is a call for action to reverse the impact of climate change, ecological degradation, and environmental injustice that dramatically affect the quality of life for vulnerable populations. It is important to note that those living in poverty, including women, bear a disproportionate share of the consequences.

SOCIAL WORK LITERATURE: TOWARD ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE PRACTICE

There is a growing body of literature in social work recognizing the need for social work practitioners and educators to link the physical and natural environment as a sphere in which to influence policy, education, and practice (Besthorn, 2012; Dominelli, 2013; Gamble & Hoff, 2012; Gray & Coates, 2012; Norton et al., 2012; Peeters, 2012a, 2012b). Gamble (2013) calls for a holistic response toward the sustainability of the planet and its people. She states:

> In the light of overwhelming evidence that a global environmental crisis exists and that the trend in global warming will affect every civilization on the planet, the challenge for social work is to engage in socioecological activities that will prevent and slow additional damage to the biosphere while at the same time helping human populations to develop the cultural adaptation and resilience required to confront increasing weather disasters; displacement caused by rising seas; drought conditions that severely affect food supplies; loss of biodiversity, soil, forests, fisheries, and clean air; and other challenges to human social organizations. (p. 4)

Zapf (2010) argues that

> as a profession with a long-standing declared focus on person-in-environment, social work might be expected to play a leadership role in the

planning stages of any new environmental state. Yet, we have generally been silent on these serious threats to human well-being and continued existence. (p. 30)

There is a need for social work to fully embrace environmental justice practices, in both resource-rich and resource poor countries, to mitigate the impact of climate change by limiting or stopping environmental degradation. Environmental degradation is the "depletion or destruction of a potentially renewable resource such as air, water, social, forest, or wildlife, by using it at a rate faster than it can be naturally renewed" (Oxford University Press, n.d.). Some examples of environmental degradation include climate change, pollution, resource depletion, forced migration, and extinction of species, especially marine ecosystems. The loss of biodiversity and the increase in deforestation and desertification are causing immense devastation among communities in regions of the world. Women and children face increasingly harsh daily routines, gathering water and fuel. Famine, regular food shortages, displacement of communities, and forced migration are other social effects caused by these losses (Healy & Thomas, 2020; Hopper, 2012). These environmental hardships continue to worsen socioeconomic and cultural inequalities rooted in environmental injustices that exacerbate those already existing in socioeconomic and political structures (Dominelli, 2014).

The literature shows a strong interconnection among poverty, food insecurity, inequality, environmental degradation, and the environmental migration of people to survive (Healy & Thomas, 2020; Schmitz et al., 2012). Yet we know that the impacts of climate change are long lasting and not borne equally or fairly. Around the world, the poor suffer disproportionately from more frequent and destructive storms, floods, and droughts and from the health impacts of toxin pollution. Those with limited or no access to productive resources such as arable land, fresh water, and sustainable energy (UNDP, 2014) are also affected by climate change. Although developing countries are responsible for only 4 percent of climate-causing greenhouse gases, they lack the resources to adapt to climate change via those means available to wealthier nations, such as the use of drought-resistant seeds, flood water management, and early warning systems. These limited resources take a toll on poor communities globally to respond to current and long-term challenges related to climate change. Willett (2019) coined the term "slow violence" to describe minor disasters that have major implications for disadvantaged populations (p. 138), especially in the area of climate-induced migration and displaced peoples.

CLIMATE-INDUCED MIGRATION: A COMPLEX REALITY

Climate change and climate-induced migration are reshaping migration patterns on all continents (Ionesco et al., 2017). There is no universally agreed definition of climate-induced human mobility (Warner et al., 2010), but broadly it refers to movement of people driven by sudden or progressive changes in the weather or climate. This can include temporary and permanent, seasonal and singular, as well as voluntary and forced movement. CARE (2020) describes climate-induced displacement or migration as the result of direct physical harm caused by life-threatening weather

events, slow onset of weather-related conditions, or policies that cause damage, causing indirect consequences for food insecurity and conflict over natural resources and land rights. According to UNOCHA (2019), the world's worst food crises are related to conflict and climate events. There are numerous examples of large-scale human migration due to resource scarcity, increased frequency of extreme weather events, and other factors, particularly in the developing countries in the earth's low-latitude band. In a 2019 report, the UN International Organization for Migration (IOM) provided some examples of migration occurring in a climate environment impacted by climate change:

> (a) communities in Pacific islands forced to plan for relocation further inland due to coastal erosion; (b) storms in populous Asian countries displacing tens of thousands of people; (c) migration of fisher folks from coastal villages in West Africa to cities because of the depletion of fish resources linked to ocean acidification; (d) rural to urban migration in Central Asia fueled by climate impacts on rural livelihoods; (e) nomadic populations in East Africa altering their traditional migration patterns to cope with the impacts of desertification; and (f) droughts in Latin America leading to internal and international migration. (IOM, 2019, p. 13)

Climate change has become one of the main reasons for migration, forcing individuals, families, and even whole communities (push factors) to seek more habitable and less vulnerable places to live (pull factors). According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), in 2017, 18.8 million people were displaced because of disasters and extreme weather events intensified by climate change (IDMC, 2018). The sudden onset of these events can be characterized as environmental disasters, and the hardship faced by those affected can be felt long after. From 2008 to 2017, an average of 24.6 million people were displaced per year. The IDMC (2018) reported that weather-related hazards, mainly storms, were the cause of the majority of the new displacements associated with disasters, triggering 17.2 million displacements in 2018 (IDMC, 2018). The Philippines, China, and India account for an estimated 60 percent of new displacements, mostly in the form of evacuations. Intra- and interstate competition for basic needs such as food, water, and other resources are intensifying, especially in the Middle East and North Africa. Among those who are displaced are persons with disabilities and the elderly, while women and girls are among the highest casualty rates in populations worldwide. These intrastate and interstate crossings occur as people seek viable places to live and often contribute to concerns and implications for host countries. The projections on continued migration are equally alarming as it becomes impossible for people to physically remain in affected areas because of food scarcity, unsustainable lands, and coastal erosion. In 2018, the World Bank estimated that Latin American, sub-Saharan Africa, and Southeast Asia will generate 143 million more climate migrants by the year 2050 to escape the impacts of climate change. This study reports that climate-forced migrants will migrate from less viable areas with lower water availability and crop productivity and from areas affected by rising sea level and storm surges. The poorest and most climate-vulnerable areas will be hardest hit. Scientists call for substantial cuts in greenhouse gas emissions

and robust development action to plan, improve, and understand internal climate migration (Rigaud et al., 2018).

According to IOM (2019), those most vulnerable to climate change are the least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), and small island developing states (SIDS), totaling 91 countries with a human population of about 1.1 billion. In addition to multiple challenges related to structural issues and geographical disadvantage, these countries and their inhabitants have limited economic and institutional capacity to cope with catastrophic challenges, let alone to plan and execute sustainable development or even to migrate (IOM, 2019, p. 7). For example, in Malawi, climate change eroded the financial capital of rural farmers, thus limiting access to the money they would have needed to relocate (Suckall et al., 2017), making climate change a barrier rather than a driver for migration. In addition, one needs to consider gender when assessing who migrates. In sub-Saharan Africa, it is predominantly men who are migrating, whereas in the Philippines, more women are moving (Nelson, 2011). In 2016, the 15 countries with the highest levels of vulnerability to natural hazards were either LDCs, LLDCs, or SIDS. These countries have less resources and capacity to prepare and mitigate against climate change–related hazards. Yet the LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS contribute least to climate change. They face "double stress" because they are among the poorest and have to deal with their own internal climate-related displacement while also opening up their countries to refugees or other displaced persons. In some West and Central African LDCs, climate change has exacerbated conflicts over natural resources, threatening these countries' peace and security (IOM, 2019, p. 7).

Climate change displacement impacts women and girls disproportionately. For example, in 2018, more than half of the 41 million people internally displaced were women (IDMC, 2018). In an exclusive system of inequality, white men are often leaders and decision makers, controlling industry, business, politics, and all major institutions. Women, particularly women of color, are systematically underrepresented in decision-making spaces at all levels, preventing them from responding to climate change. As such, climate-induced migration must also be understood in the context of gender, power, and policy.

As evidenced in Willett's (2019) work, in some instances national and local policy shortfalls can result in some people gaining more than others, thus deepening existing inequalities. Bryant and Kappaz (2005) argue that policies do not always create a level playing field or promote fundamental fairness. For example, regressive taxes, weak or no law enforcement in poor neighborhoods, underinvestment in health and education facilities, and weak or missing environmental protection in poor communities do not advance a fair and just society. Rather, environmental problems of the poor are often at a scale of abuse not seen in middle-class neighborhoods. The environmental problems of the poor often include "raw sewage in rutted dirt paths in squatter settlements, soot-filled air, crippling fumes and dust in workspaces, and peeling lead paint in filthy hovels, damaged lungs, stunted babies, and diarrheal diseases. All resulting from environmental neglect" (Bryant & Kappaz, 2005, p. 64).

Increasingly, there is a need to understand the relationship between people and their environment. For much too long, the focus on poverty eradication has been on economic development; however, with the increasing impact of climate change and environmental degradation, there is a movement for all actors to respond

ecologically. Morito (2002) identified that *ecological thinking* includes a process, worldview, set of principles, and awareness of different interventions to develop policy and effect change. Often referred to as the "triple bottom line" by activists, ecological thinking must include economic stability, environmental protection, and social equality (V. Jones, 2008). Human activity lies at the core of environmental degradation (Erickson, 2012). Thus, we need to understand the complexity of social, political, economic, and physical conditions of individuals, families, and communities (Thomas & Healy, 2010). Including the natural environment as part of assessment and intervention is increasingly understood as an extension of social work practice. Social and economic development policies from the local to the global are needed to promote sustainable development and environmental disaster mitigation, thus reducing climate-induced forced migration.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Progress made from a development perspective can quickly be undermined by climate-related events, which pose enormous challenges and setbacks. On a global stage, fear has led to a number of international conferences, conventions, and treaties in areas ranging from biodiversity to climate change. In 1972, the UN Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment recognized that the environment was a valid area of concern for both national and international governments (Hopper, 2012). The goal of this conference was sustainable development and the need to address the needs of humans and ecosystems while preserving resources for the future. The Brundtland Report (Brundtland, 1987) further defined sustainable development:

> Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts: the concept of "needs," in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which priority should be given; and the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs. (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 43)

It is important to note that emphasis is placed on using appropriate technology that includes the development and use of renewable energy and care of the environment in designing development initiatives. The movement for sustainable development grew through the 1970s and 1980s as a recognition of the environmental impacts of globalization. A major UN world conference, the Earth Summit, was held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 to expand protection and support positive interactions with the environment (Healy & Thomas, 2020). The concept of sustainable development remains important at all levels of development, from community-based initiatives to global goal setting. In 2012, the Rio + 20 Summit, 20 years after the Earth Summit, re-energized the sustainable movement and resulted in the UN's commitment to make the environment the cornerstone of its post-2015 agenda (UN, 2012). The UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide the framework for a more equitable, peaceful, and just world as well as for a more sustainable future

(United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for Sustainable Development Goals, n.d., "The 17 Goals" section).

The World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) defines sustainable development as "a path of human progress which meets the needs and aspirations of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs" (p. 43). Mary (2008) laid out four principles that are the basis for sustainability: (1) an increasing value of human life and the lives of all species; (2) fairness and equality or economic and social justice; (3) decision making that involves participation and partnership; and (4) respect for ecological constraints of the environment (p. 33). Protecting people and the natural environment through sustainable development is the comprehensive realization of a person-in-environment perspective. Social work, with its focus on political advocacy, can be an important force in addressing the problem of environmental degradation and pollution, especially in marginalized communities (National Association of Social Workers, 2018).

Figure 1.1 depicts a social work model for environmental justice that integrates the global and social work frameworks, focusing on the environment, society, and the economy for sustainable development and working toward risk reduction

FIGURE 1.1: A Social Work Model for Environmental Justice
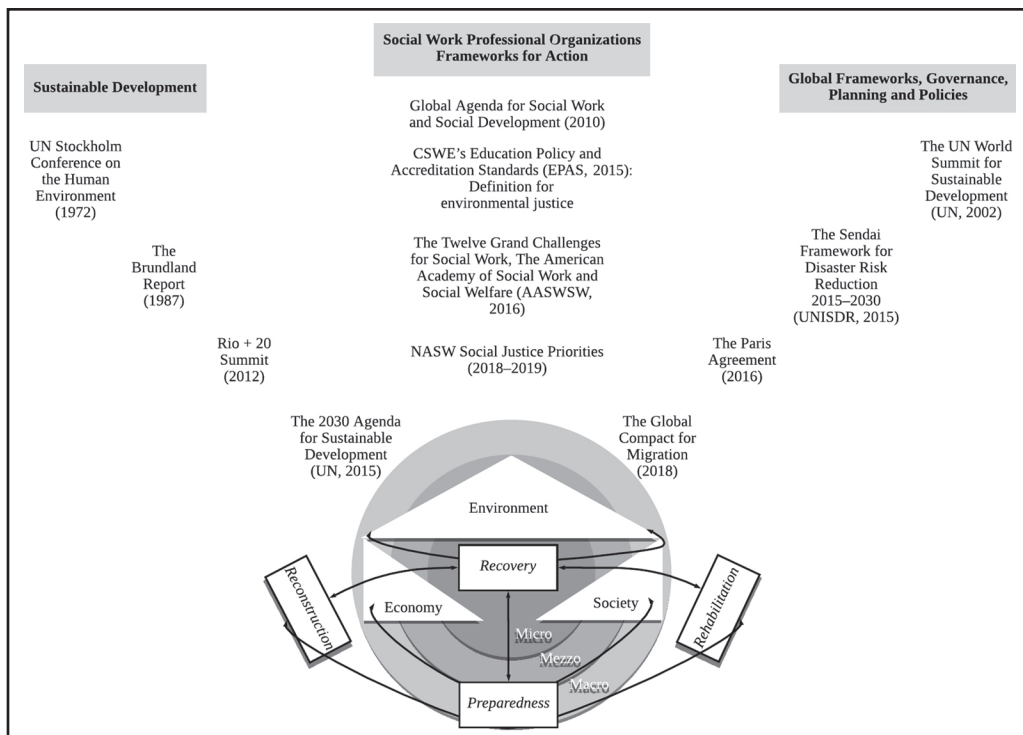
Note: UN = United Nations; CSWE = Council on Social Work Education; NASW = National Association of Social Workers; UNISDR = United Nations Office of Disaster Risk Reduction.
Source: Rebecca Thomas, 2020
Graphic Design: Gabrielle Conrad-Amlicke

management. For sustainable development, a three-prong approach is necessary, including society, environment, and economy, with culture operating as a cross-cutting factor. Social workers can operate at macro, mezzo, and micro levels toward establishing sustainable development under the rubric of environmental justice. The profession can collaborate with global governance to create plans and policies that address preparedness, rehabilitation, and reconstruction to reduce climate change, forced migration, and displaced persons.

GLOBAL FRAMEWORKS, GOVERNANCE, PLANNING, AND POLICIES

In response to climate change, several global commitments have been adopted to strengthen governance, planning, and policies that reduce climate impacts on vulnerable people. Such efforts include the Stockholm Conference and the Rio Declaration, the UN World Summit for Sustainable Development of 2002, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Global Compact for Migration, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, and the Paris Agreement.

Stockholm Conference and the Rio Declaration

The Stockholm Conference (1972) and the Rio Declaration (UN, 1992) established the need for a healthy and sustainable environment with reference to migration. They called for a global effort to preserve and improve the human environment for all people and posterity.

UN World Summit for Sustainable Development of 2002

During this summit, several environmental policies related to energy were agreed upon, such as removing lead in petroleum, promoting energy-efficient technologies, and increasing the global share of renewable energy. Although governments also agreed to significantly cut the rate at which plants and animals are becoming extinct by 2010 (Hopper, 2012), they failed to set objective targets.

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2015) goes further than the Stockholm Conference and the Rio Declaration with a plan of action involving people, the planet, and global prosperity for all. National governments are expected to include a transformational process in their political and policy agendas using the universal 2030 Agenda sustainable goals as a guide. The 2030 Agenda has 17 SDGs and 169 targets. Specifically, SDG13 focuses on the climate crisis and climate action by outlining the following targets:

> 13.1: Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries.
> 13.2: Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies, and planning.

13.3: Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reeducation, and early warning. (UN, 2015)

Although the SDGs provide a blueprint for a sustainable future for all by addressing climate change, environmental degradation, and poverty, there is no mention of the link between climate change, global forced migration, and displacement of peoples.

Global Compact for Migration

The Global Compact for Migration was adopted by the Intergovernmental Conference in December 2018. After two years of negotiation (2016–2018), the Compact was rooted in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals to maximize the potential of migration by recognizing that safe, orderly migration works best when it is planned and occurs with international cooperation and consensus. Although it is not legally binding, the Compact is consistent with human rights treaties and is respective of states' sovereignty (NGO Committee on Migration, 2018). During the implementation phase, governments will cooperate and collaborate with migrants, refugees, and other stakeholders to meet challenges and similar vulnerabilities of diverse populations (Healy & Thomas, 2020). The Global Compact covers different aspects such as the right to seek asylum and the rights of refugees and migrants, but it does not specifically focus on climate-induced migration.

Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 (SFDRR; Aitsi-Selmi et al., 2015) was adopted at the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai, Japan, in 2015. The SFDRR works with the 2030 SDGs, including the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. This framework targets four priorities for action to reduce existing disaster risks and prevent new ones: (1) understanding disaster risk; (2) strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk; (3) investing in disaster reduction for resilience; and (4) enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to "Build Back Better" in recovery, rehabilitation, and reconstruction (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, n.d.). The SFDRR serves as a global road map for efforts to build resilience to natural hazards. A clear outline of the complex relationship between disasters and human mobility is the aim of this framework. Despite this, it fails to highlight the exacerbating effect of climate change (Wilkinson et al., 2016, p. 6).

Paris Agreement

Adopted in 2015 and signed and ratified in 2016, the Paris Agreement was a landmark agreement for all nations to fight climate change as a common threat and to intensify global actions and investment for a low-carbon sustainable future. The Paris Agreement's central aim is to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change by keeping a global temperature rise (global warming) to below

2 degrees Celsius. To reach these ambitious goals, there is a need to fund poorer nation-states in their efforts to limit emissions, to create new technology frameworks, and to enhance capacity building to limit carbon emissions (United Nations, 2020a). Under the Trump administration, the United States withdrew from the Paris Agreement in June 2017. This withdrawal was a major setback toward the enforcement of this global landmark agreement.

More recently, President Biden has reentered the Paris Agreement, which took effect on February 19, 2021 and has mapped out a $2 trillion clean energy and green jobs plan and has pledged to cut emissions from electricity to zero by 2035 and "to commit to net zero emissions by the year 2050" (Hamilton et al., 2021, p. 81). In addition, President Biden signed an executive action to revoke President Trump's executive orders that weakened requirements to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from all federal operations. Despite these efforts—as well as efforts made by China, United Kingdom, and European Union—we are not yet on track to meet the overall goals of the Paris Agreement (Hamilton et al., 2021, p. 81).

President Biden has proposed a whole-of-government approach to deal with climate change. He has asked all federal agencies to address climate change in their decision making. Priorities of the Biden administration are to increase renewable energy, to decrease fossil fuel production, and to prioritize environmental justice. For example, the Department of Defense, which acquires supplies for all military branches, will shift its acquisitions of fossil fuels to clean energy technologies and low-carbon fuels. In another example, the Department of Education will fund programs that increase knowledge of climate change and fund the purchase of electric buses and green-designed schools. The Department of Transportation will set up charging stations for electrical vehicles and invest more on public transportation (Cho, 2021).

In the past few decades, serious attempts have been made by world governments to address concerns related to climate change and the concept of sustainable development. Efforts have been made through negotiation and consensus by treaty, conversion, or agreement to reduce carbon emissions and to reduce the impact of climate change. These efforts have tried to adhere to the principles of common responsibility, and differentiated commitments have been integrated into the concept of sustainable development.

SOCIAL WORK PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS PROVIDE FRAMEWORKS FOR ACTION

At the Joint World Conference (2010) on Social Work and Social Development, the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development was adopted by the International Associations of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW). Four pillars were adopted: (1) promoting social and economic equalities, (2) promoting the dignity and worth of peoples, (3) promoting community and environmental sustainability, and (4) promoting human relationships. This Global Agenda is well aligned with the UN SDGs and has provided a foundation for professional action (Jones, 2018). The third pillar of working toward environmental sustainability

requires social workers to "align their activities and programmes with development initiatives that are sustainable and integrate the human dimension." The pillars reflect the overall emphasis of the UN 2030 Agenda and a number of SDGs related to climate, water, and energy (SDGs 6, 7, 9, 12–15; Healy & Thomas, 2020).

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), the accrediting body of social work, has included the concept of environmental justice into the *Curricular Guide for Environmental Justice*. To reach this educational objective, CSWE's Education Policy and Accreditation Standards (CSWE, 2015) developed a definition for environmental justice:

> Environmental justice occurs when all people equally experience high levels of environmental protection and no group or community is excluded from the environmental policy decision-making process, nor is affected by a disproportionate impact from environmental hazards. Environmental justice affirms the ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, respect for cultural and biological diversity, and the right to be free from ecological destruction. This includes responsible use of ecological resources, including the land, water, air, and food. (Adapted from CSWE, 2015, p. 20)

The profession has recognized the need for social workers to include environmental justice in their work. CSWE (2022) advances environmental justice in multiple sections within the most recent Education Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS). In competency 2, social workers are called to "engage in practices that advance human rights to promote social, racial, economic, and environmental justice" (CSWE, 2022, p. 9). Competency 5 ("Engage in Policy Practice") describes how social workers "apply critical thinking to analyze, formulate, and advocate for policies that advance human rights and social, racial, economic, and environmental justice" (CSWE, 2022, p. 11). Further, the concept of environmental justice is specifically mentioned in competency 1 ("Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior"), as well as within expectations for the program mission, generalist practice, and field education.

In 2012, the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare developed the 12 grand challenges for social work (Uehara et al., 2015). Each grand challenge is designed for critical thinking and planned action regarding contemporary social issues facing societies. The challenge is to conceptualize bold ideas through research and innovation (Uehara et al., 2015). Grand challenge number seven calls for strengthening social responses to a changing environment. It calls for the social work profession to be the steward of the natural environment and to create social work responses to climate change, urbanization, population displacement, and the frequent devastation caused by natural disasters (Erickson, 2018). It recognizes the numerous natural disasters affecting many U.S. communities and the resulting population displacement associated with long-term environmental changes.

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2018–2019) identified five social justice priorities under the rubric of equity and inclusion that would serve as a guideline for NASW national office and NASW chapters. The priorities are interlinked. Under the category of environmental justice, there is a strong emphasis

on the linkages between environmental quality and social justice. Environmental justice supports policies that reduce environmental threats to vulnerable populations, including the reduction of risk from exposure to pesticides and other harsh chemicals. It advances the need for governmental regulations and private-sector policies based on scientific knowledge and effective testing along with regulation. Other initiatives include the need for interdisciplinary collaboration, research, policy practice, and community-based actions (NASW, 2018).

LESSONS FROM ABROAD: GLOBAL GRASSROOTS INITIATIVES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT TO LIMIT THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

In this section, a few local and grassroots initiatives are highlighted to provide examples about strategies that sustain a community, limit the impact of pollution and climate change at a local level, and support livelihoods. It is important to share innovative strategies and innovations to address global environmental challenges so that these strategies and efforts may be considered for potential replication elsewhere. As mentioned earlier, SDG13 recommends that all countries develop risk reduction policies and strategies to reduce and limit the impact of natural disasters and to include climate change policy plans in their development of national plans. In addition, SDG14 aims to address the pollution of oceans and sustainable fishing (UN, 2020b). Clearly, there is much to learn from one another as every nation moves forward with addressing these goals in ways that are relevant culturally, socially, politically, and economically.

In Fiji, local low-income-earning women observed the increasing amount of plastic waste washing up on their shores and began to collect the plastic trash and turn it into products that could be sold, such as bags, mats, and jewelry. This project has expanded into a local organization called the Nausori Women Recycling Trash. They gained the support of the government for their products and now have a label, "Fiji Made," which is promoted by the Trade Ministry. This project has now grown to serve 62 villages and provides an opportunity for youth and women to earn an income and to contribute to a cleaner environment (NGO Committee for Social Development, 2016).

Mikoko Pamoja is a community-led mangrove conservation and restoration project in Gazi Bay, Kenya. This initiative works with local government and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to influence national approaches to forest conservation. The project is managed by three groups: the Mikoko Pamoja Community Organization (MPCO), which consists of representatives of Gazi Bay, specifically the Gazi and Makongeni villages; the Mikoko Pamoja Steering Group, which provides technical support to the MPCO; and the Association for the Coastal Ecosystem Services an organization registered in Scotland. The goal of this project is both the prevention of deforestation of the local mangrove forest and community-based reforestation. Mangrove preservation provides a wide range of services and benefits to both the environment and the surrounding community. These include coastal protection; a nursery habitat for fish, including many species fished by the surrounding communities; water purification; improving biodiversity; and sequestering large amounts

of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. By raising income from forest resources, including carbon credits and other income-generating activities such as beekeeping and ecotourism, the project safeguards these benefits for the local community and for future generations (Plan Vivo, n.d.).

In Guatemala, the Alianza Internacional de Reforestracion (Alliance for International Reforestation) is an NGO that works with women farmers to promote tree planting to limit carbon emission and to improve farming techniques. The goal of this project is to create a culture of sustainable forestry. The target areas are in the western part of the country where the areas are not protected from of deforestation. The responsibility of this project lies with the local families, mostly led by women in the community. Participants use farming techniques to prevent erosion, improve yields, and increase crop diversity. By planting crops, they prevent mudslides that affect the villagers who live in the valley. They have also begun to build brick stoves with chimneys so as to reduce the negative effects of health impacts caused by smoke inhalation and have limited the need to cut down trees for fuel (McCarthy, 2017).

These examples shed light on positive steps being taken by local communities to effect change in their own environments. These groups are finding solutions to remain in their own communities by reducing waste, generating income, reducing their carbon footprint, and reducing the need to migrate. These localized, take-charge efforts give us hope that changes are possible.

Yet there is considerably more work to be done. The climate crisis is a global concern that "affects the distribution of rights, resources, and opportunities that people need to live healthy, productive, and meaningful lives" (Mason & Rigg, 2019, p. 3). It requires a combination of local and community engagement, organizational support, and policy solutions to reverse the adverse effects of climate change and to envision sustainable development for all. International resources such as the Green Climate Fund support developing countries to work toward meeting their own climate goals (Healy & Thomas, 2020). Additionally, an ambitious international climate action plan is expected to come out of the United Nations COP25 conference in the near future, after the most comprehensive report to date on climate change was released from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Masson-Delmotte et al., 2021), which was described by UN Secretary-General António Guterres as a "code red for humanity" and which called for governments to act and accelerate efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The next section considers how social workers can be part of the solution to global environmental issues such as climate change.

WHAT CAN SOCIAL WORKERS DO? THE NEXUS BETWEEN SOCIAL WORK, FORCED MIGRATION, AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

There is an urgent call by scholars and educators in the field of social work to actively apply environmental justice conceptual thinking and action into areas of practice. Dewane (2011) invites social workers to think "differently about social justice, with a more community-focused action regarding environmental policy" (p. 20). This can

be achieved by ensuring that course content in all aspects of social work education include environmental justice.

Dominelli (2013) calls for social workers to take action through a practice called "green social work" with the goal of enhancing the well-being of people and their environments to support life in an interdependent world. She outlines the various roles that social workers play in addressing social and environmental degradation. Employed at both the macro and micro level, social workers need to have an in-depth understanding of the power dynamic of those in charge at the expense of others, human rights, and the fight against environmental injustice. Green social work recognizes that advancing and enhancing environmental justice is also good social work practice. Some of the highlighted skills are taught and used in macro practice but serve as a good reminder when applied to an inclusive, rich tradition of social work practice. Roles include the following:

> A facilitator, coordinator, community mobilizer of people and systems; mobilizer of resources; negotiator or broker between communities and different levels of government; mediator between conflicting interests and other agencies; advocate for people's rights and entitlements; educator, giving out information about how to access relief aid and avoid diseases that can erupt following a disaster; trainer particularly in how to respond effectively in mobilizing local resources when disaster strikes; cultural interpreter; interdisciplinary translator; therapist helping people deal with the emotional consequences of disaster; and protector of the ecosystem/physical environment. (Dominelli, 2013, p. 438)

The uniqueness of social work is that knowledge and skills are transferable. Within the profession, training includes critical thinking, self-awareness, and reframing about just social work practice. A recent online publication, the *Curricular Guide for Environmental Justice*, "provides suggested curriculum content and resources (e.g., readings, multimedia and online resources, modules, assignments, experiential exercises, class and field activities) for each of the nine social work EPAS competencies." It also provides "identification of the competency dimensions (knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes) associated with the course content for each competency" (CSWE, 2020).

There is the potential for synergy to expand global perspectives on climate change, climate-induced migration, and environmental justice content into social work education. Climate-related events such as hurricanes, forest fires, rising sea levels, and floods kill people, destroy property, wash away arable soil, and disrupt a community's way of life. Consequently, these disasters are highly correlated with increased poverty, displacement, and forced migration. Recent examples of forced migration include people from Puerto Rico fleeing their homes after Hurricane Katrina, seeking shelter in the continental United States with their families and friends. These residents experienced significant displacement, and not all have returned home to Puerto Rico. In another example, fires on the West Coast of the United States have displaced many citizens from their homes temporarily; others have lost everything

and may never be able to return. These wildfires caused pollution that created poor air quality all the way to the East Coast and Europe (Pfeiffer, 2020).

The movement of peoples is not restricted locally, even though they might go to neighboring states or nations. Ecological disasters that spread across borders can become multinational, such as the nuclear accident at Chernobyl in Ukraine (Lyons et al., 2006).

Social workers have a responsibility to acquire skills that will contribute toward environmental justice for all. They have the ability to serve at micro (individual), mezzo (population or groups), and macro (societal) levels through a strengthened conceptual understanding of environmental justice. Social work professional framing is critical to understanding the utility of skills at these varying levels. Let us look at the example of lead poisoning at all three levels. At a micro level, the social worker can address the impact of a child's asthma by providing support and resources for the family to remove lead paint from their home. Social workers can work at the mezzo level by addressing a racial or ethnic group's health disparities caused by lead in water pipes, such as the crisis experienced by many African Americans in Flint, Michigan, in 2014. At a macro level, social workers can research the social problem of lead poisoning, measuring the health differences between two populations and developing a well-researched fact sheet or infographic to be used for informing and bringing awareness to the public. This public awareness is furthered by a political agenda for change by policy advocacy.

Finally, it is important that social workers make sure that less resourced communities have equitable access to needed resources. For example, social workers can advocate for and work to ensure access to clean water, homes free from lead through lead abatement strategies, reduction of air pollution, more frequent pickup of garbage, proper sanitation, access to food in areas that have food scarcity, appropriate technology, and rich nation-states supporting lower income countries. There are serious health-related outcomes and disparities because of environmental injustice. Table 1.1 provides examples of how social workers can employ environmentally just practices.

Social workers are primed to work with civil society, communities, families, and individuals to organize, advocate, and demand change by educating, informing, and implementing changes that reverse adverse effects on individuals, groups, and communities.

CONCLUSION

Social workers have important roles to play in creating an environment for decision makers, humanitarians, development actors, and other social workers to build a more equitable and resilient future inclusive of all people. In a sustainable environment, forced migration and the displacement of migrants can be averted and people can remain in their country of origin. Environmental justice will serve a global society that can meet the challenges of natural and man-made disasters. It is important to include women both in planning and implementation of initiatives to meet their needs because climate-induced migration impacts their lives the most. In addition,

TABLE 1.1: Exploring the Relationship between Social Work Practice Questions and Environmentally Just Social Work Practice

Social Work Practice Questions	Environmentally Just Social Work Practice
What are the environmental forces that are impacting the lives of diverse populations?	Assess the needs of individuals, groups, and communities. Include slow and rapid climate-related and environmental degradation events.
What is the extent and impact of climate change?	Design relief, reconstruction, and implementation strategies that are culturally and technologically appropriate.
What relief, reconstruction, and/or prevention strategies can one employ?	Develop prevention policies for evaluating risks.
What policies and interventions will help "vulnerable" populations to prevent forced migration?	Develop evidence-based policies.
How do social work practitioners integrate skill and leadership in environmental justice practice?	Collect empirical data on the impact of interventions based on case studies, interviews, focus groups, and quantitative data.
How can social workers integrate UN conventions and treaties into their practice?	Recognize and integrate interventions that focus on economic, environmental, social, and cultural goals.

policy and advocacy efforts must stress the importance of scaling climate action and public climate financing for developing countries to address displacement drivers with locally led actions. Social workers are in a unique position because of their competency skills to build networks to intervene at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels and to collaborate with stakeholders to create change. The profession can build capacity and public and political will by contacting legislators, being active on social media, creating infographics, and joining activist groups to raise immediate awareness about environmental justice.

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