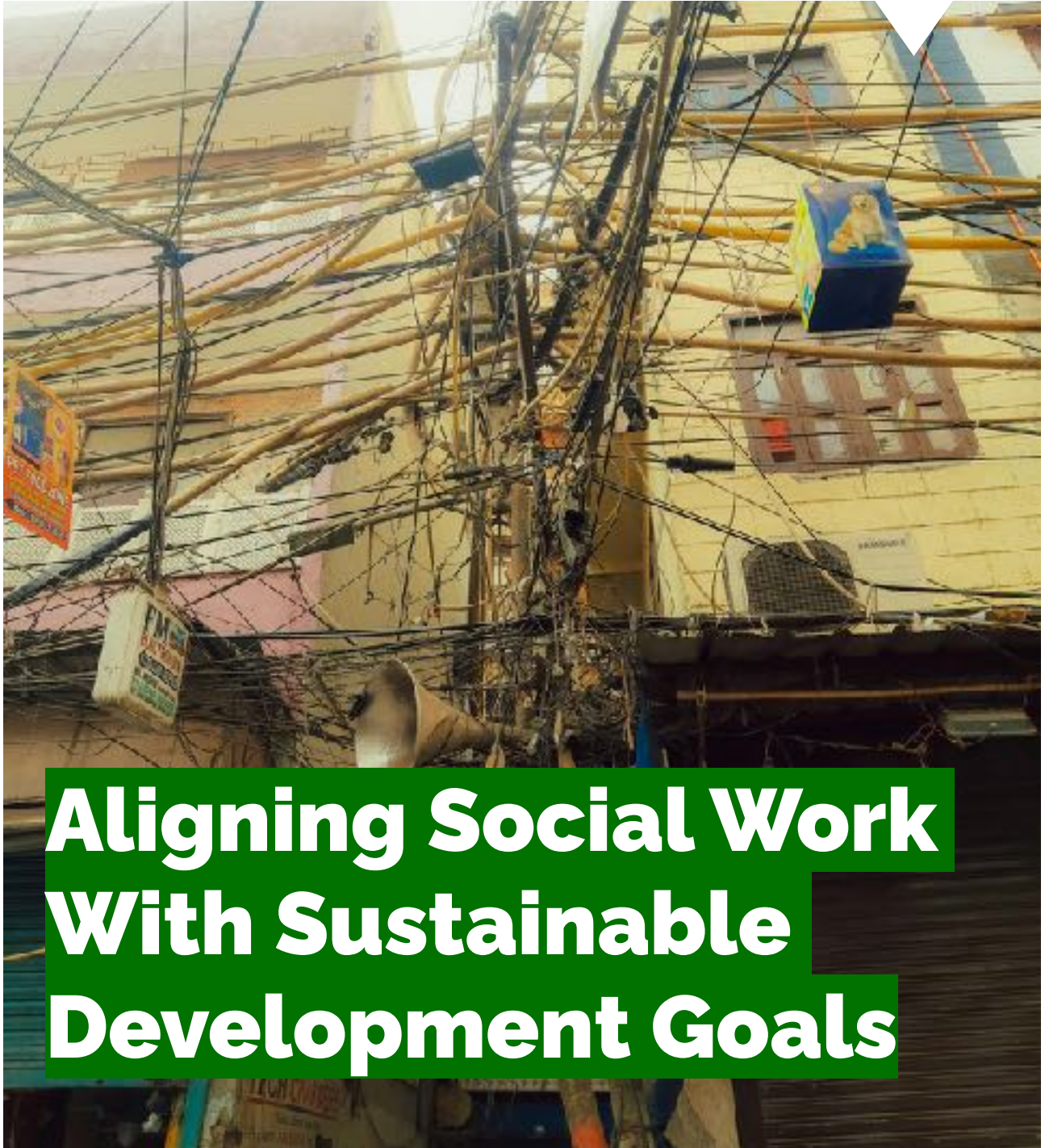


SocialDialogue

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**Aligning Social Work
With Sustainable
Development Goals**

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Editor-in-chief
Carolyn Noble, PhD

Editorial:

Social work unequivocally supports the United Nations Agenda 2030 Social Development Goals (SDGs) see Social Work and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - International Federation of Social Workers (ifsw.org) and The Routledge International Handbook of Social Development, Social Work, and the Sustainable Development Goals - International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) (iassw-aiets.org)

As a first, over 193 nations came together to map a global agenda that links economic, social and ecological concerns for the present and future generations with regard to sustainable livelihoods, poverty reduction, education, climate change, disaster risk management, gender and cultural equity and addressing income disparities across the globe. The aim of this global initiative is to foster sustainable development for the overall betterment of humanity and the planet (that's got to be a good thing, YES!).

The 17 SDGs can be clearly linked to social works' pedagogical, academic, and community endeavours and initiatives as articles in this special edition demonstrate. Contributors from India, Malaysia, Germany, Spain, The Kingdom of Eswatini, Zimbabwe, Kyrgyzstan, USA and Indigenous Australia exemplify how social work is contributing to this vision for economic, social and environmental justice locally as well as internationally. In having a whole issue devoted to the linkage between social work's continuing support for achieving these goals by 2030 we see that social work continues to place itself as a key international social policy and practice professional. As many governments are struggling to enact these goals, we see from this edition that social work academics, students, and practitioners are already taking an active role.

We thank Dr Sheeja Karalam for guest editing this 28th edition and send Professor Annamaria Campanini best wishes for the future as she finishes her terms as IASSW's President. She has given so much to social work in her outstanding leadership over the last 8 years and her support for this magazine realises two of IASSW's key commitments to engage with social work educators in international exchange of information and expertise and to foster ecological, social and economic justice.

Enjoy!

Aligning social work interventions with **SDGs**: Achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs) globally



GUEST EDITOR **Dr. Sheeja Karalam**

Professor of Social Work Coordinator, Centre for Research Projects, Research & Development Block CHRIST (Deemed to be University), Bangalore, India.

Social work aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals, especially in eliminating poverty, promoting gender equality, fostering social inclusion, and empowering communities. The magazine "Social Dialogue", issue 28 of the International Association of Schools of Social Work, concentrates on "how social work interventions implemented in various regions and nations that align with the SDGs and achieve sustainable development goals (SDGs) globally." This issue unfolds a riveting narrative of how social work practices deployed across varied areas and nations flawlessly match the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), weaving a tapestry of progress towards a sustainable future.

A montage of incisive critiques from experienced professional social workers, scholars, and students illustrates the transformative power of social work interventions in addressing the SDGs' multiple concerns. It acts as a beacon guiding readers through the unique ways used in various parts of the world to achieve sustainable development. This editorial recognises that social work interventions are dynamic, context-dependent, and used by kind people and organisations dedicated to social justice. Our authors cover a wide range of SDGs, investigating projects that cut over national boundaries and racial and ethnic divides, capturing the shared nature of our problems and the spirit of cooperation required to find solutions.

Authors effectively communicate the essence of the content, positioning SDGs and Social work. One of the pivotal themes explored is the growth of NGOs as a dynamic and strategic force in the ongoing pursuit of Sustainable Development Goals. It invites exploration into how NGOs can evolve, adapt, and innovate to make meaningful contributions to global sustainability efforts. The journey continues with a guide on examining how the SDGs are incorporated into laws and procedures to improve the welfare of senior citizens, with insightful analysis from particular African contexts. A careful investigation of social workers' contribution to sustainable development within the particular setting of Australia's isolated Indigenous communities is also added by other authors. It provides context for a globally pertinent and culturally nuanced conversation, expanding our knowledge of the relationship between social work, Indigenous rights, and sustainable development objectives.

The authors also shed light on social workers' challenges in advancing the SDGs. A perceptive examination of the relationship between achieving the SDGs, livelihoods, and cultural competency within the particular and ever-changing Indian environment. It prepares the ground for a conversation strategically aligned with global sustainability goals and sensitive to cultural differences. Many authors highlighted the limitations of SDGs, which serve as calls to action, pushing stakeholders to increase the ability and impact of social workers on the front lines of sustainable development. An in-depth, student-centred examination of how social work education adapts to the opportunities and challenges brought about by 2030 in the German context. This methodology advances a more comprehensive comprehension of the function of education in moulding a sustainable future.

The author's investigation of the relationship between social work and the SDGs is essential for building a deeper awareness of the difficulties and opportunities in our collective quest for a sustainable future and examining social workers' real-world obstacles while implementing interventions to meet the lofty SDGs. This method advances a more sophisticated comprehension of the difficulties associated with making a tangible difference in social work and sustainable development. "ODS Rural Labs" is an example of a community-driven, bottom-up approach that guarantees the applicability and efficacy of treatments. In addition to helping to achieve the SDGs, this project exemplifies inclusive, grassroots social work by encouraging holistic development in rural areas that are consistently disregarded.

Dedication to converting the Sustainable Development Goals into concrete, integrated activities were the highlights of a group of authors. It was a call to actual implementation that asked social workers to deliberately match their practice with the larger objectives of fair and sustainable development. Emphasises how social work students may actively implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through training and instruction. The authors highlight the dynamic relationship between education and practical application, highlighting students' ability to actively support the goals of the Sustainable Development Goals and connecting theory and effective action.

The authors examined the relationship between social work and the SDGs as essential resources to promote a greater awareness of the potential and challenges in our shared

quest for a sustainable future. A valuable examination of preventive social practises that demonstrates a dedication to data-driven methods for addressing youth suicidality and helping to meet international health and wellbeing goals. The authors addressed that Menstrual justice advocates committed to gender equity and women's rights are social workers. Their initiatives tackle women's sometimes-disregarded difficulties in obtaining information and assistance about menstruation hygiene. Social workers help create a more equitable and welcoming society for women by advocating for and supporting them. There was an emphasis on the importance of critically evaluating the health issues that street vendors experience. The authors address topics of public debate by reflecting on their observations of the interaction of urban settings, health inequities, and the particular circumstances of India.

These articles contribute substantially to the global discourse on sustainable development by elevating social workers' voices, exchanging best practices, and addressing the obstacles they encounter. As we proceed, let us acknowledge social workers' critical role and make the most of it to build a society where everyone can prosper just and sustainably.

**Annamaria Campanini**

President, International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW)

President's report

I hope you've had a positive start to the new year despite the challenging global circumstances, including natural disasters, conflicts, and wars.

Regarding our association's achievements, I would like to emphasize some important aspects. The Global Standards for Social Work Education, endorsed in 2020 by both IASSW and IFSW, notably incorporate user perspectives across various points. There's a dedicated paragraph advocating for schools to integrate the rights, viewpoints, and interests of service users and broader communities into their curriculum development, application, and delivery. It emphasizes making reasonable adjustments to facilitate user participation, thereby fostering personal and professional development opportunities.

As the IASSW, we're deeply committed to promoting this mindset in global education and supporting social work schools that aim to adopt these principles, we've partnered with Power Us, an organization focused on transforming social work practice to better support marginalized groups. Together, we've curated a series of 12 webinars, available on our website (<https://www.iassw-aiets.org/iassw-power-us-jointr-webinars-2023/>), engaging colleagues and experts through experience.

Power Us comprises an international network of social work educators, researchers, and representatives from various service user organizations. They facilitate mutual learning methods to enhance social work practice's effectiveness in empowering marginalized groups. Service users' lived experiences offer invaluable perspectives on living with illness, oppression, or exclusion. Their insights into needed support, effective approaches, and feedback on social services and professionals are crucial for shaping students' skills and knowledge for competent practice. Their experiences and challenges provide unique opportunities for students' growth while improving the quality of social services and contributing to the professional development of future social professionals. Additionally, involving users is a potent tool for empowering vulnerable groups and combating social exclusion and discrimination.

We're planning a Social Dialogue volume on this topic and intend to sustain and enhance our cooperation in the future, involving the Presidents of our different regions.

To disseminate the content of the Global Standard, we have established a task force dedicated to developing an e-learning program, with technical support from Hong Kong Polytechnic University (HKPU). They will assist us in creating an engaging, interactive platform. Our goal is to launch this program around May/June.

Another important achievement is the agreement signed with SpringerBriefs to create two significant book series. These series are designed to spotlight prominent national and international scholars who will offer insights into crucial social work practices, issues, debates, and innovative developments in social work education worldwide. The primary focus of these book series is to compile the work and ideas of leading scholars, creating a resource that reflects the current landscape of social work education. The intention is to produce research-based publications that not only look ahead but also make substantive contributions to professional practices and curriculum development across various facets of social work—be it education, policy, research, training, or professional development. By convening renowned authors and experts to address a spectrum of issues and concerns, these series aim to strengthen the global presence of social work and to make substantial contributions to the crucial realms of social welfare policy, education, and practice.

Moreover, these book series are envisioned to offer a platform for social work professionals and educators from regions where their perspectives are less frequently heard on an international scale. This inclusion aims to provide these individuals with an opportunity to actively participate in this collaborative endeavor. The two main themes of the series are: Advancing Social Work Practice, Policy, and Research and Advancing Social Work Education

These book series are poised to become instrumental resources for professionals, educators, and researchers in the field of social work, fostering a deeper understanding and advancement of the discipline globally.

In August 2023, we have signed an agreement with CASWE (China Association of Social Work Educators) on 'Enhancing the High-Quality Development of MSW education in China'. Currently, IASSW has produced ten lectures on Global Standards that have been translated into Chinese and distributed through CASWE. Additionally, we've initiated the peer review process for the first 4 Social Work Masters programs in Beijing, Shanghai, Changchun, and Lanzhou between the end of November and the beginning of December. This remarkable endeavor serves as an exemplary model of how we can utilize the Global Standards document to elevate the quality of social work education. We hope that other national associations or individual schools will consider following suit!

We are collaborating with the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the local organisers for a conference in Panama. taking place from 4th to 7th April. In this occasion we will also hold the IASSW board meeting and the general assembly where we will have the opportunity to announce the newly elected President, Secretary, and members at large. The conference will likely be a fantastic opportunity for networking, learning, and sharing insights around the topic "Respecting diversity through joint social action". I'm eager to see many of you there!

As I approach the conclusion of my final term, I would like to share some personal thoughts.

It has been an honor serving as President, and I sincerely hope that I have fulfilled the commitment I expressed during my candidacy for this role.

It has not been a easy period with a lot of different challenges, while I had hoped to expand more our membership and increase the participation of non-English speaking countries, I am immensely gratified by the achievements we have collectively accomplished.

Let me extend my heartfelt gratitude to the remarkable collaboration of colleagues who have made this journey possible. It is through the collective efforts, engagement, and expertise of our Board members, dedicated colleagues, and the executive manager Rashmi Pandey, that we have achieved many remarkable results. I express my sincerest gratitude to all who have contributed their time, energy, and expertise towards the success of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW). Together, we have laid a solid foundation for the future, and we eagerly look forward to continued collaboration and shared accomplishments in the years ahead.

As July approaches, I eagerly anticipate a bright future for the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) under the leadership of our newly elected President. May their tenure bring forth even greater progress and success for the organization. Here's to a remarkable journey behind us and an even more promising one ahead!

In the meantime enjoy this latest edition of our Social Dialogue with is emphasis on Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and their relevance to our practice and educational enterprises.

**Vijayan K Pillai, Ph.D,**

Professor School of Social Work University of Texas, Arlington, USA

**Julieann Nagoshi, Ph.D**

Southwest Interdisciplinary Research Center, School of Social Work, Arizona State University Phoenix, Arizona, USA

**Priyanjali Chakraborty, M.A**

Ph.D. Scholar School of Social Work University of Texas, Arlington, USA

Enhancing the Growth of Non-Governmental Organizations in Pursuit of Sustainable Development Goals

The Role of Social Work in Global Conflict Zones

Non-Governmental organizations (NGOs) play a crucial role in promoting every one of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals such as 'Good Health and Well-being' (SDG 3) and Gender Equality (SDG 5). Encouraging the development of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is seen as a promising approach for advancing socio-economic progress in developing countries. This study, based on data from South Asian countries, identifies effective strategies, including boosting membership in ECOSOC, investing in foundations that support growth, and promoting wealth equality, as beneficial for fostering the growth of NGOs.

The landscape of South Asia boasts a rich history of community-based organizations, philanthropy, and social activism. Despite this historical backdrop, research and literature on the factors sustaining the growth of NGOs in South Asia remain notably scant (Johnson, 2009; Pillai & Johnson, 2010). This study aims to examine the relationship between NGO growth and selected social structural factors associated with the South Asian setting.

Theoretical Basis:

At the theoretical core of this exploration lies the role of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), a principal organ of the United Nations entrusted with promoting international economic and social cooperation amidst ongoing global economic shifts (Fu & Lai, 2021). ECOSOC's role extends to facilitating NGO participation in UN processes, enriching discussions and decision-making with diverse expertise and perspectives.

The study narrows its focus to NGOs with special consultative status, a distinction granted by ECOSOC. Such NGOs actively engage with ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies, contributing knowledge and expertise garnered from global networks to local communities. This study focusses on selected environmental, democratic, and social and economic inequality theories, seeking to determine the socio-economic processes that influence the growth of NGOs in South Asia.

Environmental theories posit that population density in areas served by NGOs influences their growth. High-density areas are seen as more conducive to information diffusion, enabling NGOs to muster support for their missions (Islam, 2017). However, these theories acknowledge that the direct impact of population density on NGO growth is likely significant but tempered by various environmental variables (Johnson, 2016).

Democratic settings, according to existing research, positively affect the functioning and growth of NGOs (Watkins, Swidler & Hannan, 2012). Democracies provide legal frameworks supporting NGO work, thriving in open dialogue and participatory processes characteristic of democratic societies (Katyaini, Wessel & Sahoo, 2021). Democracy theories hypothesize a significant positive effect on NGO growth.

A third set of theories rooted in social and economic inequality posits that income inequality poses obstacles to the growth and effectiveness of NGO operations. In societies with high income inequality, resource allocation tends to favor small, disenfranchised groups, limiting NGOs' ability to diversify efforts and address broader community issues (Gough & Shackley, 2001). Social fragmentation resulting from high levels of income inequality hinders collaboration between NGOs and the wider communities in which they operate (McCloskey, 2019). These theories suggest a negative relationship between NGO growth and income inequality.

Understanding the intricate relationship between NGO growth and structural factors is vital for optimizing their impact on society. By comprehending the roles of these factors, strategies may be designed to bolster NGO growth, enhancing their contributions to societal progress.

Methods and Material:

The study's methodology centers on NGOs with special status in ECOSOC within the South Asian region, encompassing eight nation-states. The dependent variable is the number of NGOs with special consultative status per hundred thousand population in each country.

Three key indicators, each aligning with the aforementioned theories, serve as independent variables. The democracy index, published by the Economist Intelligence Unit, gauges the level of democracy in each of the eight South Asian nations (Index D, 2021). Population density, the second indicator, is measured as the number of inhabitants per square kilometer (World Development Report 2021, n.d.). Finally, income inequality is indicated by the proportion of national income owned by the top ten percent of the population (Wealth Inequality Ranking by Country, n.d.).

Analysis:

The first step in the analysis involves assessing the relationship between the type of NGO's ECOSOC status (special or general) and the countries they belong to. This is achieved by examining the association between countries and membership status of NGOs operating within each of the eight South Asian nations.

Data are available for two types of consultative status: special and general. Additionally, data on specialized types of NGO service including disability, indigenous groups support, and foundation, are considered. The analysis is extended to assess the association between countries and types of NGOs.

In the second step of this analysis, a simple linear regression of the number of NGOs per million population with special status in ECOSOC on the three selected explanatory variables is conducted. However, a limitation arises from the modest sample size, which may affect the ability to assess the significance of the estimated regression coefficients effectively. To mitigate this limitation, bootstrap approaches with 1000 replications or resamples are employed (Mokhtar, Yusof & Sapiri, 2023). Bootstrapping with the bias-corrected percentile approach is implemented using 1000 replications.

Results:

Results from chi-square statistics suggest that South Asian countries in the sample have a high likelihood of having ECOSOC consultative status. See Table 1. The Chi-square is 7.34 ($p=0.389$).

Table 1

Country	Statistics	Special	General	Total
Afghanistan	Count % within status Adjusted residual	295 9.5 0.4	14 8.6 -0.4	309 9.4
India	Count % within status Adjusted residual	870 27.9 1.3	38 23.3 -1.3	908 27.7
Pakistan	Count % within status Adjusted residual	425 13.6 -1.1	27 16.6 1.1	452 13.8
Bangladesh	Count % within status Adjusted residual	454 14.6 -1.1	29 17.8 1.1	483 14.7
Nepal	Count % within status Adjusted residual	423 13.6 -0.2	23 14.1 0.2	446 13.6
Sri Lanka	Count % within status Adjusted residual	330 10.6 -1.2	22 13.5 1.2	352 10.7
Bhutan	Count % within status Adjusted residual	175 5.6 -1.2	5 3.1 1.2	180 5.5
Maldives	Count % within status Adjusted residual	148 4.7 1.4	5 3.1 -1.4	153 4.7

Chi-Square (7)=7.34, $p=0.389$

Of the sixteen cells in Table 1, column percentage for India is about 27.7, a value far higher than the column percentages of rest of the cells. However, the adjusted residual of that cell (1.3) is far less than the expected ± 2 criteria and may not be considered significant.

Table 2

Country	Statistics	Type of NGO				Total
		Disability	Indigenous Groups	Foundations	Others	
India	Count	14	9	39	846	908
	% within type	20.0	20.5	40.6	27.5	27.7
	Adjusted Residual	-1.4	-1.0	2.9	-0.7	

As seen in Table 2 the adjusted residual for India is 2.9; greater Table 2 about here than the expected ± 2 criteria indicating that foundations, as an NGO type are more likely to characterize Indian NGOs. A substantial proportion of NGOs receive support from foundations, indicating a culture supportive of NGOs in the Indian subcontinent. The results, presented in Table 3, use the bias-corrected percentile bootstrap approach, taking into account potential bias in the bootstrapped regression estimates due to limitations such as a small sample size.

Table 3

Model	B	Bias	Std.Error	P<.05	Bias Corrected Confidence Intervals	
					Lower	Upper
Constant	297.22	-278.39	4293.91	0.59	-1402.11	160.15
Top 10% owns	-5.65	0.23	74.58	0.60	-63.22	25.01
Population Density	0.48	-0.22	0.55	0.76	-0.96	0.62
Global Democracy Index	0.25	4.78	35.97	0.94	-268.43	396.55

However, none of the three selected independent variables is found to be significant at the 0.05 level. While non-significant, the results remain informative, with beta values for population density, democracy index, and inequality indicating 0.253, 0.041, and -0.372,

respectively. See Table 3. The measure of inequality is inversely correlated, though not significant, with the number of NGOs in special status per million population eve.

Discussion:

The results, while not aligning with anticipated outcomes, provide valuable insights into the dynamics of NGO growth. The beta values, despite their non-significance, offer nuanced perspectives, especially the inverse correlation between wealth inequality and NGO representation.

The analysis of country associations reveals interesting patterns, with India in particular, and Bangladesh standing out as leaders in the representation of NGOs under the United Nations' special status category. Moreover, the substantial support from foundations in India indicates a robust and supportive NGO culture in the region.

While the study contributes valuable insights, limitations such as the modest sample size and the use of single indicators for dimensions like wealth inequality are acknowledged. Yet another limitation was the sparse data availability on the characteristics of non-ECOSOC NGOs. These nuances, however, do not diminish the informative nature of this descriptive study.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, this study has sought to examine the projected impacts of selected variables on the growth of NGOs with special status per million population. The findings, diverging from anticipated outcomes, underscore the complexity of factors influencing NGO growth. The beta values, though not statistically significant, hint at nuanced relationships, particularly the inverse correlation with wealth inequality.

Looking ahead, the ever-changing global landscape introduces uncertainties that may significantly impact the NGO sector. Unforeseen global events, such as pandemics or economic crises, and emerging issues like climate change or technological advancements, may reshape the dynamics of NGOs and their engagement with international organizations.

The core ideas around NGO growth, challenges, and the role of international organizations are likely to remain relevant beyond 2030. However, ongoing research and adaptability in theories and methodologies are crucial for comprehending and addressing the ever-changing landscape of non-governmental organizations. The role of international bodies like ECOSOC in facilitating NGO engagement is expected to persist, although changes in the global political landscape or organizational structures may influence the dynamics between NGOs and international entities.

As we navigate the future, the study advocates for a continued exploration of the evolving relationship between NGOs, socio-economic factors, and international frameworks, fostering a deeper understanding of their role in shaping societal progress.

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**Jotham Dhemba**

Senior Lecturer and Head of Department, University of Eswatini, South Africa

**Tatenda Nhapi**

Research Associate, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

SDGs mainstreaming for enhanced older persons' welfare -Insights from Eswatini and Zimbabwe

Ageism, limited healthcare and social services access, depleted assets, abuse and neglect (Zelalem & Kotecho, 2020), food insecurity (Kasiram & Holscher, 2015) and lack of, [or] poor housing (Dhemba, 2022) as well as environmental impacts are amongst the key drivers of older persons poverty. Therefore, increased representation of older persons in the population is a demographic imperative demanding Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) targets mainstreaming for the optimising older persons quality of life and wellbeing.

Given their ethical responsibility to intervene in the lives of vulnerable people and belief in human rights and social justice (Wamara & Carvalho, 2022) practice with older persons is one of the important areas of social work practice and intervention in many countries including Eswatini and Zimbabwe. This is corroborated by Lombard & Viviers (2022) who contend that the fundamentals of social work lie in humanity's social and evolutionary instinct to protect the most vulnerable, inclusive of older persons. In fact, this also resonates with the principles of social justice, human rights and respect for diversity, which underpin the social work profession (International Federation of Social Workers- IFSW, 2022). Accordingly, the upsurge in the population of people 60 years and older implies social

workers should be robustly and innovatively engaging in methods of interventions to address the factors that exacerbate with older persons' vulnerability.

Replacing the year 2015 targeted Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the internationally agreed SDGs the United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted on 25 September 2015 is an action plan for the achievement of targets by 2030. The SDGs constitute of a set of quantified and time-bound development goals and targets for transforming the human condition by 2030. They comprise of 17 goals and 169 associated targets premised robust economic development, natural resources management and protection, social equity and inclusion.

The section below focuses on the progress and challenges thereof, in the pursuit of some of the aforementioned SDGs and targets, in the context of Eswatini and Zimbabwe, starting with the former. Pertinently older persons' welfare in both Eswatini (Department of Social Welfare) and Zimbabwe (Department of Social Development) falls primarily within the remit of social workers, complemented by NGOs. Significantly, as elsewhere in most African countries the family, is still viewed in both countries as a key social group in which older people are embedded and supported.

SDGs and older Eswatini persons

Eswatini, formerly Swaziland, is a landlocked Southern African country. It is bordered by South Africa on one side and Mozambique on another. The country has a population of about 1.2 million and 5% of them comprise of older persons. It is a lower middle-income country and is ranked number 138 of 189 countries in the 2019 Human Development Index (World Bank, 2020). Its GNP per capita in 2018 was US\$9.439 (Government of Eswatini (GoE), 2021). On the same note, the proportion of people living in poverty remains very high, as 58.9% of its rural population live below the national poverty line of less than US\$1.9 a day (in 2016 and 2017). Its Gini-coefficient stood at 49.3% in 2017 (GoE, 2021) which makes Eswatini one of the most unequal countries in the world.

Based on the Swaziland Household Income and Expenditure Survey quantitative assessment of poverty and vulnerability in Eswatini in 2016/2017 data revealed that 35,000 households with a population of 230,000 persons, suffer from extreme poverty and destitution. They live in a situation of chronic hunger and are unable to meet any of their basic needs (Schubert, 2020). Statistics on poverty in Eswatini reflect an overrepresentation of older persons, which indicates their vulnerability and inability to support themselves (Khumalo, Musingafi & Mafumbate, 2019). Furthermore, the aforementioned authors posit that older persons in Eswatini are living in harsh conditions of poverty, destitution, neglect and abandonment, poor housing, isolation, as well as exclusion from participation in mainstream societal activities. In addition, the HIV and AIDS scourge has imposed a double-burden on older persons in Eswatini, as they have to care for orphaned grandchildren, and yet they also need care themselves.

Goal number 1 of the SDGs is about reducing poverty. Although there are many ways to view poverty, there is broad consensus that it refers to lack, deficiency or want (Schenck & Louw, 2010). As such, poverty lies at the core of all the SDGs and therefore its eradication is likely to lead to the achievement of these Goals. An effective assault on poverty is likely to lead to the achievement of Goals 2 to 7 and 10 stated above, among others.

In response to the syndrome of poverty in old age and to mitigate the impacts of HIV/AIDS on older persons, the Government of Eswatini provides for a universal social pension commonly referred to as the old age grant (OAG). It is a categorical grant administered by the Department of Social Welfare, under the Deputy Prime Minister's Office through its social workers. The old age pension is SZL500 (about US\$27.89) monthly, but is paid quarterly.

Although older persons concerns in Eswatini have been somewhat mitigated by OAG provision, its inadequacy inhibits its effective addressing of poverty challenges. This is because it is not enough to meet even the most basic of their needs. The fact that the majority of older persons in Eswatini are caring for orphans makes their situation dire (Makadzange & Dolamo, 2014). Likelihood of older persons being household heads would be because of high unemployment levels in the country thus OAG becomes the only income source for households with an older person. Furthermore, in terms of Section 27.6 of the Constitution of Swaziland 2005, the OAG provision is subject to the availability of resources. This renders the OAG as unreliable and ineffective instrument for poverty reduction among older persons.

Moreover, the OAG only targets household poverty and not independent living. Thus, the current OAG form does not stimulate older persons' self-reliance, let alone meet their needs for food, shelter and health, among others. As such, it cannot be expected to enable older persons to rise above poverty and vulnerability. Consequently, barriers are created towards SDG 2 outcomes of ending hunger, food security achievement and improved nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture, and SDG 3 of ensuring healthy lives and promoting wellbeing for all, among other Goals.

Nonetheless, being public revenue funded the OAG is therefore to some extent redistributive and addresses SDG 10 on reducing inequality. However, its redistributive effect is compromised by the fact that resources availability determines OAG provision complicated by OAG's inability to holistically meet all beneficiaries' requirements.

Thus, upward review of monthly OAG amount of SZL500 enable recipients to better meet their needs. Furthermore, it is necessary to mainstream the conceptual underpinnings of the developmental social work approach to empower older persons to become independent. OAG recipients can be motivated to be creative and innovative in coming up with income generating projects using proceeds from their pension allowances. Moreover, older persons in Eswatini reside in rural areas, with access to arable land for agricultural production. Sustained assistance with farming implements and inputs such as maize seed enriches

achieving SDG 1 on poverty and SDG 2 on ending hunger and food security and improved nutrition.

It should also be noted that voluntary organisations such as Philani Maswati are instrumental in promoting older persons' wellbeing in Eswatini. They provide relief assistance to destitute older persons. A Matsapa based NGO, Swaziland Hospice at Home (SHAH) provides home-based care to terminally-ill patients, older persons included. Their services include medical treatment, consultation and counselling and home-based care supplies of disposable napkins, gloves, toiletries and bereavement counselling, among others (SHAH, n/d). Furthermore, rationale for Eswatini's Plan of Action (2013-2018) was for care and ensuring food security of vulnerable people particularly older people within communities through resuscitating traditional methods of extending help to the needy such the forgotten practice of the Chiefs Granary (GoS, 2013).

SDGs and older persons in Zimbabwe

Climate stressors affect agriculture and food and nutrition security, disproportionately affecting older people, women and girls. Zimbabwe's predominantly semi-arid and extremely variable climate with shifting rainfall patterns, droughts and floods is exacerbated by substantial environmental challenges including land degradation, deforestation and inadequate water quantity and quality. The National Development Strategy 1: 2021-2025 (NDS1), is the Government of Zimbabwe (GOZ)'s five-year plan for realising the country's Vision 2030, while simultaneously addressing the global aspirations of the SDGs and Africa Agenda 2063.

Ending hunger

Availability of and access to adequate food to realise SDG 1 have been impeded by poverty, disease, economic hardship and low agricultural productivity. Households headed by women, older people or children are among the most vulnerable and diminished food and livelihoods access among urban and rural households has led to an estimated 4.1 million people facing food insecurity October 2023 to January 2024 across much of Manicaland, Masvingo, and Matabeleland North and Midlands Province United States of America International Development(USAID 2023).

Ending poverty

In line with SDG 1 inclusion and poverty mitigation for the vulnerable including older persons is guided by the spirit of leaving no one behind where various plans and programs in the remit of National Social Protection Policy Framework (NSPPF) inform the GoZ's social protection provision targeting.

In June 2020 the GoZ name change from Department of Social Welfare to the Department of Social Development, reflected transformation towards embracing a developmental social

welfare approach. This was under the year 2016 initiated NSPPF. National Social Security Authority (NSSA) manages Zimbabwe's private and public sector pension schemes social insurance schemes. Additionally, NSSA offers Accident Prevention and Worker Compensation and Rehabilitation scheme. In 2019, 3.2 million pensioners who form some of the older persons in the country were registered under an NSSA pension scheme and accessed USD 10.6 million in short-term benefits and USD 222.5 million in long-term benefits (World Bank Group 2022). To buffer Zimbabwean pensions from inflationary pressures as of June 2023, NSSA introduced partial pay-outs in US dollars (Ruzvidzo 2023). This would be in keeping up with SDG 3 of Ensuring healthy lives and promoting wellbeing for all.

Conclusion

Embracing the developmental approach in older persons services provision is critical for SDGs relating to older persons realisation beyond year 2030, especially SDG 1 on poverty. This is particularly important as it focuses on the empowerment and wellbeing of older people through creative and imaginative social services provision especially focused on shock responsive social protection. This resonates with Lombard's (2022, 47) stance that sustainable social work practices embrace the "... interconnectedness between people, the planet, prosperity, peace and partnerships as a foundational approach for social work...". On the same note, the enduring extended family social support system is vital in promoting the wellbeing of members, therefore social workers' interventions must contribute towards desired outcomes of robust intergenerational support. Additionally, heterogeneity of needs makes their support interventions a multidisciplinary service hence social workers and allied professionals' inter-disciplinary and inter-agency collaboration guarantees realisation of SDG targets. Social workers need to be imaginative in embedding sustained lobbying and advocacy efforts to ensure duty bearers who oversee SDGs targets implementation remain insightful of upholding rights of older persons guaranteeing their enhanced social functioning by 2030 and beyond.

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Mutsa Murenje, PhD, Territory Families, Housing and Communities Jabiru, NT 0886, Australia

Sustainable development goals (SDGs): The role of social work in remote Indigenous communities in Australia

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a common vision for peace and prosperity for all human beings and the planet. It consists of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which call for global partnership by all developed and developing countries (United Nations [UN], 2023).

Social work can lead the implementation of interventions in remote Indigenous communities in Australia where historical injustices and imbalances persist. Rural poverty is misperceived while 'rural 'peripheries' are isolated and neglected' (Chambers, 2013, p. 2). The article addresses such issues as poverty and inequality, health and wellbeing, education and employment, and proffers actions that can be taken by social workers to advance the SDGs agenda, even beyond 2030. This treatise is based on field observations and existing literature and challenges social work education to pay more attention to conditions in remote communities.

Poverty and inequality

Australia is one of the world's richest nation-states but is also a country in which thousands of Indigenous Australians are trapped in absolute poverty. Altman 2007 noted the 'many similarities in the development problems' (p. 1) facing poor Indigenous Australians and those in developing nations. Poverty is reportedly higher among Australians living in remote areas. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have lower incomes and net household worth compared to their urban counterparts; they are also at a heightened risk of poverty. For instance, the National Rural Health Alliance (2017) found that 65 per cent of Indigenous

peoples in remote areas were disproportionately affected by poverty. A 2018 study had similar findings (Davidson, Bradbury, & Wong, 2020). Median household incomes were also strictly lowest in remote areas, where the cost of energy, food, and petrol were also reportedly higher than in metropolitan areas (National Rural Health Alliance, 2017). In line with SDGs 1 and 10 which aim at eradicating poverty in its various forms and reducing inequality within and among countries, respectively, social workers need to advocate vigorously for pro-poor growth strategies or the livelihoods approach as the free market or sale of labour and operation of commercial business has been notoriously unsuccessful in eradicating poverty in remote Indigenous communities (Altman, 2007). Poverty and inequality affect health and wellbeing to which I now turn.

Health and wellbeing

Indigenous Australians in remote communities have worse health than people living in cities, poorer access to health services, and higher rates of risky behaviours, including smoking (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2014). In some parts of the Northern Territory, for example, the author has become morbidly aware of the most severe of skin infections, including scabies, impetigo, and the risk of rheumatic heart disease that Aboriginal children are confronted with. Strikingly similar findings were reported in Canada where Indigenous Canadians experienced higher mortality and poorer health than non-Indigenous peoples and received discriminatory, insensitive, and poor-quality care at higher rates compared to non-Indigenous Canadians (The Lancet, 2021). To meet SDG 3 which focuses on ensuring healthy lives and promoting wellbeing for people of all ages (UN, 2023), social workers can promote access to holistic, culturally safe, and appropriate healthcare services by remote Indigenous Australians. They can take leadership positions in community-based, Aboriginal-controlled health organisations where they will work towards tackling the social determinants of health, including discrimination, social exclusion, and poverty. Social workers might also address barriers to education and employment as discussed below.

Access to education and employment opportunities

Education is one of the most fundamental instruments required to reduce poverty and inequality, due to the significant contributions it makes towards sustainable economic development (Young & Guenther, 2008). Education is integral to the sociocultural, physical, and economic wellbeing of all peoples, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Griffiths, 2011). Aboriginal peoples were confronted with serious disadvantages across individual indicators of social and economic wellbeing and across all sectors of education, when compared with non-Aboriginal Australians (Young & Guenther, 2008). Despite Indigenous students making up most of the student populations in remote communities, their schools were rarely considered and funded in the same manner that the so-called mainstream schools were. Resultantly, students in these remote school communities often experienced serious educational disadvantages. Their numeracy and literacy skills were reportedly lower than those of other Australian students, and their

employment outcomes were also inherently negative (NT Independent, 2022). Poor quality education is largely blamed for dropouts in primary and secondary school years. Aboriginal peoples' pass rates and qualification outcomes were reportedly below those of non-Aboriginal Australians (Young & Guenther, 2008). To address this, social work approaches need to advocate for inclusive, accessible, and equitable quality education and encourage learning opportunities and skills development for all, consistent with SDG 4. Social workers can innovatively address learning barriers and actively support children's education in remote communities by working to improve such initiatives as the remote school attendance strategy (National Indigenous Australians Agency, 2023). Some learning barriers might, ipso facto, be related to housing conditions and infrastructure which are addressed in the subsequent section.

Housing conditions and infrastructure

Several communities in the Northern Territory, for instance, are in extremely remote locations where access to goods and support services is limited. In Tennant Creek, for example, Indigenous Australians live in tin sheds, without any access to power and water and where conditions become especially unbearable in winter and summer (Bardon, 2022). Residents living in tin sheds often rely on the generosity of their neighbours who allow them to use their bathrooms and showers when convenient to do so. With a long public housing list in these remote communities, it takes several years for Indigenous Australians to access suitable housing (Bardon, 2022, Jonscher & Breen, 2020). Where Indigenous peoples have access to housing, such as places like Gunbalanya, there have been reports of residents paying excessive rental payments despite the housing being dilapidated, unsafe, and uninhabitable; and many also complain about unlawful racial discrimination (NT Independent, 2022).

Despite the notable achievements Australia has made in absolute and per capita terms, Indigenous Australians are confronted with illiteracy, disease, foetid dwellings, and low life expectancy, all of which are beneath any form of human decency. Reducing inequality within Australia (SDG 10) remains urgent. Social workers must, now and beyond 2030, advocate for increased investments and promote private and public partnerships in remote communities so that human settlements like Tennant Creek become truly safe, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable, in line with SDG 11. Further, social workers need to be leaders in advocating for access to justice and development of accountable, effective, and inclusive institutions at all levels of society (SDG 16). By so doing, social workers will also have to pay particular attention to issues of gender and women empowerment which are tackled below.

Gender equality and empowerment of women and girls

SDG 5 aims at realising gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls. Social workers are well-positioned to take a leading role in this sector. This is particularly true in remote Indigenous communities in Australia where domestic and family violence rates are reportedly higher (Keel, 2004). Several factors account for higher domestic and family

violence rates in remote communities: including geographic remoteness, culture, lack of financial and human resources, and low reporting rates. A study by Campo and Tayton (2015) found that domestic and family violence was largely shunned in remote communities as family problems were not discussed publicly. As a result, women were silenced and deterred from disclosing their experiences of violence and abuse. Further, the study found that women were also prevented from seeking help and succour as they feared community gossip and lack of perpetrator accountability. The experiences of women in these communities were further exacerbated by limited transport options and lack of income when women sought help and support. As a human rights and social justice profession, social work can ensure the realisation of gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls by promoting their access to education and economic opportunities such as employment. Social workers can also tackle gender-based violence and discrimination and harmful cultural practices, all of which keep women and girls in a subordinate position to their male counterparts. In the next and final section of this paper, the author addresses the issue of environmental sustainability which has far wider application and implications for Australia as a whole.

Environmental sustainability

As noted above, social work also has an important role to play not only in realising SDGs 14 and 15, but also being a leader in this field. Sustainable development is intricately linked to conservation and responsible use of seas, oceans, and marine resources, in accordance with SDG 14. Thus, the need to protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, forest management, combating desertification, and halting and reversing land degradation, as outlined in SDG 15, are roles that social workers should begin taking seriously. As Gray (2020) observed, sustainable development needs to be environmentally friendly and move from its narrow focus on growth and production and include matters of social and ecological justice. For Gray (2020), therefore, sustainable development only makes sense to the extent that it is inherently connected to environmental sustainability, with a clear focus on human and economic development outcomes. Environmental sustainability needs to plug the gap between ecology and economics. Beyond 2030, social workers will still advocate for sustainable production and consumption practices, promote the use of renewable energy, and address environmental issues such as desertification and land degradation.

Conclusion

Social workers have a stupendous role to play now and beyond 2030 in protecting the most vulnerable of people living in remote Indigenous communities in Australia. They have the opportunity and time to work with individuals, families, groups, communities, government, and nongovernment agencies to address such injustices as poverty and inequality, poor access to quality education and livelihood opportunities, and healthcare services by Indigenous Australians in remote communities. Social workers can also advocate for

culturally safe, sensitive, and appropriate policies and programs that promote economic empowerment and social protection of vulnerable groups, especially women, children, and people with disabilities. Social work education is also expected to be typically immersed in conditions affecting remote communities. As Abraham Maslow observed, '[w]e already have a start, we already have capacities, talents, directions, missions, [and] callings' (Maslow, 1965, p. 118).

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Asha Banu Soletti, Professor Centre for Health and Mental Health, School of Social Work, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India.



Smitha Sasidharan Nair, Asst. Professor Centre for Health and Mental Health, School of Social Work. Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India



Pravin Yadav, Program Co-ordinator Pragati-IRHDP, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India

Cultural Sustainability, Cultural Competency, and Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is where the relationship between humans and nature needs to be understood and preserved. Sustainable development goals aim to involve local actors to plan, implement, and act on their own needs while understanding their contextual realities (Santha, 2019). Cultural sustainability is an important pillar of sustainable development as it values and respects the right to own language, culture, environment, traditions, and cultural memory. This dimension of sustainable development focuses on cultural context and people-centered development (World Commission on Culture and Development, 1995). Social work as a profession has consistently highlighted the importance of culture and cultural competency in its interventions. Cultural sensitivity and being conscious of cultural diversity are important to ensure cultural competency in any intervention.

Sustainable development and culture are concepts that are complex and fluid; integration of these in practice requires the skills of cultural competency. Cultural competency is the process by which social workers transform knowledge and conduct professional work that embraces the culture of the community, understands, and respects the differences, and

ensures the provision of services in alignment with the distinctive culture (Este,2007). A social worker is sensitive to the cultural dynamics and works towards meeting the culturally unique needs of the population. Working with cultural competency requires the knowledge of the community's worldview to ensure acceptable and people-centered interventions; it requires the skills to communicate and form meaningful trusting relationships with the community. It requires the skill of critical analysis and planning to ensure context-specific interventions (NASW,2001).

This paper discusses the livelihood interventions of the Pragati-Integrated Rural Health and Development Project (IRHDP) that highlight the relevance of community-based practice and focusses on cultural competency as small steps towards achieving the sustainable development goals.

Pragati-IRHDP

Pragati- IRHDP is a field action project of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. The project was initiated in 1986 by Professor Vimla Nadkarni to work on the underlying linkages between health and development. Aghai is a gram panchayat (it has a village self-governance body) located 100 km from Mumbai, in Thane district, Maharashtra. The location of the project is under the Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary. In 1970, the large forest areas surrounding the Tansa Dam were proclaimed as protected wildlife sanctuary under the Wildlife Preservation Act. This means that only tribal residents are allowed full access, and no commercial farming was/is allowed. It is predominantly a tribal area, and the major tribal groups are Katkari, Warli, Malhar Koli, and Kokna. The social exclusion faced by the tribal groups in the area has been well documented. This area historically has some of the poorest development indicators. (Mutatkar, 2017; Waghmore & Jojo, 2014).

The work of Pragati project has historically focussed on people-centered development. Elsewhere, we have documented the work done over the last four decades and the challenges Pragati faces (Soletti and Nadkarni, 2017; Nair, Soletti & Yadav, 2023). Social determinants of health and multi-dimensional poverty have been the theoretical focus of the project's interventions. The socio-ecological perspective is used to plan interventions focusing on individuals, schools, communities, and government institutions. The three main pillars of health and nutrition, education, and livelihoods and the intersectoral linkages between them are the main areas of work of the project (Figure 1). These three pillars are pathways to achieving sustainable development goals through community-based interventions. The project is currently working in 22 padas (hamlet). Cultural sustainability is considered an enabler for sustainable development in these community-based interventions. We highlight the livelihood interventions of the project to highlight the relevance of cultural sustainability.

Livelihoods and Cultural Sustainability:



Community consultation as the key strategy of Pragati

Pragati's work has focussed on community participation and cultural integration. The livelihood intervention (Figure 2) of the project emphasized building on the community's strengths, and local knowledge systems are given priority. Land and access to land and forests are crucial to the tribal communities, and there is a synergistic relationship that the tribal communities share with *jal, jungle, aur jameen*. Sustaining this synergy is essential, therefore, the project works on land, water, and farming. The approach was to plan interventions that are meaningful to the daily lives and needs of the tribal population, keeping the tangible and intangible assets at the center of the intervention (Daskon and Binns, 2010). Over the years, increasing droughts and dwindling support mechanisms resulted in depleting opportunities for agriculture. This acted as a push factor for many farmers and youth to migrate to peri-urban areas in search of jobs. Being unskilled made them accept poorly paid informal sector jobs. Farmers and youth left their families and older adults behind in the *padas*. It created a vicious cycle of poverty. To break the vicious cycle, we worked towards supporting the tribal communities to reclaim their space.

Connecting/ Reconnecting to land:

Tribal communities innately connect to the natural resources. Farming is an important skill and is an inherent skill of the local communities the project works with. The project aimed to reconnect the farmers to their land, building on their strengths and working on the assets they had, a System of Rice Intensification (SRI) and organic farming were initiated in the hamlets.

Along with this, an effort was made to introduce the concept of nutri-gardens, where the local vegetables are grown for consumption and surplus is sold in the market. The project has initiated jasmine farming as a commercial crop that fetched farmers' income. Jasmine is a low-maintenance, high-yield, resilient crop, thus ensuring a stable income for years. Training in farming-related activities was accompanied by the provision of kits and saplings.

The project co-created diversified livelihood avenues through land-based interventions with the local communities and other stakeholders. Key interventions that reconnected the tribal communities to land and natural resources:

- Farm-based interventions: A wide range of crops to like rice, pulses, and jasmine flowers increase productivity and fetch income. Kitchen gardens and vegetable cultivation have been introduced recently to influence local consumption of nutritious food.
- Water is a critical resource and substantial attention is given to effective water conservation mechanisms. The project initiated low-cost and efficient irrigation mechanisms like drip irrigation and setting up for flood irrigation in one pada that require minimal resources. Also worked on local systems of water conservation mechanisms like Goni Bhandara.
- Attempts are made to promote conservation agriculture, preparation and use of organic manures, and introduction of intercropping mechanisms.
- Shifting the livelihood initiatives beyond basic subsistence to add basic assets and enhance the living standards of households in the padas.



Farmers Training Source / Authors

Jasmine farming / Authors

Enhancing Access to Water and Livelihood Options:

Another vital step toward sustainability was laying down waterpipes in two of the hamlets where there was water scarcity. The entire process of laying down the pipeline was community-led, with Pragati playing a facilitator's role. A water committee was formed in the community to ensure that the pipeline is maintained. Laying a pipeline has reversed migration in two hamlets. Farmers are engaged in sustainable agriculture in these padas, and the outcome has been fruitful.

Water pipeline in Mukhnepada / Authors

Goni Bhandara Local water systems / Authors

"Water pipeline has transformed our lives. We do not need to migrate for seasonal and petty jobs in places that are unfamiliar to us. We have left our families alone for months to earn a meagre income. That meagre income was insufficient even for survival. We had to stay on roads and shanties to save money. Now, with

the impetus you have given us through this water pipeline and the seeds to kickstart our work, we are confident that we will lead a life with dignity in the coming years, also experiencing the comfort of staying together as a family and working together in the farm as a family."- Farmer from Malepada

Alongside water and land, the project facilitated livestock and apiculture, which aids the farming practices and supports landless families. Working with key stakeholders:

The forest department is an integral part of the work with the community; an example is that Pragati has built a storage facility where the farmers can store vegetables and other crops. Along with this, the plan is to start seed banking, so the local food knowledge of the community is sustained. The cultural knowledge of the community is the starting point for



livelihood intervention and an important resource throughout the process of ensuring a generational transfer of knowledge. Building local leadership ensures community sustainability and the transfer of the cultural knowledge of the community.

A field action project of the institute is also a space for the social work students to do fieldwork and learn from the community. Pragati- IRHDP provides a space for students to engage and understand the local context, rural realities, and the importance of a people-centered approach, which is an important way forward to ensure sustainable community development. The relevance of cultural sustainability and cultural competency skills are learned through the hands-on training.

Cultural sustainability and Livelihood intervention: Achieving SDG's now and in the future.



The work of Pragati project has highlighted some important lessons for achieving SDGs and ensuring that the interventions continue to have an impact in the future.

Culture-sensitive approaches have demonstrated concretely how one can address both the economic and human rights dimensions of poverty at the same time while providing solutions to complex development issues in an innovative and multisectoral manner. (UNESCO, 2012)

Local Leadership is the bridge between the community and the project's intervention. It is a bottom-up approach to connect, engage, and understand the community's needs. Local participants, who are insiders of the communities, are pillars in recognizing and resolving concerns using local resources. Local leadership is also important for sustaining the work and innovating.

For sustainable livelihood models, local cultural values should be vital to planning livelihood interventions. The project has witnessed the relationship between local culture and livelihood sustainability.

Livelihoods - Moving the Wheels of Sustainability

Living together as a collective community always have been the strength of tribal communities; seasonal migration/migration has affected their cultural practices in a big way. Culture-led development includes a range of non-monetized benefits, such as greater social inclusiveness and rootedness, resilience, innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship for individuals and communities, and the use of local resources, skills, and knowledge. (UNESCO. 2012)

Fig. 2 Livelihood Interventions of Pragati



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**Anne Chmela**

Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences, Germany

**Lea Schaefer**

Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences, Germany

**Nele Tyburski**

Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences, Germany

**Sophie Weihs**

Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences, Germany

**Dagmar Oberlies**

Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences, Germany

**Shewli Kumar**

Tata Institute of Social Sciences, India

Social Work Education towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: a Student Account from Germany

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Goals (SDGs) offer a human rights- based agenda for change that balances economic development, social justice and environmental sustainability. This article wants to show their relevance for social work education (1). It will then describe a transnational study program that reflects these goals (2) and suggest an SDG-sensitive curriculum for the years to come (3).

The Relevance of SDGs for Social Work

The people centered SDGs reflect on many fields of social work. The reduction of poverty and hunger, social inclusion, namely access to education, social and health services, countering discriminatory practices, policies and laws, especially gender inequalities, are at the core of social work efforts. In addition, social work always promoted peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice and accountability as well as global partnerships. In its policy paper from April 2021 the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) recognizes the goals as an opportunity for global transformation in social, economic and ecological aspects. Social work could take the role of a partner on international level as well as facilitator of partnerships within communities and various stakeholders. The paper emphasizes a social work approach from bottom-up (community and people driven) that gravitates around the knowledge and needs of the people (IFSW 2021).

Pandey and Kumar (2018) see the need to therefore create awareness about global concerns at the local levels and ensure participation in collective action (p. 200). This will need adjustments to curricula as "social workers need to be equipped with skills and competencies required to handle the concerns of SDGs while they work with target communities" (p. 194). According to Pandey and Kumar such a curriculum should include key sustainable development issues like climate change, disaster risk reduction, biodiversity issues, poverty reduction, sustainable livelihood opportunities and sustainable consumption (p. 202). While social work has to be located within a national framework and must be specific to the local situation or context, social workers will be instrumental in creating an enabling environment for ensuring that the local needs interface with the SDGs (p. 202). This approach would call for dynamic interactions between educators, practitioners and social work organizations as well as more involvement in policy planning (p. 204).

2. Transnational Social Work at Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences

The program at Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences that we describe in this article uses the name Transnational Social Work pointing to the fact that Social Workers are confronted with people who are embedded in transnational processes such as crossing physical borders, communicating across borders, in more than one language, carrying many local and hybrid identities etc. (Schwarzer 2016).

The transnational social work program at Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences was introduced in the year 2013 (www.frankfurt-university.de/transnational). The program wants to equip social workers with the knowledge and understanding, the methods and professional ethics to work with people who migrated or fled to Germany. Thus, the (legal) framework is still national, but the perspective is trans-national. The program is based on the requirements of the German qualification-framework for social work. It intends to impart the following skills: knowledge and understanding of global context as well as processes of

inclusion and exclusion; foundations of transnational social work and finally project-management skills, language proficiency and ability to work in multi-cultural and interdisciplinary teams.

Many of the topics of the program take up relevant SDGs and are designed for the world envisioned by the Global Agenda beyond 2023. Several modules evolve around social inequalities, discrimination and social justice; others investigate migration law, policies and research, and the mental stress that comes with migration. Access to education is at the heart of social pedagogy, that is social work with children, youth and families. The support for victims of violence, namely child protection and violence against women, is also covered. Poverty and hunger are discussed from a global perspective, and international law and institutions as well as development cooperation are explained.

Student's views are expanded during an Erasmus-semester at one of the program's European partner-universities (2nd year), an internship in Germany (3rd year) and a practical placement outside of Europe (4th year). An integral part of the program is a continuous reflection to deliberate on privileges, power-relations as well as the structural and political context, thus facilitating a non-oppressive approach and civil engagement. The mandatory semester abroad introduces students to the social and societal order of another EU-country, it's social problems and social policies, social services and support systems. For our Erasmus-semester we studied in Denmark, France, the Netherlands and Turkey.

Even so our host countries have systems of social protection in place around 20% of their population, many migrants, are considered being 'at risk of poverty or social exclusion' because of monetary poverty, severe material and social deprivation or very low work intensity; rates in Türkiye being even higher (Eurostat 2023, p. 47, 200). This has consequences for accessing health services or affordable housing etc. Moreover, the European Union is moving away from combatting climate change and its impacts, with CO₂-emissions per capita being amongst the highest on the globe (Eurostat 2023, p. 11). The internship in Germany opens various options: Our internships took place in homes for unaccompanied minor refugees, with the youth migration service (which helps with educational and labor-market integration), and at a counseling center for migrant women and their families. This describes best the transnational focus of the social support system in Germany.

International practice placements (preferably in Non-European countries) take place in recognized services and are accompanied by supervision to reflect on culturally different working environments and transnational cooperation. Wehbi (2009) has pointed out that students' motivations for international placement are diverse and sometimes questionable. Learning about 'other' cultures, opening new horizons, extending personal and professional networks are some of the reasons given (Cleak et al. 2016, p. 5). At the same time new fields of practice become available such as working on the alleviation of poverty, responding to natural disasters, working in refugee camps etc.



Currently, we are placed in a women's rights organization in Uganda, and with a refugee support service and in a mental health clinic in Malaysia. We hope to have more insights into community-based support systems, and to be equipped to lobby for the SDGs when returning home.

When asked, students report having to cope with new and unexpected situations while studying and living in a foreign country. A literature review of the last two decades indicates that students experience culture shocks and otherness and start questioning their western beliefs and privileges (Ali et al. 2022, pp. 17). This allows students to relate to feelings normally expressed by minorities, which makes them, hopefully, more sensitive to the biographies of their clients, and into advocates for social change and inclusiveness in future.

We also had an opportunity to participate in an international week and a transnational summer school that included partner universities from Europe, but also India, Malaysia, Morocco, Namibia and South Africa. This short-term, in person programs allow for better understanding of diverse realities and facilitates transnational interactions and teamwork. A recent example was a four-university writing workshop on inequalities within and among countries. The workshop was preceded by two online courses to introduce SDGs and theories of social inequality and to prepare participants' own writing project. Posters were presented at the International Malaysian Studies Conference. When reflecting on their learning experiences, participants highlighted the link of their own research with the SDGs, and the interconnectedness of targets dealing with inequalities and equal opportunities.

They understood the relevance of working with marginalised and vulnerable groups, and how inequalities play out in different countries and contexts. Networking in achieving the global goals was considered a crucial factor.

3. Conclusions and Recommendations

We want to conclude this article with recommendations for social work education that values the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:

- Following the suggestion from Wehbi (2013) 'core critical knowledge areas' should be identified (p. 229) - and SDG 10: inequalities within but also among countries should become one of those areas. Students will then gain knowledge to be able to contribute to the main SDG-targets: reduce income inequalities, inclusion and equal opportunities for

all, end discrimination, and impact on social policies that promote equality and responsible migration policies.

- Curricula often adopt material from Western, mainly Anglo-American sources and adapt them to reflect the local context and requirements (Pandey & Kumar 2018, p. 202). We suggest that more publications from the Global South should be integrated into 'western' classrooms. One such example is the South African Ubuntu philosophy which fosters connections and responsibilities among individuals, families, communities, and the environment (Van Breda 2019). Ubuntu could lead to an eco- social approach to social work by embracing indigenous concepts, treating the Earth as a vital community member rather than a mere resource.
- Indigenous concepts can also pave the way to reflect on climate change and environmental implications that pose unprecedented threats to the globe and to society. The urgency is reflected in several Sustainable Development Goals, namely SDG 11, 12, 13, 14, 15. As the definition of Social Work highlights: "Social Work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments" and deals with the social effects of environmental and climate crises (IFSW-IASSW 2014). Therefore, environmental justice and sustainability should become an integral part of social work curricula - from content to practice to professional ethics and advocacy.
- These changes also must acknowledge the necessity of collaboration across borders (SDG 17) and encourage ways of peaceful transformation for justice and equity (SDG 16).

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**Dolly Paul Carlo, PhD**

Senior Lecturer Social Work Program Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

The difficulties social workers have when putting interventions into reality to achieve the SDGs

Social Work is a profession that provides help to persons in need which aims to enhance the well-being of individuals, groups, and communities, especially those who are marginalized, oppressed, or vulnerable. Social workers promote social justice, human rights, and social change through various interventions either at macro, meso and micro level. Social workers in their practice setting, cannot diverge from their plan of actions and the effectiveness of their interventions relies on how thoroughly and holistically their assessment (Dolly, 2020). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are relevant and synchronous with social work aims and practice (Karen et al., 2022; Jayasooria, 2016).

In addition, the SDGs are significantly aligned with social work's focus on individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities as intervention targets to promote well-being. The SDGs have provided a framework and useful road-map to unite social work and social development efforts for action aiming to address human needs, the planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership in order to meet the needs of vulnerable individuals and communities worldwide (Karen et al., 2022; Jayasooria, 2016). Therefore, involvement of all key stakeholders is essential to mobilize and to achieve the SDGs by the 2030 target date (Karen et al., 2022). Within the agile world, social work interventions should be consolidated and oblique with the SDGs in bringing about change the well-being of their service users. The

effectiveness of social work interventions, nevertheless, depends on their context and overtime context. The SDGs provide social workers with a holistic intervention framework of practice, but in the process of interventions and aiming to make SDGs real, there are challenges for them.

"Teach how to catch the fish rather than give a fish"

Often, in social work, the saying "Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime". This saying can tie in with the concept of empowerment in social work that often cannot be translated into real practice. The empowerment is the purpose of social work, no matter which end of the transaction intervention is directed (Parsons, 1991). The struggling aggregation of this paradigm within the culture and political context of social service providers in certain settings creates challenges for social workers in their practices. Social work deals with society and works side by side with various social services that are full of diversity. The interventions to achieving the SDGs will be unenviable in the context of the environment where the opportunities for social workers in the context of practicing are limited to practicing the concept of 'Teach a man to fish'. The role of social workers in the implementation of the SDGs and finding synergies with social services are very vital in addressing a specific goal relevant to target groups. As Ling (2022) highlighted in community empowerment, the role of the social worker is vital to building bridges-enabling access to human needs and life opportunities. Community work as part of social work interventions in applying this concept and integrating with the SDGs in reality depends on the paradigm and approaches of social services that social workers attach. A great deal of social services is performed just like services. This will challenge social workers to encourage their target group to achieve the SDGs. For instance, in the context of no poverty, if social services provide approaches like 'giving fish and feeding for a day'. Social services and social work practice are supposed to be committed to evidence-based interventions and they incorporate this approach into implementing effective promoted practice either at individual or community levels.

Assessing the surface of the problem

Those who are not trained but considered and played their role as social workers, these uncommon conflicts and challenges (Amar Singh, 2023; Jayasooria, 2016; Ismail Baba, 1992) for social work to be recognized as a profession. Competent social workers have a large indefinite amount needed in their practice. Competence in relation to their ethical practice has always been stressed that trained social workers follow the necessary knowledge, principles, values and ethics, skills, and systematic methods to provide professional service. Assessment is an integral component in social work practice and competence social workers in assessing their target groups will determine appropriate interventions to be carried out (Dolly, 2020). Social workers are trained to identify and assess holistically the needs of service users. Holistic and thorough assessment will bring an appropriate plan of actions and interventions. More often, a wrong assessment will not benefit the well-being of the target

groups. Assessment is not a one-off activity but should be a continuous activity as an assessing process in the whole context of a situation rather than diagnosing the surface of the problem. Öztürk et al., (2022) highlighted that social workers need to be able to critically evaluate the associated processes and results in order to play an active role in the achievement of the SDGs. Diagnosing the surface will create intervention to quickly fix the problem. In addition, understand the whole environment of the problems rather than 'pathologizing' the individuals of service users. Jayasooria (2016) summarized that social workers must work with their service users as partners in development and address issues of injustice and inequality, not be busy processing application forms based on eligibility for the grant or service but focusing on making a comprehensive assessment of the needs and issues for a range of intervention strategies. As Mohd Azahari (2022) highlighted, the SDGs requires social workers who are knowledgeable, skilled and competent in planning and implementing action plans to achieve the agenda and goals outlined for the survival and to ensure the well-being of the target group. Therefore, empowering and strengthening the competence of social workers as a tool in assessing their target groups is required in order for appropriate interventions to be carried out and in making the SDGs become reality.

Lack of collaboration and working in partnerships/a multidisciplinary team

Social workers are not working in a vacuum and do not work alone. Social work relies on collaboration and working in partnerships and a multidisciplinary team with various stakeholders, such as clients, colleagues, organizations, communities, and policymakers. Social services are part of a multidisciplinary system that provides integrated support, engaging and brings together agencies to engage in community partnerships actively involved. Without collaboration and working in partnership with them, social work interventions would not be reached out and in achieving the SDGs will become reality. Building effective social work partnerships can enhance the quality and impact of social work practice, as well as their professionalism. Lack of collaboration and working in partnerships and a multidisciplinary team is one of the challenges for social work intervention in achieving the SDGs to become reality. Making social work interventions into reality to be relevant and synchronous applicable to the SDGs is necessary and the spirit of working in collaboration in partnerships and a multidisciplinary team in practice.

There is a tendency for social workers to work alone and it is one of the challenges if social work is done in non-social-work settings (Klein, 1959) where there is lack of work in multidisciplinary teams with other professions and people from within the same agencies or other agencies. Klein (1959) has emphasized that "if social work is to perform effectively in a non-social-work setting, all parts of the organization must have well-defined functions and procedures so that there is a clear understanding of the various areas of responsibility". Working with various professionals and people from other agencies enables social workers to provide a joined-up service, maximizes services and prevents duplication of services. In addition, one of the main benefits of working in collaboration and partnerships and a

multidisciplinary team allows for a holistic and comprehensive assessment and intervention of the clients' needs and strengths. By bringing together different perspectives, skills, and knowledge, the team can offer more bespoke and effective solutions to the complex and multifaceted problems that social workers encounter.

Moreover, working in collaboration within a multidisciplinary team can enhance the quality and efficiency of the service delivery, as it reduces duplication, fragmentation, and gaps, in particular in the provision of care. Working together and supporting each other to communicate essential information, sharing ideas and pooling skills and knowledge are needed in order for appropriate social work interventions to be carried out. Additionally, working in a collaboration and working in partnerships/a multidisciplinary team can foster professional development, learning, and innovation, as the team members can share their expertise, feedback, and ideas, and learn from each other's experiences and practices. Making the SDGs into reality will become difficult without support, collaboration and working in partnerships/a multidisciplinary team with the social workers. Social work interventions cannot respond alone with support and engagement from others.

Limited resources and access to resources with evolving the nature of social life

There is no single and standard model for social work to work with service users and implementing appropriate interventions as it is the "constantly evolving nature of social life" (Parker, 2013). How the system is operating, availability and accessibility of resources will influence social work interventions. Pooling of resources; head, heart, hands, and joint action are needed by social work interventions to walk side by side in making the reality of SDGs and 'leave no one behind'. In many instances, in particular in developing countries, social workers allocate limited resources and resources always as challenges. In addition to access to getting limited resources due to geographical or political practices is also an obstacle to this. When resources are limited, all eligible people, groups, communities, and organizations would and should receive an equal share of what is available. But when resources are limited and society is transforming at a rapid pace, it is critical for social workers to respond to the evolving nature of social life (Parker, 2013). Often, social workers face dilemmas in thinking about equality and quality but to use and emphasize the procedures used to allocate limited resources rather than the actual outcome. The procedures have influenced decision making and, at the end of the day, challenge social workers to understand the reality of SDGs.

Conclusion

Social work as a committed profession-dealing with social problems, functions in various contexts and within complex situations. Working in complex contexts such as in terms of resources, policies, social problems, culture, and belief will influence social work interventions. How social work is functioning and response to many different contexts in

which it operates will determine their interventions in order to make the reality of the SDGs. Understanding the context and utilization of a holistic approach to social work will influence the way social workers think and what to do, and this will strengthen the way their work and intervention is carried out by their service users. The challenges faced by social work practice should be addressed holistically. The innovative framework for approaching the SDGs through various social services and social work education and practice in the future should be a promising approach and relevant to its context. How best to integrate and frame a social work approach and practice in strengthening the SDGs with various social services must be further explored in order to sustain its development and achieve goals.

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Patricia E. Almaguer-Kalixto
Universidad de Zaragoza, Spain



Chaime Marcuello-Servós
Universidad de Zaragoza, Spain

'ODS Rural Labs' and Community Social Work: contributing to approach Sustainable Development Goals to rural areas

Social work is central to addressing the challenges of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in unfavourable contexts. One of them is the rural environment.

Sustainable Development Goals in rural contexts

Community Social Work is key approach to promote the SDGs, (ODS in Spanish), particularly in rural contexts. Here, we propose that the SDGs can be an innovative agenda at the global level; however, knowledge in social diagnosis and community methodology intervention is required for a long-term endurance.

Social Innovation Laboratory for Rural and Peri-urban Areas (ODS Rural Labs its original acronym) is a participatory research-action project designed ad-hoc by a research team from the Degree of Social Work at the Universidad de Zaragoza, Spain , with an interdisciplinary advocacy . Our main proposal is to carry out community diagnoses "in SDG perspective" in order to connect the logic of the SDG with specific needs identified by local actors, but not only stays at a diagnosis level, it engages co-creation practices to move forward social action

with local citizens of the rural territories. Starting from 2018, the project has reached five years of experience in seven different territories and recognition from different institutions as a good practice example of Community Social Work intervention. In 2023, was selected by the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID) and the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMAP) as a good practice of Global Education and SDG promotion.

The participation of local actors is fundamental as they contribute with their popular and political knowledge required to perform a local community diagnosis (Marchioni 1999, Lillo and Roselló 2004). However, the laboratory is also an interdisciplinary space in which professors, university students and local communities come together in order to contribute in the implementation of the project (Almaguer-Kalixto and Escriche, 2020). For this reason, the laboratories are a favourable space for community social work insofar they enable the interaction of local actors, administration representatives and social science experts in citizen science framework (Serrano et al 2014).

Echoing global views of Social Work

The Global Agenda of Social Work and Social Development, has already pointed out the potential of social work to influence and contribute to sustainable development and in particular to the current 2030 Agenda is promoted. As mentioned by Truell, Jones and Lima et al (2017), the contribution from this discipline is not only about monitoring that governments and institutions are committed, community projects for citizen training should also be promoted.

ODS Rural Labs project proposes an opportunity to work with active methodologies that involve the population in the analysis and design of proposals related to the community and the 2030 Agenda; from their perspective, enabling to target real challenges that relate each SDG to their context. Many cases of social innovation labs have been running in the urban sphere, however less attention has been given to rural areas, where SDG are perhaps, more urgent. In addition, it is important to reinforce the complexity of rural areas and its contribution for global sustainable development. For instance, although SDG 11 refers to cities and sustainable communities in its title, in general Agenda 2030 makes short reference to rural contexts. Therefore, among our objectives is to enhance the concept of Sustainable Rural Communities. The project is thus, in 4 SDG as presented in the next illustration

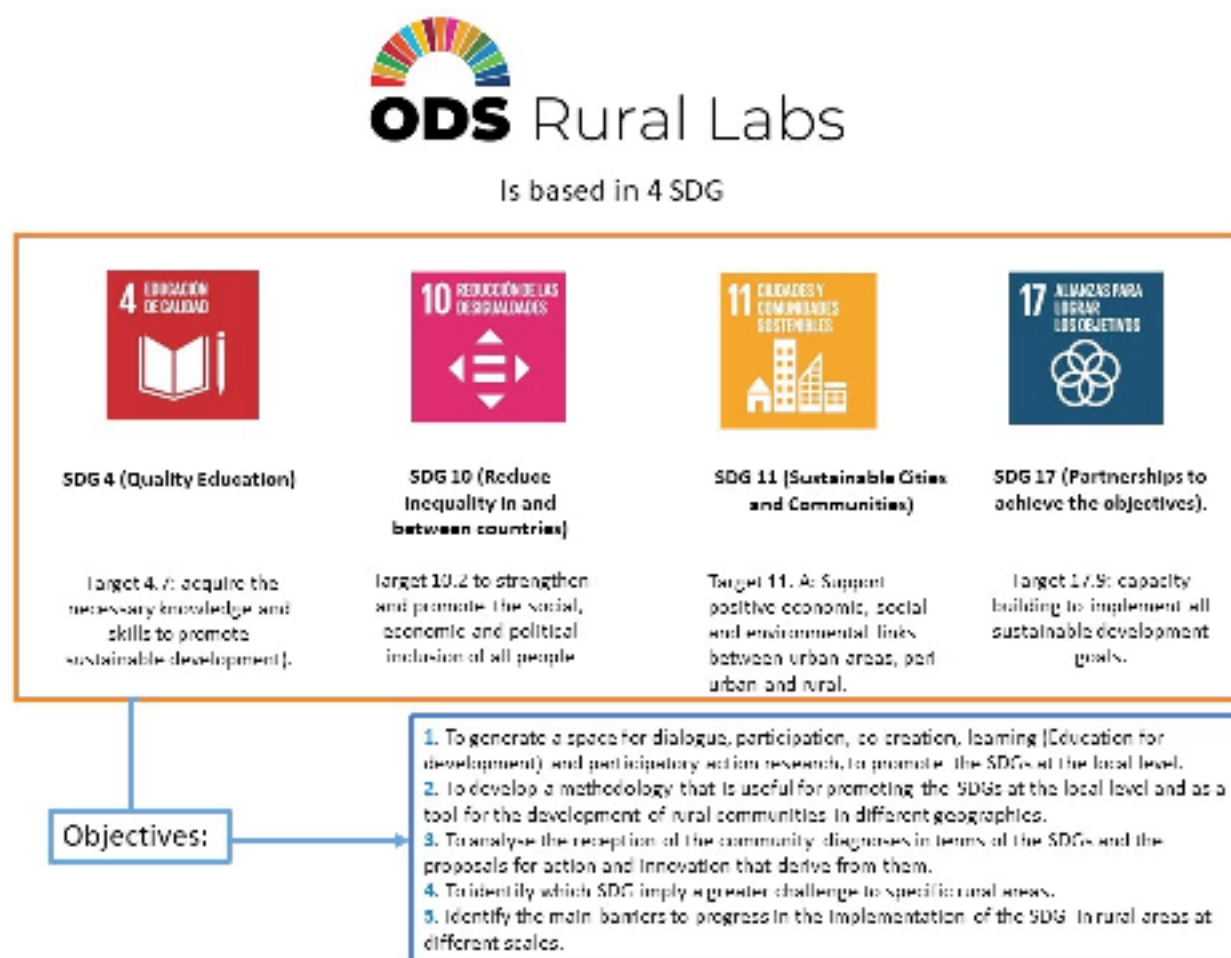


Figure 1: Basis and objectives of the 'ODS Rural Lab'

Methodology, execution strategies and implications as a model

We apply a systemic approach of social innovation processes, based on social innovation laboratories (Westley and Laban 2011) and sociocybernetics (Geyer, 1995; Scott, 2021). The goal of each laboratory is to develop an adaptive change strategy engaging heterogeneous actors from different social groups. By introducing new information about SDG and particularly, promoting reflexivity through the sessions. All those who participate investigate and seek to generate new knowledge about how their immediate environment works and, above all, how it can be transformed.

ODS Rural Labs project has roots in participatory action research allowing citizens to define the guidelines and objectives of the research process and its results (Balcázar 2003, Barton, Stephens and Haslett, 2009). The use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is complementary, however the context of the COVID19 pandemic in 2020 showed that new

technologies where key to adapt projects to others forms of participation through online community work strategies (López and Marcuello 2021, Almaguer, Borobio and Eito 2021) that enable to follow up the processes in a virtual manner.

'ODS Rural Lab' Methodology

The SDG Rural Labs have an adaptive methodology based in the following steps:

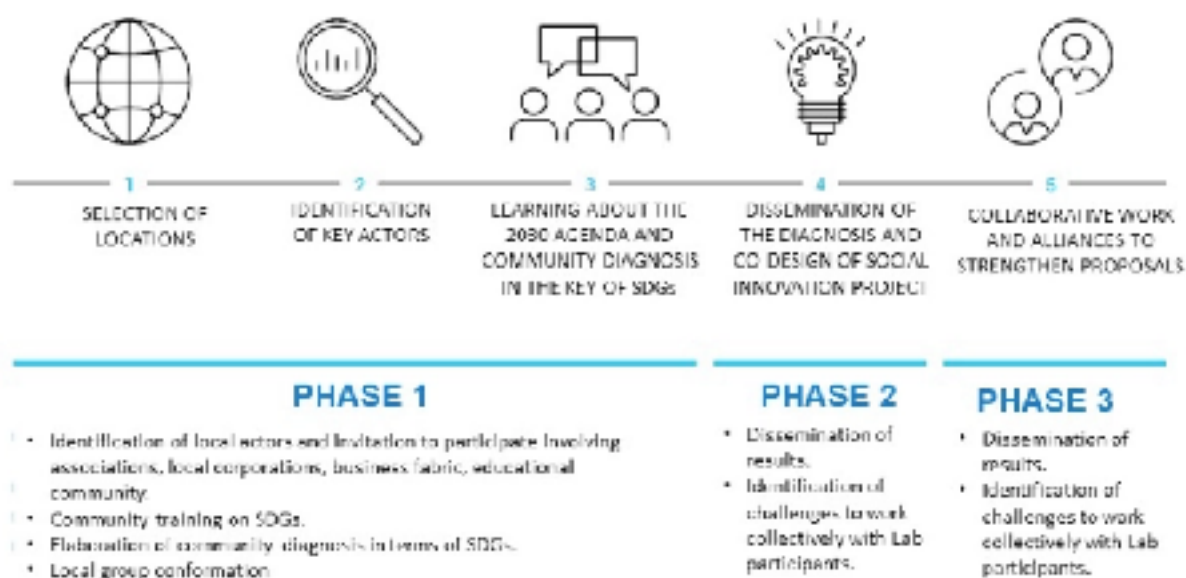


Figure 2: 'ODS Rural Lab' methodology. Source: Almaguer Kalixto, et al (2023: 9)

What has been achieved so far

In 2018, we started two pilot experiences in different territories of Zaragoza Province. On the one hand, 5 small villages belonging to the municipality of Ejea de los Caballeros, with population ranging from 100 to 300 inhabitants each of them and with a strong agricultural background. In this case, synergies were made with the local rural school Colegio Rural Agrupado Luis Buñuel, which was key in the engagement of neighbours and local associations. The second territory was a radically different, La Puebla de Alfindén, a municipality near Zaragoza, the capital of Aragon, that remained rural until the 1960s but had had a rapid industrial growth from 1000 to 5000 inhabitants. This rapid growth and migration has been difficult to fit in their identity and social cohesion. In this case, a local action group was created with a heterogeneous profile from commerce, education, cultural and political

spheres and the emphasis was given to promote the youth participation in the activities of the Rural Lab.



Figure 3: 'ODS Rural Lab' participatory process in La Puebla de Alfindén, 2019. Local Actors presenting elaborating and presenting the findings of the social diagnosis. Pictures: Patricia E. Almaguer Kalixto.

The third laboratory was developed from 2019-2021 in Santa Engracia, Tauste. In this village with 274 inhabitants, the school also played an important role as a local facilitator. Although the process was interrupted due to the pandemic and mobility restrictions, we developed virtual strategies to keep in contact. Thanks to that we could complete the edition of a local book elaborated by the local participants which included the history, but also the social diagnosis elaborated in the Lab. The book was presented until 2021 and was proudly celebrated and presented by the local actors.



Figure 4. Santa Engracia Community Book, elaborated while the COVID 19 lockdown (2020).

Despite the COVID19 pandemic, we came into contact with other initiatives, such as Frena la Curva, which called for projects to strengthen the social fabric during the pandemic. Thanks to this participation, we establish contact with international organisations interested in the methodology. As a result, in partnership with Fundación Pacífico Emprende, a Colombian NGO we developed a virtual laboratory from September to November 2020 in Tumaco, Colombia. In 2023, a second laboratory has been held in the same territory, this time in presence to reinforce the engagement with local actors. Participants of the first lab, which was a success despite the online format and the structural difficulties for participants to connect (poor internet connection, difficulties due the pandemic restrictions), elaborated a magazine as a titled PERIOGRAMA coordinated by local teacher César Delgado. It included local narratives, poetry, and the results of the social diagnosis. The material is used as a reading material in schools, with few reading resources in Tumaco.



Figure 5: 'ODS Rural Lab' in Tumaco, Colombia 2020 organised online while the COVID 19 lockdown (2020), and the publication *Periograma*. Images: César Delgado.

New territories have subsequently joined the Laboratory, we currently have 10 municipalities engaged and two territories abroad, in Tumaco, Colombia and Hassilabied, Morocco. All these practices and local interventions, in terms of community social work, are also a teaching innovation field that is linked to specific courses where teachers design practices to bring a "real" project that is being implemented to specific contents of their subjects.

Looking forward: beyond 2030

ODS Rural Labs intervention allows local actors to actively participate in their agenda of development priorities and this is directly related to having a more just and equitable society. The SDGs can be a connector between local needs and the global agenda. It is there where the ODS Rural Labs play a fundamental role. If this diagnosis is collective, it is easier to encourage local actors to propose innovative ideas to improve and advance, analysing what already exists, making alliances and following up on the administration.

Figure 6: Posters of activities developed in the 'ODS Rural Lab' during 2018-2023 along the different territories.



From our perspective, the best way to promote SDG for social work students is through action-research projects where they not only analyse, but seek to contribute to specific social transformation through knowledge, research and intervention. SDG is a grid of objectives based in human rights with no temporary deadline. The ODS Rural Labs allows us to transmit the idea of the importance of generating scientific and verified

knowledge to be able to transfer solid methodologies to the communities, which can sustain their results.

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You may find more information of the project in www.odsruallabs.com

**Ruchi Sinha**

Associate Professor, Centre for Criminology and Justice, India

**Srilatha Juvva** Professor,

Centre for Equity and Justice for Children and Families, India

Walking the Talk: Accentuating the Embeddedness of SDGs in Social Work Practice

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted on September 25, 2015, during the U.N. Sustainable Development Summit in New York. However, the UN General Assembly adopted the global indicator framework only on July 6th 2017. The document "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" marked the adoption of the SDGs as a global commitment to addressing a wide range of social, economic and environmental challenges by 2030.

The initial framework had 17 goals, 169 targets and 232 unique indicators. The defining criteria for SDG are the goals - broad and aspirational statement that outlines a desired outcome and represents a fundamental area of sustainable development. Conversely, a target is a more specific and measurable subgoal contributing to achieving the broader goal. Each goal is accompanied by a set of targets that provide more precise directions for action, time-bound and quantifiable, helping to focus efforts and monitor progress. An indicator is a further quantifiable measure to track progress towards achieving a specific target, thus providing data-based evidence of fulfilment of the target, and assess the extent to which the intended outcomes are realised and guide decision-making. However, 36 significant changes to the global indicator framework for SDGs were approved and adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) at its 51st session on March 6th 2020, in New York. These changes were based on the 2020 comprehensive review conducted by the UN Interagency Expert Group (IAEG-SDGs) on SDG indicators and presented to the UNSC on

the first day of the 3-day session . Thus, the revised global framework now has 231 indicators, all of which drive the social work agenda too.

Social workers engage with systems and structures by grounding themselves in professional values. This enables them to understand interwoven realities and undertake holistic interventions across multiple entry points encompassing individuals, families, groups, communities, organisations and societies. This fluidity provides diverse vantage points for enacting change, complemented by a range of methods tailored to context. Social worker's cyclical interleaved approach acknowledges ever-evolving contexts to leverage a continuum of interventions ranging from working with individuals to societies, networks and polity. Social work practice is adaptive in nature rather than responding in the form of episodic intervention. It thrives on co-creating solutions alongside clients and communities. Embracing diversity involves unlearning biases and being open while social workers strategically address issues in systems, structures and cultural norms.

An attempt has been made to map how social work actions and interventions cut across all the SDGs. The work done by a community-based organisation (CBO), named VVFT, in a low-income neighbourhood has been illustrated to demonstrate the inherent nature of social work interventions to respond holistically.

Social work typically uses inquiry to co-create answers with the client or communities. The training and unlearning that fosters openness to diversity enables Social workers to address issues maintained by systems, structures and cultural norms. For example, a person with a disability feels 'inadequate' because of inaccessible structures, lack of timely vaccinations, and stigmatising 'gaze' of people, posing attitudinal barriers leading to exclusion and discrimination. It is the same mindset that 'others' people with disability also discriminates against people based on divisive factors such as gender, class, religion, caste, sexual orientation, etc. Sharma (2017:222) says this mindset stems from a rigid, scarcity-based mindset driven by egoism. It is possible to interrupt discriminatory processes when social workers act from universal values and values of the profession to develop strategies that interrupt such divisive forces and generate results. Given the pan micro-macro lens, diverse perspectives, and skills that social workers are equipped with, it is possible to strategically shift such discriminatory ideologies and practices using the methods of social work.

It is as important to work with systems as it is with people, and hence, the methods of social work provide that fluidity and flexibility to bring about change. To illustrate, VVFT, used social work methods of working with individuals, families, organisations and communities to break the stigma related to disability. Advocacy initiatives with schools and prospective employers enabled the co-creating of job opportunities for persons with disabilities. Thereby for individuals with disabilities, social workers dismantle this divisive force by embodying universal and professional values when facing discrimination. Their skills and perspectives enable shifts in discriminatory ideologies, effectively employing social work methods across micro-macro levels. The versatility of social work methods extends to systemic interventions. The example of VVFT showcases a transformation achieved through

engagement at various levels. Social workers, fluidity facilitated the breaking of the stigma around disability and fostering advocacy in schools and workplaces to co-create job opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Sustainability emerges as a dynamic process, not merely an outcome in SDG social work becomes a dynamic force for change, unravelling complexity and fostering lasting impact.

Table 1: Social Work Interventions in the Context of SDGs

1: No Poverty	NGO located in a slum with HDI = 0.05 (MCGM, 2010:197). The interventions include accessing social security benefits to alleviate divversty.
2: Zero Hunger	The link between disability and malnutrition has been established (Engl et al. 2022). VVFT distributes rations and food supplements to families of children with disabilities while working towards ensuring access to the state food security Public Distribution System
3: Health & Wellbeing	VVFT undertakes promotion programs for early identification and treatment of disabilities and mental health problems, through weekly and monthly medical clinics, community volunteers and follow-up visits to people's homes. Referrals for investigation and support to procure aids and appliances are made. VVFT serves as a collateral contact for other NGOs in the neighbourhood. It advocates state health systems to hold health camps as well.
4: Quality Education	VVFT assists families in enrolling their children with disabilities in regular and special schools. The remedial classes and coaching enable children to appear for open schooling final exams. VVFT also works for accessible school infrastructure, through substantial engagement with both public and private systems.
5: Gender Equality	VFT attempts parity of attention and early intervention for men and women. When women do not come readily for treatment, the community volunteer network is activated to ensure treatment follow-up and assistance using prosthetic aids. Issues related to violence faced by women with disabilities are addressed through the services offered.
6: Clean Water & Sanitation	Interventions to address accessible water and sanitation are made in schools and community common spaces. While toilets are yet to be made accessible, assistance for home modifications has been undertaken.

7: Affordable & Clean	Energy (direct work on this goal has not yet begun) However, employment through E-rickshaws is in the pipeline.
8: Decent Work & Economic Growth	Collaborations for employment, job fairs, skills training, etc. have been made. Through the network of professionals, this has been a regular feature of VVFT.
9: Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure	
10: Reduced Inequalities	VVFT works towards inclusion, especially in procuring identity cards, social protection measures, etc. The values of VVFT include respect for diversity to facilitate social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities at home and in the community.
11: Sustainable Cities & Communities	VVFT collaborates with other NGOs to procure accessible transport to schools for children with disabilities and works with school authorities to ensure access to premises for children with disabilities.
12: Responsible Consumption & Production	VVFT intends to implement, along with disability and mental health initiatives, projects to promote recycling and reuse. This initiative has begun in the office in terms of the use of steel utensils for meals.
13: Climate Action	(direct work has not yet begun)
14: Life below Water	(direct work has not yet begun)
15: Life on Land	(direct work has not yet begun)
16: Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions	Children with disabilities are the foci of interventions to prevent abuse. There is transparency in fund flow and expenditure. VVFT aims to forge peaceful relations with community stakeholders - schools, religious places, etc. Caregivers of children with disabilities are employed as staff, and those with mental illness as community volunteers.
17: Partnerships	Intersecting all goals

SDG SW Practice

While the primary engagement of SDGs happens to be outcome-oriented, social workers engage with SDGs as a process and hence realise 'the sustainability' in the 'development goals'. Essentially, the MEAL Framework [monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning], applied mainly in development projects, humanitarian aid and organisational learning, is the primary evaluative tool for SDGs. While this frame for project and program management is aligned to ensure effective implementation, has a focus on continuous

assessment and learning within the program, it ensures that projects are on track, aligned with objectives to evaluate effectiveness and has scope to incorporate lessons learnt for improvement, it is a flawed tool. Some experts feel that the GROW model [Goal, Reality, Options, and Way Forward], developed for coaching and personal development, needs to be integrated into SDG evaluative frameworks as it focuses on goal setting and problem-solving through conversations. It primarily facilitates goal-setting, problem-solving, and action planning; it focuses on personal growth, exploring possibilities, and achieving goals. This model guides individuals through a structured process of setting goals, assessing reality, generating options, and planning the way forward, if scaled, it would ensure due focus on each person rather than just the final cumulative goal.

The authors propose a GAP-REMOVAL model [Goal, Accountability, Progress, Reality and Responsibility, Evaluation with Empathy, Maintaining Accountability, Viable Strategies and Learning] developed in their work.

Table 2: GAP-REMOVAL Model

G:	Goal - define and implement clear objectives based on principles.
A:	Accountability - Ensuring responsibility and transparency while being cognizant of international processes that interfere with national goals.
P:	Progress - Continuously using and tracking progress and data for transparent whole systems interventions
R:	Reality - Assessing the current situation, context, and what happened responsibly.
E:	Evaluation with Empathy - Assessing the effectiveness of interventions, leaving nobody out.
M:	Maintaining Accountability - Maintaining responsible actions.
O:	Options and Dignity - Exploring different strategies and approaches that restore dignity.
V:	Viable Strategies - Planning and implementing action.
L:	Learning - Incorporating lessons learned and adapting strategies in a recursive manner.

The above model helps to contextualise yet universalise the accountability to SDG's, while showcasing how social work challenges common assumptions and calls for a nuanced analysis in the context of SDGs and beyond. Social work emerges as a critical practice to decode these complexities. Social workers address disparities, collaborate across sectors and ensure no one is left behind in SDG efforts. Social work bridges the gaps and steers progress towards holistic development by understanding paradoxical trends. A compelling effort has emerged to illustrate how social work interventions intersect with all sustainable development goals; we witness the inherent holistic nature of social work interventions by a

CBO operating in a low-income neighbourhood. This approach underscores systems and structures as interconnected, necessitating comprehensive responses.

Conclusion

The synergy of the whole systems perspectives for processes and outcomes (giving primacy to both) using a critical approach is imperative in social work training. While human travails are pervasive, strategies to deal with them require context and cultural sensitivity; the GAP-REMOVAL model is versatile to respond to such diverse needs. This model rests on the values of the profession and derives strategies that generate responsible solutions that are enduring. Emerging social work professionals shoulder the mantle of transformation in keeping with the key principles of respecting the diversity of life, caring for the community with compassion and love, building just, participatory and peaceful societies, and securing the earth for the present and future generations.

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Athirah Azhar, PhD Coordinator Social Work Programme, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), Malaysia
Deakin University, Geelong, Victoria, Australia

Social Work Student's Engagement to Execute the Sustainable Development Goal Missions through Social Work Education and Social Work Practice

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the comprehensive 2030 agenda established by the United Nations with the aim of fostering sustainable development for the betterment of humanity and the preservation of our planet; objectives are geared towards promoting peace, prosperity, and sustainability for present and future generations (United Nations, 2015). Social work educators and social work practitioners deliberate the potential implementation of all 17 SDGs in the social work context.

National Association of Social Workers (2023), enumerated the following types of social work: administration and management, advocacy and community organising, ageing, child welfare, developmental disabilities, healthcare, international social work, justice and corrections, mental health and clinical social work, mental health and substance abuse, occupational and employee assistance program, policy and planning, politics, public welfare, research, and school social work. As enumerated, there are gaps in which some SDGs are absent. Nevertheless, this endeavour may be accomplished by means of collaborative efforts

and strategic alliances. Referring to SDG1 through SDG17, most SDGs (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 16, and 17) are ongoing in social work. Only SDGs 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, and 15 may be utilised less frequently in social work practice.

In relation to the research conducted in selected countries concerning the comprehension of college students in Malaysia regarding SDGs, it has been observed that they possessed a high level of knowledge and exhibited positive attitudes towards SDGs. However, their practical implementation of the SDGs remained subpar (Afroz & Ilham, 2020). 74.4% of the students expressed optimism about the attainment of SDGs by the year 2030 (Ghazi et al., 2020). In Spain, it has been reported that 15.9% of college students have demonstrated an awareness of the SDGs (Leiva-Brondo et al., 2022).

Furthermore, 44.36% of students in Jordan exhibited a commendable level of comprehension pertaining to the SDGs (Alomari & Kataybeh, 2021). According to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO 2009; p.6), despite the resources available in a wealthier country, "many young people leave school with no useful qualifications and some choose to drop out since what is taught is irrelevant to their lives". "Education is key in achieving all SDGs where aspects of education is in relationship with gender equality (SDG 5), climate change (SDG 13) focusing on linkages monitoring and professional capacity development, including through partnerships (SDG 17)" (UNESCO, 2020; p.312). This demonstrates that a heightened emphasis on the quality of education holds the potential to facilitate the attainment of more SDGs.

The SDGs were officially adopted in the year 2015. According to Jayasooria (2016), a conspicuous disregard for environmental and sustainability considerations has been observed within the Malaysian context. However, it is noteworthy to acknowledge the commendable endeavours undertaken by human rights advocates, development practitioners, and environmental activists, particularly those actively engaged in advancing indigenous communities, as they have consistently championed the interests of community development and social equity. All prospects are subjected to meticulous scrutiny in order to execute the missions of the SDGs effectively.

At the institution of higher learning where I am currently employed, there is a significant emphasis on the SDGs across every discipline, particularly concerning the pedagogical endeavours, academic activities and community initiatives undertaken by the staff. Since 2019, it has been mandated that all academicians adhere to the inclusion of SDG elements within their work. It is vital to denote a minimum of one SDG, or potentially multiple, within the course's learning objectives and units. Furthermore, it is crucial to establish a correlation between research grants and community projects with a minimum of one SDG. In this manner, it is ensured that the entirety of the academic personnel within the university is duly mindful of the SDGs and, in unison, contribute towards achieving all of the constituent components of SDGs. The transfer of knowledge and awareness about the SDGs occurs indirectly, in which students and local communities receive such information.

Social work education for SDGs in tertiary education context

The SDGs may be incorporated into social work education (SWE). In order to prepare them for social work practice (SWP) and their prospective prospects as social work students, it is crucial that they are aware of global and local issues. Among the potential approaches are:

Assessment: Students are able to establish a connection between their assessment report and one or more SDGs, elucidating how their assessment, report, or reflection can potentially contribute to the SDGs' objectives. This approach would assist students in comprehending each of the SDGs and enable them to align these goals with their assessments.

Global classroom: To achieve this, for example, the author has previously conducted an online global classroom for final-year social work students enrolled in the Social Policy Analysis and Planning course. One of the learning units is the Major Social Policy, encompassing education, health, social security, and housing. The author contacted and communicated with social work educators from Iran and Pakistan to deliver online lectures via Zoom platform pertaining to the four significant policies for students in Malaysia, Iran, and Pakistan. Concurrently, this fostered students' understanding regarding the disparity of social policies across three countries, as well as partnerships among universities on a global scale, intending to nurture the education of future social workers. The purpose of this endeavour is to achieve SDG4, SDG16 and SDG17.

Student online forum or discussion: Students could conduct online forums or discussions with welfare agencies in order to acquire knowledge and information. In conjunction with World Social Work Day this year, the social work student association in my university conducted an online forum with all social work representatives from six universities. They discussed numerous issues related to SDG1, SDG3, SDG4, SDG5, SDG10, SDG11, SDG16, and SDG17. Moreover, IASSW (2021) identified a paradigm shift in SWE through flexible learning, group discussion using online messaging, and fieldwork online supervision.

Research findings in journal articles or online magazines: In addition to students, social work educators share research and findings in comparable journal articles and online magazines. Therefore, social work educators and practitioners should collaborate to produce research inform practice or practice inform research. The attainment of more SDGs holds the potential for further progress in addressing global challenges.

Courses and training: SWE serves social work educators, students, and social service practitioners. Educators in the field of social work conduct online and physical courses and training for social service practitioners, such as welfare officers and social workers.

Online group chat: Malaysian social work educators participate in an online group conversation to discuss social work education at the university. This online discussion has

brought together nine public and private universities and colleges that offer social work studies.

Social work practice for SDGs in tertiary education context

Prior to graduating, social work students are required to complete hours of social work practice. SDGs could also be incorporated into social work student practice.

Casework and groupwork in student fieldwork practice: Students are exposed to practicum practice for both case work and group work under the supervision of social work educators and agency administrators because they have studied casework and group work in the classroom. Aside from that, for group projects, students should organise community service projects with social work students and students from other academic disciplines or faculties.

Action research: Due to the fact that social work is a practice-based profession, social work educators should conduct more discipline-wide action research. For instance, by conducting research, the community may express concern about SDG8, SDG9, or SDG12. Social workers' knowledge on this subject may be limited; therefore, social workers can serve as mediators to address community concerns. According to the IASSW (2019), direct practice training frequently overlooks policy, research, and community development skills.

Way forward for social work in incorporating SDGs mission and conclusion

Incorporating digitalisation and technology into social work education and practice is essential. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the tertiary level of education has undergone significant change. Currently, teaching and learning are aligned with technological advancement. There are more online courses and workshops available. I have researched my second- and final-year social work students to determine their preferred teaching and learning methods after almost two years of studying exclusively online. After nearly two years of exclusively online learning, 147 social work students reported that they preferred hybrid (online and physical class) learning (57%), physical class (32%), and exclusively online (12%) (Azhar, 2022). Social work students interested in pursuing professions in this field should be exposed to practice and skills, considering the majority of online social work courses do not expose students to actual client interactions (Azhar, 2022).

Furthermore, pupils in rural and remote areas must not be neglected, as this will result in a digital divide and social exclusion. The digital divide exacerbates social exclusion for employment, education, health, social services, and socioeconomic development, according to Molala and Makhubele (2021). Social workers with knowledge of the role of the digital divide in social exclusion are therefore expected to advocate actively for Information Communication Policies (Molala & Makhubele, 2021).

It is anticipated that 17 SDGs will be achieved by 2030, with seven years remaining. Numerous obstacles, including the COVID-19 pandemic, have been encountered; however, the SDGs have persisted in their pursuit of implementation. What does the future hold for SWE and SWP? By effectively bridging the gaps between transdisciplinary education, research, and practices, a more significant number of SDGs could be attained through SWE and SWP. According to the International Federation of Social Workers (2017), the emergence of eco-social work, green social work, or ecological social work has introduced a novel paradigm that extends beyond the exclusive focus on humans. As a matter of fact, social work should transcend the boundaries of humanism. Nonetheless, it is essential to emphasise the significance of SDG16 and SDG17 to foster a collective and symbiotic engagement between public, private, and international entities even after 2030.

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**Leila Salimova,**

Leila Salimova, Lecturer at the Bishkek State University in Kyrgyzstan, MSW with Children and Youth (ISCTE, Lisbon)

Evidence-Based Approaches to Decreasing Suicidality in Young People: Preventive Social Practices to Support SDG 3.4.

According to the World Health Organization (2019), 700k. people commit suicide each year, and many more attempt it. Every suicide is a tragedy that profoundly impacts the survivors, including the families, communities, and entire nations. Since it is the fourth leading cause of death among 15-29 year-olds, young people are most at risk. The highest global suicide rate among young people in 2017-2019 was recorded in Guyana, followed by Micronesia and Lesotho in southern Africa (WHO, 2019). Estonia, Lithuania, and Finland have the highest suicide rates in Europe among young people (EuroStat, 2019). In the US, adolescents and young adults have a suicide rate of around 15 cases per 100k. which is still relatively high compared to other countries (American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, 2020). Among the Central Asian countries, Kazakhstan is taking a leading position with around 15 cases per 100k. (WHO, 2019).

Undoubtedly, suicide is a global health issue that transcends borders, impacting individuals across nations, cultures, religions, genders, and socioeconomic classes. The leading factors contributing to most suicide cases in high-suicide-rate countries are acknowledged to stem from a blend of psychosocial factors, including mental disorders, poverty, access to pesticides, alcoholism, violence, interpersonal conflicts, and insufficient access to psychological support (World Population Review, 2019).

The World Health Organization prioritizes reducing suicide mortality as a global goal. In 2013, the Sixty-sixth World Health Assembly adopted the first-ever Mental Health Action Plan, introducing suicide prevention as an integral part (WHO, 2013). Moreover, the

indicator of the target has been included in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under target 3.4. It states, that “*by 2030, reduce by one-third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being*” where indicator 3.4.2. is focused on the suicide mortality rate (WHO, 2020).

The decade of 2020s has finished and we already may witness the effectiveness of action measures that countries under the surveillance of the World Health Organization had provided. The statistics show that the rate has decreased by 9.8% in the six years between 2010 and 2016 (WHO, 2020). Even though the global suicide rate is somewhat in decline, it is important to declare that such a picture is not observed in all countries worldwide. As the majority of suicides are known to occur in low- and middle-income countries, it is not vividly possible to retrieve needed data for representing a ‘real’ picture. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020; WHO, 2021) continues appealing to all countries to improve the surveillance of suicide as an important aspect, as it helps to inform planning and evaluation in countries and to accurately assess progress towards global suicide mortality targets.

Since prevention is recognized as an effective way to reduce suicide cases, social services put all their effort to combat it. This article intends to introduce some methods and approaches in the work of suicide prevention, the role of social work in prevention, and the potential for progressing SDG #3 to contribute to reducing the suicide rate worldwide.

Methods And Approaches In The Work With The Suicidal Youth

When discussing the topic of suicide, many people focus on the clinical approach to the psychosocial treatment of suicide. Indeed, suicidal ideation, self-harm, and suicide attempts are linked to a range of detrimental effects as they pose immediate threats to an individual's life and well-being. Additionally, these behaviors often contribute to long-term psychological distress, strain interpersonal relationships, and may lead to enduring emotional and physical consequences for the individuals. The use of mental health services, the diagnosis of a mental disorder, and adult suicide are all more likely in those who had attempted suicide as adolescents (SAMHSA, 2020).

While clinical approaches are vital, a holistic view that incorporates community support and addresses social determinants of mental health is equally essential for a well-rounded approach to suicide prevention and treatment. Researchers identify the following evidence-based suicide prevention methods to be the most impactful and effective - restriction of access to lethal means of suicide, pharmacological and psychological treatment, and school-based prevention programs (Zalsman et al., 2016; Wasserman, 2019). This may include programs on medication treatment, psychosocial treatment, different tools of assessment for evaluation of suicide risks, as well as school-based programs, gatekeeper training, and a suicidal awareness campaign.

Safe Alternatives for Teens and Youth (SAFETY) is a 12-week family-oriented treatment designed to build skills, increase safety, and reduce the risk of suicide attempts. Within each young person, their families, and other social systems, this approach increases protective characteristics while lowering risk variables. The main emphasis of the schedule is a young person who sees one therapist while parents also see a separate therapist. Then, children and families gather together to put the skills they have decided are crucial for preventing further suicide attempts into practice. This treatment is distinctive in that it may be carried out either in an outpatient environment or in the client's home, where different social service staff, including social workers, play a vital role in the treatment of suicidal ideation and attempts by providing crucial emotional support, conducting risk assessments, and connecting individuals with appropriate mental health resources.

Since universal suicide prevention typically occurs under the umbrella of curriculum-based education initiatives, they attempt to give interventions to the entire student body through the academic program. The research conducted by Singer et al. (2019) underscores the pivotal role of a social worker as a specialized professional collaborating with adolescents and their families. Their responsibilities include crafting safety plans, facilitating connections with relevant mental health services, and delivering continuous support and counseling.

In school settings, the following prevention program had high achievements - **the Signs of Suicide (SOS)** Middle School and High School Prevention Programs in the US. SOS is a program for preventing adolescent suicide that has scientific backing and has helped students better comprehend suicide risk and develop positive attitudes toward it. SOS provides materials to help schools, parents, and communities identify at-risk adolescents and take the required action while also teaching students how to spot the warning signs of depression and other mental health deviations as well as suicide in themselves and their peers. Moreover, according to the assessment of SAMHSA (2020), SOS showed a reduction in self-reported suicide attempts by 40%.

In fact, school-based programs bring much-needed evidence on how interventions for suicidal youth can be implemented. One such example would be the national **Saving and Empowering Young Lives in Europe (SEYLE)** program, where professionals and researchers conducted research on evaluating risk behavior prevention interventions among school students from 11 European countries from 2009 to 2011. The uniqueness of this program was that SEYLE generated an extensive database containing information about socio-demographics, risk factors, lifestyles, and the status of mental health of adolescents in Europe. And even though, the primary setting was at school, it still serves as evidence-based proof of the importance of implementing preventive interventions at any level of the Ecological system including community, interpersonal, and individual environments (Wasserman, 2016).

Kazakhstan ranked highest in adolescent suicide among neighboring countries (21.7) in 2016, with high rates of attempted suicides among school students and a significant percentage at risk (World Bank, 2016). **The Adolescent Mental Health and Suicide**

Prevention program (AMHSP) (UNICEF, 2018) was tested in Kazakhstan's pilot districts from 2015 to 2017 as a solution to this issue, with the assistance of UNICEF Kazakhstan. The final evaluation of the intervention demonstrated the success of the AMHSP pilot program. WHO statistics show a significant reduction in suicide rates in 2019, with students experiencing reduced suicidal ideation, stress, and anxiety. The pilot program improved sociability, academic performance, coping with aggression, bullying, self-development, and improved school psychologist status (UNICEF, 2018).

While certain approaches share common theoretical foundations and often target similar mechanisms, these practical and intervention-oriented strategies underscore the imperative of comprehensive prevention and treatment measures. Their applicability across diverse contexts emphasizes the necessity of addressing suicidal or self-harm behaviors in young individuals, irrespective of their prior histories, through varied forms and agendas.

Social Work Practice In The Prevention Of Suicide

Due to social workers' dual focus on the individual and their environment, social work considerably differs from other occupations. While social workers deal with the outside factors that affect a person's position and outlook, they also offer opportunities for evaluation and intervention, help clients and communities successfully adapt to their reality (McCave&Rishel, 2010).

It is crucial to recognize that in the realm of suicide prevention, social workers are typically not involved in prescribing medications or implementing measures to establish protective infrastructure or restrict access to lethal means. These actions, proven to be highly effective in reducing suicide risk, fall outside the purview of the typical responsibilities of social workers in this context (WHO, 2014). Contrarily, social workers excel in harm minimization through practices such as routine home visits, surveillance, education, problem-solving therapy, and media outreach (WHO, 2014).

The importance of a social worker in suicide interventions has increased over time. The literature review highlights the importance of school social workers in educational settings and the need for them to continually improve their abilities to effectively handle issues, such as juvenile suicidal behavior, in particular. An exploratory study on the experiences of school social workers with youth suicidal behavior in American schools discovered that these school social workers were able to help at least one student who made suicide threats (88%), attempted suicide (50%), was hospitalized for suicide risk (64%), or actually died by suicide (10%) (Singer&Slovak, 2011).

Scott and Guo (2012) identified a number of school-based interventions which were mainly focused on issues such as raising awareness of suicide, encouraging behavioral change, and coping strategies, and were usually delivered by school staff or social workers. Despite good

intentions, out of ten suicide prevention programs, only two programs that focused on behavioral change and coping strategies in the general school population demonstrated lowered suicidal tendencies and improved coping ability. The authors explained it that methodological limitations meant that the results from these studies were difficult to compare and the soundness of conclusions based on such studies may be questioned. However, they believe, that the importance of the program cannot be underestimated but require more impact.

This could also have something to do with social workers' ongoing capacity to hone the abilities required to evaluate the resources and risk factors that might present in the child's home, the neighborhood, and the wider social environment. Here, the emphasis on intervening action is placed on the context of the mezzo and macro levels rather than the individual level. These intervention strategies may really entail methods for bringing about change in a variety of contexts, such as the classroom or school, the peer group, the neighborhood, or the general populace.

Conclusion

Based on the evidence-based examples presented in this article, youth suicide emerges as a complex societal challenge warranting thorough study, research, and analysis to identify effective solutions. Numerous researchers emphasize the preventable nature of suicides and advocate for policymakers and stakeholders to prioritize comprehensive suicide prevention programs on both national and local scales.

Together with educationalists and mental health service providers, social workers are also uniquely positioned to identify and intervene with at-risk youth in educational and community settings, providing support for those who are at risk or/and affected by suicide. However, their role lacks clarity and prioritization. Strengthening social work practices includes individual and family counseling, connecting clients with resources, and providing crisis intervention. In addition, social workers can offer collaboration with school personnel, mental health professionals, police, and community members by being included in multidisciplinary teams to better address various youth issues which are crucial for preventing adolescent suicide.

All these preventive interventions and practices have the potential to frame the foundation for effective measures in support of the 2030 Agenda and Goals (WHO, 2020) which generally provide a global vision for sustainable development and intersectoral action from multiple stakeholders which aim to strengthen health and social systems. In addition, more scientific research should balance health, social, and environmental determinants for monitoring and evaluation of progress toward Sustainable Development Goal 3.4. and other social-related indicators.

The research on suicide prevention and its relevance for social work remains profoundly significant even beyond 2030. The study not only encapsulates the multifaceted approaches required for effective suicide prevention but also sheds light on the pivotal role of social work in implementing these strategies. Its findings and recommendations emphasize the necessity of integrating mental health and suicide prevention modules within social work education curricula. Moreover, the study underlines the importance of SDGs, particularly Goal 3, and highlights how addressing mental health concerns, including suicide prevention, is integral to achieving broader global development goals.

The ongoing significance of this research lies in its perpetual relevance, as the global community continuously strives to minimize the prevalence of suicide through interdisciplinary approaches, with social work education being a crucial component in fostering sustainable change beyond the set target year of 2030.

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**Ms Shenbakam N, MSW**

PhD Scholar, CHRIST (Deemed to be University), Bangalore, India

**Ms Seema Khandale, MSW**

Founder, Ashay Social Group, India

**Ms Babitha N S, BA.LLB, LLM**

PhD Scholar, CHRIST (Deemed to be University), Bangalore, India

Social Workers fighting for the Menstrual Justice of women

With the growing female population in India, menstrual justice of women should be considered seriously. However, menstruation is considered as a few days' period problem for women and menstrual hygiene is often neglected. Menstrual health is a public health and human rights issue. Menstrual justice should be at the heart of health and gender equity interventions for social workers. Menstrual hygiene management (MHM) plays a crucial role in the overall well-being of women and girls.

Access to affordable and sustainable menstrual hygiene products, along with education and awareness, is essential for promoting good menstrual health and hygiene. Social workers have a significant role to play in addressing period poverty and promoting sustainable menstruation practices. This article explores the role of social workers in promoting menstrual hygiene management in India, focusing on the initiatives, challenges, and impact of the interventions and also presents a case study of a non-profit organization ASHAY SOCIAL GROUP, India, and how it intervenes with the MHM and helping the nation to achieve sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Keywords: Menstrual Justice, Menstrual Hygiene, Menstrual health, Public Health, Menstrual Material, Sustainable Menstruation, SDG

Introduction

Menstrual Hygiene Management is fundamental to the equality, rights, and dignity of all individuals who menstruate. Nonetheless, menstrual health is still not considered a priority by all. Menstrual hygiene management (MHM) is an essential aspect of women's health and well-being. Access to affordable and sustainable menstrual hygiene products, along with education and awareness, is essential for promoting good menstrual health and hygiene. In developing countries like India, where menstrual hygiene is often neglected, social workers have a significant role to play in addressing period poverty and promoting sustainable menstruation practices. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recognize the significance of MHM in achieving gender equality, health, and environmental sustainability. In this context, social workers have emerged as key advocates and facilitators in promoting sustainable menstrual practices. This article explores the role of social workers in promoting the use of menstrual cups as a sustainable solution for menstruation.

Growing female population in India

In 2022, the female population for India was 685 million persons. Female population of India increased from 287 million persons in 1973 to 685 million persons in 2022 growing at an average annual rate of 1.79%. Around 40-crore menstruating women population are in India. Not just in India, all over the world, menstrual hygiene management (MHM) has remained a major challenge for women, more so in rural areas which comes with additional challenges of improper access to clean water, sanitation facilities and sanitary napkins.

Menstruation is a biological and natural process (Biran et al,2012). However, in many countries, it is associated with cultural and social constraints for women. The cultural stereotypes, societal taboos, inadequate health education and poverty that pervade the society have only acted to reinforce gender inequality which have even led to systematic public health issues. A reproductive tract infection, which has become a silent epidemic that devastates women's life, is closely interrelated with poor menstrual hygiene (Dasgupta, A., & Sarkar, M, 2008). Therefore, proper menstrual hygiene, beliefs and the right perceptions can protect women from this suffering. There is a growing necessity to address women's needs to manage their menstrual hygiene privately and conveniently, and hence guidance and training to girls and women on MHM education has to be provided and the government has to coordinate with grass root level NGO and delivery systems to ensure equity and inclusion in sanitation.

The Importance of Menstrual Hygiene Management

According to the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP), for women and girls to be able to manage their menstruation hygienically, they must have access to:

"...clean menstrual management material to absorb or collect menstrual blood, that can be changed in privacy as often as necessary for the duration of a menstrual MONTH, using soap

and water for washing the body as required, and having access to safe and convenient facilities to dispose of used menstrual management materials."

Achieving good menstrual health is not just a matter of ensuring access to menstrual products but also relies on individuals having the resources they need to participate fully in all spheres of life during their menstrual cycle (Van Eijk AM et al, 2016). Menstrual hygiene management has far-reaching implications for women's health, education, and overall development. Proper menstrual hygiene practices are essential to prevent infections, maintain good reproductive health, and ensure dignity and well-being during menstruation. Moreover, addressing menstrual hygiene is closely linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being and SDG 6 Clean Water and Sanitation. By promoting menstrual hygiene management, social workers contribute to achieving these global goals and fostering SDG 5 gender equality.

Menstrual Hygiene Challenges in India

Every month, 1.8 billion people across the world menstruate (Rohatgi A, 2023). Millions of these girls, women, transgender men and non-binary persons are unable to manage their menstrual cycle in a dignified, healthy way. In India, menstrual hygiene management faces numerous challenges, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. Lack of awareness, limited access to affordable sustainable menstrual products, inadequate sanitation facilities, Disposal of menstrual waste and cultural taboos surrounding menstruation are some of the key barriers that women and girls face. The consequences of inadequate menstrual hygiene management are severe, leading to health issues, school absenteeism, and limited opportunities for women's empowerment. Menstruation education is often lacking, both for women and men, contributing to stigma and a lack of supportive environments. Social workers recognize these challenges and strive to address them through innovative interventions. Gender inequality, cultural taboos and poverty can cause menstrual health needs to go unmet.

Sustainable menstruation- Moving beyond commercially disposable sanitary pads

"A report estimates that a woman generates around 14.1 kg of non-biodegradable waste in a lifetime if she uses commercially manufactured disposable sanitary pads. On the other hand, if she uses menstrual cups she will generate 0.06 kg of non-biodegradable waste. This reduces the generation of total non-biodegradable waste by 99% and is an example of a win-win intervention that is good for the environment (SDG 13 Climate action) and good for health and hygiene (SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being). Menstrual cups are practical, hygienic, and cost-effective. More and more women need to know about them and myths around their use need to be busted" said Dr Soumya Swaminathan.

The Role of Social Workers in Promoting MHM to advance the SDGs:

Social workers play a crucial role in promoting menstrual hygiene management in India through various initiatives. They work closely with communities, government agencies, and non-profit organizations to create awareness, provide access to menstrual products, and break the silence surrounding menstruation. By addressing the social, cultural, and economic aspects of menstrual hygiene, social workers contribute to sustainable change and improved well-being for women and girls, and sustainable development of the nation.

Awareness and Education Programs: One of the primary roles of social workers in promoting MHM is conducting awareness and education programs. These programs aim to debunk myths, provide accurate information about menstruation, and promote positive attitudes towards menstruation. Social workers engage with schools, communities, and women's groups to deliver comprehensive menstrual health education, emphasizing the importance of hygiene, safe absorbents, and proper disposal practices.

Capacity Building and Training Social workers also focus on capacity building and training of frontline health workers, teachers, and community leaders. By equipping these individuals with knowledge and skills related to menstrual hygiene management, social workers create a ripple effect, reaching a larger population. Training programs cover topics such as menstrual health, safe absorbent use, disposal practices, and addressing taboos and stigma surrounding menstruation.

Innovative Distribution Models: Social workers are at the forefront of developing innovative distribution models for menstrual products, ensuring affordability and accessibility. Organizations like Ashay Social Group, Myna Mahila Foundation in India leverage social entrepreneurship to produce and distribute affordable, high-quality menstrual material within communities. They empower women by creating sustainable livelihood opportunities and promoting menstrual hygiene simultaneously.

Advocacy and Collaboration: Social workers actively engage in advocacy and policy influence to bring about systemic change in menstrual hygiene management. They collaborate with government agencies, NGOs, and international organizations to develop and implement policies that prioritize menstrual health.

For instance, Shuchi Scheme was launched, which is an initiative of the government of Karnataka in India, to provide schoolgirls with Free sanitary napkins. The program, which aims to educate individuals on menstrual hygiene and provide females with sanitary products. But It has been suspended for three years since the Covid pandemic. Social workers have to use advocacy and social research to intervene in such situations. Social workers raise awareness about the importance of menstrual hygiene management among policymakers, advocating for budget allocation, infrastructure development, and inclusion of MHM in school curricula.

Case Study Success Story of Ashay Social Group:

ASHAY SOCIAL GROUP is a non profit organization founded in 2015, started working on a sustainable menstruation project of designing and distributing RUTU Cup and Rutu Cloth Pad at affordable price. So far Ashay Social group has made a difference to more than 75000+ women's lives. Awareness and promotion of hygienic, healthy, sustainable menstruation options including menstrual cups and cloth pads. As a social worker with specific knowledge, Ms. Seema designed the menstrual cup. Ashay Social Group has trained 50,000+ people to make their own cloth pads by reusing household clothes and taking proper hygiene precautions.

For the past seven years, Ashay Social Group has been creating awareness campaigns in schools, colleges, Government and Corporate offices, among Mahila mandals, Househelps, Anganwadi Sevikas, Sportspersons, visually challenged, physically challenged, rural women and also doctors.

'MAKE OUR OWN CLOTH PADS' project is aimed at helping the women to help themselves to make their own cloth pads who can't afford to buy Period Cups. Awareness and training sessions are organized to make cloth pads with available resources like old saree and dupattas. Collaborating with schools, colleges, NGOs, several workshops have been conducted. Few of those who got trained in making cloth pads also started their own MSME (Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises) of making cloth pads for their Livelihood, SDG8 Decent work and economic growth

The efforts of social worker, Ms Seema Khandale in promoting menstrual hygiene management have resulted in significant impact and success in MHM. The intervention programs have shown improvements in knowledge, practices, and access to menstrual products among women and girls. These positive outcomes demonstrate the effectiveness of social work interventions in improving menstrual hygiene practices.

Challenges and the Way Forward:

While social workers have made significant strides in promoting menstrual hygiene management, several challenges remain. Limited funding, inadequate infrastructure, and persistent cultural taboos pose obstacles to sustainable change. Social workers need to adapt their strategies and find innovative solutions to overcome these hurdles.

Also social work education should include Public Health Modules with Menstrual Hygiene Management which is contributing to several SDGs. Public health Social specialization may be considered as the future of social work. Recent changes in healthcare, demand more emphasis on preventive healthcare and integrated healthcare and wellness services. The ability of the public health social worker to bridge prevention and intervention, individual and community, and practice and policy will be increasingly valued by our changing society.

Moving forward, it is crucial to continue strengthening collaborations between social workers, government agencies, and non-profit organizations. By working together, they can amplify their impact, share best practices, and advocate for comprehensive policies that prioritize menstrual hygiene management. Additionally, integrating menstrual hygiene education into school curricula and ensuring access to affordable and sustainable menstrual products are essential steps towards achieving widespread menstrual health and hygiene.

Conclusion

Menstrual Hygiene Management Project is directly influencing SDG goals like SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being, SDG 6 Clean Water and Sanitation, SDG 5 gender equality and by choosing sustainable menstruation it is contributing to SDG 13 Climate action, and also by involving women in making the sustainable menstrual material it is also contributing to SDG8 Decent work and economic growth

Thus Social workers play a vital role in promoting menstrual hygiene management in India. Through their awareness programs, innovative distribution models, capacity building efforts, and advocacy work, social workers are driving positive change in menstrual health and hygiene. By addressing the social, cultural, and economic barriers, social workers are empowering women and girls, improving health outcomes, and contributing to sustainable development. With continued collaboration and innovation, social workers can create a future where menstrual hygiene is no longer a barrier to women's well-being and empowerment.

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Moni Virginia,
Social Work Student, Christ University, Bangalore, India



Madhavi Manoj Warriier,
Social Work Student, Christ University, Bangalore, India

Street Vendors: Confronting Health Challenges Amidst Urban Landscapes

Two billion people work informally worldwide, making up a sizeable component of the labour force in many low and middle-income countries, yet the impact of this employment on health has received very little attention in the literature. India contributes the fifth-largest share of the global gross domestic product, with the informal sector accounting for more than 80% of the nation's GDP. One of India's three or four largest metropolitan areas, Bangalore, makes up 10% of this total and, as one of the country's principal economic hubs, makes a perfect study focus. Since its founding, the 450-year-old city has played a significant role as a commercial centre, and the former trading fort has grown to become the current city's major marketplace, bustling with merchants selling their wares and services throughout its streets, which together form an unofficial urban public space (Patel, S., Furlan, R., & Grosvald, M. 2021).

This article is in line with SDG Goal 3, which appropriately states that promoting well-being for all ages and guaranteeing healthy lifestyles as priorities. Many people around the world still do not have access to essential healthcare services. It is imperative to address discrepancies in order to close this gap and guarantee equitable access to healthcare. The goal, which addresses the two crucial targets 3.8 - Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access

to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all and target 3.9 - By 2030, substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination (Goal 3 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.), requires attention to a number of health determinants, including environmental and commercial variables. It is what universal health coverage seeks to accomplish (Sustainable Developmental Goals, n.d.).

Considering this scenario, we the social work trainees decided to engage in a constructive and significant exchange with six street vendors in order to learn more about the individuals experience in metropolitan Bengaluru. The primary goals of the interview were to first understand the health-related lifestyle choices made by street vendors and, secondly, to investigate the Affordability, Availability and Accessibility of health care systems (Saha, 2011). Numerous elements of their labour, including working conditions, hours worked, pay, and occupational health and safety, are not regulated and may be damaging to their health. In urban public spaces all throughout the world, you can see street vendors, but statistics on how many of them there are famously elusive. One such group in the informal and unorganized sector, who work day and night for meagre earnings in order to support their families and live their everyday lives. It is impossible to accurately estimate the struggle they go through in all four seasons, in the heat of the sun, or during severe rainfall. In order to improve the well-being of street vendors and ensure their sustainability in the future, an analysis is necessary to close the gaps and concentrate on the indicators that need greater attention.

A vicious cycle of challenges

The lifestyle of street vendors plays a crucial role in health promotion and improvement, as it directly affects their physical well-being and overall quality of life. Street vendors often face unique challenges due to their occupation, including long working hours, limited access to healthcare facilities, and limited resources for maintaining a healthy lifestyle (Challenges Faced by Street Vendors, 2018). Understanding and addressing these challenges are essential for promoting the health of street vendors and improving their overall health outcomes. Some of which are as follows:

- **Occupational Hazards:** Street vendors are subject to a variety of work risks, including standing for extended periods of time, carrying large loads, and exposure to harsh weather. These elements can cause weariness, musculoskeletal issues, and chronic discomfort. They start their routine from early morning and end their day nearly at midnight. They don't have any safety measures or first aid available at the workplace. All these factors affect the health of the street vendors. The other factors like education, income and availability of basic facilities like water and sanitation at residence and workplaces determine the health of the individual (Meher & Ghatole, 2020) (Sepadi & Nkosi, 2022).

- **Nutritional Concerns:** It might be difficult for street vendors to eat a diet that is both balanced and nourishing. They largely rely on readily available, cheap, and occasionally unhealthy dietary options. Poor nutrition, obesity, and chronic illnesses like diabetes and cardiovascular issues can all result from these decisions.
- **Uncertain Employment:** As a job, street vending is full of uncertainty because the earning range changes daily. Since it depends on a number of variables, there is no job stability in street vending. Due to these constraints and the instability of their work, street vendors find it difficult to prioritize their health.
- **Mental Health and Stress:** Due to the varying wages, everyday struggle and conflict, and lengthy working hours, street vending can be a difficult job (Rahman, 2019). Consequently, this may lead to simultaneous mental health problems of depression and anxiety.
- **Hygiene and Sanitation:** Street vendors face improper sanitation and hygiene standards that leads to the spread of diseases. The vendors should be encouraged to practice and ensure proper access to handwashing stations, clean water, and proper waste disposal (Kanungo et al., 2021).

Apart from the points mentioned above, the vendors face barriers in accessing healthcare services such as limited financial resources, lack of health insurance, and irregular working hours. All these factors make it challenging for them to seek regular medical care and thus it can be well noted how all these points are directly connected to the targets 3.8 and 3.9 and how important it is to address the issues of informal sectors to achieve universal health coverage (Subramanian et al., 2023).

Essence of the interview

To further examine the health care challenges and health-related issues specific to availability, affordability and accessibility of street vendors, the trainees had interviewed six street vendors to understand their experience better. The interviewees' age range was between 16 - 65 years old and their daily minimum income between 200 to 2000 rupees maximum on an average (Hoque, 2003). Out of the six interviewees, only one has completed their formal education successfully. Following a brief discussion with each of the six participants, the key problems identified included lack of prioritization of their health which contributes to increased health issues. Majority of them had faced body aches, back pain, ulcers, diabetes and other chronic illnesses. Speaking in particular about the area the trainees researched upon, it was observed that the width of the road is narrow for the vehicles to pass thus being a barrier to the street vendors as the space constraint is a huge issue for their daily vending.

Considering the high traffic volume area, the vehicles cause a lot of noise and air pollution which directly affects their health (Kiran, 2019). Street Vendors did not have access to

adequate food and clean restrooms as they did not have a suitable assigned spot. Especially for women, it is extremely challenging when they are menstruating. This was one of the major concerns that affects their reproductive health as well. It was observed during the interviews that most of the participants were unaware of the health care delivery systems available through the government hence, the health seeking behaviour is directed towards the local pharmacies to cure the illness by themselves.

Street vending in specific has a lot of uncertainties, to cite a few, the interviewees had mentioned that their operational time were too long, (Panwar & Garg, 2015) mostly from 4:00 am till 10:00 pm which makes them physically exhausted throughout the day. Usage of carts are quite common in regards to street vending, but one among the interviewees had mentioned that he bicycles to various places to sell one particular type of vegetable making the probability of earning low when compared to the vendors nearby. This in turn consumes a lot of physical energy and requires adequate care, having a toll against their health. Furthermore, the nature of employment is unstable; they may experience profit and loss or perhaps lose the job altogether. These challenges make them unable to meet ends, having an adverse effect on their health.

Social work interventions alongside SDG - a step towards an egalitarian society

Giving special focus on SDG 3.8: Achieve Universal Health Coverage (UHC), which deals with proximity and convenience, it's critical to make sure that health services are easily accessible and conveniently located for street sellers. They lift heavy weights while opening and closing the shop daily and they work for a long time. The implementation of mobile health units near street vendors' places of business to improve accessibility and the extension of clinic hours to account for street vendors' irregular work schedules will promote routine health examinations. Furthermore, campaigning for affordable and cost-effective health care services for street sellers and developing funding mechanisms or health insurance programmes adapted to meet the specific budgetary restrictions of street vendors.

Minimizing the need for street vendors to go to distant medical facilities by scheduling regular health fairs, examinations, and preventative care services, as well as implementing targeted health outreach initiatives created especially for them. However, SDG 3.9—Substantially Reduce the Number of Deaths and Illnesses—should also receive equal attention since it calls for increasing health literacy and making street sellers aware of the resources for medical care that are accessible. provide street vendors with the knowledge and resources they need to make wise health decisions and successfully navigate the healthcare system. creating a multidisciplinary strategy that addresses social, psychological, and physical well-being to identify and address the different health challenges that street vendors face. This approach should involve healthcare professionals, social workers, non-profit organizations, and governmental organizations.

A district-level approach adds a significant level of precision to the public policy environment, particularly given the considerable influence and autonomy enjoyed by district administrations in promoting the welfare of their constituents. In order to properly target current needs at the district level, policies and programmes that need to be freshly created, amended, or better prioritized must be closely monitored at the district level in order to obtain a comprehensive picture of where India stands (Husain et al., 2015) (BHOWMIK, S.2010). The well-being of street vendors can be assessed by this method, at least district by district, and a methodical and sustainable strategy will guarantee the informal sector's healthy existence free from social disapproval or unstable finances.

Conclusion

On a concluding note, accessibility, affordability, and availability of health care delivery systems for street vendors requires a comprehensive and tailored approach. By recognizing and addressing the unique challenges they face and implementing comprehensive strategies that encompass nutrition, occupational health, mental well-being, access to healthcare, hygiene, and community support, we can make significant strides in enhancing the health outcomes in alignment to SDG Goal 3 and quality of life for street vendors to promote overall health and well-being of street vendors to attain an egalitarian society.

Gallery: Some pictures from the field



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Mel Gray,
Emerita Professor Newcastle University, Sydney Australia

Can social workers be agents of change in global development agendas?

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development seeks global transformation through poverty alleviation, social and economic development, and environmental sustainability, with its success measured in terms of its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2015). While social development sought to harmonise economic and social development, the SDGs brought sustainable development and poverty alleviation into a single frame, highlighting environmental sustainability within contemporary global agendas (Gray, 2020; Gray et al., 2017). With their explicit focus on human development, development policies have long prioritised economic growth over social and environmental justice. With their anthropocentric priorities, human wellbeing has become central to the normative visions of sustainable development and environmental justice (Bullard, 2011). However, for Cox-Shrader (2011: 270), 'the transition to sustainability is a transition to a worldview grounded in ecological justice'. Living in harmony with the environment has long been a central tenet of Indigenous cosmologies, where sustainability is 'about harmony, relationships and rhythms ... not an accounting exercise for rationing how we use the planet's resources' (Bullard, 2011: 142). Thus, sustainable development and ecological justice bring social and economic development into line with age-old Indigenous ecological perspectives.

Sustainable development's intransigent focus on development

Sustainable development calls for a return to comprehensive development, which was lost in the narrow focus on poverty alleviation in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Correll, 2008). It emphasises the connection between sustainability and environmental awareness, protection, and conservation, as well as issues of economic growth, social development, and poverty alleviation. However, its dismal progress toward environmental sustainability relates to its intransigent focus on development (Sachs, 1999). Thus, for Luke

(2005), sustainable development is neither sustainable nor development, while for Bullard (2011: 141) it made little sense when there was 'so little left to sustain'. For Sneddon et al. (2006), fathoming what constituted development was even more difficult. Bullard (2011: 141) agreed: Perhaps the greatest challenge we face is not so much about how we understand sustainability, but rather how we understand development. When we consider the state of the world and the routine failure of 'development' to feed, house, clothe, educate and care for the invisible majority, the word no longer has any moral or even practical content.

Acero's (2011: 205) view of development as 'equitable and sustainable growth ... [and the] expansion of human capacities' makes its success all the more unlikely, since this rests on transforming all forms of discrimination and increasing 'women's political participation' (Acero, 2011: 207). As Banuri (2013: 209) observed, sustainable development is 'difficult to operationalize ... without an underlying political consensus over equity', while Sneddon et al. (2006) perceived a lack of political will to pursue development models that would guarantee the invisible majority a decent quality of life, address inequalities, and lessen environmental degradation. As long as economic development trumped environmental sustainability, sustainable development - in policy discourse and development practice - would remain a myth.

SDGs and environmental sustainability

With sustainability as a generic principle, the SDGs remained development goals, though, unlike the MDGs, some were primarily about ecological rather than human wellbeing and offered a glimpse of what sustainable development might look like conceived as environmentalism rather than developmentalism. However, like the MDGs, the SDGs have failed to overcome implementation challenges (IFSW, 2021). What was the point of adding inclusive goals on the environment, peace, and equality, when corporate-driven globalisation and modernising development were perpetuating poverty, inequality, and exclusion? How would the SDGs further global partnerships, when they failed to articulate how governments, nongovernment organisations, and international institutions with mandates to enact sustainable development would challenge the destructive ideological and economic powers of global corporations? While they heralded greater attention to sustainability, the systems underpinning global exchanges continued to emphasise economic development. Further, without international consensus on, and substantial action to address, the serious issues of climate change and environmental degradation, disappointing progress toward environmental targets would likely continue under the SDGs. As Banuri (2013: 208) noted, neoliberalism sought to jettison social protection, while sustainable development sought 'to protect human welfare' through integrated development. The former assessed development and poverty alleviation in terms of economic outcomes, while the latter used human development indicators to determine outcomes for human wellbeing (UNDP, 2014), rather than environmental degradation as an unavoidable consequence of human progress.

Ongoing tensions between the various aspects of sustainable development sustained the myth that economic development and environmental sustainability were mutually exclusive. The focus on economic growth put all nations and people on the same path to development, when underdevelopment was a problem of those with less not more. Notwithstanding the shift to poverty reduction with the MDGs, and environmental sustainability with the SDGs, the focus on economic growth as the key to prosperity persisted, despite history's lessons to the contrary of gross inequality, with millions of people mired in poverty worldwide. Further, the lack of progress on environmental sustainability resulted from the failure of development as economic growth, applied universally through foreign aid and development policy, to the detriment of local cultures, knowledge, and environments. Economic development could not solve the interconnected problems of poverty, ill health, illiteracy, maldistribution of wealth, low social development, and ecological injustice, the solution to which lay in concerted local, national, and international action. The continual externalisation of ecological issues demonstrated the absence of political will to take determined decisions and make firm commitments to lessen environmental degradation and reduce climate change and their accompanying social problems.

What can social workers do?

Social work has embraced social and sustainable development, yet few social work education programs include discussions of international social work and sustainable development, with northern programs unlikely to learn about social work in the Global South, while, ironically, southern programs largely use northern literature. Few programs offer critical analyses of the enormous influence of international financial institutions and nongovernment organisations on national and regional development in the Global South, or interrogate the relationship between development, foreign aid, and poverty alleviation. The tripartite relationship between these three domains hinges on how each is conceptualised and defined, and shifts in understanding of exactly what each seeks to accomplish. Gray (2017) argued that understanding the meaning of development - and social work's role in, and contribution to, social and sustainable development - required an exploration of the discourses shaping approaches to development. With their value-driven approach and emancipatory claims, social workers champion the rights of vulnerable and oppressed people and acknowledge the need to work toward poverty alleviation, without serious consideration of how they do this from the service infrastructure within which they are embedded and its binding social policies. As Matthies (2012: 248) observed, social work is not 'an autonomous and self-organized profession', as its global agenda seems to suggest. The goals of poverty alleviation, environmental justice, and social development are far removed from daily employer and service-user expectations.

Rather than study sustainable development goals within their broader context, or set realistic expectations within the parameters of what most social workers do, and are required to do, social work tends to take a normative stance. This, too, is how it approaches issues of environmental sustainability and ecological justice. The problem with this

normative stance is it leaves little room for serious debate and critique, as it pursues the cause with missionary zeal rather than scholarly enquiry. Areas of environmental and climate change science are hotly debated and by no means conclusive. In books, conferences, and on electronic discussion lists, there is an element of preaching to the converted and a great deal of within-group encouragement and promotion such that a climate change denier would be a pariah. There are people with left- and right-wing leanings within social work, yet its discourse carries a largely leftist, emancipatory ethos. There is a need to be deeply critical of social work's stance and to deconstruct initiatives to open the door for discussions on an ecocentric foundation that prioritises environmental justice in approaching inequality, poverty reduction, and sustainable development. For change to take place, social workers of diverse political persuasions need to be involved in the discussion. Concerns about the environment need to move from the margins to the mainstream, bearing in mind that, as Matthies (2012: 248) observed, 'in many countries, social workers themselves are part of, and dependent on, the unsustainable neoliberal industrial model and its power structures'.

'Designed to strengthen the profile of social work' (Jones & Truell, 2012: 454, emphasis added), the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development exemplifies the kind of solidarity, rather than constructive critical debate, that dominates the profession. It is a political vehicle to establish social work's development credentials, despite several key international bodies already occupying this space, including from within social work, such as the International Consortium on Social Development (Gray & Webb, 2014). Dominelli (2014: 339) reiterated social work's aims to protect 'the physical environment', adding an environmental justice string to the Global Agenda's bow. However, she saw this as contingent on holding multinational companies accountable for exploiting land, labour, and resources to maximise profits. Her presentation of green social work as a grassroots movement that takes place through macro-level community development seems far removed from challenging multinationals and the realities of daily practice for most direct-practice social workers (Dewane, 2013). Those pushing for a renewed ecological perspective signal the need for a new paradigm and a move away the modernist one underpinning social work. The question, however, is how can 'social workers ... paid to work in public or private services in the current economic model ... change into mobilizing people towards the collective problem-solving of environmental conflicts and economic injustice?' (Matthies, 2012: 248) Bearing in mind the political nature of the discourse on sustainable social development and environmental social work, contributors in Gray (2017) wrote repeated accounts of how they were trying to embed developmental social work in Africa, while being hampered by legislative environments, where social workers lacked a collective voice, a political platform, and professional legitimacy.

In conclusion, while poverty and inequality remain, social work is highly unlikely to place environmental sustainability above social justice. The best social work can do is learn from practice by documenting what social workers are doing to further sustainable development and environmental justice, cognisant that most social workers are not engaged in such work and social workers are small players in this terrain. We should avoid over-ambitious claims of

social work's contribution and instead seek to establish the effectiveness of what social workers are doing. Already, social work's goals are wide-ranging and its practice so diverse that it is difficult to articulate exactly what it is that social workers do. This is possibly one reason why social workers around the world feel their work goes unrecognised and the profession lacks the respect not only of politicians but also of local communities and service users of all ilk. Social work offers a unique perspective that needs to be better articulated, not only to policy makers and fellow professionals, but also to local communities and service users. By demonstrating the effectiveness of their interventions, social workers around the world will earn the recognition for the good that they do to further social and ecological justice.

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