The Routledge Handbook of Green Social Work

Lena Dominelli, Bala Raju Nikku, Hok Bun Ku

Social work response to Himalayan disasters

Publication details
https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315183213-10
Bala Raju Nikku
Published online on: 06 Apr 2018

How to cite: Bala Raju Nikku. 06 Apr 2018, Social work response to Himalayan disasters from: The Routledge Handbook of Green Social Work Routledge
Accessed on: 26 Jul 2023
https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315183213-10

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms
This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.
Himalayan disasters and development

The Himalayas or Himalaya are a mountain range in Asia separating the plains of the Indian subcontinent from the Tibetan Plateau. The Himalayan range has the Earth’s highest peaks, including the highest, Mount Everest (8,848 metres). The Himalayas include over 100 mountains exceeding 7,200 metres (23,600 ft) in elevation. The Himalayas are spread across five countries: Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan (from the South Asian region) and China. Some of the world’s major rivers – the Indus, the Ganges, and the Tsangpo-Brahmaputra – rise in the Himalayas,
and their combined drainage basin is home to some 600 million people. The Himalayas have profoundly shaped the cultures of South Asia; many Himalayan peaks are sacred in Hinduism and Buddhism (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Himalayas).

The Himalayas as a region has always been susceptible to disasters like earthquakes, landslides, floods and lake outbursts, due to the neo-tectonic mountain building processes. The Himalayas are heavily glaciated, due to their high altitude (and consequent low temperatures) and snowfall brought by the summer monsoon (in the central and eastern Himalayas) and winter storms (mainly in the western Himalayas). The Himalayas are tectonically active and the combination of earthquakes and long steep slopes is particularly worrying. Some parts of the Himalaya are more active than others (www.st-andrews.ac.uk).

To understand the nature of Himalayan disasters, one should also be aware of the three main Himalayan river systems and their impact on the livelihoods of millions of people in the Hindu-Kush Himalayan region. The three river systems are the: Indus (Sindhu) – Sutlaj, Byans, Chenab, Jhelum, Nubra, Syok, Kabul (covering Tibet, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan); Ganga – Yamuna, Kali, Karnali, Ghaghra, Kosi (Tibet, India, Nepal, Bangladesh); and Brahmaputra – Teesta, Siang, Subarnsiri, Lohit, Manas (Tibet, India, Bhutan, Bangladesh).

The spread of reckless developmental activities in this region coupled with unchecked, corrupt governance practices have transformed many natural hazards into human-made disasters. Two of the most populous nations in Asia and the world, China and India, are building hundreds of dams in a violently active geologic zone, possibly causing more earthquakes in the Himalayas. Earthquakes could fracture hydro-dams and cause secondary disasters placing a heavy toll on life, property and development infrastructures. The aftershocks that follow such quakes also crack or damage other smaller hydropower projects resulting in dam bursts. Landslide disasters are another major source of damage and destruction in the region and are associated with other calamities like earthquakes, floods or volcanoes, involving movements of the earth.

The Himalayan region is a diverse and complex region, prone to both natural and political disasters. Communities in the Himalayan region maintain a close relationship with livestock, because animal husbandry forms part of a livelihood strategy and culture. It plays a vital role for the survival of people especially in the ‘drier parts where production systems usually are based on some form of pastoralism, which involves seasonal mobility of herds and people between grazing areas’ (Anderson et al., 2010: 204).

The research sites: Uttarakhand (India) and Nepal

**Uttarakhand**

The Indian state of Uttarakhand shares borders with Tibet (China) and Nepal. Uttarakhand is the 27th state of India, newly carved in the year 2000 by joining a number of districts from the northwestern part of Uttar Pradesh and a portion of the Himalayan mountain range. The state is mostly known for its natural and scenic features and riches of the Himalayas, the Terai and the Bhabhar. The autonomous territory of Tibet is situated to the north of this state. Uttarakhand has about 11 million people and is known as the ‘Dev Bhumi’ or ‘Land of Gods’ because it houses various Hindu religious places of worship that are regarded as the most sacred and propitious areas of devotion and pilgrimage.

The 13 districts in the state are grouped into two administrative divisions, namely Kumaun and Garhwal. Out of the 13 districts, three are plain and the remaining 10 are hill districts. Geographically, the state can broadly be divided into three zones, namely the upper hills (Uttarkashi, Chamoli, Rudraprayag, Pithoragarh and Bageshwar); middle hills (Tehri-Garhwal, Garhwal,
Almora, and Champawat, the hill regions of Nainital and Chakrata tehsil of Dehradun); and foothills (the remaining area of Dehradun, Haridwar, Udham Singh Nagar and the remaining area of Nainital). The concentration of population is quite high in the middle and foothills as compared to the high/upper hills. The state is predominantly rural with 16,826 rural settlements, of which 12,699 or 81 per cent have a population of less than 500. The small size of settlements and their widespread distribution is reported as one of the main challenges for the delivery of services including that of social work (www.ukhfws.org). Agrawal (2013: 16) observes that:

Uttarakhand remains largely rural with 69.45 per cent of its population living in villages and 58.39 per cent of its workforce engaged in agriculture. But agricultural land in the state has decreased. . . . One can imagine how many more people will lose their primary livelihood if all the 558 proposed dams and Hydro Electric Projects (HEPs) are constructed. Although at 1.91 per cent, the population growth rate is not alarming, large-scale migration of people from the hilly regions to the plains has been a constant factor and will only increase . . . given the daily energy consumption in rural Uttarakhand, how much of people’s displacement, their loss of land and livelihood and the destruction of natural resources like land, water and forests is justified to produce power for the plains?

**Nepal**

Nepal is known as a landlocked country with three geographically distinct areas. However, it could be considered a land-linked country linking China and India. It has the highest mountain range in the world in the north; hills and mountains in the middle; and the lowland plains of the Terai (plains) in the south. The population of over 29 million recorded at the last census covers 125 caste/ethnic groups, 123 languages and 10 religions. Hinduism is the dominant religion (81.3 per cent) and the Chhetri (16.6 per cent) and Brahman (12.2 per cent) are the dominant castes (CBS, 2012).

Nepal, declared a federal republic when the institutional Monarchy was abolished in 2008, is a socially, culturally and environmentally diverse country. Nepal is one of the poorest countries in South Asia with a per capita income ranging from $700 to $1260 per head by different organizations (World Bank, 2013). It is ranked as 157 on the Human Development Index (HDI) and, despite economic growth, absolute inequalities persist with two out of three Nepalese living in poverty (HDR, 2011).

In Nepal development is rarely a cumulative process, evolving indigenously through its symbiotic interaction with the expanding base of local knowledge and resources. It is pre-defined and predetermined in accordance with the Westerners’ assumption of superiority of their economic rationality, imbued with techno-fetishism. It is this overt emphasis on the presumed superiority of Western economic rationality that has led to the total devaluation of the local modes of life and economics, consequently breeding and nurturing the culture of dependency and dependent development in Nepal.

*(Shrestha 1997: 22)*

The work of scholars like Shrestha amply captures the dynamics of Nepalese society, polity, the ongoing community conflicts, disasters and the role of foreign aid, and role of China and India vying for influence (see Malone, 2011; Nikku and Azman, 2014). Life expectancy in Nepal has risen by more than 20 years in the past three decades and is currently 68 years of age. Until
recently, Nepal was one of the few nations where men, on average, outlived women (Nikku, 2010).

Social work responses to Himalayan disasters

The nature and frequency of disasters is on the rise worldwide. Disasters have always threatened human communities and their resilience. The more recent disasters and destruction have become global mass media spectacles dramatically delivered to living rooms throughout the world (Rosenberg, 1997). Disasters are now defined as the outcome of hazards that are income neutral and colour-blind. However, their impact is not (Cutter et al., 2003). Leading disaster researchers have revised their conceptualizations of disasters to include ideas about the ‘social amplification of disasters and crisis’ and the existence of ‘trans-system social ruptures’ (Quarantelli et al., 2006).

The Himalayan region within the Asian region is prone to both natural and political disasters. Social work in Himalayan countries is diverse, dynamic and also disjoined. The nature, scale and impact of disasters in this region are also increasing and are having differential impacts on the livelihoods of the communities that live in this region.

Professional social work responses and contributions to the reconstruction and rebuilding communities after disasters have not been well documented, particularly for Asian societies (Tang and Cheung, 2007; Dominelli, 2015). Only a limited literature is available to understand the social work’s contribution to disasters, such as the 1993 Latur earthquake (India), 1999 earthquake in Taiwan, 2001 Bhuj earthquake (India), 2004 Asian Tsunami, 2005 Kashmir earthquake (Pakistan), 2008 Wenchuan earthquake (China), 2011 Japan tsunamiogenic earthquake and 2015 Nepal earthquakes (Nikku, 2015; 2014). Social work as a human rights-based profession claims to intervene to enhance people’s well-being. To achieve this goal within disaster settings, Lena Dominelli (2012) argues that a ‘green social work model’ is necessary to address social inequalities, change socio-economic models of development rooted in neoliberalism and the environmental degradation that impacts adversely primarily on disadvantaged communities.

The Uttarakhand floods

Floods and other disasters are recurring events in the state of Uttarakhand. Communities are highly vulnerable to multiple hazards and their associated risks and unprepared to cope with recurring disasters. Uttarkashi is one of the more disaster-prone districts in Uttarakhand, having faced earthquakes in 1991 and 1999, a cloud burst in 2012 and floods in 2013. The Chamoli district faced an earthquake in 1999 and Okhimath in the Rudraprayag District was devastated by a cloud burst in 1998.

On 17 June 2013, the river Mandakini flooded Rudraprayag around 2 o’clock in the morning. The National Highway 107 was washed away and many hotels along the road were destroyed. Buildings and other infrastructures built on the banks of the Alaknanda, Mandakini, Bhagirathi and Kalinadi rivers were swept away as many of them were built without applying building codes and safety measures. Hundreds of buildings along the banks of the Alaknanda and the Bhagirathi have been swept away in Rudraprayag district alone. Downstream, the Ganga, Yamuna and other rivers have reached levels not seen in years, posing difficulties for the officials responsible for disasters in Delhi, India’s capital. This tragedy had the makings of a national calamity (The Hindu, 21 June 2013). Initial estimates showed that more than 100,000 people needed to be evacuated from Rudraprayag, Chamoli and Uttarkashi districts. To carry
out this enormous task about 10,000 defence and paramilitary personnel and volunteers aided by 83 aircraft were deployed to search for survivors and deliver relief (Bloomberg News, 26 June 2013).

The flash floods also caused a massive flood in the Mahakali River of Nepal on 16 June 2013. It claimed many lives and weakened the livelihoods of people in the Darchula, Baitadi districts of the far western development region of Nepal. Thousands of Nepalese, mainly from western Nepal, were working in Uttarakhand (India) as porters, palanquin bearers and manual labourers. Alongside these labourers, a majority of those reported missing in the 16 June disasters were pilgrims visiting the Hindu shrines of Kedarnath, Badrinath, Gangotri and Yamunotri.

Within the first week of the Uttarakhand flood disaster, Bala Raju Nikku, author of this chapter and member of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) Disaster Committee headed by Lena Dominelli were able to contact a few social work colleagues from the states of Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh in India and Nepal to learn about disasters and offer possible support. They also reached out to the Nepalese social workers in 2013 and after the mega-earthquakes in 2015. Using ICT tools and personal contacts, Bala Raju Nikku collected and collated brief information about the scale of these disasters, their impact on communities and potential social work interventions in the two sites. This was accompanied by a short status report on the social work response and community needs. Further discussions with the social work colleagues from Kathmandu (Nepal) and Uttarakhand (India) illustrated the lack of skills and resources to respond to the needs of the disaster victims. The need for capacity-building in disaster social work became clear. To address this gap, a disaster social work research capacity-building proposal was developed and submitted to IASSW’s small grants committee in the latter half of 2013. The proposal (led by Bala Raju Nikku, Lena Dominelli and Vimla Nadkarni) subsequently secured a small budget of US$4000 to carry out work with social work educators from India and Nepal.

A two-day capacity-building research training workshop for social work educators and practitioners was organised during 4–5 September 2014 with a theme ‘Social Work Responses to Himalayan Disasters’ with the local support from Uttarakhand Open University, Department of Social Work, Haldwani, India. About 25 social work educators and practitioners and two Nepalese educators took part, presented their work with the disaster-affected families and communities, and identified challenges. Expert lectures, some delivered by Skype, were arranged in addition to actual field visits to the post-flood recovery communities.

Shekhar Pathak, a former professor of history at Kumaun University, Nainital and founder of People’s Association for Himalaya Area Research (PAHAR), delivered an orientation on understanding Himalayan disasters. He provided a brief overview of Himalayan diversity and a landscape that spans many countries (i.e. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Tibet (China), India, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan). Known as the water tower of Asia, the Himalayan region represents nearly about 40 million people. The Hindus of Indian origin mainly dominate the Sub-Himalayan and Middle-Himalayan valleys. The Great Himalayan region in the north is populated largely by Tibetan Buddhists who are seen from Ladakh to northeast India. In central Nepal, both Indian and Tibetan cultures have blended together, producing a mixed culture of Indian and Tibetan traits (www.himalaya2000.com). Thousands of peaks and glaciers (about 15,000) originate from the Himalayas to provide a source of water for drinking, irrigation, water mills, hydro-electricity and the water-packaging industry.

Lena Dominelli of Durham University gave an online presentation about green social work and the framework that could be further applied to analyse the socio-economic power structures and governance mechanisms that were threatened by the Uttarakhand flood disaster. Participants were encouraged to share their practice and reflect upon the challenges this highlighted...
to understand what social work models could be applied to strengthen the families affected by the devastation.

According to their feedback forms, the online lectures, presentations, field visits and sharing of local knowledge practices, enhanced participants’ understanding about Himalayan ecology, diversity and disaster social work concepts and tools that can be applied in such situations. The reflections and self-narratives influenced social work thinking about the disasters for the future, as well as enhanced understanding of how to intervene in a holistic way and what aspects to include in the social work curriculum in India and Nepal.

Mandakini River Valley, Rudraprayag District

Two community organisers from Mountain Shepherds, a community-owned and operated eco-tourism company that grew out of the Nanda Devi campaign for cultural survival and sustainable livelihoods, shared their flood responses and challenges in working with communities. According to them, many volunteers and guides came from local communities, all over the upper reaches of the Himalayas, to extend helping hands, especially during the rescue phase. A few staff members of this NGO were also trained at the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering and were equipped with mountaineering skills like making rope bridges. Zip-line (Tyrolean Traverse) was one of these methods used to cross the rivers and/or connect two high points for ferrying members and supplies across ravines. These skills were used during the flood disaster and rescued many lives in the district. The participants suggested that basic training in mountaineering and disaster rescue techniques should be made available to all the young people from the state, as it is a mountainous and disaster-prone area.

In their presentation, the participants shared how Ziplines were being used elsewhere and can be installed within few hours of flood to rescue people by evacuating them from their villages to safer and higher altitudes using high-quality mountaineering equipment such as static mountaineering rope, tandem pulleys, carabiners and jumars. These tools are lightweight and hence easy to carry to remote locations. The presenters concluded that if a few sets of these materials are made available to technically trained human beings, especially young people, in each of these flood-prone villages, many lives could be saved during emergencies. The presenters highlighted the need for providing training opportunities to women and young people to receive training in basic mountaineering, eco-tourism and life-saving skills during disasters. Not only can they obtain employment in the tourism industry, but also contribute to livelihood regeneration. It became clear in the ensuing discussions that preventive measures and prior training would minimize disaster risks in the communities. Helping communities to deal with the risks is an important aspect of disaster management and social workers can play an important role in helping communities to access these resources and facilitate training.

The 2015 Nepal earthquakes

Across the Earth each day there are hundreds of earthquakes. Most of them are too small to be detected without monitoring equipment, but some are powerful enough to destroy villages, cities, vital infrastructures like schools and hospitals, cultural artefacts, hundreds of families and communities in a few seconds. Two devastating earthquakes struck Nepal on 25 April and 12 May 2015 followed by hundreds of tremors. The many aftershocks following these events continued for many months and brought international attention and support to Nepal. There were thousands of stranded people, many of whom were evacuated and saved by rescue teams that came from other countries. Those wounded and rescued were transported to temporary shelters,
mobile clinics and local hospitals which were also damaged by the earthquake. Many local non-governmental organizations, civil society groups and international agencies appealed for immediate relief and rescue support to the communities with whom they were working. This assistance was additional to the rescue and relief efforts of the Government of Nepal. Despite all these efforts more than 10,000 lives were lost, thousands injured and over 250,000 buildings were destroyed including many of the Kathmandu Valley’s historical architectural treasures. The economic losses were estimated at anything between US$1–10 billion, with the second most probable scenario showing that damages may reach US$100 billion. The country’s GDP stood at $19.29 billion in 2013. These figures tell the tale that Nepal, as an economically weak state, will take many more years to recover from the human, economic and cultural losses of these disasters.

Nepal witnessed the more conventional responses to disasters such as that of the Nepal Red Cross which responded immediately with its wide network of volunteers. However, its assistance is very short term in nature. Organizations like the Red Cross, with their years of experience in disaster management and know-how, make a difference to the lives of disaster victims. Similarly, the Nepal situation indicates that the international aid agencies and their practices are good for short-term responses: sending in relief and rescue teams, distributing medical supplies, and setting up temporary shelters. This kind of assistance only addresses the symptoms of an earthquake and the problems of built environment. Disaster relief and management interventions that focus only on meeting victims’ immediate emergency disaster survival needs enabled some victims to resume their activities, in some cases to rebuild their lives independently. It also became evident that emergency-focused relief work only was not enough as these approaches failed to answer critical questions about how to respond to the long-term needs of survivor–victims. All those affected communities need additional psychosomatic services that are culturally appropriate and financial inputs for the long term in order to rebuild their livelihoods, and restore family ties and community cohesion.

The pressing questions then are: What are the sustainable ways to respond to such devastating disasters in Nepal, a country that is located in a seismically active zone of the Alpine–Himalayan subduction belt? Earthquakes are common at subduction zones, points where one plate moves below another. How can communities be nurtured to build their resilience to disasters? Examining these questions from a green social work perspective developed by Lena Dominelli followed her introduction of it to the Nepal School of Social Work (NSSW) students and faculty a week before the 25 April 2015 earthquake on her visit to Kathmandu yielded some pathways for Nepalese social workers involved in disasters. These were built upon subsequently through the Nepal Earthquake Virtual Helpline which helped to deliver training and support through the internet and Skype.

By mobilizing immediate internal resources and self-care methods, a small NSSW team took its first and crucial step in disaster social work. Very soon, the school became a small hub for providing information related to disaster management, a place giving shelter to community members, and a space in which local police could plan and discuss relief activities. After two weeks the school also started serving as the reference institution for a few other (foreign) agencies who came to deploy their medical and other psychosocial teams. These were well intentioned and trained, but had problems in terms of local cultural sensitivities, language and communication skills.

The students of NSSW had volunteered, and in some cases, were hired immediately by these organizations. Their reactions illustrated that collectively the social work educators and students were able to perceive opportunities, needs to be met and the importance of self-care while extending help to other survivors. They have shown a deep conviction that ‘disasters often create a political and economic atmosphere wherein extensive changes can be made more rapidly than
under normal circumstances. The collective will to take action is an advantage that should not be wasted (UNDRO, 1992: 202). As a relatively new school of social work, NSSW successfully demonstrated the use of collective leadership despite a lack of resources and the required disaster social work skills. When disasters occur irrespective of whether a country is developed or developing, social workers and other health service professionals often prioritize post-disaster counselling that includes trauma and grief management, critical incident stress debriefing (CISD), possibly because this is where the skills and funding are available. Offering such support is not always appropriate and highlights an issue that the ‘green social work model’ questions, particularly with regards to timing. Psychosocial support for many people is a matter for response later. And then, it has to be culturally relevant and fit in with traditional rituals (Dominelli, 2012).

Consequently, NSSW started its work with practical relief and support activities with 913 families in the Sipapokhari Village Development Committee of Sindupalchowk District. The team quickly realised that the need for help is huge and that all requests for help cannot be handled by NSSW alone. In this process it became difficult to locate sufficient funding to organize the disaster-devastated families in this district. Resources external to the community are required, and speedily (Dominelli, 2012). The NSSW team also became aware that relief materials alone cannot help as there are politics involved in aid distribution. The disaster-affected communities have to become empowered to become involved in disaster policy formulation and post-disaster implementation so as to access the resources required to overcome their vulnerabilities. The traditional disaster management model often only encompasses the physical hazard component and the social vulnerability component is often ignored. The same situation was observed by the Nepal earthquake disaster management. Reducing or addressing social vulnerabilities (stress, poor coping, isolation, exclusion, to name a few) can decrease both human suffering and economic losses, but much neglected by disaster bureaucracies.

Like in any other country in the region, social work education in Nepal is influenced by risk perceptions, traditional human behaviour theories, and group and community organization methods despite of the lack of coherence in the curriculum. After the one month of disaster work, the NSSW faculty started to discuss the need for more focus and content on understanding community dynamics, needs assessment skills, policy advocacy and group work skills, all materials that are necessary to build robust grassroots organizations. Such reflections on the mega-earthquakes of Nepal are marking a beginning for disaster social work to be developed and integrated into all levels of education in the country. Being aware of these issues, NSSW focused on reducing social vulnerabilities by working with communities, schools, youth groups and green social work interventions that are aimed at enhancing family and community resilience.

Conclusion and way forward

What social work lessons can be derived from these two research sites? The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2004 reported that about 75 per cent of the world’s population was affected at least once by natural disasters during the 20-year period from 1980 to 2000. This situation suggests that there lies huge need for disaster social workers and a responsibility for education systems to provide them. Increasingly, there is a necessity for a paradigm shift that reorganizes the environment for social work as a more holistic, global one, rather than a mainly Western-dominated, anthropocentric and social arena (Dominelli, 2012; Gray, Coates, and Hetherington, 2012). Dominelli (2012: 25) defines green social work as:

a form of holistic professional social work practice that focuses on the: interdependencies amongst people; the social organisation of relationships between people and the flora and
fauna in their physical habitats; and the interactions between socio-economic and physical environmental crises and interpersonal behaviours that undermine the well-being of human beings and planet earth. It proposes to address these issues by arguing for a profound transformation in how people conceptualise the social basis of their society, their relationships with each other, living things and the inanimate world.

There is urgency about greening social work education in the region as is evident from the two research sites (Uttarakhand, India) and Kathmandu (Nepal) discussed in this chapter. The focus of most disaster management programmes in the Himalayan countries remains external because the resources, both physical and human, that are deployed come from outside the disaster zone and produce delays in disaster mitigation and recovery efforts, with a consequent loss of human lives and economic resources.

The modernization of education in Himalayan countries started only after the end of the Second World War in 1945 and continued over the last few decades, but the process is far from complete due to the failure of higher education policies. Out of the five countries of the Himalayan region, two countries are landlocked (Nepal and Bhutan) and both are included in the list of least developed countries (LDCs). The political, economic, social and cultural milieu of the Himalayan region offers vast potential and abundant challenges for disaster social work. The cultures and philosophies that exist in this region are rich, complex and diverse. Professional social work, like the diversity of the region, is not a homogeneous entity in the region. Different models of social welfare and social work have developed over many decades.

The existing literature on disaster risk, rescue and rehabilitation informs social workers that the scale and complex nature of disasters in the Himalayan region requires knowledge and practical evidence from more than one form of science, as advocated by green social work. It is crucial that the natural sciences, social sciences, medical and health sciences, law, arts, humanities, social work, social policy and engineering, to name a few, should come together in interventions as a comprehensive, integrated whole (Dominelli, 2012) and not as separate disciplines that examine one aspect of the disaster and its devastating impact on human lives. The need for inter- and trans-disciplinarity is more than ever necessary for designing and implementing sustainable disaster management practices in the region. This requires reforms in higher education policies and the allocation of budgets to incubate innovations that can answer the wicked problems encountered in disaster management and community action.

The concept of ‘disaster resilience’ has been frequently used and cited in both scientific and social science literature but has been explored less in social work. The concept of resiliency is both problematic and refreshing. It is problematic when used loosely by many and refreshing when opening new areas for further interdisciplinary research. When disasters occur and threaten communities and their livelihoods, they pose challenges not only to the physical but also the social and ecological resiliency of communities. They tear at the fabric of economies, democracies and citizenship (Abel et al., 2006; Dominelli, 2012; Hayward, 2013; Nikku, 2013). Adger (2000) has used the term social resilience to highlight ways whereby human communities withstand a variety of external shocks to their social infrastructure. Other concepts like coherence, social memory, community and family coping, shared vulnerability and elements of compassion are useful to develop further the concept of social resilience in the region. Curriculum reforms that integrate disaster science as a cross-cutting theme in the higher education institutions in the region and social work are also essential, and not insulated from this process.

The exploitation of rivers in the region by building mega-dams with their resulting negative environmental and livelihood impacts are not well evidenced and are a cause of concern for green social workers. In-depth studies about the construction activities in several river valleys
Himalayan disasters

(including the Narmada, Alaknanda and Bhagirathi) have exposed the corruption, unethical practices of several construction companies and ineffective state monitoring (The Hindu, 16 December 2014). Green social workers should make use of these studies to understand the links between ecological devastation, corruption and the violation of human rights, and to use these findings in their advocacy and lobbying efforts to ensure safe livelihoods.

Solas (1990: 149) identified criteria for effective teaching that indicated that students felt ‘the most important component of overall teaching effectiveness was the relationship between the educator and themselves’. Now the questions before the social work educators of the Himalayan region are: how to ensure the relationship and connectedness that ensures effective socialwork teaching? Which methods of teaching will encourage autonomy within social work students’ learning so as to motivate them to work for themselves and significant others during disasters? How can disaster social workers ensure that the students have the required knowledge and skills to be able to work with disaster-prone communities and be successful in their own terms?

This chapter has shown how, working in collaborative partnerships with local and overseas contributors, it is possible for local schools of social work to enhance their capacities to deliver assistance in difficult circumstances and develop models of social work that can address the complex needs that arise in disasters. A holistic, green social work approach was one of these because it covered immediate needs and long-term reconstruction goals alongside caring for the physical environment. NSSW’s interventions also highlighted the importance of distributing scarce relief resources to local populations using equity principles yielded in making the best use of limited resources. There is much evidence that it is not the disasters per se but the way they are managed that presents the crux of the problem. There are bound to be conflicts in accessing these meagre resources warranting the crucial role for green social workers to facilitate this. The green social work framework provides social workers with the knowledge, skills and understandings, not only for applying appropriate interventions during the post-disaster period, but also for preparing communities to respond to disaster vulnerabilities before and after disasters strike.

References


Nikku

http://dx.doi.org/10.5751/ES-05947-180437.


UNDRO Disaster Management Training Programme, 2nd edn. Geneva: UNDRO