Introduction

Lijiang City in Southwestern China was struck by a serious earthquake in 1996. Its reconstruction strategy involved tourism and in 1997 it gained UNESCO World Heritage Status (UNESCO, 1997). The rapid development of the tourism sector occurred at the expense of the Naxi and Yi – poor indigenous communities living along the Lashi Lake watershed. Water supply to Lijiang’s tourism development had been secured by limiting these communities’ access to the lake, land and forest. These restrictions triggered a vicious cycle of overfishing, deforestation and landslides, causing further immiserisation. In 2000, the Green Watershed programme adopted the Participatory Small Watershed Management Programme (PWM) and collaborated with local government to break this vicious cycle. The PWM struggled to deal with stakeholder tensions involving government, communities and individuals pursuing ecological preservation and ecological justice. The PWM in China’s Lashi Lake Green Watershed received the UNDP’s 2015 Equator Prize in recognition of outstanding local achievement in promoting resilient, sustainable development for people, nature and resilient communities (UNESCO, 2015).

The PWM is a natural resources management programme typically found in development work to address ecological justice through participatory and gradually equitable decision-making over access to or redistribution of natural resources among communities living along a watershed. The PWM model puts together a systematic framework and toolbox useful in analysing and dealing with ecological injustice along the watershed. Addressing all forms of social and environmental injustice is at the heart of green social work (Dominelli, 2012).

As a social worker turned development action researcher, I echoed the ecological approaches of Besthorn (2012), Dominelli (2012) and Gray (2013) that social work should integrate the ecological environment as an important component of social development in social work (Hugman, 2016). As a co-manager of the PWM, I observed ample opportunities for synergy between social work and development work. I present my professional and intellectual journey in blending social work and development work and analyse the predicament of the Lashi Lake watershed communities in serving the development of tourism in Lijiang City in this chapter. I examine the intervention strategies of the Green Watershed in PWM and bottlenecks encountered and
reformulate the PWM’s implications for practice research as developmental social work turns towards green social work.

Background

Lijiang’s historical reputation dates from the 12th century when it was an important tea distribution nexus in the ancient tea horse trail between Inland China and Tibet. Moreover, the beautiful indigenous Naxi cottages and community were embedded in a wisely designed water system that effectively supplied clean water and disposed of dirty water. Moreover, the integrated ecological system of the old town, Lashi Lake and Yulong (Snow Dragon) Mountain constitute the majestic landscape full of indigenous Naxi legends and imaginings that lure millions of tourists to pay tribute.

The application for World Heritage Site Status was part of the Lijiang Municipal Government’s grand development plan for exploiting the exotic Naxi indigenous culture, ethnic settlements and architecture. The plan had been progressing slowly but speeded up after the serious 1996 Mw 7 earthquake. The central government supported Lijiang’s World Heritage Status Application to initiate large-scale tourist post-earthquake reconstruction. The enormous scale of Lijiang as a tourist destination had serious repercussions for Lashi Lake and the riverside landscape of Lijiang Old Town. Expanding and replicating Lijiang’s river town model to other towns and villages required the enlargement and securing of Lijiang’s water supply, primarily through Lashi Lake.

The rural communities around the watershed of Lashi Lake have been affected to various degrees. The Naxi tribe used to live by the lake and are considered the indigenous people, having lived there thousands of years. The Yi people living uphill are deemed migratory groups from the large Liangshan region, the ancestral home of China’s Yi people a thousand kilometres away.

Shifting social work development discourses

The textbook social work models of North America and Britain had been influential in shaping social work development discourses in Asia and other parts of the world. During my social work studies in the early 1980s, I was intrigued by the professional de-colonialisation argument (Midgley, 1981) which contained a critical reformulation of the disciplinary and institutional foundations of social work. Following the emerging quest for indigenisation and Sinification of social sciences in Taiwan, Hong Kong and China, I became more committed in developing alternatives to mainstream social work models from North America and Britain.

In the 1990s, I co-founded the Zigen Foundation in Hong Kong to work with poverty-stricken Miao ethnic communities in mountainous Guizhou. This involved collaborators trained in educational and development studies. Collaboration across these professions proved difficult. Unlike green social work, their change models relied heavily on technical transfers that paid scant attention to individual growth, group dynamics and community development. Deeper engagement with local service users was considered unnecessary and too expensive, viewing their training in capacity-building as enough.

The ‘poverty’ of Miao people in Guizhou was typified as ‘poverty amid affluence’ by mainstream development policymakers who argued that the Miao tribe was poor because they lacked ‘market’ consciousness or knowledge for exploiting the rich natural resources from the mountain for cash. They ignored the victimisation of Miao people through ecological destruction caused by over-logging following the rapid socialist industrialisation and economic expansion of the 1980s’ economic reforms and open-door policies. Indigenous tribes were victimised again
and again as central government, aware of the ecological problems, developed these resources and imposed severe protection measures over the ecological legacy that the Miao had inherited from their ancestors. This developmental mobilisation resulted in social and ecological injustices including the unfair redistribution of entitlements and rights of access to natural and cultural resources (Luk, 2005). These issues raised concerns beyond social work interventions. When Oxfam Hong Kong decided to set up a research and development centre in Beijing in 2005, I quit my university teaching job and became the director of the centre. As a development action researcher, I retained my social work identity within the development community in China.

Before I joined Oxfam, I first encountered the predicament of the Lashi Lake and Green Watershed’s PWM when I attended the Gender and Development (GAD) Annual Conference in Lijiang in 2002. The Green Watershed, an environmental NGO of Yunnan Province, reported on the damages of Lijiang’s tourism development to the communities around Lake Lashi, and therefore, the coping strategies of PWM in alleviating the plight of indigenous Naxi communities to compensate for their loss of living when arable lands were submerged into the lake. In 2003, I met Green Watershed and the PWM again in the Hydropower Summit, organised by UNDP in Beijing. From a PWM perspective, they organised dam-affected victims from various dam building projects of Yunnan to speak for their rights following involuntary displacement through the hydropower projects. Adopting PWM perspectives, the Green Watershed had been running impressive community-based development programmes and rights-based advocacy campaigns with affected people and communities across various issues of watershed development.

It came to my knowledge that Green Watershed’s PWM programme had been supported by Oxfam America after I joined Oxfam Hong Kong in 2006. After a restructuring of Oxfam programmes within China, Oxfam Hong Kong took over the strategic collaboration with Green Watershed and I became the manager to collaborate with Green Watershed in the scaling-up of the PWM programme.

The predicament of small watershed management in Lashi Lake, Lijiang

Lijiang’s development as a tourism city intensified the urban–rural bias in the redistribution of rights in natural resource management and further immiserised indigenous Naxi people living by the lake, initiating economic hardship and resistance. Lashi Lake was originally a seasonal wetland that became a lake during the rainy season. A sink hole in the lake turned it into a fertile wetland which enabled Naxi communities to grow rice, raise other cash crops and cows during the dry season. This seasonality governed the rhythms of Naxi family life and their livelihoods of fishing and cultivating crops. This changed dramatically when the sink hole was blocked and Lashi Lake dammed to form a reservoir that increased water supplies for the huge Lijiang tourist development. As water levels rose, the wetland was permanently submerged and even lakeside lands were flooded, thus severely undermining agricultural income for most of the Naxi households living by the lake. To compensate for this loss, Naxi peasants intensified their fishing in the lake, adopting many illegal and unsustainable practices. Over-fishing brought the fish stock in Lashi Lake to the brink of extinction. Previously, the Lashi Lake wetlands had attracted many migratory birds, and the local government was concerned about overfishing that jeopardised the food chain of the wetland, especially for migratory birds. Consequently, it, adopted a harsh seasonal fishing ban without taking into account its impact on Naxi communities.

Rising water levels also intensified mudslides in communities close to lake. These were the outcomes of the mid- and upstream ecological degradation of the Lashi Watershed following
the surge in economic development and reservoir project. This affected Yi communities living upstream in the upper part of the rugged mountain landscape where the temperature is cold, agricultural income is low and poverty is widespread. The older Yi people recalled that the mountain had been covered in thick forest during the 1980s. Rapid urbanisation within socialist China’s economic reforms drove the huge demand for wood. Older people reminisced about the ability to amass considerable sums of money by cutting down the forest and selling wood to local merchants downhill around Lashi Lake and Lijiang City.

Along with their Miao counterparts, the strict ecological protection measures gave a heavy blow to the Yi community living upstream. Although extensive logging was halted, illegal logging and logging downhill with support from corrupt officials remained common practices that enabled the Yi community to recover part of their living expenses. The predicament of the Naxi and Yi communities downstream and upstream of the Lashi Watershed involved coping with complex ecological injustices including urban–rural inequality and inter-ethnic group inequalities.

The participatory small watershed management programme: a coping strategy for environmental degradation

Dr Xiao Gang Yu, founder of the Green Watershed when observing the predicament of Lashi Lake, thought about the PWM when studying at the Asia Institute of Management in Thailand. PWM seemed like a governance model capable of coping with the vicious cycle of ecological injustice in natural resource management, economic losses, rivalry over natural resources, ecological and community degradation, ecological inequality and community fragmentation. Receiving support from Oxfam America in 2000, he started the Lashi Lake participatory small watershed management programme in collaboration with the Lashi township government. Township officials were initially positive towards the collaboration. They believed Naxi community grievances over economic losses would be satisfied if the programme introduced alternative income-generation activities.

The PWM organised downstream and upstream communities into mini-watershed groups or committees. Representatives from each group or committee were invited to join the Lashi Lake Watershed Management Committee that consisted mainly of officials from the relevant township government departments. Each committee could provide a platform for officials and representatives of the mini-watershed groups to come together to deliberate issues raised by upstream and downstream communities along the watershed, such as overfishing, disaster prevention, cash crops, poverty alleviation and ecological protection.

A mini-watershed group was organised downstream in Xihu village, on the west side of Lashi Lake. The Green Watershed and Xihu village used participatory rural assessments (PRAs) to devise three projects. One was to build a dam along the river bank to prevent mudslides from damaging arable land and houses. The second aimed to promote agro-forestry along the river bank to prevent soil erosion and grow fruit trees. The third encouraged households to use bio-gas digesters which could reduce logs to firewood and provide organic fertilizers for fruit trees. Older people were organised into a singing and dancing troupe to publicise environmental protection in their community performances.

To address the problem of overfishing and illegal fishing that endangered fishing stock in Lashi Lake, the Green Watershed also developed a fishery association with agreement from the township government. Halting illegal fishing would enable fishing stock to return to normal levels and would be in the interest of fishing communities and their environments. Hence, the
Green social work practice in Lijiang

Fishery association was tasked to collaborate with the government, and monitor and report illegal fishing practices to the fishing administration.

Green Watershed conducted a PRA exercise in Yangyu Chang (potato field), the upstream community inhabited by the Yi tribe to formulate poverty reduction projects. Many poor families could not afford to send their children to boarding school downhill, which left many children illiterate. Green Watershed obtained bursaries from Project Hope to enable some children to complete primary school and secondary school, as well as to graduate from college. Yi women who had been denied the opportunity to attend school requested a literacy project to help them learn to read and write Han Chinese. This learning could help them to buy and sell in the local market or seek employment downhill.

The third problem concerned food shortages for upstream mountainous communities located in rugged landscapes and cold climates where poor growing conditions for ordinary plant species lowered food production. The Green Watershed worked with the Agricultural Bureau to introduce high-yield potato species to the Yi community. A micro-credit programme was developed to deal with the issue of cash shortages. Villagers were able to get recurrent cash allocations to send their children to school, buy drugs for health problems and buy agricultural inputs for income-generation activities. Technical support was provided for villagers to raise chicken, cows and goats.

When the honeymoon ends: the limitations of development work

From a multi-stakeholders’ management perspective, development projects follow a cycle of ups and downs in interactions between government and communities. By 2003, the PWM of the Green Watershed in Lashi Lake ran into difficulties. The immediate cause was triggered by the Green Watershed’s seemingly active role in organising Naxi villagers to petition against the second phase of the enlargement of Lashi Lake. The township government cast Green Watershed as a trouble-maker. During a research interview conducted in 2010, Dr Yu explained that he might have exercised poor judgment in endorsing the villagers’ position when asked to assist in a petition to be presented to the county government. Those who signed the petition wanted to express their discontent over the tiny compensation offered and economic difficulties they would encounter if more land were to be submerged. When the time for the rally arrived, villagers withdrew, leaving Green Watershed to be identified as the petition organiser. Furthermore, Green Watershed joined a nationwide environmental campaign against hydropower in advocating for the rights of involuntarily displaced people across southwestern China and along the Mekong River. The involvement of the Green Watershed in those highly sensitive campaigns put it under stringent surveillance by the security authorities. The local authorities even threatened to expel Green Watershed from Lashi Lake. The antagonistic attitude of local government turned the activists of the mini-watershed group away from the projects and activities of the Green Watershed.

Moreover, collaboration with local authorities had turned fishing communities against the Fishery Association and Green Watershed. The monitoring and reporting of illegal fishing practices had angered fisherman as well as heightened distrust and hostility towards the community workers and activist. Activists of the Fishery Association complained of being mocked by fellow villagers for betraying their communities and sometimes even their fishing gears were damaged or stolen as acts of revenge.

When Oxfam Hong Kong assumed co-management of the PWM in 2006, the programme almost became paralyzed. The antagonistic relationship with the township government persisted,
although the government officials had stopped threatening to expel Green Watershed, having suspended the collaboration agreement and ignored Green Watershed’s presence. Green Watershed began to realise that their organising approach was elite-biased and when elites were withdrawn from the programme, Green Watershed was unable to solicit support from ordinary villagers.

As in other developmental approaches, Dr Yu, the organisers of Green Watershed and the PWM could provide conceptual and institutional rhetorical devices; however development workers lacked the tactics and skills to implement the participatory watershed management model. They were not equipped to work with individuals, groups and communities, and to cope with being at the centre of a storm.

**Developmental social work: the interface of environmental work and social work**

As a development practitioner trained in social work and sociology, I adopted the development workers as potential or quasi-social workers. Development work and social work share similar values around social justice, ecological justice, and empowerment of individuals, groups and community (Dominelli, 2012). Social work has an urban tradition bias developed in liberal, democratic capitalist societies, and has limited working models addressing ecological issues in developing societies within semi-capitalist, authoritarian political contexts. For social work, PWM provides a heuristic conceptual and institutional model for NGOs to work with rural communities along the small watershed to deliberate and negotiate collaboration, benefits and risk sharing. A lot of adjustment is necessary for deliberative consultation mechanisms to accommodate authoritarian contexts, and intervention strategies that cope with income generation, ecological preservation, community organising and community building for sustainable development.

Besides providing an institutional design for resource management, PWM provided few tactics and skills for development workers to employ. Common skills are limited to a rigid routinized participatory methodology in visualisation, facilitation and decision-making processes within the community. In many cases, PWM developed mini-watershed groups and watershed management committees, but did not take seriously community mobilisation and organisation. The formation of groups and committees could easily mask nuanced dynamics and interactions among individuals, groups, community and the environment, which requires subtle tactics and skill sets that social workers could provide.

Such contexts could ensure development work and social work supplement each other. The synergy occurred during the organising of the Rural Community Work Learning Network which I collaborated on with an action researcher with a social work background. The learning network pulled together organisers from conventional development NGOs including the Green Watershed, leaders of peasant cooperatives and social work action researchers (Yang and Luk, 2013). Development work provides conceptual and institutional frameworks and strategies for community workers to formulate needs-based to rights-based approaches to work on meso- and macro-development issues ranging from technical training, income generation, community enterprises, cooperatives, gender equality, social inclusion, natural resource management through strategies affecting service delivery, capacity-building, and policy advocacy domestically or transnationally.

Social work can contribute to development work by providing more subtle intervention strategies and skills in working with activists, community groups and entire communities. My observations of the Rural Community Work Learning Network revealed that community workers or quasi-social workers had to learn the arts of switching from imposing organisation
missions to addressing the interface with everyday lives; transforming income-generating activities to group organising and community-building strategies; working with authoritarian leadership and its transformation; dealing with jealousy, competition, rivalry, conflict resolution, sharing interests between groups and the community. In sum, social work has to blend meeting pressing needs, community organising and strategic interests in gender equity, community development, ecological protection and the like (Luk, 2012).

Using these general principles of developmental social work, I worked with the Green Watershed to assess the state of community organising, capacity-building of organisers and relationship with the township government. We came up with a two-year PWM strategy plan. To remedy the relationship with local government, Yu devised a strategy to re-shape collaboration with local government. He entered competition to ‘renowned’ institutions and environmental awards for PWM. The Lashi PWM got a Development Marketplace Project from the World Bank to develop the Water User Association. Furthermore, PWM got the Environmental Award from the SEE Foundation, China’s largest environmental protection association formed by famous entrepreneurs, and another environmental award from Ford Motors. The grants and awards from national and multi-lateral organisations strengthened the legitimacy of Green Watershed. Furthermore, Yu encouraged local officials to participate in a good governance workshop offered by the School of Public Management in China’s prestigious Tsinghua University, usually regarded as the MIT of China. These efforts stabilised a working relationship with local government.

The PWM in Lashi Lake was reformulated to substantiate the participatory watershed management mechanism and improve joint ownership of the programme with the local township government by undertaking joint strategic planning. This would enable Green Watershed to understand better local government goals and plans. This incorporated the interests of local government, and emphasised better formulation of coping strategies.

The PWM shared the values and empowering strategies of Asset Based Community Development (ABCD). It emphasised the utilisation of the community’s ecological, cultural and social assets in developing a virtuous cycle of income generation, livelihood improvement, community cohesion, protection of environmental resources and sustainable development. Capacity-building initiatives supported community organisers in identifying community assets and organising strategies, and coping with the dilemmas of mobilisation and interest-based conflicts.

A critical dilemma for environmental NGOs working with grassroots communities is the practical, opportunistic and conservative attitudes which eschew empowering environmental approaches. Developing empathetic understanding is a critical principle and skill for development workers. Instead of simply convincing community activists to follow the principles of PWM, workers were encouraged to develop empathetic understanding of their situations in the community, government and ecology. Empathetic understanding could help workers to develop various strategies that aligned the interests of individuals, groups and communities with ecological preservation. Building capacity among activists would enable Green Watershed to facilitate informed and strategic decision-making in communities. Local community conservatism is usually linked to a lack of ownership, poorly imagined possibilities, inadequate decision-making, strategies and competency, and finally, control of the external environment. If the community could understand alternative possibilities, local activists could devise indigenous ways of imagining and doing things.

Strategies were also formulated to broaden and deepen community engagement in various mini-watershed groups using community and group work approaches to enable development workers to formulate diverse strategies for mobilising communities and develop potential activists beyond elite models. This strategy could also solicit broader community support and organisation for future work.
The final strategy concerned community group sustainability in PWM. Since the mini-watershed groups were developed largely through external support, many such groups ceased when external support was withdrawn. Green Watershed formulated strategies to increase ownership of these organisations, develop resources through direct contact with foundations, and generate self-sustaining income-based activities. Community-based peasant associations and cooperatives were proposed as potential organising modes for community workers and activists to consider.

Through these strategies, PWM assisted in restructuring individual community organisations. For example, a solid organisation and leadership in Xihu facilitated the broadening of community engagement and encouraged more fellow villagers to participate in agricultural training, fruit cultivation and organising fruit growers cooperatives. The community also explored organic farming methods to reduce agricultural pollution to Lashi Lake and increase income by selling higher-priced organic fruits. Finally, alternative organisational forms were explored to transform the mini-watershed groups into local community initiatives, such as a peasant association with a cooperative at the core, simultaneously promoting organic farming, ecological protection and participation in watershed management issues.

The Fishery Association was to reduce conflicts of interest by aligning with the fishing community. To avoid antagonism and direct confrontation in monitoring illegal fishing practices, Green Watershed worked with the Fishery Association to develop bird watching tours and to seek public funding and social donations to increase fishing stocks in Lashi Lake. This objective was achieved as fishing stocks rose gradually, restoring the public image of the Fishery Association and proving that the previous polemical campaign was necessary and appropriate. Eventually, the Fishery Association also explored how to develop a fishing cooperative that would sell authentic Lashi fish in the burgeoning tourism market.

Eco-tourism in the upstream Yi community incorporated community engagement and ownership. Green Watershed broadened the community activist base and created platforms for villagers to participate in community-based eco-tourism. Green Watershed workers and activists from the Yi community were supported in visiting other community tourism models, so that they could differentiate tourism models, make informed decisions and learn various tactics and skills for benefit sharing and sustainable development in their community.

In 2009, a local Naxi businessman threatened the Yi community with a large-scale eco-tourism project. He won political and financial support from the local government by framing the project as an ecological resettlement programme which was win/win for Yi communities living in poverty and ecological degradation. The project proposed to resettle the Yi community from the high altitude and rugged mountain to warm, fertile land by Lashi Lake. Those promises would be hard to realise as arable land by the lakeside was already occupied and the developer would be unlikely to spend large sums to procure these. Since the local boss had strong political support from the local government, the Yi villagers lacked confidence in withstanding pressure from the local developer.

The viability of community-led eco-tourism required that Green Watershed and community leaders urgently demonstrated to the Yi community that it was an alternative to the ‘faked’ ecological resettlement. Community-led eco-tourism had to be geared up to boost the morale of the villagers and ensure community cohesion in standing together to withstand the pressure. To deepen community engagement and benefit sharing in community tourism, various groups were mobilised to capitalise on their interest and abilities. Young people were trained as trail guides; they designed ecological trails with the help of older people so that local knowledge of the legends, history, landscape, plants and way of life could be incorporated as cultural learning for tourists. The embroidery skills of Yi women were used to teach others to prepare Yi souvenirs.
for tourists; they were also eager to learn cooking skills to serve the tourists. Some young people were also trained to promote tours in the inns and hotels of Lijiang City. A capacity-building forum was organised to provide various best practices in dealing with the dilemmas of tourism development, benefit sharing and cultural preservation.

**Discussion**

The Green Watershed’s PWM in Lashi Lake exposed the ecological injustice inherent in development projects and NGO endeavours to empower local communities to cope with the vicious cycle of ecological injustice and immiserisation, predating ecological resources and leading to further immiserisation and ecological degradation. At the meso-level, PWM, like other natural resource management models, has elaborated frameworks and participatory tools for analysing the ecological injustice embedded along river courses and watersheds. It also provided the institutional framework for building the platform for deliberation, bargaining, collaboration, benefits and risk sharing along the watershed to promote an equitable and fair natural resource management system.

The reformulation of Green Watershed’s PWM through developmental social work reveals how social work, particularly green social work as espoused by Dominelli (2012), can complement the participatory watershed management model. Development work and green social work share common goals in promoting social justice, as well as adopt similar rights-based and empowerment approaches. Development work also has a number of conceptual, analytical and working approaches for community workers to utilise. Working approaches include those from needs-based to rights-based approaches to work on meso- and macro-development issues including technical training, income generation, community enterprises, cooperatives, gender equality, social inclusion, natural resource management through strategies for service delivery, capacity-building, and policy advocacy domestically and transnationally.

As the bottlenecks of the Lashi Lake case unfolded, the PWM provided a working direction and guidance. However, it could not address the practical concerns and dilemmas of development workers dealing with individuals, groups and communities in subtle social, economic and political realities, and conflictual situations. The pilot project substantiating the PWM through the social work lens was intended to complement sustainable environmentally based development work by facilitating development workers to develop more subtle intervention strategies and skills in working with activists, community groups and communities. When it does so, it becomes green developmental social work.

During the co-management of PWM in Lashi Lake, the green developmental social work approach has generated more in-depth understanding of the dynamics of local state–community–group–individual–environment interaction in watershed management, and highlighted the need for further development in community intervention strategies. This includes skill sets in integrating group work, community work and casework. Reflecting upon my co-management experience of PWM, the reformulated intervention strategies include the following:

1. Development workers have to acquire the arts of transformation to address economic needs, organise groups and community building, and move from problem-based to strength-based approaches. The experiences of the Xihu mini-watershed group demonstrated that communities and local governments facing ecological problems have high expectations that external interventions will address practical problems in poverty reduction and minor infrastructures. Quick wins can become platforms to secure engagement from the community and local government, and provide the momentum for the potential transformation of
community strategies to cope with more subtle and complicated institutional and structural issues where ecological injustice is embedded.

2 In addressing issues of sustainable development, development workers should avoid a direct confrontation with the majority of the community. The tortuous journey of the Fishery Association demonstrated that development workers should not directly impose their organisational mission and strategies, but patiently observe and analyse the subtle community dynamics in managing ecological resources and identify the appropriate issues and moments to intervene. Building social capital is fundamental before launching direct campaigns against predatory environmental practices. Once the relationship with the community is broken, it takes years to repair. More strategic manoeuvres should be devised to understand the dynamics of ecological degradation and to devise wise strategies to create solidarity rather than fragmentation in pursuing sustainable development.

3 Group work and community work approaches are instrumental in substantiating group and community organising strategies in development work. The PWM, like other development projects, relies on a few elites acting as agents that represent the community (Mohan and Stokke, 2000). Many development projects focusing on community as a whole fail to identify and address cleavages within the community. Group work and community work from a green social work perspective can help development workers facilitate better democratic leadership, active participation in community groups, and broader community participation, as well as secure the rights of minorities in inclusive and sustainable development (Dominelli, 2012).

4 Amid the economic hardship brought forth by ecological degradation and immiserisation, social work should play a role to help individuals and families in difficulties by linking social or public resources, strengthening family and social support. Moreover, community activists are always enmeshed in tensions and conflicts involving community divisions and the government. In most cases the blows were fierce when their families withdrew support. Social workers should be able to provide personal counselling to activists to enhance their resilience in coping with these challenges.

5 Green Watershed’s PWM has employed a number of working approaches including needs-based and rights-based approaches working on meso- and macro-development issues ranging from technical training, minor infrastructure construction, income generation, community enterprises, cooperatives, gender equality, social inclusion, natural resource management through strategies in service delivery, capacity-building, and policy advocacy domestically or transnationally. These approaches can enrich the toolbox from which social workers select options. Social workers can further substantiate these approaches and tools by integrating group and community organising skills.

6 Developmental social work in small watershed management programmes reflects the many projects that are involved in the distribution or redistribution of interest, entitlements, access to natural resources or compensatory measures. These issues could intensify active and passive rivalry within community groups and the community. Although the programme attempted to emphasise the values and norms of equity and benefit sharing, there is limited practice research that documents the methodology and skills used by development work and social work to demonstrate alternatives.

7 This case indicates that natural resources management issues often occur in areas where indigenous communities reside – an issue also highlighted by green social work which critiques industrial neoliberal capitalist development (Dominelli, 2012). Development work has to develop indigenous knowledge-based approaches that emphasise the importance of indigenous knowledge, methodology and data collection, as well as use the findings
in ecological protection and community organising. Social work has already developed strategy and skills in cultural competency to facilitate the sensitivity of social workers to the ethnicity of service users (Dominelli, 1988; Xiang and Luk, 2013). Indigenous knowledge approaches and cultural competency can complement each other in developing green developmental social work perspectives and skill sets to work with indigenous communities.

The predicament of Green Watershed’s PWM in confronting authoritarian government, in most developing countries, may be the norm rather than the exception. In developing countries, the state usually takes advantage of ambiguous property rights regarding natural resources in indigenous regions by arbitrarily blocking access to or selling natural resources to other parties (Martinez-Alíer, 2014). Participation within authoritarian government structures seems full of tensions and contradictions, which natural resource management programmes have to address. Ingenious strategies have to be developed to find ways to optimise affected peoples’ rights and contributions to green social work.

Conclusion

The PWM revealed that social work and development work complement each other on multi-dimensional levels within their working models to increase the resilience of communities in coping with ecological degradation and injustice, and can promote green social work. Our reformulation of PWM through a green developmental social work perspective generated many strategical, tactical and skill issues for development and social workers to develop further.

My own experience ended in 2010 and I was unable to oversee how the developmental social work strategies in the PWM were implemented or modified, or advise additional capacity development for development workers coping with practical challenges on the ground. The programme has subsequently suffered from worker turnover, gradual withdrawal of Oxfam funding, and the inertia of communities and local government.

In 2015 being awarded the Equator Prize by UNESCO (2015) boosted the work of Green Watershed and the communities it encompassed. This enabled the programme to enhance resilience in indigenous communities when addressing climate change, amid the immiserisation and ecological injustices that resulted from the boost to tourism development that emerged when Lijiang City gained World Heritage Site Status in 1997.

For the past two years, the Chinese government has advocated that social work strengthens its role in rural poverty eradication (China Daily, 2016). In China, rural poverty is ecology-related and has resulted from poor natural resource management. The analysis and reflection from the developmental social work approach of PWM should provide a direction for practice research among green social workers and researchers dealing with social development issues of environmental justice.

References


