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Green social work in theory and practice

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Green social work (GSW) is a transdisciplinary, holistic approach to environmental crises that has challenged the social work profession to incorporate its principles, values and concern over environmental degradation, and the disasters associated with this into daily, routine, mainstream practice. Whether arising through air, water and soil pollution caused by industrial contaminants or ‘natural’ hazards, these have damaged people’s health and well-being, and exploited the environment for the gain of the few. Thus, environmental crises perpetrate environmental injustices that must be eradicated before their deleterious effects become irreversible. The green in green social work highlights the imperative of caring for the beautiful living planet human beings inhabit. The earth that sustains us has its bounty currently exploited by 1 per cent of the population for itself. Its destruction impacts heavily on the 99 per cent.

Poor people live and work in the degraded environments that feed the industrial system. Adults simultaneously struggle to obtain basic necessities including food, clothing, housing, healthcare, social services, and education for themselves and their children; and sustain their communities and geographical spaces. This calls for a rethinking of the economy – how it distributes goods and services; how it uses the earth’s physical resources; how it uses and treats human labour, animals and plants; how the products of human labour are distributed; and what economic alternatives can be developed to meet the need of each human being now to enjoy a decent standard of living, without destroying the earth for future generations. Neoliberalism, the current socio-economic system, is not fit for purpose within countries or globally. Neoliberalism is steeped in inegalitarianism. Thus, a new system has to be redistributive and regenerative. It has to ensure that every human being has his/her share of the earth’s goods and services, and that the earth’s capacity to regenerate itself is maintained. The global trends towards hyper-urbanisation and hyper-industrialisation, and creation of ugly urbanity for people to live in, must stop.

Why are these concerns a matter for all social workers? The answer is simple. Social workers are the professionals responsible for the health and well-being of those with whom they work. Their practice engages those whose lives are undermined by the lack of access to resources...
and opportunities in myriad settings. Thus, they have a professional and moral responsibility to examine why service users are in such situations and work with them for transformative change. Also, social work services should be universal. Within this framework, social workers should also work with the 1 per cent who own more than they can possibly use, and engage them in thinking about how they can contribute to the development of new, alternative economic systems that do not exploit people or the earth – its flora, fauna, minerals and physical environment.

Consequently, green social workers can ask awkward questions about the direction of humanity’s travel: Who benefits from the current socio-economic arrangements and governance systems? Who loses? How can the earth’s bounty be shared more equitably? How can the geographic spaces within which people’s sense of identity and belonging reside be enhanced and preserved? To contribute to answering these questions, green social work includes the incorporation of environmental justice within the profession’s social justice agenda, alongside that of critiquing neoliberal socio-economic forms of development and highlighting the duty to care for the earth in sustainable ways so that it can meet the needs of contemporary and future generations. Such commitment is embedded in acknowledging and addressing the interconnectedness and interdependencies that exist between living beings and inanimate things and maintaining a sustainable planet.

Addressing environmental concerns allows social workers to adopt a number of diverse roles ranging from being coordinators of practical assistance to developing community and individual resilience in responding to disasters throughout the disaster cycle – prevention, preparedness, immediate relief, recovery, and reconstruction. And, it challenges social workers to understand the porous borders between ‘natural’ and (hu)man-made disasters and include environmental rights in their conceptual framework of social justice at the local, national, regional and international levels (Dominelli, 2012). There is no area of human life that is beyond the remit of green social workers. Their interventions are based on engaging victim–survivors of disasters to coproduce solutions to problems that are defined by those in the communities within which they are working. These should be inclusive and innovative. Green social work has initiated a paradigm shift in conceptualising environmental social work, away from leaving knowledge in the hands of environmental scientists into mutual sharing of scientific and lay expertise and embedding the coproduction of disaster action plans in mainstream social work values and empowering practice.

In this chapter, I describe the beginnings of green social work, its theoretical framework and value-base for practice, and its commitment to social change, including at the policy level, especially as it concerns the elimination of poverty and equitable distribution of resources from the local to the global. This aim is central to reducing vulnerabilities among the world’s poorest and most marginalised peoples before, during and after their differentiated experiences of disasters. I conclude with a call for social workers to include environmental concerns in their routine practice and social work curriculum for training and practice.

Developing the Green Social Work Framework

The absence of social workers’ voices during the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami when 250,000 people were killed in the 12 countries affected by its destructive waves spurned me to contemplate collective social work responses through the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) to change this state of affairs. A week after this disaster, IASSW established the Rebuilding People’s Lives After Disasters Network (RIPL) to do this (Dominelli, 2013). I became its first chair and later RIPL turned into IASSW’s Disaster Intervention, Climate
Change and Sustainability Committee, which I currently head. Strengthening social work’s visibility in disaster interventions also led me to undertake research in this arena, and produced the ‘Internationalising Institutional and Professional Practice’ (IIPP) research project (Dominelli, 2015) funded by the UK’s Economic and Social Science Research Council (ESRC).

When I was appointed a co-director in the Institute of Hazards, Risk and Resilience (IHRR) at Durham University, I started to work with physical scientists including geologists, earth scientists, volcanologists and geographers to think about the science underpinning natural hazards such as earthquakes and volcanoes and the (hu)man-made ones including climate change, floods and poverty in projects that were funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (Wistow et al., 2015) and the Natural and Environmental Research Council (Dominelli et al., 2015). The ensuing research interactions made me realise how little social workers knew about how natural hazards became disasters, and highlighted the importance of thinking differently about the social dimensions of disasters, and in appreciating the intricate connections between the animate and inanimate elements of the ecosphere, and between the so-called ‘natural’ aspects of a disaster and its ‘social’ ones.

Social justice is an integral part of social work, and strongly embedded in its value of equality. The inclusion of struggles for environmental justice within an environmental framework is a critical and significant part of green social workers’ activities. It surfaces when redressing complex issues involving environmental degradation, vulnerability among marginalised populations, and disaster responses. Contributing to these involves green social workers in highlighting the:

- Human rights violations that go hand-in-glove within degraded environments.
- Socio-economic political systems that fail to hold multinational corporations accountable for destroying environmental resources and perpetuating structural inequalities.
- Inadequate governance structures that discourage local communities from acting as co-producers of solutions to the environmental problems they encounter.
- The global, inequitable distribution of the world’s physical resources and conflicts that ensue among those seeking to acquire a share of the earth’s ‘natural’ resources.
- Neglect of cultural diversity including the undermining of aboriginal, indigenous and/or nomadic lifestyles, knowledges and expertise.
- Absence of local environmentally friendly community relationships that acknowledge interdependencies between people and the environment.
- Inadequate care of natural resources and poor environment-enhancing regional and national policies.
- Lack of universal publicly funded provisions for health and social care services that promote the well-being of people and their capacity to prevent, mitigate and recover from disasters.
- Lack of care for the physical environment in its own right (i.e. as an end in itself).
- Disregard of the environmental damage caused by armed conflicts including the carbon dioxide discharged and ensuing environmental degradation.
- Lack of recognition of the interdependencies among peoples, and between people and the biosphere/ecosystem.
- Absence of resilient built infrastructures, resources and communities (Dominelli, 2012).

Addressing these issues requires social workers to engage with the knowledge and expertise held by other disciplines and community residents. Accordingly, green social workers have sought to develop transdisciplinarity to highlight the links between the physical and social sciences
in ‘doing science differently’ (Lane et al., 2011) with local communities. In Dominelli (2016), I differentiate between multidisciplinarity, interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity as follows:

- **Multidisciplinarity** consists of a group of disciplines working together, but with little or no attempt to develop a coherent team ethos of working together, learning from each other or developing new approaches as a result of their interactions.
- **Interdisciplinarity** comprises of a number of disciplines working together as one team in a specific project with specific aims that all those involved are aiming to fulfil, with a limited focus on how their work can be facilitated through some common approach or theoretical framework.
- **Transdisciplinarity** involves a number of disciplines working together on a specific project using a common holistic theoretical and practice framework. Specific endeavours are made to develop joint understandings about a problem that draws on the: local, indigenous, and expert knowledges; development of new approaches; considerations about how an issue might be resolved through coproduced solutions that engage with all forms of expertise; and that provides for changes in current policies and practices.

Physical scientists had highlighted the dangers of human activities on the environment some time earlier (e.g. Rachel Carson’s [1962] *Silent Spring*). She spelt out the dangers that chemicals in everyday artefacts such as pesticides in farming and cleaning fluids in the household were causing by polluting the soil and water. Some people’s behaviour changed as a result of reading it. President J. F. Kennedy initiated a scientific committee to investigate pesticides. I read the book as a teenager shortly after publication, and it engaged my interest in the topic. At that point, I was more intrigued by chemistry’s capacity to solve the problem, rather than understanding that changing people’s socio-economic behaviour was possibly a much better solution.

On one level, social work’s concern with the environment is not new. It is a thread deeply embedded in its professional foundations. Social work began with a focus on the person-in-the-environment with the Settlement Movement in Victorian London’s East End (Younghusband, 1978). However, its emphasis on the physical environment, especially built infrastructures such as housing, was lost with the ecological school of thought that followed Brofenbrenner (1979) who emphasised social systems as the environment within which people were located. By the 1990s, a number of American social work academics (Rogge, 1994, 2000; Besthorn, 2012; Besthorn and Meyer, 2010) and Canadian scholars (Coates, 2005; Ungar, 2002) had again raised the physical environment as an issue for social workers to take seriously. In the UK, I (Dominelli, 2002) had tried to include the physical environment in holistic, anti-oppressive approaches to social work, depicting it the anti-oppressive social work chart I devised. But, at that point, the holistic, transdisciplinary approach to the theory and practice of green social work had yet to be developed. Moreover, these strands have begun to come closer together as more authors collaborate on environmental theory development (Coates and Gray, 2012; Coates et al., 2013; Drolet et al., 2015; Alston and McKinnon, 2016).

While the social work academy saw a general narrowing of the profession’s wider remit, individual practitioners, particularly those embedded in community action, had responded to environmental concerns by supporting poor communities ravaged by different polluting agents released by chemical and nuclear explosions (e.g. Bhopal, India in 1984 and Chernobyl in the Ukraine in 1986, respectively). In 2010, with the support of Angie Yuen, then-president of IASSW, I initiated and completed the process whereby IASSW joined the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This venture was a response to increased academic interest in social work’s roles in the environment (Dominelli, 2011). To
Green social work: a new paradigm

promote green social work in the UK, I returned to community social work traditions to engage a local community in Durham in renewable energy as a way of exiting fuel poverty and unemployment through transdisciplinary green social work approaches (Dominelli, 2012).

Green social workers also support people who are injured physically and psychosocially during disasters and provide practical help such as water, food, medicine, clothing, shelter and family reunification. They also assist in repairing damaged environments and facilitate longer-term transformative initiatives that develop environmentally just, sustainable, life-enhancing forms of being and doing throughout the disaster cycle. Doing this in the reconstruction phase when preventative measures are being considered is especially important because most external actors and civil society organisations leave a site within six months of a disaster. Also, for those whose mental health is undermined by disasters, social workers provide psychosocial support (IASC, 2007). Indeed, this dimension is the area of social work intervention most often embedded in public consciousness. Although when the appropriate time to engage psychosocial workers and how this service should be provided is contested (Sim and Dominelli, 2016), the IASC (Inter-Agency Standing Committee) has developed guidelines, the IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings, for these practitioners.

Additionally, in completing community-based coproduced actions, green social workers carry out duties such as:

• Assessing need among victim–survivors and disaster-affected communities.
• Coordinating and delivering goods and services to alleviate individual suffering and rebuild communities.
• Assisting family reunification, and ensuring children’s rights are safeguarded and that they are well–cared for, preferably in families and communities with whom they already have a relationship or they know.
• Supporting individuals and communities in rebuilding their lives, developing resilience and building individual and community capacities to minimise future risks and better prepare people to survive future calamitous events.
• Advocating, lobbying and mobilising for changes that protect the environment and all other living things, mitigate future disasters and reduce losses in this sphere.

The Green Social Work Framework encourages practitioners to become involved with confidence in environment-enhancing activities, because green social work is not completely outside their knowledge-base. It draws on generic social work skills known to all social workers. Additionally, it is:

• Transdisciplinary.
• Evidence based, including undertaking its own social work-based research.
• Community based and participative throughout action and research processes.
• Social change oriented because it links its research analyses to changing policy, practice, socio-economic systems and identifying future research questions.
• Coproduces community–based social action throughout the disaster cycle.
• Coproduces solutions/action plans to grow resilience at local, national and international levels.

Green social work reshapes social work’s generic skills by emphasising the coproduction of knowledge and action in transdisciplinary, empowering processes that operate before a disaster, throughout it and afterwards in reconstruction endeavours. It does so by engaging local residents
in the development of resilience as people and communities recover from the impact of a disaster. Green social workers are driven by egalitarian values and have the capacity to intervene in all types of disasters, adding to their personal knowledge-base by forming transdisciplinary partnerships.

The steps that green social workers undertake in their interventions are visually encapsulated in the green social work model. Its framework for practice is an iterative one in which interventions are constantly being co-evaluated through reflective thought and community engagement, and altered as appropriate after collective co-evaluation involving practitioners and local residents. The steps undertaken in this process are expressed in Figure 1.1.

Green social work is a form of community social work that addresses both (hu)man-made disasters including poverty because that condition exacerbates vulnerabilities, and natural hazards which lead to disasters such as earthquake-induced ones. The green social worker engages community residents and other relevant stakeholders. These can include local government officials, elected representatives, civil servants, civil society organisations and businesses to coproduce research, documents and solutions to the issues they face. Together, they begin by identifying and then assessing the hazards and vulnerabilities which are evident in their social, cultural, political, economic and physical environments to compile their risk assessments. Having done that, they then focus on coproduced resilience-building exercises. Risk assessments should include self-care.

The science behind risk assessments in social work is imperfect, and has to be used with caution (Swift and Callahan, 2010). However, used carefully, risk assessments are important in responding to current and future disasters because they assist in mitigation planning, especially around people’s safety and security. Mitigation planning is part of reducing the risk of hazards, ‘natural’ and (hu)man-made, and hence constitute an important element in the formation of preventative strategies and their subsequent implementation. Engaging local residents in risk assessments is an interesting process that requires green social workers to use an array of communication tools ranging from audio-visuals to games, depending on age and capacities, including literary skills among those individuals involved.

Figure 1.1 The green social work model: a framework for practice
These risk assessments form the basis of action plan developments which are locality based. Engaging residents in co-formulating solutions is not the prerogative of social workers alone. Lane et al. (2011) describe their community engagement in devising solutions to flooding in Pickering, England. Their efforts have prevented flooding in that location since, and expose the advantages of good community work practice in bringing physical and social science knowledges together with community-based expertise. Discussing this example with Stuart Lane contributed to my conceptualising green social work as transdisciplinary.

Action plans should be forward-looking and contain preventative dimensions that mitigate future risks. If this were to be the case, when a shock turns into a disaster, people would be better prepared to survive it. A shock is caused by an adverse event that undermines a person’s or community’s sense of stability and causes them to feel less able to cope than usual (i.e. they experience a reduction in their capacity to respond with resilience). Resilience in social work terms is an emergent property with fractured characteristics aimed at ‘rebalancing a system and refocusing . . . [that] involves preventative measures, crisis responses, and long-term reconstruction and is essential in tackling structural inequalities’ (Dominelli, 2012: 65). When a shock occurs, it creates an emergency that cannot be solved purely at the local level. Individuals and diverse communities and organisations from the local to the global respond to re-examine risks, devise risk-proofing measures and plans for immediate responses and their implementation, and develop future resilience locally.

Resilience strategies became a resource and foundation for action plan implementation. These have to be contextualised; adjusted for scale, locality and culture; and disaster specific. Once implemented, it is crucial that the action plan is evaluated constantly. Evaluation should not be treated as a one-off event. Coproduced action plan evaluations are important activities at the community scale. Evaluation is also a dimension of generic social work practice. This should make it easier for practitioners to understand the processes involved, although they will be exercising their skills in a new arena – the environment. These include key social work concepts that green social workers comprehend already (e.g. risk, vulnerability, adaptation and resilience). The usefulness of generic social work skills in green social work means that mainstream social workers do not have to feel intimidated by moving into a new area of practice.

Furthermore, practitioners working for environmental justice aim to uphold the duty to care for others and in turned be cared for by them. This is a relationship that includes the duty to care for the planet that humanity inhabits – earth, to ensure its sustainability. In carrying out this task green social workers seek to:

- Support people endeavouring to affirm their human, social and environmental rights.
- Support people in protecting the environment; enhancing the well-being of humans and the flora, fauna and physical ecosphere; and securing environmental justice.
- Mobilise people in diverse local, national, regional and international partnerships and alliances to promote residents’ well-being and the earth’s health.
- Empower marginalised individuals, communities and groups, especially those aiming to influence commercial interests, institutional routines, policymakers and other decision-makers engaged in determining environmental policies and practices that impact upon the environment, especially how it is exploited and misused.
- Mobilise residents to protect their local environment (Dominelli, 2012).

The support of social workers, their managers and government is critical to mainstreaming green social work in the social work curriculum in both the academy and fields of practice. The
roles that green social workers can play in reducing environmental degradation and mitigating environmental and social vulnerabilities are those that they are also familiar with:

- **Protectors.** This involves not harming people or the planet’s flora, fauna or physical environment.
- **Consciousness-raisers.** Practitioners can share scenarios about reducing greenhouse gases, developing alternative models of sustainable socio-economic development and acting as cultural interpreters conveying information across diverse settings, disciplines, professions, organisations, and societies and their different cultures.
- **Lobbyists.** Practitioners can promote preventative measures locally, including built infrastructures (e.g. housing and health facilities) while incorporating local conditions, traditions and resources; advocating at national and international levels for policy changes that facilitate access to green technologies, and equitable sharing of resources regardless of country boundaries; and tackling (hu)man-induced climate change.
- **Coordinators.** Practitioners can coordinate residents, multiple stakeholders, opinion-formers, resources and activities.
- **Mobilisers.** Green social workers can assist communities to reduce carbon emissions and care for the physical environment.
- **Translators.** Green social workers can translate and make easily accessible local knowledges to scientific experts, and scientific expertise to local communities.
- **Co-producers.** Green social workers can engage scientific experts and local residents in sharing their respective knowledges to find new solutions to identified environmental problems.
- **Dialogue agents.** Green social workers, physical scientists, other professionals and local policymakers can work with residents to engage opinion-formers in the media in dialogues that aim to change environmental policies locally, nationally and internationally.
- **Curriculum changers.** Green social work academics can engage in research and argue for curricula changes that cover climate change, sustainable development and disaster interventions to build resilience within individuals and communities (adapted from Dominelli, 2011: 438).

Environmental issues have to become integrated into mainstream social work curricula. Carrying this out effectively requires the training of social work educators, managers and practitioners, most of whom are unaware of these concerns. Once these changes occur, they can act as advocates for the sustainable care of the environment in research, teaching and practice. Additionally, it would enable them to undertake the consciousness-raising that has to occur to change behaviour among local residents and society more generally.

### Creating the green social work curriculum for community-based disaster risk reduction and sustainable development

Community-based disaster risk reduction and sustainable development is high on the policy agenda of the UNISDR (United Nations International Strategy on Disaster Reduction). UNISDR agreed the *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030* at Sendai, Japan in 2015 as the successor to the *Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) 2000–2015*. IASSW was represented at Sendai and social work researchers including myself presented papers there. In the next 15 years, the UNISDR seeks to use the *Sendai Framework* to achieve substantial reductions of disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health; and protect the economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets of persons, businesses, communities and countries. The
Sendai Framework aims to reduce existing disaster risks through seven targets and four priorities for action. Its four priorities are to:

- Understand disaster risk.
- Strengthen disaster risk governance better to manage disaster risk.
- Invest in disaster reduction to build resilience.
- Enhance disaster preparedness for effective responses and ‘building back better’ expressed as resilience in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

The green social work curriculum has a role to play in enabling students, practitioners and local residents to understand the provisions of the Sendai Framework and engage in its implementation. This they can do through local practice initiatives which they can utilise to co-formulate solutions that advance local objectives. Green social work facilitates this ambition through its holistic and transdisciplinary framework that enables green social work practitioners to:

- Work in empowering community-based partnerships to resolve environmental issues with coproduced solutions that local residents feel that they own, control and manage.
- Understand disasters, their nature, causes and associated secondary hazards. Much of these knowledges, especially the physical science behind it, have to be made easily accessible to non-specialists.
- Know the spatial contours or geographic particularities of each disaster. Communities are located in specific physical settings. Understanding their specific vulnerabilities and strengths are important in caring for the physical environment and not stressing it with inappropriate demands (e.g. building housing on floodplains).
- Understand the social, cultural, economic, political and historical contexts of the locality in which the disaster has occurred. These aspects are central to individuals’ sense of identity and belonging. People’s attachment to space and place is usually under-rated in traditional models of community-based disaster risk reduction strategies. This approach is eschewed by green social workers who understand that attachment issues are deep, profound and critical in explaining people’s sense of security and safety in a specific place and space.
- Appreciate the physical environment as an end in itself, not only as the context in which people live and acquire the resources they need to survive and thrive.

The green social work curriculum has to be mainstreamed for every social work student to engage service users in the coproduction of locality-specific and culturally relevant solutions to the environmental issues that undermine their health and well-being. To facilitate this endeavour, the mainstream curriculum should be mined for materials that involve transferable knowledge and skills of use in green social work practice. These include: the generic knowledge contained within practice theories and methods; the skills associated with communication, interviewing people, and coordinating agencies and activities; organisational cultures; group work; community action; social development; and an understanding of human relationships and development, and human interactions with social and material systems and structures. These elements ought to be linked to disaster legislation and procedures from micro- to macro-level to ensure relevance to any new developments and disaster interventions within which they may participate.

McKinnon (2008: 10) argues that the ‘university curriculum and continuing professional development program[mes] for social workers [have to] raise these [environmental] issues and consider processes for sustaining reflexive and relevant social systems alongside mediating economic and ecological factors’. The curriculum can include elements already covered by
existing pedagogic processes (e.g. its value-base of anti-oppressive, socially and environmentally just, empowering practice). This is central to empowering local residents in environmentally degraded areas, including those enduring ‘environmental racism’ or the dumping of pollutants in marginalised neighbourhoods (Rogge, 1994), poor African American communities (Bullard, 2000) and low-income households with children (Rogge and Coombs-Orme, 2003). Moreover, large-scale hydro-projects are significant in undermining indigenous peoples’ lives by destroying the biosphere in tropical rainforests (Liebenthal, 2005), such as those owned by the Mapuche tribes in Chile (Carruthers and Rodriguez, 2009). Covering indigenous perspectives in the curriculum can help social work students understand connections between people and their living environments and the responsibilities that they have for their use of the earth’s resources (Grande, 2004). Unlike the exploitation of the earth’s resources favoured by multinational corporations, indigenous worldviews promote those who ask people to act as custodians of the earth now and into the future to ensure that there is a healthy physical environment for future generations of living beings to enjoy.

According to Adger (2006), vulnerability highlights a tendency to succumb to harm in the context of a disaster. He argues that the degree of vulnerability is shaped by exposure to a shock, a sensitivity to stress, and the capacity to react and adapt. Each of these dimensions can mitigate or reduce vulnerability. No country is immune from environmental disasters. However, countries in the global South are more vulnerable than those in the global North, primarily because the former have larger numbers of poor people, and inadequate built infrastructures including housing, health and social care facilities, schools, power utilities, water supplies, sanitation, transportation and communication networks. Consequently, the Global South bears 76 per cent of damages caused by disasters; 92 per cent of people affected by disasters live in countries located there; and 65 per cent of economic losses occur in these locations (IFRC, 2009). Additionally, it is important that green social workers consider differentiated vulnerabilities, particularly among older people, women and children, because they are seldom heard in pre-disaster planning or in post-disaster reconstruction (Alston, 2002; Pittaway et al., 2007; Seballos et al., 2011). Their differentiated experiences are a critical dimension and ought to be included in the curriculum. Essential to this consideration are economic questions about paid employment and workplace organisation. Low-paid jobs increase vulnerabilities by impacting upon people’s income levels and social status. When these are low, people are more likely to live in environmentally vulnerable areas and have fewer resources with which to survive disasters and build resilience.

Transdisciplinarity encourages student engagement with a wide range of expertise necessary for operationalising social, economic and environmental justice into disaster interventions, and include people from other disciplines and professions in their multi-stakeholder partnerships for sustainable social development and disaster interventions. Additionally, their curriculum has to cover advocacy, lobbying skills, knowledge about how to form wide-ranging and strong alliances, the development of strategic thinking and non-violent conflict resolution skills. The green social work curriculum is, therefore, multi-dimensional and has to include items that ensure it is relevant to the environmental and life challenges of the 21st century.

Conclusions

Green social work envisages a world that meets the needs of all people, the earth’s flora, fauna, other living things and the physical environment today and in the future. To achieve this aim, green social work provides a new paradigm for environmental issues to be tackled by social workers. It asks them to go beyond their traditional comfort zone by becoming engaged in sustainable, coproduced transformative social change that creates a living, viable earth with
equitably shared and distributed resources and opportunities. Thus, green social work is redistributive and regenerative. Green social workers endeavour to develop preventive and responsive emergency services before, during and after disasters. Like other responders, their overall objective is to reduce the number of deaths and casualties among people, animals and plants; and to assess the needs of people. It transcends these by including other living things with which people share the physical environment and the inanimate world itself within its remit. Green social work, therefore, is conducted to promote a healthy and sustainable physical environment and biosphere; enhance resilience in the social, physical and built environments; and enable disaster survivors to flourish in the future.

Green social workers engage local residents and experts in holistic approaches that bring people together to protect their physical, social, political, economic and cultural environments across all phases of disasters. These dimensions are part of an integrated whole, and not separate from it. To pursue the cause of environmental justice, endorse social justice in environmentally degraded communities, undertake reconstruction tasks and intervene effectively, green social work practitioners ought to understand the complex power dynamics and relationships that underpin the entrenched views that people hold about their involvement in ending the exploitation of the physical environment and its resources, and elimination of environmental injustice. Its complexity highlights the significance of green social workers engaging all stakeholders – 100 per cent of the earth’s population, in developing the new socio-economic alternatives needed, and raising questions to ensure that no one group is privileged above another.

References


