

Book Review

GREEN SOCIAL WORK: FROM ENVIRONMENTAL CRISES TO ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Lena Dominelli. Rawat Publications, Jaipur, ISBN: 9788131609231, Hardback, pp. xiv+ 244. Price: Rs.995

This book is one of the first of its kind which encourages the profession of social work to have a holistic approach to sustainable environmental practices. Through relevant discussions, case studies and descriptions of the roles of social workers in various settings, the author aims to provide an egalitarian framework that addresses prevailing structural inequalities and unequal distribution of power and resources to achieve environmental rights and justice equitably to all the stakeholders (p. 195). By providing evidence of human induced and natural environmental issues from various parts of the world, the author shows the reader how environmental issues have gravely undermined people's well-being related to universal human rights, and how environmental justice is denied to vulnerable sections of society. The book also gives a clear picture of how human-induced activities of one country can cause damaging impacts on the environments of other countries. The necessity of increasing the limited role of social workers in global interdependence emerged from these environmental crises. The reader is invited to embrace a green social work practice to make this planet a happy home, by drawing on the contributions from all the earth's inhabitants (p. 206).

This book consists of ten chapters. Each chapter commences with an analysis of the theme, articulates the concept with suitable examples and citations, and concludes with a social work perspective. Most of the case studies in the book illustrate how to convert the challenges into opportunities for social workers by making culturally relevant and environmentally friendly development models.

The first chapter introduces the concept of a holistic model of social work practice termed Green Social Work. The limited existing literature on environmental and ecological social work and the need of a book which addresses environmental issues from a social work perspective are provided as the rationale for Green Social Work. The structure of the book, with

the author's justification of the inclusion of the contents of each chapter presented in the first chapter, reveals the interest of the author in human rights, justice, and poverty inequality. This thought-provoking introductory chapter calls for the equal distribution of power and social and natural resources.

In Chapter 2, a wider historical perspective is given in the first few paragraphs for the reader to understand how the profession is recognised in different parts of the world and its concern in different locations. The chapter then exposes the reader to the new challenges for the profession by intervening in situations where poor people are disproportionately subjected to manmade and natural disasters and climate change. As a solution to this challenge, the author defines the concept of Green Social Work and highlights the opportunities for the profession to expand into new areas by becoming engaged in environmental issues and practicing green social work within a redistributive framework (p. 21). The author explores the opportunities and dangers of responses to fiscal crises locally and globally which decreases the public welfare fund, by citing the example of Big Societies in the U.K. One of the case studies provided in this chapter highlights decent housing as an environmental right. Another case study demonstrates the role of green social workers in the empowerment of communities in power struggles.

Chapter 3 illustrates how green social work can use innovative approaches to address the negative human impact on the environment in the context of hyper urbanisation and its negative effect on people's well-being. The ingredients for developing alternatives are also described. It suggests the role of social workers is to ensure an equitable sharing of earth's resources by identifying, developing and implementing locally relevant and culturally appropriate strategies to protect the rights of people and the earth through developing sensitive, holistic and sustainable approaches. The case study presented in this chapter explains how social workers can use their skills and expertise to empower individuals and communities who face the negative impact of rapid industrialisation and unplanned urbanisation. This could be done by encouraging social responsibility which balances environmental responsibility, using insights of green social work and its role in developing sustainable communities by demanding accountability for their actions from all the stakeholders.

In chapter 4, the author cites examples of industrial and nuclear accidents which occurred in different parts of the world, and examines the long-term consequences for the overall well-being of present and future generations. The author argues for the need to establish precautionary measures for the future and to launch voluntary initiatives to improve health, safety and environmental performance in the locations of nuclear and chemical plants. In the analysis of nuclear disasters which occurred in three Mile Island (USA), Chernobyl (Ukraine), Fukushima Daiichi (Japan), Chalk River (Canada) and the chemical disaster in Bhopal (India), the author describes the role of social workers in developing resilient responses and using a strength-based approach to reduce vulnerabilities due to industrial disasters. The necessity to develop ethical guidelines for a virtual helpline support network in any type of disaster situation is highlighted. In this chapter, the author also tries to reconceptualise the terms resilience and vulnerability from a social work perspective. One of the case studies exposes the role of green social workers in helping the community to conduct a holistic analysis to meet the current and future needs of all the stakeholders, and to take environmentally sound decisions during infrastructural development which otherwise would affect the rights of the powerless. The other case study indicates how environmental degradation prevents people from enjoying their surroundings and how one individual's action energised a community to enjoy their surroundings by improving the quality of the physical environment.

Chapter 5 presents climate change, the result of greenhouse gases caused by human industrialisation and urbanisation, and the most challenging issue to be addressed in the 21st century. The author argues for making industrialisation processes carbon neutral for the health of people, plants and flora and fauna (p. 87). The concept of environmental justice is discussed in detail in this chapter in the context of industrial pollution. The chapter also describes the role of social workers as advocates of poor people by enhancing their quality of life and increasing their access to renewable energy. The author suggests that social workers could be catalysts in communities by transforming social and political priorities and policy-making regarding climate change. A case study of community initiatives to conserve wildlife and a beautiful physical environment through culturally relevant collective action could be considered as a model that could be adapted anywhere.

Chapter 6 provides a wide array of information on how climate change and industrialisation lead to the mass migration of people who depend on traditional farmlands and forests. The case study in this chapter analyses the role of social workers among migrant communities as mediators, development workers and therapists. The chapter gives an overall view of the activities of environmental activists in countries like India, Chile, Myanmar, China and Turkey against development which destroys local people's lives and beautiful landscapes. The protest against the loss of biodiversity and entrepreneurial piracy of farming knowledge is revealed with supporting citations. The chapter also suggests that the role of social workers is to question the loss of citizenship of people who became migrants due to environmental reasons. In order to reduce vulnerability to climate change, the author suggests resilience building in communities as one of the best options. One of the case studies in this chapter suggests the need for appropriate training for social workers to behave ethically, to acknowledge culturally specific customs and issues and to acquire a wide range of skills that would cater for the individual and collective needs of the community to practice a sustainable way of living.

The theme of Chapter 7 is disaster preparedness. The author argues that damage inflicted upon natural environments and infrastructures raises questions about how to develop technologies that meet people's needs without destroying the Earth (p.129). In this chapter, the social workers' involvement in these events, their critiques of traditional interventions and suggestions for providing more appropriate ones in the future is examined. The author suggests that social work involvement has to be more preventative in its focus for practitioners to enhance the resilience of people and communities by minimising danger, responding to catastrophes and rebuilding their lives afterwards. The roles of environmental NGOs are well described in this chapter.

Chapter 8 outlines how social workers can support inter-country initiatives for sustainable development, especially in the context of resource scarcity. The author discusses in detail the shortage in housing and employment opportunities, scarce water resources, consumption of non-renewable fossil fuels and conflict among refugees. How to cope with the demands of a growing world population and ensuring sustainable development is discussed in this chapter. Natural disasters like hurricane Katrina, the floods in Pakistan, the earthquake in Haiti, and the tsunami

in Sri Lanka are discussed with case studies to make the reader understand how human actions aggravated the sufferings of vulnerable groups including children in calamitous situations. The author argues that community participation is the basis for successful holistic sustainable development initiatives and gives a hint of the social worker's role in empowering the community to conduct research at a local level for the intelligent utilisation of natural resources. The chapter also identifies the need of disaster preparedness training for social workers, and tries to attract the attention of the profession toward the limited role of social workers in UN disaster intervention committee structures.

In chapter 9, the author argues that people need a sense of place and a stake in society to respect and value the environment. By exploring the indigenous people's struggle for their cultural heritage and traditional rights, the author tries to convince the reader how Green Social Work Practice intervenes to protect the environment and enhance the well-being of the people. The chapter discusses in detail the world views of the First Nations people in Canada, the Maori in New Zealand and the Mapuche in Chile to give the reader a good understanding of how indigenous people perceive the environment. The case studies in this chapter demonstrate the complexities of becoming involved in working across cultural divides.

The need to develop social work interventions that address crises and disasters of individuals, groups and communities locally, nationally and internationally is suggested by the author in Chapter 10. A case study of the struggle by indigenous people to maintain a way of life that is in harmony with the ecosystem, and their collective action to protect their ancestral spaces is also given in the chapter. The author encourages all stakeholders to understand the exploitation of people and natural resources for the benefit of a few and to design strategies to address the prevailing structural inequalities and the unequal distribution of power and resources. In this concluding chapter, the author offers and discusses a holistic sustainable practice chart which could be used by social workers in the micro, mezzo or mega setting to be active and engaged in the empowering process for a deeply transformed social work (p.199).

Green Social Work is one of the few referral books which set an ambitious agenda before the social work profession. The attempts described in this book by social workers to develop a harmony between the natural environment and human beings through the empowerment of communities

will definitely help social work students, educators and practitioners to develop green social work initiatives in their sphere of activities. However, a careful examination of the chapters reveals that the book fails to provide the theoretical background of involvement with the natural environment. The case studies did not highlight the methods that could be used to address environmental issues from a social work perspective.

This book will be an effective tool for all those who want to become advocates for better environmental policies. It will definitely inspire readers to become actively involved in the process of developing a respectful partnership between nature and society (p.198).

Shaly M.O

shalymo@gmail.com