

Promoting Ecological Citizenship: Social Work Approach to Save the Environment for Sustainable Livelihood

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Abstract

Ecological citizenship is gaining recognition as a strategy to mitigate the impact of climate change. Climate change continues to pose a threat to the well-being of individuals, families, groups, and communities. Not only does it affect the environment, resulting in environmental degradation posing a threat to the general well-being of individuals, but it also has consequences for society since it compromises livelihood. Environmental degradation, as a cause of climate change, also threatens their society and future generations' well-being. The devastating floods that caused massive destruction in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape in April 2022 are some of the factors that result in environmental degradation, thereby increasing vulnerability, which serves as a reminder of the significant role of ecological citizenship. Social work has a responsibility to help improve the quality of life, especially of marginalised and vulnerable populations, and can, therefore, play a crucial role in minimising the devastating effects of climate change through promoting ecological citizenship. Promoting green behaviour among citizens is one way in which social workers can indicate their commitment to sustainable development. Because environmental problems are proving to have a social angle, social workers should include the attainment of environmental justice and sustainability as part of their social interventions. In addition, social work can influence the environmental actions of various stakeholders. This paper offers a pragmatic approach rooted in social work to consider ecological citizenship to support sustainable livelihood. Informed by approaches and processes in social work, this paper explores and describes the role of social work in promoting ecological citizenship to achieve sustainable livelihood.

Keywords: climate change; ecological citizenship; environment; livelihood; social



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work approach; sustainable

Introduction

Ecological citizenship has gained increasing recognition and significance in recent years as societies grapple with the urgent need to address the challenges posed by climate change and environmental degradation. South Africa has had its fair share of natural disasters with the recent destructive weather conditions, such as flooding and Tornados/cyclones that resulted in a massive loss of life and left many people homeless and displaced in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape Provinces (AfricaNews 2022; Pinto et al. 2022). Studies warn that as the risk of poor weather conditions increases with climate change in the country (Leonard 2022), its consequences are not limited to environmental disturbances but also extend to socioeconomic challenges, with many people, especially vulnerable populations, facing increased risks to their livelihoods, health, and general well-being (Pickson and Boateng 2022; Scholes and Engelbrecht 2021; Wright et al. 2021).

As individuals, communities, and nations grapple with the complexities of a rapidly changing climate, a shift in people's attitudes and behaviour toward the environment is required. Jagers, Martinsson, and Matti (2014) suggest ecological citizenship, which is regarded as a driver for the individual's pro-environmental behaviour, to be adopted as a strategy that provides a stable foundation for lifestyle changes. Ecological citizenship places emphasis on citizens taking responsibility for maintaining ecological balance. It is an aspect of social justice with a specific focus on environmental rights, hence the emphasis on citizens' rights to participate in decisions that concern the environment (Karatekin and Uysal 2018). Ecological citizenship creates an opportunity for citizens to participate in such decisions to protect their environment.

Social work, as a profession dedicated to social justice and improving the well-being of individuals and communities, has a significant role to play in promoting ecological citizenship. Social workers must play a key role in facilitating a collective understanding of ecological citizenship and encourage individuals, groups, and communities to participate in activities that seek to protect the environment. However, notwithstanding the evident progress made in many professional organisations and priorities such as the Global Agenda for Social Work and despite the profession's responsibility to address the issues of climate change, there has been a slow start in integrating this in practice and education in South Africa (Shokane and Nel 2017; Arkert and Jacobs 2023). Research shows that social work has not yet embraced environmental social work in South Africa, as social work intervention remains invisible before and during disasters and is mainly noted post the disaster (Muzingili 2016; Arkert and Jacobs 2021; Noyoo 2020).

Drawing on secondary data, this paper analyses approaches adopted in social work practice to mobilise individuals and communities to take a stand and address the impact

of climate change. Utilising secondary data helped in identifying, selecting, and synthesising relevant datasets that provided comprehensive insights into ecological citizenship and social work. As such, this paper offers a pragmatic approach, rooted in social work, to promote sustainable livelihood, which refers to the ability to deal with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or improve capabilities and assets both presently and in the future, without undermining the natural resource base (Singh 2016). The discussion first reports on the methodology used and then outlines climate change and its implications on livelihood, followed by an overview of ecological citizenship and social work approaches that can be used to promote ecological citizenship to promote sustainable livelihood.

Methodology

The data for this article were collected from secondary sources, including research articles, books, and reports (Kabir 2016; Taherdoost 2021), as well as the author's observations of news about climate change-related occurrences. The secondary data were collected from both qualitative and quantitative sources. The advantage of collecting secondary data is that it is readily available, making it time-saving compared to collecting primary data from scratch (Kabir 2016). Secondary data also helps authors to obtain and explore existing information as background information (Mazhar, Anjum, Anwar, and Khn 2021; Taherdoost 2021). However, the authenticity and credibility of the secondary data can be a disadvantage because it can be manipulated, thereby compromising its quality (Kabir 2016; Taherdoost 2021). To avoid this challenge, the author used published books, commissioned reports and journal articles as they are deemed reliable (Taherdoost 2021) with a specific focus on climate change and social work literature.

Climate Change and Its Implications

Climate change and associated disasters have an impact on many aspects of life globally, with both developed and developing countries feeling the pinch as heat waves and other extreme weather conditions have been rapidly increasing in magnitude, intensity and frequency (Hayhoe et al. 2018; Xu, Ramanathan, and Victor 2018). For instance, evidence shows that many Canadian communities are currently experiencing about \$2B per year in damages from severe weather that result in adverse health outcomes (McBean, Kovacs, Voogt and Kopp 2021). Climate change poses particularly high risks in African countries as it threatens health and homes, as well as the natural resources upon which many Africans depend to survive. Therefore, it contributes to adverse socioeconomic conditions experienced by many people (Department of Environmental Affairs 2017; Wright et al. 2021). Van der Bank and Karsten (2020) confirm the viewpoint that while the impact of climate change extends to both developed and developing countries and affects all sectors and levels of society, its impact is particularly severe in developing countries. Notably, with the temperatures increasing beyond average due to global warming, the African continent is most vulnerable to

climate change (Ogundeji 2022). This is attributable to the developing countries, especially Sub-Saharan African countries' dependence on climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture, water, and other zones while they lack the means to cope with the risks associated with climate change (Ebhuoma et al. 2020; Gitz et al. 2016; Ogundeji 2021).

Climate change poses a multifaceted threat to societal well-being as well as the environment. It has an impact on every aspect of life, with the poor and the most vulnerable populations bearing the brunt. For instance, Cammarano et al. (2020) note that in South Africa, the food security of rural households is linked to the sustainability of the country's agriculture industry, which supplies food, income, and employment to more than 70% of the population. Thus, Joubert (2009) asserts that the dependence on agriculture means that the slightest changes in climate-related aspects, such as unpredictable weather patterns, have the potential to destroy livelihoods and plunge people into poverty. Due to little resilience and limited adaptive capacities (Aggarwal and Singh 2010; Department of Environmental Affairs 2017; Harvey et al. 2018), the dependence of poorer communities on ecosystems for their livelihoods increases the risk of desperation since climate change disrupts ecosystems and depletes natural resources (Ogundeji 2022). While poor people are believed to have limited resources to cope with the impact of global warming, Joubert (2009) claims on the one hand that, due to lack of access to land, poor people tend to live in areas that are prone to potential disasters from flooding, cyclones, as well as droughts; thereby exacerbating their vulnerability to climate change. On the other hand, extreme cases of land degradation and droughts due to climate change may force people to relocate to areas where competition for scarce resources already exists, resulting in a higher risk of conflict (Kumssa and Jones 2014). The mentioned factors pose challenges to sustainable development and amplify the underlying social, economic, and political weaknesses that exist at the local and national levels (World Bank 2014).

Although the economy of Southern Africa is dependent on climate-sensitive sectors (Masipa 2017; Pickson and Boateng 2022), this region is prone to climate change because of its geographical location and socioeconomic development state (Scholes and Engelbrecht 2021). As an already warm and dry country, climate change poses a significant threat to water resources and increases the likelihood of reduced agricultural production, including staple crops and livestock in South Africa (Adetoro et al. 2020; Scholes and Engelbrecht 2021). With many South African households already experiencing high levels of food insecurity (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2014; StatsSA 2020), the reduction of production threatens their livelihood as food prices increase, making it difficult for poor people to afford basic needs (Barbut and Alexander 2016). Other factors of climate change that contribute to food insecurity include land degradation and intense droughts that increase the risk of wildfires and further land degradation (Ogundeji 2022; World Bank 2014). Considering South Africa's high levels of poverty, with an estimated 50% of citizens living in poverty (Mdluli and Dunga 2022), these impacts pose critical challenges for sustainable development, defeat the purpose, and undermine work towards achieving the

sustainable development goals (SDGs) surrounding no poverty and zero-hunger goals (Boutin and Smit 2016).

Like in most parts of the world, the consequences of climate change in South Africa are not limited to environmental disturbances that result in socioeconomic challenges but also extend to adverse health-related challenges that can impair both physical and psychological health and well-being (World Bank 2014). The rising temperatures are expected to have a negative impact on health, with various conditions such as heat exhaustion and stress increasing the likelihood of respiratory, cardiovascular, and renal diseases, as well as mental disorders (Wright et al. 2021). They are also likely to lead to fever viruses and diseases such as malaria, even in areas where they are not common (Joubert 2011). Wang and Geng (2019) recognise the interconnectedness between poor health and socioeconomic challenges and explain that the latter is regarded as the precursor of the former. They are of the opinion that poor socioeconomic status affects health status. With many people experiencing chronic food insecurities, there is a high likelihood of poor people remaining in poverty since their poor health status may prevent participation in the labour market. Thus, it has become inevitable that social work as a profession must take a stand and be at the forefront of the fight against climate change in South Africa.

Social Work Approaches to Promoting Ecological Citizenship

Social work has an important role in environmental preservation and in ameliorating the impact of climate change. As a profession rooted in promoting social justice, equality, and the well-being of individuals and communities, social work has a responsibility to improve the quality of life, especially of marginalised and vulnerable populations (Domineli 2012; Drolet and Sampson 2017). Social workers possess unique skills that are useful in addressing effects and mitigating environmental degradation (Mpambela and Mabvurira 2017; Ramsay and Boddy 2017; Dominelli 2018). These skills underpin social work interventions.

Although there are many known social work skills, this paper bases its argument on behavioural theories as they argue that the environment, rather than the person's emotions, reinforces human behaviours (Karpetsis 2018). To change people's thoughts and attitudes toward climate change, social workers adopt behavioural modification techniques. Fortune, Lee and Cavazos (2007) propose cognitive behavioural skills which help social workers separate feelings and attitudes from facts. Therefore, it is important that social workers possess behavioural modification skills, which include the identification and affirmation of positive behaviours (Forrester, Westlake and Glynn 2012) and the exploration of strengths (Martin and Hollows 2016). This includes enhancing people's capacity to adopt effective strategies to mitigate and respond to various challenges imposed by climate change (Palma 2005; Kemp, Palinkas, Wong, and Wagner 2015).

Since climate change through natural disasters disrupts the social functioning of people by destroying the common forms of survival such as food security, health, education, and other related aspects of humanity (Mhlanga, Muzingili and Mpambela 2019), there is a need for social work involvement in improving social functioning, which includes an individual's ability to engage with their environment. Considering that social functioning is affected by climate change, social workers have a responsibility not only to help people as they strive to prevent and solve problems related to climate change but also to advocate for systemic changes (Dominelli 2012; Schibli 2020). With its strong focus on empowering the marginalised and vulnerable, social work is well-positioned to respond to the challenges posed by climate change, and social workers have a moral and ethical obligation to address the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation on vulnerable populations and to advocate for policies and practices that foster resilience and sustainable livelihoods (Dominelli 2012; Drolet and Sampson 2017). This can be achieved by promoting ecological citizenship through the application of the following approaches.

Promoting Green Behaviour

Green behaviour refers to the actions taken and choices made to minimise negative effects based on the conscious understanding of the impact that the behaviour has on the environment (Mishal, Dubey, Gupta and Luo 2017). This includes adopting sustainable practices by making environmentally sustainable choices and supporting environmental initiatives such as anti-littering campaigns, the use of renewable energy, conserving water as well as recycling (Mishal et al. 2017; Newell, Daley and Twena 2022). Thus, the promotion of green behaviour and encouraging sustainable practices among individuals and communities can be viewed as one of the essential aspects of social work's commitment to sustainable development.

Since climate change is a result of the non-sustainable lifestyles of citizens (Hobson 2013), there is a need for a new form of citizenship that can lead to a change in the behaviour of citizens towards sustainable lifestyles, ensuring that their ecological footprints are sustainable (Karatekin and Uysal 2018). Ecological citizenship is the form of citizenship that is regarded as the driver for individuals' pro-environmental behaviour and the recognition of their responsibility in addressing environmental challenges (Mariyani 2017). It involves dedication to SDGs and participation in efforts to achieve such goals (Gunawati and Rejekiingsih 2019). While dedication and participation are important, Drolet and Sampson (2017) and Mariyani (2017) recommend mobilising local knowledge, culture, skills, values, and attitudes as important to take on the responsibility to ensure significant positive environmental outcomes. Thus, the importance of eco-literacy as a way to overcome environmental challenges is emphasised.

Eco-literacy, or ecological literacy, refers to a knowledge and understanding of natural systems, ecology, and an understanding of interconnections of humans and their natural

surroundings. This involves an understanding of the contribution of human activity to climate change crises (Boetto 2017). Based on the notion that environmental knowledge significantly influences one's decisions, values and beliefs with respect to environmental support and practices (Muo and Azeez 2019; Naz et al. 2020). This is an indication of the importance of improved environmental knowledge in influencing individual and community attitudes and behavioural change toward sustaining the environment to reduce the risks of climate change.

Lysack (2012) highlights the likelihood of change occurring within the social context when individuals and communities perceive it as the dominant norm. Social workers can encourage individuals and communities to adopt green behaviour as a norm. By fostering ecological citizenship, social workers can inspire positive environmental action and empower individuals to adopt practices that contribute to long-term solutions. This can be achieved through educational initiatives, community-based programmes, and policy advocacy. By encouraging environmentally responsible behaviour, social workers contribute to the preservation of natural resources, the reduction of carbon footprints, and the overall well-being of both present and future generations (Karatekin and Uysal 2018). They can work with various influential individuals, such as traditional, political, and faith-based leaders within the communities, to develop policy positions on sustainable behaviours and highlight model behaviours through public recognition and awards (Lysack 2012).

Considering the significance of behavioural approaches in solving environmental issues, Smith (2022) recommends that social workers employ behaviour change theories and strategies to pursue green outcomes by changing people's ecological attitudes. To facilitate shifts towards sustainable actions, social workers can give clear and authoritative information that establishes links between specific behaviours and climate change (Neville 2010). They can encourage individuals to reflect on their own lifestyles, consumption patterns, and carbon footprints and to make conscious efforts to reduce their environmental impact. This may include adopting energy-efficient practices, practising waste reduction and recycling, supporting sustainable products and businesses, and advocating for environmentally friendly policies (Domineli 2012; Ramsay and Boddy 2017; Karatekin and Uysal 2018).

Create Awareness and Environmental Consciousness

Karatekin and Uysal (2018) are of the view that understanding ecology should be the starting point in bringing solutions to environmental problems and re-examining peoples' relations with nature. Raising awareness about the interconnectedness of environmental issues, climate change, human well-being, and livelihoods at a local level is one of the important elements of ecological citizenship. Research shows that citizens can respond effectively to climate change only when they are clear about it and its implications for their lives (Neville 2010; Karatekin and Uysal 2018).

As an indication that many people are less aware of the potentially far-reaching social and economic consequences of climate change in South Africa, most people associate it with natural science (Nyahunda 2021), while others view it as an issue that wealthy should worry about since it affects only them (Neville 2010). This is an indication of the need for social workers to take the lead in climate change initiatives where ordinary people can use their knowledge and experiences to interpret it. As a profession that works closely with people at the grassroots level, social workers are best suited to raise awareness about the impact of climate change. For awareness raising that translates into action, Pawar (2014) emphasises maintaining a two-way communication that involves engaging people in dialogue that explores and interprets their understandings of climate change and in critical reflection on it. Communication skills are identified as the central element of social work practice (Gockel and Burton 2014), with Egan's (2013) proposed generic interviewing skills, including attentive listening, empathy, and clarification, that are contemplated to rely on communication.

Media platforms play a crucial role in disseminating information and creating knowledge about issues of concern within communities. Foxwell-Norton, Backhaus and Leitch (2022) highlight the importance of the community radio sector in climate change communication. Due to their accessibility and positions within the communities, community radio stations can overcome various barriers, including language, affordability, and lack of access to electricity. These stations can be used for emergency broadcasting during bushfires, disaster preparedness and recovery work in cyclone seasons, and to play an activist role on local environmental issues. Social workers can engage media houses, especially community radio stations, to raise awareness and educate communities about environmental challenges and to garner local communities' buy-in for local initiatives to protect the environment.

Considering the power of social media platforms in bringing people with a shared interest together and minimising distance, social workers can harness this power to raise awareness about issues of climate change further and engage or influence other people toward activist causes (Anderson 2017). It is estimated that 97% of adolescents use social media regularly (Woods and Scott 2016), making this platform a powerful tool for forming social networks among youth (Lenhart, Smith and Anderson 2015). This platform can be used to allow youth to engage in dialogue about various issues of environmental concerns and their contribution to environmental degradation, thereby encouraging them to come up with strategies that can be implemented to save their immediate environment. It can also be used to convey information and create content that brings the concept of climate change to life, making it more tangible and relatable to those who might not have personal experiences with its effects (Anderson 2017). Importantly, social workers can use social media not only to create awareness but also to provide support (Halabuzza 2014; Fagan, Grenen and McGlynn 2018) since 70% of 18 to 24-year-olds are reported to be increasingly worried about climate change (YouGov Poll, 2020), leading to an increase in climate change anxiety (Parry, McCarthy and Clark 2022).

While awareness of environmental degradation is important, Lysack (2012) argues that awareness alone is insufficient for the development of motivation and commitment to protect the environment. Thus, capacity building is highlighted as another important element of ecological citizenship.

Building Capacity for Ecological Citizenship

The dependence on a climate-based natural resource base for survival increases the vulnerability and threatens the social welfare of individuals, families, groups, and communities in marginalised areas since they lack the adaptive capacity to protect themselves from the impacts of climate change (Nyahunda 2021). While reducing the vulnerability of marginalised populations can help address poverty and resource degradation, Mulligan (2015) recommends enhancing their adaptive capacities to increase their resilience and ability to respond to a range of shocks resulting from climate change. Barbut and Alexander (2016) warn that land degradation will continue to threaten rural livelihoods significantly should there be no adaptation strategies and resilience building dedicated to managing and restoring natural capital. Preparing for the future and enabling individuals to engage in conversations with their families, communities, and governments about the risks and possible courses of action requires that they are equipped with the knowledge about changes in weather patterns and the likelihood of occurrence of extreme weather events (Neville 2010).

Based on the notion that environmental problems are social problems, social workers play a crucial role as coordinators to develop community capacity and enhance the existing adaptive capacity (Dominelli 2012). Drawing from a social development approach that focuses on building people's capacity, social work interventions can focus on building the capacities and skills of individuals to foster ecological citizenship and encourage engagement in sustainable practices (Karatekin and Uysal 2018). This may involve providing training on energy conservation, waste reduction, sustainable agriculture, or promoting green technologies. By equipping individuals with practical skills, social workers enable them to participate actively in ecological citizenship and to make sustainable choices in their daily lives. In addition, individuals are able to make informed decisions that prioritise environmental sustainability (Lysack 2012; Drolet and Sampson 2017). Social workers can encourage individuals to adopt an ecological consciousness, recognising the impacts of their actions on the environment and the importance of sustainable practices. They can also build community capacity by supporting volunteering efforts (Drolet and Sampson 2017).

Engaging Stakeholders for Collective Action

The efforts to address the impact of climate change and environmental concerns require collective action. While individual actions are recognised as crucial, they are not sufficient to achieve substantial change. Ecological citizenship fosters collaboration, community engagement, and grassroots movements by encouraging individuals to come

together to address common environmental concerns. Research acknowledges the need for various stakeholders, including civil society and faith communities, to collaborate if society is to make progress in addressing climate change and ecological deterioration (Lysack 2012). Dominelli (2018) and Boetto (2019) agree that efforts to solve problems caused by climate change need assistance from the whole community. Considering that social work is one of the professions charged with environmental and individual change at various levels, Drolet and Sampson (2017), as well as Ramsay and Boddy (2017), opine that social workers can mobilise communities to actively participate in efforts to mitigate climate change and environmental degradation.

Social work possesses the unique capacity to influence various stakeholders in society, including policymakers, organisations, and communities. They can use networking skills to exert significant influence in mobilising various stakeholders to prioritise environmental actions, driving change at both the micro and macro levels by advocating for sustainable practices and engaging with policymakers, organisations, and communities (Lysack 2012; Nyahunda 2021). The purpose of such engagements is to include diverse stakeholders and facilitate dialogues and actions aimed at mitigating the impact of climate change and promoting ecological citizenship, thus promoting shared ownership and responsibility for environmental sustainability (Lysack 2012). In the same light, drawing on their expertise in policy lobbying and development, social workers can negotiate for policies that are responsive to the needs of those mostly affected by climate change (Nyahunda 2021) while mobilising individuals to influence policy decisions through collective action (Lysack 2012; Drolet and Sampson 2017).

Van der Westhuizen (2021) emphasises the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration in addressing environmental concerns. Social workers can collaborate with professionals from various disciplines, such as environmental science, urban planning, and public health, to address complex environmental challenges. By fostering interdisciplinary partnerships, social workers can influence diverse expertise to develop holistic approaches that integrate social, economic, and environmental factors (Nyahunda 2021). This collaborative approach ensures that ecological citizenship is embedded in broader initiatives for sustainable development to uphold social justice.

Fostering Sustainable Action for Environmental Justice

Ecological citizenship recognises the interconnectedness of social justice and environmental sustainability. Environmental sustainability requires environmental justice, which is concerned with fair treatment and the meaningful involvement of people regardless of social status, race, or age in decisions that have resulted in those people experiencing environmental harm (Scott 2014). Social work is deeply rooted in social justice principles, and addressing environmental inequalities is an integral part of this work. Therefore, social workers should play a critical role in promoting both social and environmental justice (Dominelli and Ku 2017; Ramsay and Boddy 2017). They can play an important role in facilitating understanding of the social dimensions of

climate change and building on the principles of equity and social justice, especially for the most vulnerable people. This would be a valuable contribution to climate change policy (Drolet and Sampson 2017).

Human rights and environmental issues are connected. Climate change and environmental degradation disproportionately affect marginalised communities, exacerbating existing social inequalities. They diminish human and environmental rights, leaving social workers with a critical role in this global movement to address these inequities (International Federation of Social Workers 2022). Social workers can identify and address the disproportionate impacts of environmental degradation on marginalised communities. By promoting ecological citizenship, social workers strive for a more equitable distribution of environmental benefits and burdens. It encourages the inclusion of diverse voices in decision-making processes, ensuring that vulnerable populations have equal access to resources and opportunities for environmental well-being.

As a profession committed to social justice and sustainable development, social workers can advocate for policies that prioritise environmental justice and sustainability. By engaging with policymakers, conducting research, and participating in policy discussions, social workers can contribute to the development of laws and regulations that promote ecological citizenship. This may involve advocating for renewable energy incentives, sustainable urban planning, or environmental regulations that protect vulnerable communities from environmental harm. Lysack (2012) asserts that social workers can direct their focus on building leadership capacity regarding advocacy for ecological justice by strengthening environmental campaigns, lobbying the government for needed resources, and forming coalitions to pursue legislative changes. While it is important to advocate for policies, social workers can assess and challenge structural aspects and inequalities that are a result of the existing policy flaws (Alston 2015). By working with communities, social workers can empower individuals to become agents of change, fostering collective action and sustainable practices. This can be useful in informing the development of relevant policies that will decrease the vulnerability of the population.

Through community organising, social workers can facilitate the formation of grassroots movements and environmental groups that will challenge environmental injustices and address socio-political and economic forces that contribute to environmental degradation. They can mobilise communities to work collaboratively and support community-led initiatives to address environmental challenges that lead to environmental degradation while ensuring equal distribution of natural resources to meet human needs (Dominelli and Ku 2017).

Implications for Social Work

Research shows clear evidence that climate change, with its natural disasters, poses a threat to everyone, but especially to the poor and most disadvantaged populations in South Africa. This makes climate change an issue that requires urgent attention, presenting implications for both social work practice and education. In practice, as a profession that focuses on enhancing well-being, social work can promote ecological citizenship by fostering a sense of responsibility and stewardship towards the environment by encouraging communities to adopt sustainable practices to mitigate environmental degradation and enhance community resilience against climate change (Dominelli and Ku 2017; Drolet and Sampson 2017).

The author believes that, while there is progress in dealing with issues of climate change social work practice in South Africa, there is slow incorporation in the curricula despite a vested interest shown by local academics. There is an urgent need to incorporate aspects of climate change, including the methods and approaches to address it in curricula.

Conclusion

As climate change continues to pose a threat to livelihoods, promoting ecological citizenship becomes paramount. This requires engaging at micro, mezzo, and macro levels to deal with misinformation and to influence people to take charge in addressing climate change. Social workers, with their commitment to social justice and well-being, could and should play a pivotal role in mitigating the devastating effects of climate change by integrating ecological citizenship into their practice. Through interventions aimed at promoting green behaviour, creating environmental consciousness, building capacity and ecological citizenship, engaging stakeholders for collective action, and fostering environmental justice, social workers can contribute to sustainable development, protection of vulnerable populations, and creating a better future for all. The literature presented in this article highlights that, through collaborative efforts and informed interventions, social work can drive positive change and help build a resilient, environmentally conscious society. This requires reflecting on existing policies and their contribution to climate-related challenges that increase people's vulnerability. It also means advocating for the development of policies and implementation of programmes that result in improved quality of life.

While there is an acknowledgement of the devastation of environmental changes in general, this matter is not yet prioritised in the social work profession. It is therefore recommended that social workers strengthen efforts to be conscientious not only in communities but also integrate this as a core subject in social work education. Social workers should also reactivate their roles as advocates for and agents of social change through active participation in efforts to advocate for the development of programmes and policies that serve communities vulnerable to natural disasters. This includes efforts

to intensify ecological citizenship interventions as they are vital for fostering not only a sense of responsibility and commitment to environmental preservation but also supporting the development of sustainable livelihoods. It is also important to prioritise continuous professional development and improve the capacities of social workers providing services to natural disaster-prone environments.

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