# Robust Responses to the Impact of Climate Change in Zimbabwe: Social Work's Contribution

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## Abstract

It has become important that social work confronts environmental challenges associated with climate change. Environmental social work is an approach to social work practice founded on ecological justice principles. A literature review was conducted to analyse social work's contribution to robust responses to the impact of climate change in Zimbabwe. Despite an enabling legal and policy environment, the degradation of natural resources has become pervasive owing to Zimbabwe's socio-economic dynamics. Institutions such as the Council of Social Workers Zimbabwe (Council of Social Workers), and the National Association of Social Workers Zimbabwe complemented by the four universities that offer social work training are found to contribute to social work when mitigating the impact of climate change in Zimbabwe. These strategies enrich social work's responses to the challenges of climate change and environmental degradation. This is achievable by engaging in research opportunities of applied action that explore communities' public and social spaces. The article concludes by offering pathways for more proactive social work contributions towards mitigating climate change impacts in Zimbabwe.

**Keywords:** climate change, livelihoods, poverty, social work, Zimbabwe

## Introduction

Climate change has begun to dominate the social justice grounded profession of social work. Poverty reduction and enhanced social functioning of communities are among the desired outcomes of social work interventions. As suggested by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (2018), significant resource constraints make Africa severely vulnerable as it has limited capacity for responses to climate change. Certainly, the climate is warming in Zimbabwe, a country reliant on rain-fed agriculture and

UNISA university of south africa PRESS

Southern African Journal of Social Work and Social Development
https://unisapressjournals.co.za/index.php/SWPR/index
Volume 33 | Number 1 | 2021 | #6717 | 18 pages

https://doi.org/10.25159/2708-9355/6717
ISSN 2708-9355 (Online)

livestock; thus livelihoods, well-being and human development implications are huge (Bandara 2018).

Disconcertingly high poverty levels in Zimbabwe have been attributed to climate change or extreme weather effects and poor economic development. To aggravate the situation, the Poverty Income Consumption and Expenditure Survey report of 2017 commissioned by the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) noted that extreme poverty rose from 23 per cent in 2011/2012 to 29 per cent in 2017 and to as much as 38 per cent in 2019 (Zimbabwe Reconstruction Fund 2020). Muzulu (2017) notes the remarks of the then Minister of Public Service and Social Welfare, Priscilla Mupfumira, who said that increased social welfare service demands in Zimbabwe have been owing to vulnerability exacerbated by poverty and natural disasters which required more social workers to be employed by the GoZ.

It is important to highlight that globally, social workers, through skilfully collaborating with other professionals across disciplines, bring a unique lens to interventions targeting communities struggling with climate change and inadequate resources (Powers et al. 2018). Zimbabwean communities require resilience to climate change impacts owing to their increased exposure and vulnerability to human-induced and natural hazards shocks.

Pertinently, Powers et al. (2018) highlight the need for strategies that deal with the underlying causes of peoples' vulnerability from cyclical humanitarian crises that induce persistent chronic food insecurity and child malnutrition. Accordingly, Zimbabwean communities' resilience enhancement is built on increased climate change adaptation abilities (European Union 2015). Given the foregoing, the article assesses different perspectives regarding the social work contribution to climate change mitigation. It is organised as a critical review, aiming to analyse the way in which the core competencies of the social work profession, such as those in rural and community development interventions, contribute to climate change mitigation responses in Zimbabwe. The main research question in this article is: "What strategies can be applied by social workers to proactively embed climate change domains in frontline social work interventions?"

Undeniably, climate change has become a pervasive challenge to the attainment of social development desired outcomes that social workers strive for. Amid Zimbabwe's socio-economic turbulence for survival, communities are increasingly engaged in wanton destruction of natural resources. The same natural resources, when harnessed sustainably, transform communities, resulting in the achievement of social development aspirations. Without social workers and other social development actors implementing robust social development interventions, communities' vulnerability to the intractable challenges of economic instability and climate change impacts such as famine and droughts is heightened.

The article makes forays into social work's contribution to robust responses to mitigating the impact of climate change in Zimbabwe. It further probes what strategies social work can harness to contribute to robust responses to mitigating the impact of climate change in Zimbabwe. The article is structured as follows: an introduction is given, and the socio-economic context including pertinent developments in the context of climate change contestations and tensions are examined. A literature review follows and analyses dominant narratives regarding social work, social science and climate change. Afterwards, social work's contribution to climate change mitigation is explored. Finally, pathways to galvanise social work's role in climate change are offered.

## Literature Review

This section analyses scholarly discourse on climate change and social work. Clearly, there is no question that climate change is one of the most significant challenges facing the world today (Bhatasara 2015). Without sounding alarmist but articulating on the urgency of approaches as environmental social work, Peeters (2012) asserts that the combined stress of a global ecological, financial and economic crisis makes the planet suffer. An important challenge for social work, according to Peeters (2012), is the impact of the ecological crisis and the globally widening social gap on poor people. According to the United Nations (2020), people living in extreme poverty are the first to act decisively in their communities in response to poverty, climate change and environmental challenges. However, their efforts and experience often go unnoticed and unappreciated as they are not recognised as drivers of change and their voices are not heard, especially in international bodies.

Social work's connection with other social science disciplines and climate change as observed by Murombedzi (2014) is because climate change continues to be the subject of much African social science research. However, Bhatasara (2015) disagrees with Murombedzi and notes that social theoretical consideration of climate change revolves around a handful of slow-moving, essentially classic problems. But at the same time environmental concerns dominate development agendas targeting the lives of ordinary Africans (Adger, Shardul, and Mirza 2007). On a different note, Murombedzi (2014) is of the persuasion that although African humanities and social sciences are disaggregated, they have considerable research that is ancillary to the natural sciences.

Zvomuya (2017) adds another twist to the environmental social work and climate change debate. According to Zvomuya (2017), environmental social work proponents argue that social work core values and skills stimulate social change for environmental degradation mitigation and biodiverse planetary ecosystem maintenance. Of particular significance in this regard is Zvomuya's (2017) observation that in the past, social workers failed to understand the sociality of the physical environment. Similarly, numerous intersecting factors, mostly social in nature, result in climate change vulnerability. These factors result from the exacerbation of already existing precarity

and vulnerabilities experienced by people in their specific social and political reality (Adger, Shardul, and Mirza 2007).

Murombedzi (2014) argues that the environment is taking centre stage in local, national and global discourse and policies. According to Murombedzi (2014), this focus on the environment is occurring in a neoliberal context defined by unprecedented land grabs, increased natural resource use, government militarisation and privatisation or commercialisation. Nevertheless, for Murombedzi (2014), the intellectual and research agendas of the social sciences have mostly not mainstreamed environmental issues.

Murombedzi (2014) observes that a coherent social science of the environment capable of empirical research-based contributions is urgently required. Importantly, Muzingili (2016) opines that fulfilling the basic needs of vulnerable people and giving pertinent attention to environmental issues are the ways in which social work enhances the social functioning of vulnerable people. Bryan and Behrman (2013) argue that in the extensive literature on climate change adaptation, the focus is more on the responses to climate change policy while community-level adaptation efforts are often left out (Bryan and Behrman 2013). Murombedzi (2014) asserts that the political and social salience of the land distribution, ownership, tenure and resource degradation continues to make climate change the subject of much African social science research. It must be noted that the daily lives of ordinary Africans and development agendas are dominated by environmental concerns (Adger, Shardul, and Mirza 2007). African humanities and social sciences have considerable but disaggregated environmental issues research, ancillary to that of the natural sciences (Murombedzi 2014).

Chimanikire (2013) notes that social science research aids in understanding changes in water, air, climate, environment and oceans and their influence on individuals and communities, organisations and businesses through time and in very different social contexts. Social science also plays a role in the development of responses that can build resilience and reduce risks and vulnerabilities for people (Chimanikire 2013).

However, Murombedzi further asserts that social scientists collaborating in conservation and related natural resource management contexts have successfully stimulated cross-disciplinary engagement with natural science understandings of resource management challenges. Nevertheless, at an epistemological level, Murombedzi (2014) observes a need for a coherent social science of the environment. According to Murombedzi (2014), this social science of the environment would be capable of empirical research-based contributions urgently required for African policy responses to the contemporary environmental questions. Finally, Muzingili (2016) insists that the fulfilment of the basic needs of vulnerable people is an outcome the social work profession aims for, which requires pertinent attention to environmental issues.

## Context

Zimbabwe is a low-incom0e food-deficit country of 13.1 million people. It is ranked 156th of 187 countries in the 2014 Human Development Index and 46th of 78 countries in the 2013 Global Hunger Index (United States Agency for International Development 2018). Zimbabwe's economic boom after independence in 1980 was led in part by a remarkable but short-lived growth in marketed output by smallholder farmers. This resulted in a major extension of social services to an indigenous population previously not prioritised by the former political regime (Kinsey 2010). Mate (2018) observes that since 1980, several national development plans have embraced social protection as a key to poverty reduction. Such plans have included the "National Economic Revival Programme, 2001; Towards Sustained Economic Growth"; "National Economic Development Priority Programme (NEDPP), 2008–2009"; "Zimbabwe Economic Development Strategy (ZEDS), 2009–2013", and the "Medium Term Plan (MTP), 2011–2015" (World Bank 2016). The majority of Zimbabwe's population live in rural areas in which they exploit natural resources including water bodies for food, fuel and other basic needs. Such exploitation leads to environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity.

It is important to note that in negotiating climate change impacts, Zimbabwe's rural and urban poor people have to contend with high poverty and inequality. Poverty measurement in Zimbabwe relies on a per capita consumption approach based on the total consumption poverty line (TCPL) and food poverty line (FPL). A total of 62 per cent of Zimbabwean households are poor as displayed by the per capita consumption expenditures below the TCPL (UNCT 2014). Zimbabwe's social protection system once ranked impressively in coverage and other measures, but recent crises and structural challenges have eroded its quality and reach. Although Zimbabwe now spends almost 5 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on what could be defined as social protection, interventions targeting poor and vulnerable people are heavily dependent on declining development partner financing (World Bank 2016).

Zimbabwe's economy is founded on sectors vulnerable to climatic changes, namely, agriculture, forestry, energy, tourism, and industry, among other things. The agricultural sector which constitutes between 10 and 15 per cent of the GDP is largely rain-fed and hence highly sensitive to climate change. Zimbabwe's current economic blueprint, the National Development Strategy 2021–2025 (GoZ 2020), highlights that increased pollution, land degradation, deforestation, over-exploitation, land use changes, siltation of rivers, water bodies and climate change result in a worrying reduction in both the quantity and quality of natural resources.

This reduction in the quality and quantity of natural resources has a negative bearing on the country's socio-economic development and other sectors, such as tourism which depends heavily on these resources. In 2019, eastern Zimbabwe suffered devastating impacts due to Cyclone Idai which destroyed infrastructure as well as much loss of life. On 16 March 2019, the eastern parts of Zimbabwe were hit with heavy rains and strong

winds as Cyclone Idai made landfall. Cyclone Idai caused flash floods and left in its trail massive destruction of infrastructure and livelihoods, affecting approximately 270 000 people and displacing almost 60 000 (World Bank 2020). The cumulative number of confirmed COVID-19 cases as of 19 March 2021 comprised 36 652 positive cases, 1 510 deaths, and 36 652 recoveries (United Nations Country Team Zimbabwe 2021).

In addition, the constitutional protection of environmental rights is one of the key sustainable development and environmental protection strategies in the Global South (Murombo 2011). It must be noted that to regulate deforestation, Zimbabwe has a comprehensive legal framework. This is principally through the Forest Act (Chapter 19:05), and the Communal Land Forest Produce Act (Chapter 19:04). According to the Environmental Management Agency (EMA), section four of the Communal Land Forest Produce Act allows inhabitants of communal lands to exploit forest produce for their own consumption, not for commercial purposes.

In the same vein, the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) (2014) asserted that a marked increase in woodlands clearance rates in commercial and resettlement areas was recorded following associated land tenure changes owing to the year 2000 onset of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme. Factors that account for high deforestation and degradation rates, according to the UNCT (2014), include forests' clearance for agriculture, over-exploitation for fuel wood, urban and rural settlements expansion, infrastructure development, inadequate planning of land use, elephant damage in some national parks, safari areas and frequent late dry seasons. In 2009, the National Environmental Policy and Strategy was launched to complement the flagship environmental protection law, the Environmental Management Act (2002 Chapter 20:27), and other legislation pertaining to environmental protection, monitoring and sustainable management.

It is laudable that as testimony of commitment to climate change mitigation endeavours, Zimbabwe is a signatory to a number of multilateral environmental agreements. Some of the agreements are: the Montreal Protocol on Substances depleting the Ozone Layer; the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD); the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD) and its Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety; and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (GoZ 2012).

In terms of environmental social work application in Zimbabwe, reliance is made on the experiential knowledge of the author as a one-time frontline social worker in the Department of Social Services (DSS) stationed in a vast Zimbabwean rural district. Environmental social work was not clearly defined. However, the DSS-employed social workers would collaborate extensively with other district frontline extension staff. This would entail joint field activities with the EMA and the Agricultural Extension Services (AGRITEX) officers. Confronting climate change key drivers such as land degradation

through stream bank cultivation, veld fires, and rampant tree cutting for tobacco curing was done by social workers when collaborating with development work practitioners from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and government departments' frontline extension staff. This could be during platforms as district crop field days and during periodic district development planning meetings.

Other forms of social workers' involvement in climate change and natural resources conservation encompassed supporting NGOs in the implementation of rural and community development projects. Thus, the DSS-employed social workers engage principally in child protection programming, and brokering social assistance to, among other things, older persons and persons with disabilities. However, these responsibilities are complemented by a strand of environmental social work. Such environmental social work roles were done at a micro level as they were overshadowed by day-to-day statutory roles of offering social services such as the ones listed above.

## The Impact of Climate Change in Zimbabwe

In this section climate change impacts in Zimbabwe are enumerated to justify why more than ever social work interventions should be more visible to mitigate climate change. As noted by the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development, hereafter referred to as the Agenda, people's health and well-being suffer as a result of inequalities and unsustainable environments related to climate change, pollutants, war, natural disasters, violence and inadequate international responses (IASSW, ICSW, and IFSW 2012).

The Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP) (2019) noted that as of November 2019 more than 11 million people in nine southern African countries had experienced crisis levels of food insecurity. This is due to the deepening drought and climate-induced crises which have a negative impact on food production. Climate change is likely to result in hotter days and fewer cold days than before and the warming trend is already established with increased annual mean surface temperatures. The timing and amount of rainfall are becoming increasingly uncertain and the frequency and length of dry spells during the rainy season have increased (Akesson et al. 2016). El Niño-induced droughts and floods in Zimbabwe are being experienced coupled with increased temperatures and heat waves. The year 2016 saw Zimbabwe experiencing extremely hot and cold temperatures and heat waves (Mpambela and Mabvurira 2017).

The Rural Livelihoods Assessment Report by the Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZimVAC) in 2020 estimated about 56.2 per cent or around 5.5 million rural people will be food insecure at the peak of the hunger season from January to March 2021. This food insecurity prevalence is one of the highest recorded in Zimbabwe's recent past indicating that households continue to require support to avoid slipping into chronic food insecurity (World Food Programme 2020). Given this

trajectory, poverty will be added to the intractable social development challenges that social workers have to grapple with. Climate change impacts result in poor harvests and thus food insecurity means more people would require government-administered conditional cash transfer programmes which are already hampered by resource constraints.

Similarly, Bandara (2018) notes that a million people in Zimbabwe are vulnerable to adverse climate shocks as droughts, some of which were followed by violent floods, put over 4.2 million Zimbabweans – more than a quarter of the total population – in need of food assistance. These shocks will constrain or even reverse the gains in human development that Zimbabwe has made over the years. Furthermore, Alderman, Hoddinott and Kinsey (2006) showed that when a famine hit in Zimbabwe, children who were under the age of two generally suffered throughout their lives from lower school achievement, inferior health, and lower earnings, as a result of this.

In addition, Brazier (2015) notes that deforestation has become a major problem because of forests clearance for agriculture, fencing, firewood for cooking, tobacco curing and brick making. Thus, between 1990 and 2015 Zimbabwe lost 36 per cent of its forests and forest cover reduction has been at a rate of 9 per cent per decade (Brazier 2015). Another climate change impact noted is the development of human settlements leading to the destruction of natural habitats which accelerates climate change (Brazier 2015). Henceforth, social workers should be instrumental in designing programmes that galvanise currently ongoing strategies to mitigate climate change. Social workers have a niche of being able to mobilise communities when implementing community and social development interventions. Climate change mitigation embedding strategies are enriched when community and social development interventions emphasise aspects such as tree planting and bees harvesting as part of livelihood strategies can aid in forest cover preservation. Also, social workers can mobilise stakeholders such as spirit mediums and paramount chiefs so that mainstreaming of indigenous knowledge systems is reinforced. The indigenous knowledge systems emphasise natural resources as having spiritual custodians who guard over the land and get displeased when sacred grooves and rivers are desecrated through wanton degradation, such as artisanal gold panning.

## Social Work and Climate Change in Zimbabwe

This section begins by an argument asserted by Mupedziswa (2018) that the question of social workers' involvement in environmental affairs has been a controversial one. Mupedziswa (2018) opined that some critics argue that social workers cannot be expected to be experts in every field. In Mupedziswa's (2018) analysis, however, because of the magnitude of ecological matters ultimately affecting the quality of human life, it is logical for the social work profession to be involved in the environmental protection struggle.

Designing of the Agenda by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Council of Social Welfare (ICSW) aimed at enabling social workers to make stronger contributions to policy development. The Agenda (IASSW, ICSW, and IFSW 2012) was designed to serve as a common platform for debate and as an agenda of commitments to action from 2013 onwards (Lombard 2015). It is important to note that promoting community and environmental sustainability is one of the pillars of the Agenda.

The Council of Social Workers (CSW) established in terms of the 2001 Social Workers Act (27:21) and the National Association of Social Workers Zimbabwe (NASWZ) are two institutions central to the visibility of social workers' contribution to climate change mitigation. It is pertinent that the CSW conceptualises future social workers' annual summer schools whose agendas can reflect on strides, gaps and opportunities towards mainstreaming climate change mitigation on the Zimbabwean social work frontline. Again, the CSW can mobilise funds for initiatives that can see tree seedlings being availed across 65 districts in which the DSS has a presence. Service users accessing social assistance as cash transfers from these district offices can then be issued with tree seedlings for planting at their respective homes to aid in afforestation and climate change mitigation.

Furthermore, there is no question that for social workers' contribution to climate change mitigation an appropriate response strategy and evidence base is essential (Mason et al. 2017). The NASWZ is another vital Zimbabwean social work institution that is instrumental in rolling out climate change mitigation strategies. The NASWZ can collaboratively engage in research studies with the Department of Social Work at the University of Zimbabwe and the Midlands State University School of Social Work among the other social work training institutions. Community members in areas experiencing environmental degradation can complement the data collection undertaken by social workers in applied action research studies. Among some of the many climate change key drivers which social workers research activities can target, are the destruction of wetlands and the implications of uncontrolled deforestation.

Research findings can contribute to an eclectic knowledge management evidence base of environmental social work. I argue that this evidence base can be used, for example, during parliament portfolio hearings on the state and dynamics of Zimbabwe's social development trajectory or the annual pre-national budget consultation seminars. I further assert that social workers can harness knowledge elicited from the empirical research findings to sensitise policymakers in their role as duty bearers. For example, they could craft national budgets and policies guaranteeing vulnerable communities to be cushioned from climate change impacts.

Policies that mitigate the impacts of climate change need expansion based on the lobbying and advocacy outcomes of social workers and other development actors.

Currently in the 2021 agricultural season, government is to be rolling out the Pfumvudza climate smart agricultural initiative which can potentially preserve the integrity of the environment. In addition through the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Water and Rural Resettlement, the Climate Change Department in partnership with the UNDP Zimbabwe in November 2020 launched the "Building Climate Resilience of Vulnerable Agricultural Livelihoods in Southern Zimbabwe project" financed by the Green Climate Fund (UNDP 2020). The US$26.6 million initiative according to the UNDP (2020) aims to reach 2.3 million vulnerable smallholder farmers in the Manicaland, Masvingo and Matabeleland South provinces. These kinds of intervention resonate with the standpoint underpinned in this article that for people whose lives and livelihoods are being put at risk due to climate change, the desired outcomes of improved food security and resilience building are crucial. It is vital that government-employed social workers collaborate when implementing such projects.

As asserted by Jones and Truell (2012), owing to the impacts of ongoing natural and human activity-related disasters, increasing the acknowledgement of climate change impacts is relevant to social workers and social development actors. However, navigating complexities while meeting moral and political imperatives for poverty alleviation, social justice and environmental sustainability, presents formidable challenges (Institute of Development Studies – University of Sussex 2011). Climate change threats posed to the world's poorest people has meant increased attention to the need for effective and equitable "adaptation" mitigating its effects in the Global South (Adger, Shardul, and Mirza 2007). Thus the Agenda asserts that social work's relationship with the physical environment had not been a mainstream concern. This is unlike community development awareness that had always been a prevalent element in social work, and community work (IASSW 2016).

The above assertion is bolstered by Wood's (2011) contestations that climate change knowledge is heavily concentrated among scientists and "experts". For Wood (2011), those affected by climate change are unaware of it as a global phenomenon but possess valuable knowledge of local climate patterns and their interactions with other stresses in their own livelihoods and aspirations. In rural development interventions, local communities partnering with social workers have an intimate knowledge of cultural heritage and customs that have contributed to environmental preservation. For instance in Zimbabwe's cultural dynamics, careful harnessing of wildlife and trees has been through the totem system institution, in which a particular clan is identified by a totem in the form of an animal. This is because a clan member should not upset the gods by wanton tree cutting in the forests where his totem resides.

Similarly, the awareness of the vulnerability of the natural environment to human activity is not new and existed in indigenous cultures, established religious thinking, and cultural references while also referred to in nineteenth-century social work experience and literature (Jones and Truell 2012). Social workers should be at the forefront of designing poverty alleviation social development projects making

communities less likely to degrade the environment for survival. This social development projects design and implementation should be underpinned by the SDG 16 which stipulates promoting inclusive societies, justice and institutions for sustainable development and promoting strong and inclusive institutions. It is crucial that social workers be visible at key national events, for example, National Tree Planting Day and World Wetlands Day. Also, when building the capacity of vulnerable communities, for example, projects targeting less reliance on wood cutting for energy and communal agriculture sustainable approaches to conservation should be mainstreamed.

This is achievable by employing additional staff from government agencies such as the EMA and AGRITEX to work collaboratively with social workers. In this collaborative working environment social workers bring in their repertoire of community mobilisation skills. The other technocrats can apply their degradation prevention knowledge such as contour ridging, and afforestation with appropriate tree species. Some of the urban poor people cannot afford access to electricity and heavily rely on fossil fuels such as wood as their main source of fuel or energy. Most rural and urban areas experience environmental challenges such as pollution, poor waste management, deforestation and biodiversity loss. Undoubtedly these environmental challenges may be worsened if knowledge of climate change is not continuously imparted to communities.

Finally, for a home-grown compendium of best community and social development climate change practices in Zimbabwe, it is vital that social workers conduct regular desk reviews. Developing such a knowledge product would aim at assessing existing social work methods of interventions and literature and identifying gaps in community mobilisation communications. This innovation by social workers can be a benchmark for climate change centred social work interventions.

## Future Strategies for Mainstreaming Social Work's Contribution to Robust Climate Change Responses

The following section of the article enumerates strategies applicable for the advancement of social work roles in the climate change mitigation agenda. Certainly, Peeters (2012) suggests framing the problems that social workers deal with as social–ecological issues may result in adjusting working methods of social work. As Mathende and Nhapi (2016) opine, environmental management and protection issues in Zimbabwe have always dominated some researchers and development practitioners' research agendas. Thus, future social work strategies contributing to climate change mitigation should stimulate reflective thinking among services users and beneficiaries in rural and social development interventions. This enables communities to see the way in which interventions for poverty reduction can be galvanised if intersecting issues of climate change and natural resources degradation are dealt with.

As noted previously, Mupedziswa and Sinkamba (2014) emphasise forthrightly that at the education level particularly in Africa, efforts must be made for relevant theories to inform practice appropriateness in a given situation. Murombedzi (2014) articulates that climate crisis responses from African social scientists should encompass scholarly collaborations with scholars from other continents. According to Murombedzi (2014) the collaborations have been grounded on investigating environmental governance, environmental sustainability and livelihoods linkages.

According to Mathende and Nhapi (2016, 44),

> Social work training institutions in Zimbabwe should enrich their curriculum; to integrate issues of Social Ecology and Climate Change. Although tailor made Masters programmes as Social Ecology are offered by the University of Zimbabwe through the Centre for Applied Social Sciences and that Social Workers may enrol, Social Ecology and Climate Change concepts should gain more traction in critical undergraduate modules as Rural Development and Community Work.

Mbigi (2014) points out that another strategy led by social workers contributing to climate change mitigation would be articulating the vitality of harmonising African and Western knowledge systems. Mbigi (2014) opines that the African spiritual hierarchy or the African Theory of Intelligence shows that the only difference between Western and African theories is on metaphors and not making African theories useless or of less value.

On the same note, mainstreaming participatory research by social workers in communities can be harnessed as a key strategy for enhancing the desired outcomes for mitigating the impacts of climate change. Such an approach is crucial as it bolsters a better understanding of the contribution of public and social spaces to climate change mitigation. As observed by Cole (2014), the broader power dynamics in a society are reflected by the public space and its inclusionary and exclusionary processes. Spatscheck (2012) aids in the conceptualisation of public and social spaces by offering an understanding currently followed by the social work discourse. Researchers who developed concepts about youth work, and social development regard social spaces as fields for processes of acquirement, learning and active participation (Spatscheck 2012).

I contend that to bolster social work's contribution to climate change efforts, it is critical that accessibility to research outputs by service users be prioritised. This is because knowledge procreated by social workers in participatory action research for climate change mitigation has service users as the consumers of the knowledge. Therefore, social workers would need to ensure that findings from research studies on climate change impacts be translated to local vernacular languages. This stimulates social work climate change knowledge procreation than mere data mining. This offers a platform for challenging the dominance of "external expert" knowledge as social workers applying participatory practice is facilitative and developmental.

On this note, the *Nordic Social Work Research* (2014) highlights the Salisbury statement on practice research:

> Practice research involves curiosity about practice. It is about identifying effective and promising ways in which to help people; and it is about challenging troubling practice through the critical examination of practice and the development of new ideas in the light of experience. It recognizes that this is best done by practitioners in partnership with researchers, where [researchers] have as much, if not more, to learn from practitioners as practitioners have to learn from researchers. It is an inclusive approach to professional knowledge that is concerned with understanding the complexity of practice alongside the commitment to empower and address social justice issues, through practice. Practice research involves the generation of knowledge of direct relevance to professional practice and therefore will normally involve knowledge generated directly from practice itself in a grounded way.

Moreover, Palmer, Biggs, and Cummings (2015) note that co-produced research such as the co-production of services can be a collaboration between transdisciplinary academics and practitioners or practice-oriented researchers. A transdisciplinary approach is a mechanism for building shared understandings as a precondition for making progress jointly (Palmer, Biggs, and Cummings 2015).

It is commendable that the NASWZ hosts the online publication *African Journal of Social Work*. This is a good knowledge management platform in which best practices and reflections by social workers engaged in climate change interventions can be disseminated. Various research domains of the intersections of climate change and social work can be featured in special journal issues themed on social work and climate change. The themes could range from applied action research studies such as housing developments' impacts on wetlands to other themes such as documenting indigenous knowledge systems and their roles in climate change mitigation.

By promoting environmental and community sustainability, the Agenda commits social workers and social development practitioners to align activities and programmes with development initiatives integrating the environment with human dimensions (Lombard 2015). Henceforth rather than a remedial social work focus, Mpambela and Mabvurira (2017) exhort social workers to target the challenges brought forth by climate change by empowering communities on climate adaptation. Social work students' fieldwork placements in Zimbabwe are with government departments, hospitals, psychiatric and rehabilitation units, parastatal organisations, the private industry, mines, local authorities and NGOs. For embedding the climate change agenda through environmental social work approaches, Powers et al. (2018) note the importance of social workers who have not yet joined the profession to be trained to work alongside social workers who have taken up the fight to redress the climate crisis. By working alongside other professional disciplines as partners engaged in response systems, social workers and community members can help to highlight the interconnections that characterise the climate crisis (Powers et al. 2018).

## Conclusion

The article has framed the Zimbabwean socio-economic trajectory and the way in which social workers can contribute their repertoire of skills to the agenda to mitigate climate change impacts. Reflecting on broader literature, the article has shown that the social work profession in Zimbabwe has a role to play in climate change mitigation. This is because poor people's livelihoods in the Global South is buttressed on harnessing the natural resources, but this ends up being one of the key environment degradation drivers. The article concludes by asserting that one of the social workers' meaningful contributions to climate change mitigation is when they take the lead in engaging the communities they work in to reflect on environmental degradation, while applying a repertoire of community mobilisation skills that empower communities. This allows reflection and suggestions for possible solutions to overcome climate change challenges. Achievement of climate change mitigation in frontline social work practice as advocated by the Agenda, makes the profession better personify the change agent aura it is associated with.

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