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# Environmental Social Work in Zimbabwe: A New Field of Practice



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## Abstract

This paper seeks fostering understanding of 'people and place' by social work professionals. Increased demand for social workers comprehensive dealing with challenges of modern citizenship pushes for their pro activeness in line with a changing globalised world. The paper explores pathways for environmental social work activities engagement by Zimbabwean social workers. This is within the broader global South context for outcomes of contributing to global social impact, for evolution of more pro-environment social work methods. Environmental injustice is one of the challenges requiring social workers employment of holistic methods of interventions to intermediate on environmental justice. The paper argues for environmental justice and natural resource governance oriented Zimbabwean indigenous social work practice.

The paper conducted in-depth Zimbabwean environmental degradation literature review alongside purposely selected social work theoretical literature. The paper established lack of interdisciplinary collaboration amongst Zimbabwean professionals. The paper recommends social workers' active advocacy for solidarity and social economy through natural resource governance and environmental justice involvement. The Systems and Person in Environment Theoretical Framework are basis for social workers' environmental issues involvement when dealing with clients' (individual, group and community) problems. Schools of social work's curriculum inclusion of social ecology and environmental justice through post graduate applied courses in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Social Impact Assessment (SIA), Public Participation (PP) is argued for.

**Keywords:** Social work; Environmental degradation; Environmental justice; Natural resource governance; Person in Environment

## Introduction and Background

As change agents, social work professionals are not only restricted to therapeutic interventions for individuals, groups and community to alleviate poverty and unlock livelihoods linkages to service users. Social workers are also bold advocates of social justice and enhanced social functioning of clients in their environment. Zimbabwean social workers previously have been "shy" and not been comprehensively visible in collaborating and advocating for environmental justice; specifically in programmes aimed at mitigating environmental degradation.

The Rio Earth Summit of 1992, Agenda 21 advocates for global partnerships in sustainable development and poverty reduction [1]. Environmental sustainability where states commit to creation of environmental sustainability policies tackling climate change and carbon footprint is one of the outgoing Millennium Development Goals (MDG). MDG seven recognises the poor people's plight in the developing world and advocates for pragmatic steps to achieve environmental sustainability [2].

In this regard four targets are set out: integration of the principles of sustainable development into governmental policies and programs, reduction of biodiversity loss, halving the proportion of the population without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation, and achieving a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers [2].

In Zimbabwe, historically and in recent times, the impoverished have in most cases "been pushed aside to physical spaces with the poorest environmental quality relative to residential and industrial spaces of the rich, with serious consequences to their health and that of the future generations of the poor" [3]. In most cases, it's likely that people who live in fragile and infertile environments find it difficult to escape the cycle of poverty without the assistance of social workers. Hoff & Pollack [4] scolarion call by that "an extension of current focus on social justice to environmental justice will release enormous opportunities for social workers to participate in the

sustainability movement”, should not be ignored by Zimbabwean social workers if they are to deal holistically with causes and effects of poverty.

In Zimbabwe and globally, sustainable environmental management and protection issues have become topical. Within the profession, it can be argued that the discussion of developmental social work and indigenisation of social work in Africa is inadequate without focusing on environmental sustainability. This comes as environmental degradation continually emerges as a rising threat due to extraction of resources by entities with capitalistic tendencies and indigent people harnessing their natural resources to eke out livelihoods. The *raison d'être* being that there is a symbiotic relationship between humans and the environment. Whenever humans want resources, they turn to their environment. It is important to note that humans are in the ‘process of becoming’; social workers’ role is to aid the process by ensuring a beneficial relationship between people and their environment. Humans are subject of their environment; their problems arise when they try to interact with their environment; at this point that’s when the social workers intervention is required.

Guided by social work professional values and principles, practitioners should concern themselves with resource allocation and beneficence (equity and equality), extraction (in relation to conflict resources and human rights) issues. Moreover, in the African context, social workers methods of intervention target poor communities, who in harnessing their natural resources end up being one of the key environment degradation drivers based on the assertion that poverty is the biggest polluter. Gray & Coates [5] note that ‘environmental destruction and devastation are carried disproportionately by disadvantaged and marginalised groups’. In Zimbabwe environmental concerns in impoverished areas have resulted to be one key forced migration drivers. In the eastern Zimbabwe Chiadzwa community, villagers were forced to relocate due to perceived environmental impacts posed by open cast diamond extraction. Additionally, deforestation, principally in tobacco growing areas due to wood usage in tobacco curing by resettled farmers has caused concerns from the state, non-state actors and environmentalists alike.

Furthermore, financially hamstrung local authorities resorting to untreated sewerage discharge into rivers coupled by diamond and other mining companies discharge into major tributary rivers like Odzi, has resulted in massive water pollution. Resultantly, downstream communities livelihoods and food security has been impacted by this phenomenon. Moreover, at current, pre-paid water metering is to be rolled in urban centres though however, health and safety of the water consumers remains at risk with empirical evidence indicating pollution of most water sources. All these state of affairs should again be a concern for both social workers and health professionals as it means disruption of rural livelihoods and non-communicable diseases threat. In many urban centres littering has become unabated due to lack of environmental consciousness by the

public and ever increasing vending due to high unemployment. Recent urban developmental projects continue to pose serious environmental threats e.g. the under construction Mall of Africa in Borrowdale, Long Cheng Plaza Mall in Belvedere and the new housing schemes that are built in wetlands and fragile environments.

The article explores what potential advocacy roles institutions as National Association of Social Workers Zimbabwe (NASWZ) can implement to contribute to current multi stakeholder efforts towards ensuring environmental justice and sustainability outcomes. NASWZ represents the social work fraternity, a profession whose ethics and values commit it to applying a critical mass of its knowledge base to enhance human functioning. Collaboratively, with other non-state actors as Zimbabwe lawyers for Human Rights, Zimbabwe Environmental Lawyers Association (ZELA), Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for Human Rights (ZDHR), civil society actors as Environment Africa (EA), Centre for Natural Resource Governance (CNRG), World Wildlife Foundation(WWF) in mainstreaming visibility in environmental preservation within broader agenda of environmental protection and social development.

The articles objectives are three fold:

- i. To analyse Zimbabwean environmental degradation trends and impacts.
- ii. To explore potential social workers’ roles in aiding efforts towards sustainable natural environment harnessing towards communities well-being outcomes.
- iii. To recommend potential strategies for social workers collaborative environmental justice advocacy strategies.

### Overview of Environmental Protection Legislative Framework

Zimbabwe has an enabling environmental protection legislative framework principally under the Environmental Management Act Chapter (20:27), administered by the country’s statutory arm Environmental Management Agency (EMA) [6]. The Act’s Chapter six, section 97 criminalizes failure for undertaking of a mandatory Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). It asserts that EIA needs to be commissioned prior to any major developmental project to guarantee the mitigation of social and ecological impacts of activities such as mining. The assessment should also lay down the development company’s commitment to address the environmental risks and negative impacts arising from its activities.

By criminalizing developmental projects that goes on without Environmental Impact Assessment, the law advocates environmental justice. Moreover, by advocating that there should be mitigation of social and ecological impacts, the law also advocates for social justice. Therefore, social workers can effectively deal with this by advocating for compulsory Social Impact Assessments (SIA) as part of EIA; as a legal requirement

in advancing social and environmental justice. Though it is not in explicit terms, the Environmental Management Act enlists Social Impact Assessments to be carried out as part of EIA, and that Social Management Plans to be implemented as mitigation of negative impacts. However, this is not taken seriously in Zimbabwe as EIA certificate is just obtained to have a complete checklist before developmental projects start.

Moreover, under this law, EMA issues a certificate of compliance for development projects such as extractive mining to proceed after EIA has been conducted. However, from desk surveys of newspaper articles undertaken in compilation of this paper, on the contrary, economic expediency in extractive mining ventures has taken precedence over legislative compliance. In most cases the extractive mining ventures undertaken without legal due diligence in terms of the environment have had devastating livelihoods and ecological consequences to downstream communities whose water sources are within the same catchment as with the extractive mining ventures.

### Methods

We conducted a small scale, secondary document review of environmental issues in Zimbabwe, in particular newspaper articles that covered extractive industries in Mashonaland and central, Harare and Manicaland provinces between 2010 and 2015. The non exhaustive review of publicly-available secondary literature on environmental degradation documents also was undertaken to inform the analysis. Reviewing secondary literature helped to elucidate an understanding of environmental injustice, its relationship with social work outcomes and the unique positioning of social work in this field. This phase of work served primarily to position our findings within the existing landscape. Publicly-available documentation on environmental degradation was reviewed and content analyzed.

### Perspectives of Environmental Fragility

The following section of the article will catalogue some of the environmental degradation dynamics currently at play. Zimbabwe's vast mineral wealth has been experiencing relatively massive investments in the face of the country's fragile economic recovery after a decade long recession. Extractive mining investments in Zimbabwe's lucrative mining sector are embraced given employment creation, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) contributions and infrastructural development prospects. Such investments especially with nations as China and Russia have steadily risen where for instance Zimbabwe's trade with economic powerhouse-China topped \$1,102 billion in 2013 (Daily News, 24 February 2014). However such investments, in extractive mining, have brought with them devastating ecological implications which has become a cause for national concern. Many mineral prospectors in their exploration activities have flagrant disregard of the country's environmental laws greatly exposing already economically strained populations in which they are operating in, to ecological and livelihoods security risks.

In most instances, downstream communities are the casualties of negative mining ecological implications. These are poor people who survive on less than a dollar a day. These communities are impacted due to their river courses' exposure to toxins from extractive mining and other various forms of environmental degradation. This would be conflict with their livelihood options such as communal farming and livestock rearing. Coates [7] notes that "when the earth has been senselessly exploited and polluted, social injustice has been a result". The existing challenge is what platforms the affected communities can utilize to seek effective recourse to guarantee enhanced livelihoods security when prone to ecological disturbances caused by extractive mining.

Under the 'militarized' and irresponsible capitalism in Chiadzwa, Manicaland Province, [6] and other mining areas in Zimbabwe, capitalists have exploited the rapidly depleted resources to the detriment of the poorest of the poor. From a neo-Marxist standpoint, as remedial intervention, it can be argued that social workers should initiate strategies that can be used for regenerating natural resources on which the livelihoods of the majority of the population depends. Moreover, a paradigm shift by actors involved in livelihoods security and mining investment facilitation is required. This argument is supported by Miller, Hayward & Shaw (2011) who asserts that it's crucial for contemporary social workers to take note of the impacts of environmental injustice on vulnerable populations groups, and start to work on mitigation programmes.

Moreover, Sakubva River, flowing through the City of Mutare, is a tributary of the Odzi River, which in turn drains into the Save, one of Zimbabwe's major rivers. The City of Mutare pollutes river water by raw sewage, industrial and institutional waste. At current moment, urban centres despite heavy protest are with government approval to start rolling out a pre-paid water service for consumers. Although this has been contested as trampling upon human rights and constitutional guarantees that the water itself remains under constant threat of pollution is even more apprehensive. This justifies Cajete's assertion that "...the fate of the earth is now intimately intertwined with the fate of the human species".

Deliberate pollution of water resources is one good example of environmental injustice. As proponents of environmental Marxism contend, industrial pollution by unsympathetic capitalists mostly affects the poor communities whose livelihood is hinged on the environment. This is afflicting injustice on the defenceless poor communities as it dents on their livelihoods. It is generally agreed in literature that "environmental pollution disproportionately affects minority and low-income populations" [8]. Also, Jarvis [9] asserts that the "minority and poor communities bear the burden of environmental problems that are forced upon them by decision makers and more empowered communities that subscribe to the notion of not in my back yard". These further results in social inequalities, marginalization and

disenfranchisement of the poor, which calls for the intervention of social work cadres to act on behalf of their clients in liaison with legal professionals.

Additionally, year 2014 research carried by the University of Zimbabwe (UZ) on pollution levels at Lake Chivero, a major city of Harare water supply source, revealed that the lake and all its subsidiary rivers are subject to stress from heavy pollution of metals, pesticides and raw sewage. This requires a huge financial commitment to rehabilitate the lake for the benefit of water users (Zimbabwe Broadcasting Cooperation <http://www.zbc.co.zw/news-categories/top-stories/17219-chivero-heavily-polluted-uz-research>).

According to the research, Lake Chivero is highly eutrophic and levels of nutrients in the water are now very high because of raw effluent, domestic and industrial waste being discharged into it, resulting in blue-green algae blooms and water hyacinth. Moreover, rapid urbanisation and increased housing construction demand, sand poaching has emerged as a versatile livelihood strategy where the natural resource is freely and readily available. In Zimbabwe, there is a current debate on livelihood or survivalist strategies against environmental protection, given the high unemployment rate in the country. The unemployed people have been engaged in income generating projects like sand poaching and vending which are not compliant with environmental legislations and city bylaws. On an industrial scale, there have been recent developments in Harare and Mutare, where urban land has been converted from nature reserves/recreational parks to construction of shopping malls and hotels. Some of these spaces were previously regarded as 'fragile' or nature reserves. Due to land shortages and or unscrupulous land deals, these natural spaces have been disrupted by construction projects.

Examples are Meikles Park land saga in Mutare. Meikles Park was designated as a recreational park, though it was lately being used by poor informal traders as a vending space. Mr. Isau Mupfumi the new owner of the land was quoted in the Daily News newspaper saying, "We (Stalvic Investments) are the new owners of the Meikles Park and we have big plans for it as we envisage putting up a five-star hotel there" (Daily News, 2 May 2014). The question that activist environmental social workers have to pose is: Did the City of Mutare conduct public participation and consultations? Public participation is an international best practice, especially where there are plans to have major infrastructural development projects like this, as there are environmental and social impacts that are likely to occur due to the development. In cases like this, social workers should be prepared to confront politicians as the Meikles Park land transactions were aided politically.

In another case, Harare's Belvedere and Borrow dale residential areas wetlands have now been converted into spaces for Shopping malls. Karikoga Kaseke, the Chief Executive officer of Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) was quoted by the

Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce (ZNCC) defending the construction of a Chinese Mall in Belvedere wetlands saying the construction of a USD300 million cannot be stopped by frogs. "So some people wanted us to sacrifice thousands of jobs and forgo these massive investments in order to protect frogs and 23 trees" [10]. Besides the 'frogs and 23 trees' in this area, there were families and community groups like churches who regarded the place as their place of worship. The project went on despite a controversial Environmental Impact Assessment process. In cases like this, involvement of social workers in environmental advocacy is very challenging especially in a country struggling with high unemployment where jobs have to be created.

In these cases, social workers can also broaden their social research settings and also focus in areas like ecotourism to study issues like conflict between local control of resources and global capitalism. Global capitalism is a threat to intergeneration equity, which is a concern for activist social workers and eco feminists because equity and equality are central in human development [11]. The question to be further interrogated is what best position can social worker's play in cases like this, besides calling on the EMA to take Social Impact Assessments seriously as they conduct EIAs.

Again, foreign mining companies especially from the far east, are perceived as bringing in the much needed investment in the face of Zimbabwe's constrained relations with traditionally economically powerful western countries. This economic paradox has resulted in many instances of lack of due diligence oversight by the different concerned powers that be in granting green light to extractive mining ventures resulting impacts like ecological disasters. However, when these entities are prospecting and extracting the minerals, their approach has been rapacious to the environment as they seek to ensure maximum benefit from the minerals. State actors only realize such implications only through surveillance which is initiated usually a bit too late or when pleas by affected communities also reach the corridors of political power that's when they crack the whip. However the ecological damage would have been done.

Restorative measures like invoking the environmental laws is initiated when extractive mining is already taking its toll on the environment and the communities deriving livelihoods from natural resources as rivers. The media oversight role and advocacy groups' efforts have facilitated visibility of environmental impacts of extractive mining.

Displacement of Chiadzwa and Chisumbanje communities to pave way for diamond mining and bio fuels respectively has been so traumatic for the rural poor. Villagers were displaced without a proper Resettlement Action Plan (RAP). Institutions like the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) or the Ombudsman office nor human rights defenders as Zim Rights did not rise to the occasion as per their mandates for safeguarding of the villagers' livelihoods security The harnessing of natural resources in Chiadzwa and Chisumbanje whilst desired to boost



the country's GDP and ultimately citizens standards of living, is the exploitation of poor people; directly and indirectly, the communities have suffered as a result of environmental damage in these villages. Villagers suffered loss of fertile agricultural lands; their rivers were polluted and state sponsored violence reported. For concerned social workers, this situation meant that the villagers seemingly required some sought of restorative psychosocial assistance as the entire community was stressed by the sudden and unprecedented displacement due to the development. In Chisumbanje, the issue of land dispossession is still unfinished business between state, Green fuels and the community. Social workers as mediators should find their space and take up the challenge of resolving this potential conflict. Natural resource governance induced conflicts are well pronounced in Africa. For example, in Nigeria, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) has used extra-legal means to demand their rights. In Zimbabwe, this should not be case in a country where social work is recognised and defined as "...a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social working ages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing" [12]. The above definition should be practically used in this context because social work is a profession with capacity to solve problems in human relationships.

The significant economic, social and physical land scape changes in settings as Chisumbanje should drive social workers and others actors in the social development community of practice to action. These cadres actually have a role in addressing new challenges associated with the alteration of land use. Prostitution is on the rise, cotton production has been greatly affected, and Checheche (a rural service centre near Chisumbanje) was recently given town status, influx of people working in cotton and ethanol plants (without an Influx Management Plan) which burdens the local health services centre like St Peters Hospital.

In 2013, the gold rich region of Mazowe, saw 11 Chinese miners being ordered to cease mining. This was after an eventual tour of the Minister responsible for the Environment and Climate and other governmental officials after numerous pleas by villagers whose livestock and drinking water was exposed to toxins from extractive mining activities (Herald newspaper, 8 October 2013). These downstream villagers are communities upon which livelihood activities rely on the river's watercourse especially livestock like cattle which is valued for draught power and social status. In a more recent report about the Mazowe environmental crisis by the Herald Newspaper, "Mecassi Engineering which has been operating along Mazowe river has defied government's directive by carrying out its operations

on the river bank and conducting alluvial mining instead of desilting" Herald 12 July 2015.

It is reported that due to this, Mazowe River has changed its course. Surprisingly, this company was given a river desilting licence by the Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA) but started carrying out illegal alluvial gold mining under the guise of river desilting. What are the implications for social work? This shows lack of strict implementation of the Environmental Management Act. Uzumba Maramba Pfungwe is in the catchment area of Mazowe River. This area falls in region five agro-ecological region of Zimbabwe which is characterized by low rainfalls and high temperatures. Its means water (as a basic need and right) is scarce both for domestic and agricultural activities. The scarcity of water in this area is not only caused by drying up of rivers but also by polluted rivers which makes the water unclean and unsafe for human consumption.

Also in Chiadzwa, Kusena, Chirasika, Chishingwi and Tonhorai alluvial diamond mining on soil and water resources has loosened soil as the heavy vehicles and machinery have the effect of hardening the soil. The loose sediment is easily carried away into the riverine systems composed of major rivers as Save, Odzi and Singwizi rivers and the small dams in the area. Amongst the impacts have been skin rash and livestock losses [13]. Additionally, the mining companies have contributed to deforestation by effectively cleared large tracks of land for diamond ore exposure with loss of fruit trees such as the baobab tree (*adansoniadigitata*) which has social and economic roles in the community [14].

### Environmental Degradation Implications and Pathways for Social Workers Involvement

Multinational companies in the mining sector investments are usually welcomed as it is one of the country's levers of economic growth. However, the contestation is about encouraging GDP growth forecasts spurred by indicators as mining whilst overlooking the socio-economic cost of extractive mining sector activities. Another critical perspective to consider is whether people power really matters in guaranteeing ecological diversity at the expense of mining industry investments. Can community actors mobilise their capacities and engage the mining sector players, the government for their voice and concerns to be factored in harnessing of natural resources surrounding them given how such exploitation ends up with more enduring ecological harm than mid-term economic gains accrued.

Again, the other dilemma to critically reflect on is the structures obtaining in extractive mining affected communities where most of the affected communities would readily offer their abundant varying skills and labour force to any extractive mining employment opportunities presented to them. This is oblivious of potential hazards to their own local environments which form their system of socio-economic resilience. In one newspaper report, 500 workers of a mining company ordered to

cease operations due to massive water pollution were reported to be facing an uncertain future without regular employment guarantees, (Manica post newspaper 12 December 2013).

### Indigenisation of Social Work Inspired Social Work Curriculum Realignment

Jarvis [8] notes that social work institutions have scholars and have been producing professionals who lack the capacity to “address the nexus of environmental justice, social work, and social justice”. This is a global phenomenon as social workers merely train professionals to become caseworkers, group workers and community workers. Ideally, social work training institutions in Zimbabwe should reform their curriculum; to integrate issues of social ecology. It is evident that social work in Zimbabwe and far afield has principally majored on social issues and has been disconnected from topics concerning the natural and physical environment [15]. There is increasing need for social workers in Zimbabwe to be equipped with environmental knowledge. Environment should be incorporated within the social work knowledge base. Social workers could be aware of environmental issues but tend to merely concentrate practically on the social environment, but with adequate training on natural environmental concerns, they can develop their understanding of the need for environmental justice in helping their clients. Duwane [16] argues that “it is important that social work courses and field education offer students the opportunity to study the nexus between environmental justice and social work”. For social workers to be active participants in environmental justice in future, they have to adopt Duwane’s recommendation of including multidisciplinary ideas on social work training.

Irwin [17] argues that, “separations of the social from the natural, biological and scientific can be effective in terms of establishing disciplinary boundaries and gaining professional recognition from practitioners of other disciplines, however, such division of labour becomes profoundly problematic when confronting environmental questions” (Irwin, 2001: 7). Jones [18] concurs with Irwin [17] by noting that, “Social work education must contribute to the available scholarly research and connect social work’s long-established social justice values and commitments with environmental justice issues”.

The environmental problems currently confronting the social work fraternity and their clients include but not limited: recurrent droughts, pollution in its various forms which is a great health and livelihoods risk to the people, irresponsible natural resource extraction, which is causing displacements and environmental degradation. Mining activities have been done without Environmental and Social Management Plans. Displacements due to mining have happened in Chiadzwa with apparently no Resettlement Action Plans (RAP).

Therefore, it can be argued that the current modules in the Bachelor of Social Work Honours Degree currently offered by the UZ and Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE) do not adequately deal with environmental issues like justice

and sustainability. To enrich social workers’ training to be more responsive to environmental justice and sustainability issues, the paper recommends that applied social science postgraduate courses introduction like Social Ecology, Social Impact Assessment, Public Participation and Corporate Social Responsibility by the Schools of Social Work. These courses will prepare and enrich graduates to deal with issues of environmental justice, ethical business and ecological sustainability. “To tackle problems that are both social and ecological, we need place-based models, which help to understanding the dynamic interaction between nature and society...” (Fribergh Workshop, 2000) [19]. This approach redefines a social worker as a social ecologist with profound knowledge in environmental research, policy, and practice.

Though social work is a global profession, its practice changes from time to time and place to place. The problems that were there during the inception of social work are different to the societal problems that confront social work. It can further be argued that social workers should be diversified and indigenised to fit in to the African context. Kemp [20] argues that by neglecting the environmental justice field and by not recognising it a bonfide professional identity, social workers are violating their own ethics. Social work principles entail the responsibility to help the needy, ameliorating social problems and promoting social justice [21]. From the angle of social justice, there is nothing that can prevent social workers from delving in issues of environmental justice, because social workers are committed to vulnerable individuals and communities. However, their intervention is depended on the knowledge of social ecology and interdisciplinary.

### Social Entrepreneurship

Social workers should create professional institutions and platforms for advocacy. This can be in the form of a working group on environment within the ranks of National Association of Social Workers Zimbabwe (NASWZ) or formation of new environmental pressure organisations which for example can be termed: Concerned Social Workers Forum or Social Workers for Human Rights. In other allied professions like legal fraternity bodies like Zimbabwe Environmental Lawyers Association (ZELA); an organisation that deals with environmental justice from a legal platform are in existence.

If social workers are not equipped to form an organisation that deals directly with environmental issues, collaborations can be made with organisations like Environment Africa (EA), Centre for Research and Development (CRD), Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR). These coalitions would be for dealing with issues of environmental justice and natural resources governance in an integrated manner. Zapf (2009) notes that “forming multidisciplinary partnerships is an important and effective step toward achieving environmental justice...., a diverse group of professionals-such as engineers, scientists, businesspeople, urban planners, and those in the legal profession-has focused

heavily on environmental concerns within its practice". Platforms as June 5-World Environment Day and World Social Workers Day (WSWD), National Tree Planting Day, Day of the African Child can be used to initiate environmental protection conscientisation strategies dissemination to grassroots communities.

The strength of social work is on its involvement in it multidisciplinary approaching problem solving in communities and promotion of social justice. This place the profession best suited to take an active role in the environmental justice movement in closing the gap between social and environmental justice [22,23]. This view motivates the "legitimate emergence of social scientists as one group among several stakeholders in achieving sustainability" [24]. Social work practitioners can be extend this by engaging in social action aimed at legislative reforms and raising awareness about environment and also educating communities not to grant 'social licence' to investors who do not implement their Environmental and Social Management Plans.

Social workers' involvement in environmental issues should not be problematized. The thereof environment in social work is as old as the profession itself. Historically, Zapf [25] argues that Mary Richmond, the founder of Social work, practiced the social systems approach of 'person in environment' social work of "visiting client in their home environments". This means the founder of the profession recognised the importance of the physical environment and its connection of poverty status of persons.

Since then, social workers have been involved in addressing environmental problems affecting human beings, though much attention has been on the narrow social and economic environment as compared to the biophysical environment. Limited attention towards the natural environment is one of the reasons that led to little focus on environmental justice issues. Ecological crisis is one of the contemporary problems posing a great threat not only to the poor but to the rich individuals and communities. At a global scale, environmental crisis like climate change and global warming have implications on social welfare and social work. It is difficult to talk of developmental social work or social development without arguing on the relevance of social work to environment and sustainable growth. Social workers are called upon to focus on the social dimensions of the global environmental crisis in order to continually meet the needs of vulnerable people and to remain relevant as a profession which serves humanity with competence.

### Roles of Social Work in Environmental Advocacy

With reference to the social work profession's knowledge base, the Integrated Approach to Social Work is a major standard. It encompasses human rights, global social development and ecological perspectives [26], guided by ecological perspective conceptual underpinnings. Environmental problems are symptoms of significant and underlying problems and resolving is through social, economic and political change than scientific and

technological change, [26]. Balancing human's environmental impact with the inherent needs of the environment is critical.

In the past decade, in line with the MDGs, the concepts like sustainability, social development, and sustainable development have featured much in social work both in practice and theory. These issues are linked to what Midgley & Conley [27] call developmental social work. Patel [28] notes that social development is about setting goals that lead to the improvement of the material conditions of the people or attainment of socio-economic returns. This assertion situates social workers as agents for improvement of people's productive capacities by connecting them with their environment.

Midgley & Conley [27] note that social development approaches are also called developmental social work, where social workers are principally oriented on improving basic capacity or functioning among individuals, groups, and communities through addressing issues of basic needs. Basic needs are ecological as individuals, groups and communities depend on the environment to meet their social and economic needs. In this case, the focus of social workers should be on ensuring that individuals, groups and communities exploit resources in a sustainable way so that their livelihood and that of future generations are guaranteed.

Sustainable development means protecting people and the natural environment, and giving hope to future generations. Social work is inherently considered as a profession that gives people hope. This is the "fullest realization of the person-in-environment perspective", which is the theoretical cornerstone of macro level social work practice (NASW, 2000: 105). The Systems and Person-in-environment approach broadly looks at the person/ social work clients in relation to the social, economic, political and natural environment problems. Social workers normally have the tendency of ignoring the biophysical (natural) environment in the helping process. The paper therefore calls on social workers to take practical steps towards holistically addressing environmental issues when helping poor people, especially the rural poor in Zimbabwe. This is because people are products of their environment.

Ecological and livelihoods nexus in mineral extractions reflection will be aided by application of integrated perspectives of social work lens. Potential catalysts to tackling this anomaly can be through change agents as social and community development workers amongst another host of actors should a community of practice approach are embodied to confront extractive mining challenges. These actors in facilitating community mobilization to access rights and obligations from state and non-state actors, derives guidance from dynamics in development thinking. Currently, an integrated approach is being touted for effective development interventions guaranteeing communities enhanced social functioning and socio economic development aspirations.

It is also important for grassroots social workers educate communities and also influence social policy makers that "...



positive social environment is not possible without a sustainable natural environment..." [29]. This instils acceptance in the communities and government that our "natural environment not only influences but also is crucial for our social lives now and in the future" (IFSW *ibid*); hence social policies have to integrate issues of environmental sustainability and equitable natural resource governance.

### Conclusion

Social workers should not be apologetic to address issues of ecological sustainability, human rights when dealing with the issue of poverty eradication. There is no poverty eradication to talk about, without strictly addressing or integrating these issues in social work intervention amongst the poorest of the poor. Environmental exploitation practically violates the social work principle of social justice. Social workers are dictated by their code of ethics to safeguard people against social injustice (Council of Social Workers Zimbabwe, CSWZ, 2015) [30]. Through the social workers' ecological model (person in environment), professionals must integrate the concept of sustainability in poverty reduction efforts, through championing environmental justice and natural resource governance. It should be understood that the natural world or natural capital is at the centre of our ability as social workers to meet the basic needs of our clients. A hazardous natural environment is a health and social risk. Environmental/ecological social work should be a field that practitioners should consider in Zimbabwe if they want to ensure the improvement of quality of life, restoring the dignity of the rural and urban poor [31-37].

Community social workers should embrace their role of promoting community environmental education, planning, and advocacy. Activist social workers should also influence policy makers to understand that the social and physical environmental forces are determinants of people's needs and social policies have to be responsive to this. Social workers should also collectively advocate for increased budget/financial support for environmental causes. Social workers should again advocate/plan for the implementation of environmental reclamation programmes through for example the Food for Work Programme/Public Works Programme. After going through years of physical exploitation by mining companies, the Chiadzwa and Mazowe environments are now fragile. Environmental reclamation programmes are justified by neo-Marxists who argue that they would help to rehabilitate the natural resources on which livelihoods of the community depend.

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