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Climate Change and Sustainable Development in Pakistan: A Social Work Perspective

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Abstract: Pakistan is among those countries of the region which are affected by climate changes. Every year floods inflict heavy losses to men and material causing heavy burden on national exchequer. The main causes of these sudden climate changes are damages caused by humans themselves to natural environment. The study concludes that due to damage to natural environment disaster like flood, drought and other natural calamities have increased which is a matter of concern for policy makers. The study recommends that social workers can contribute in the protection of environment and mitigation of climate related disasters by performing different roles. In addition, he/she can train and educate the people regarding their role and responsibilities in protection and conservation of environment. Social workers must to be equipped with modern knowledge and skills for delivering services to those who are affected by disasters. They can advocate for the cause of those who have suffered a lot due to climate changes. Social workers can also mobilize and train volunteers for taking part in environmental conservation, controlling deforestation and encouraging afforestation.

Introduction

South Asian states including Pakistan are highly vulnerable to climate change and related climate change-induced calamities such as floods, droughts, hurricanes, storms, and heat waves, etc (Ullah et al, 2024). The major outcome of these calamities are raising temperatures, unexpected rainfall patterns, rise in sea level, and dangerous weather conditions are negatively human lives and the atmosphere (Hussain and Khan, 2023).

Since 2022, there many disasters occurred in Pakistan due to climate change such as outburst of glaciers in the Upper Indus Basin, flooding in urban areas like Karachi and Hyderabad, rains in Baluchistan, Sindh and floods southern Punjab (Kamal, 2023). The heavy rains in summer of 2022 caused heavy floods which badly affected lives and properties in many parts of Pakistan. This calamities inflicted heavy loss to agriculture and devastated 3.6 million acres of land for cultivation of crops, killed more than 75000 livestock, nearly 24000 schools were partly or fully damaged and other infrastructure including bridges,

roads and culverts were demolished.

Moreover, millions of families have been displaced to safer places while to losses due the floods exceeded 30 billion US dollars (Majeed, 2023).

Climate change has affected the efforts for sustainable development such provision of healthcare education, gender equality and provision of clean drinking water (Mukhtar, 2020). Furthermore, intervention for decent work, economic up-lift, infrastructure development, sustainable communities have also been affected (Sidun, & Gibbons, 2024). In addition, raise in temperature and changing weather patterns has affected the weaker sections of society and is endangering bais human rights in 21 century (Shah, Amjad, Hameed, & Shahzad, 2020). Climate change is not solely an conservational problem rather it has affected all spheres of life including social and economic of the whole world particularly poor countries. To tackle this issue, an all-inclusive approach is the need of the hour (Shahid, and Ahmad, 2023). This research paper is an attempt to highlight the impacts of climate change on sustainable development in Pakistan. It also aims to know about the role of social workers in mitigating the impacts of hazards on weaker sections of communities in local context.

Methodology

The paper is qualitative in nature and is based on the review of available literature. In order to carryout review, books, research papers, online sources were consulted and critically analyzed. The paper examines the impacts of climatic changes on those who have less resource and are more vulnerable to all types of hazards in Pakistan. It also aims to identify the role of social workers in mitigation of damages to the local people in Pakistan.

Literature Review

Climate change has become a global issue as earth's climate is changing very rapidly due to damages inflicted by human (Drolet et al. 2015). It is expected the due to climate change, poverty will increase; social inequality may expand making it hard for the weaker section of society to avail health services (Cheng et al. 2021). As a result there is a shift in policy measure throughout the world for focusing on impacts of climate change and disaster risk reduction In addition; it has also affected the efforts to achieve sustainable development (IPCC 2007).

Sustainable development has been interpreted by scholars and development practitioners as that development which fulfils the demands of the current generation and also makes sure future generations should also enjoy its benefits (Robinson and Herbert, 2001). There are three dimensions of sustainable development i.e. the economic, ecological and social that is the pillars of sustainable development. It demands that sustainable development is that which is economically viable, socially desirable and ecologically sound (Munasinghe and Swart, 2000.

Social Work and Climate Justice

Climate change is rarely debated in mainstream social work and was presented for the first time in Copenhagen during the Conference of the Parties (COP15) (Dominelli, 2011). Social workers have professional responsibility to have knowledge about hazardous position of natural environment, to aware the people and to help their clients act in an environmentally responsible way (NASW, 2006).

In order to handle climate issues on top priority basis, social workers throughout the globe have joined together to work for climate justice (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2020). As per guidelines of International Federation of Social Workers, climate change is affecting all of us especially those who have meagre resources or who are marginalized in all spheres of life. The Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development was released at the same time as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and included various themes line *'Promoting social and economic equalities'*, *'Promoting the*

dignity and worth of peoples' 'Promoting community and environmental sustainability', and 'Promoting the importance of human relationships'. The third theme, 'Promoting community and environmental sustainability' is directly linked with the need to help solve climate change and inspired social workers throughout the globe to launch activities with host communities for viable solutions (Moonga, 2018).

It is the moral obligation of social workers to work for protection of human rights which are in line with environmental rights. For this purpose they have to launch advocacy campaigns, environmental protection, mental health and sustainable communities (International Federation of Social Workers 2020). Social work profession aims to ensure social justice in society. The Canadian Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics stresses on the worth and dignity of all persons and inspired us to understand the person-in. It is the duty and responsibility of social worker to build the capacity of individuals and communities and make them independent. Climate justice demands us to accept the association between humans and environment (McKinnon, 2012).

Watt-Cloutier (2016) held that there is close relationship of social work with climate change as it is linked with social inequalities and impacts individual and communities at all levels. Social workers, work with the affected communities at micro level who are impacted by climate change. They also make sure that their voices are heard by policy makers and initiatives should be launched in consultation with the local communities (O'Riordan, 2004). Moreover, the poor and marginalized sections of communities should also be taken onboard in project cycle i.e. decision making, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of climate change interventions (Madey & Chege, 2022). In order to achieve the goal of sustainable development climate change interventions should be community driven Absolon, 2019). Social workers have the capabilities to get connected with communities, policy makers, government authorities and other important stake holders including target communities for addressing social inequalities and offering a sustainable solution. At the individual level we as citizen of the country are responsible for respecting our environment (Schibli, 2020).

At present, social workers face multiple challenges because they have to work for the protection of human rights, ensuring social justice as well as to strive for preservation of earth to by applying practical social work intervention to tackle natural disasters as a result of climate change (Ritchie, 2010). Social work practitioners and researchers have realized that this is their primacy obligation is to deliver services to those affected by disaster especially to the weaker sections of society (Wu, Karabanow, & Hoddinott, 2022). Social work interventions stresses on the relationship between various aspects like social, economic as well ecological.

Green social work is comparatively a new concept that emphasizes on equipping social workers with such instruments which they need to take part in all types of hazards. The major difference between social work and green social work is the blend of natural and physical environment in to practice for welfare of client and the ecosystem in which they live (Shukri, Yahaya, & Bahrin, 2024).

The International Federation of Social Workers has identified the following roles which a social worker can play for conservation of environment:

1. Education

Social worker should gain new knowledge and skills regarding climate change and should take part in policy discussions (Hussain, Ibrar, & Alam, 2018). Without necessary knowledge the social workers will not be able to assist the client by providing emotional support in the form of counselling for minimizing the effects of climate change (Abro, & Wasi, 2024). It is the moral obligation of social work educators to make sure that future social worker have the knowledge about climate change. In addition the curriculum should also contain topics related to environmental justice (Holbrook, Akbar & Eastwood

2019). Social Workers emphasis that disastrous event as a result of climate change are not the source of disparities and those most obstructed are already living miserable life. They have not access to safe drinking water, lack of health facilities, quality education and food insecurity (Alston & Drolet, 2015).

Social Workers through education and advocacy can guide the people about the negative impacts of pollution and deforestation on environment. In addition, they can sensitize them about sustainable practices and need and importance of environmental conservation through education and campaigns (Bai and Lyu, 2023).

This, social worker has to play central role in environmental protection and climate change. For this purpose education, research and practice of the discipline can contribute to control factors which are responsible for environmental degradation (Lavuri, 2022). According to Alsehaimi, (2023) due to increasing number and frequency of natural disaster and its impacts has led to the recognition of the discipline of social work as environmental concerns were part of social work theory and practice (Zheng and Jin, 2023)

2.Advocate

Green social work is an essential part of professional social work where social workers addresses all form of oppression comprising those that are influenced by environmental degradation (Nagoshi, Pillai, & Salehin, 2025). In green social work, the social workers sensitize the general public, mobilize and organize them regarding environmental degradation. Hence green social work strive for human rights and social justice issues with the goal of conserving the environment to for welfare of the people (Abid, Raza, Naz, & Bukhari, 2025).

Social workers can also advocate for framing such policies and action which can help in minimizing the impacts of climate change (Abro, & Wasi, 2024). In addition, they can also work with the host communities for getting funds to mitigate climate related damages. Moreover, social workers can also motivate people for more plantation, stop cutting of tress and aware people regarding negative impacts of environmental degradation (Alston, 2019).

Social workers can also empower the communities by mobilizing them and motivate them to solve their issues on self-help basis. In this way the communities are prepared for collective action to implement such schemes for protection and climate and conservation of resources. (Hopp, 2022).

Social workers can serve as a link between community and government functionaries as well as donors for initiating climate related projects. In addition, they can help on rehabilitation of those people who were displaced due to any natural or man-made disasters (Suppa et al., 2019).

3. Agent of change

Social workers are agent of change and are responsible for making people accept the socio-cultural changes which are beneficial for them. In addition, they orientate the local community to support those projects which are planned for climate protection (Schibli, 2020). Social workers the weaker sections of society by giving them opportunity to take part in those decisions which mainly affect them (Holbrook, Akbar & Eastwood, 2019). Mostly the people of rural areas who are more close to the nature are ignored in those decisions which are directly related to their lives.

In addition, the voices of these marginalized people are not heard government departments, donors and partner agency. Social workers by organizing and mobilizing these people enable them to participate in project cycle of environmental conservation projects (Masud & Khan 2024). In addition, they can highlight the social impacts of climate change in community. Moreover he/she can examine the impacts of climate change in future policy decisions and community projects (Appleby, Bell & Boetto 2015).

4. Mobilization of volunteers and capacity building

The 2018 General Assembly resolution 73/140 on Volunteering for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development accepted volunteering essential for execution of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Qayum, Afzal, & Qayyum, 2023). It inspires the governments to include volunteerism in plans and policies for attainment of the said agenda. The 2021 Report of the Secretary-General on Volunteering for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development further demands from Member Countries to encourage informal volunteer groups at the grassroots community level who are always at the front line of community response (Fadel, 2021). There is chance for government to cultivate the power of groups working in the localities to develop resilience against disasters due climate change (UN Volunteers, 2024).

Volunteer activities can be carried out in different ways for responding to climate change and developing community resilience. In addition volunteers and volunteering promotes climate justice through gender equity and youth leadership (Feeney, 2024). They serve as trainers, trainees, educators and are active participants in climate policy. In many countries, national and international volunteers help in enhancing institutional capacity to tackling climate risk. For instance Australian Volunteers International is listed as a partner to help build public sector capacity for the implementation of Myanmar's NDC. The private sector also contributes in sharing information. In China, environmental volunteers and business representatives exchange their experiences in executing green and low-carbon initiatives (UN Volunteers, 2024).

Mathbor (2007) is of the opinion that these professionals can identify and mobilize for launching activities during disasters and in post disaster period. These volunteers can be helpful in identification of the affected and at risk communities for timely intervention for mitigating losses to lives and properties. Social workers can train and educate the communities regarding their roles in environmental protection. Similarly organizing trainings, seminars and workshops for social work professionals is also of utmost importance for the integration of social, ecological and economic aspects in theory as well as in practice (Drolet & Ersing, 2014). Volunteers perform an active role in sharing knowledge, building the capacity of local people and mobilizer. In addition, they also educate the individuals, groups, members of community organizations, officials of government departments to adjust to climate change and build resilience (Feeney, 2024).

Conclusion

Climate change is the most debatable and important topics today as South Asian counties are highly exposed towards various disasters as a result of climatic changes during the last few years. Increasing temperatures, natural disasters like floods, droughts are some to the symptoms of climatic changes. Due to its adverse impacts people of the South Asian Counties have suffered losses both men and material. In addition, these climatic changes have also affected efforts for sustainable development. The poor, marginalized, women, persons with disabilities are most in danger as compared to those who have resources. Just like other states, the government of Pakistan has also tried her best to mitigate the sufferings from disasters bit still a lot needs to be done.

Just like other professionals, professional social workers are also actively engaged in disaster management. They are offering services in pre and post disaster period by assisting the affected individuals, groups and communities. These services include counselling, provision of assistance to displaced persons especially to women, children and persons with disabilities. They can educate the masses regarding causes and effects of climate change on livelihood. As an advocate he/she can advocate for policies, programs and legislation which can help minimize threat of climate change. As

climatic changes are as a result of damage to natural environment therefore these professionals can better guide the people regarding negative impacts of deforestation, advantages of afforestation and conservation of wildlife. In addition, social workers are considered as agent of change as they prepare people of rural communities to accept socio-cultural changes. In addition, they can prepare them to be more receptive to new ideas, new projects and intervention to ensure sustainable development. They can mobilize activists and volunteers for community development activities. They can educate, train and organize them in village level organizations for resource mobilization. As mostly the volunteers are identified from youth who can be productive to their own communities, therefore they are involved in all those interventions which directly and indirectly affect them. These volunteers can deliver services like plantation campaign and in pre-disaster period as well as in response and rehabilitation activities.

Social workers can mold the public opinion about a particular issue using their knowledge and skills. They can perform the role of bridge between community and government, civil society organizations and the donors regarding environmental conservation.

Recommendations

The study recommends that social workers should be involved in activities related to environmental conservation. Social work curriculum should be revised and courses and topics regarding need and importance of social work in environmental conservation should be included.

They should also equip themselves and update their knowledge and skills regarding environmental conservation and climate changes. In this way they will be in better position to serve the communities especially those who are at risk.

It is the professional and moral responsibility of social workers to reach these poor and vulnerable people and provide them maximum assistance for protection from disasters. In addition, they should provide assistance at the time of any emergency.

Sustainability and environmental protection for climate needs community participation at all levels from decision taking till appraisal. Therefore social workers should involve the primary stakeholders in all the stages of project cycle for creation of ownership and sustainable development. While planning any such activity the marginalized section of society including women should be given opportunity to participate in all those decisions which affect them.

These workers can formally and informally educate the people regarding their role in environmental conservation. For this purpose broad based community meetings, awareness walks and discussion with community can be helpful. In addition, exposure and excursion visits should also be arranged so that the people of the community can learn from successful projects and imitate them in their own communities. Alternate sources of energies should be introduced so that people stop cutting of tress for firewood and other commercial purpose. Developmental interventions should be economically viable, socially desirable and ecologically sound. This is only possible when the people cooperate in all those activities which are important for environmental conservation and climate change.

Social workers should provide emotional support in the form of counselling to those who have lost their family members and relatives and whose properties have been damages as a result of natural or manmade disasters. In addition, they should perform the role of a link between the communities and government departments, donors and private philanthropists

Every community possess resources i.e. natural, financial and human, but they need knowledge, guidance and assistance for its utilization. Social workers should enable the people of area to judicially utilize the available resources for the benefit of the community.

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