



Social Capacity, Social Innovation and Social Participation as principles of Social Worker Advocacy in support of Sustainable Development

Ahmad Sururi

Associate Professor, Department of Public Administration, Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa University, Indonesia.

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***Corresponding Author:** Ahmad Sururi, Associate Professor, Department of Public Administration, Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa University, Indonesia.

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Abstract

This commentary aims to encourage the importance of social workers connected to sustainable development through the principles of social advocacy which include social capacity, social innovation and social participation. It is very important to assume that social workers are not only seen by various parties as a profession but as individuals who have competence and concern in carrying out the duties and responsibilities of service and handling social problems, community counselling, community provision and empowerment, encouraging social change and strengthening groups. As stated by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) that the mission of social work is to improve the welfare of society and help fulfil the basic needs of society by paying special attention to vulnerable, oppressed, and poverty-stricken groups. Placing social workers solely as a profession will only create relational gaps and barriers to collaboration in sustainable development. Social workers are individuals who have high professional values, have social capacity, the ability to innovate as well as agents of social participation. Therefore, placing social workers as agents of change in sustainable development is a necessity amid the dynamics and challenges of the current global era.

Introduction

The value of the social work profession in various countries has a very long history, especially in social and community development. Early on, the social work profession was assumed to be a leader in creating policies and services that addressed the impact of rapid industrialisation and urbanisation on communities and households. [1]. The social work profession was developed in the United Kingdom and the United States and showed rapid growth worldwide after the 1920s [2] and subsequently social workers experienced job shifts such as becoming community developers, administrators and researchers [3].

Traditionally, social workers fall under the auspices of social, health or legal institutions that have the responsibility of providing direct services to the community. Such institutions include prisons, residential facilities for the elderly and children, and offenders or

criminals. One of the key values of social workers is to promote social change by being impartial, open, honest, professional and responsible [4] and endeavour to live up to the principles of collective responsibility, social justice, human rights, and respect for diversity.

An important aspect of the social work profession and instrument in sustainable development is social advocacy for the rights of individuals and communities so that their needs can be met. Social work advocacy includes: 1) case advocacy that addresses individual needs by assisting service users in receiving benefits and services; and goal advocacy that aims to make systemic changes and promote policies that benefit specific communities [1, 5]. Advocating for people's social rights without discrimination is an important and integral part of social work values as well as being key in addressing the poor and marginalised [6].

Social Workers and Sustainable Development Policy

Sustainable development is a central issue for countries around the world and social workers are the main actors who contribute to managing and implementing sustainable development programmes effectively. In this case social workers are assumed to have knowledge, social awareness and technological skills that are useful [7].

Therefore, social workers are required to develop their abilities, skills, initiatives and produce quality services over a long period of time. In addition, to ensure sustainable development, there are three important requirements: community participation, strong leadership and community capacity [4].

The involvement of social workers in the practice of sustainable development policies does not only function as a control but encourages social change and development. This is as the internationally agreed general definition of social work that the purpose of social work is to contribute to the achievement of social change, community empowerment, and equality of individual and community rights based on values and principles including human rights, social justice, collective responsibility, and diversity [8]. Thus, it can be concluded that social workers have a moral responsibility to conduct social advocacy in support of sustainable development policies and endeavour to ensure that all individuals have equal access to basic needs, public resources, services and opportunities.

Social Capacity, Social Innovation and Social Participation as principles of Social Worker Advocacy

The first principle for social workers in conducting social advocacy activities is ability or better known as social capacity. Social workers must be able to act as responsible individuals in organising public relations [9], have adherence to norms, trust, co-operation and prioritise community facilitation and networking [10, 11], and it is supported by characteristics based on trust, shared understanding and participation in achieving common goals [12].

In relation to sustainable development, a social worker must be able to overcome various obstacles by giving trust, space and time to the community to cooperate with each other, showing a level of respect and trust, conducting social communication, and giving fair rewards voluntarily. On the other hand, social workers try to mediate in government and community development programmes, respecting cultural values that continue to grow and develop in the community.

In addition to social capacity, social workers are also required to have social innovation as the key to adaptation in facing any changes and challenges in the environment, society and technology. Social innovation has been praised as a way to understand and achieve new solutions to social problems [13]. This is closely related to the development of societal instruments, processes and technologies in the context of development policy [14]. At this point, social workers should have an awareness of the impact of each policy.

That social innovation is capable of system change and contributes to community development, adds value to technology, and encourages digital connectivity [15]. Social innovation is assumed to be important because it has efficient solutions, significant leadership, better policy designs [16, 17]. Finally, it is important to ensure that the primary purpose of social innovation for social workers is to address challenges and ensure change to fulfil people's needs and impact sustainable development.

Ensuring sustainable development that is based on a chain of positive social relationships, demonstrating empathy, respect and responsiveness is critical, hence the focus on relationship maintenance is a challenge for social workers [18]. One of the principles for social workers in ensuring positive social relations is social participation. Social participation is the involvement of individuals to interact in activities together in society or community [19].

Individual participation in social relationships is such a central concept for social workers that it is often considered a strategy and a value [20, 21]. This is an important asset for the success of sustainable development because in social participation individuals, families, and groups are actively involved and intervene in various social problems or needs as well as make decisions when conflicts occur and evaluate the success and failure in achieving sustainable development goals [21].

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