

Global Observatory Promoting Environmental and Community Sustainability

Environmental Justice

The first paragraph of the Preamble to the *NASW Code of Ethics* clearly states that “fundamental to social work is attention to the environmental forces that create, contribute to, and address problems in living.”(NASW, 2015, p. 1) Social work emphasizes the person-in-the environment. The environment consists of both the natural and social environment. To ensure human rights both environments must be considered with special attention to the needs of ethnic minorities and indigenous people. The right to a clean, safe and healthy environment is a human right for all. Social work is based on the respect for the equality, worth, and dignity of all people.

Natural and built environments have a direct impact on people’s ability to develop and reach their potential. The environment is a key component of the social determinants of health and wellbeing. Social, economic and environmental justice is intertwined.

Both IASSW and IFSW emphasize the importance of protecting the natural environment as a key feature to promoting economic and social justice. This advocates for the need for sustainable development. Sustainable development is defined as meeting the needs of current and future generations in a way that does not exhaust either human or physical resources. This will necessitate academic-community partnerships, as well as an interdisciplinary partnership approach to resolving the situation.

Examples of natural environment: climate change, global warming, drought, soil erosion, natural resources depletion, drought, floods, hurricanes, tsunamis, tornadoes, earthquakes

Examples of social environment: pollution- water, air, soil contamination, chemical poisons (commercial, agriculture and household use), physical, social and communication infrastructures-energy sources transportation, housing, sanitation, etc.; violence, war

Examples of disproportionately affected populations: refugees, immigrants, displaced workers, disaster survivors, rural workers without land, rural and urban poor, women, children, older adults, individuals with mental and/or health issues

Example of social work domains: disaster preparedness and response, refugee resettlement, political advocacy, community capacity building, research and policy development, behavioral and mental health, evidence-based practice, treatments and strategies, cultural competencies, social work education and training.