

Green Social Work: A Pathway to Social and Environmental Justice in India

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Abstract: India faces severe environmental challenges, including climate change, deforestation, pollution, and resource depletion, which disproportionately impact marginalized communities. Green Social Work (GSW) offers a crucial framework for integrating environmental sustainability with social justice, promoting inter and intra-generational equity and justice. This study explores the role of GSW in India, analysing its potential to address ecological and climate concerns through community organization, social action, and policy advocacy. Using an exploratory and descriptive research design, the article synthesizes existing literature to examine Indian social work practices that incorporate environmental consciousness. It highlights initiatives such as the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) and grassroots interventions that strengthen resilience and sustainability. The findings emphasize the need for an interdisciplinary approach, positioning social workers as key agents in promoting ecological sustainability and sustainable development in India.

Keywords:

1. Climate Refugees
2. Environmental Policies
3. Extreme Events
4. Resilience
5. Social and Environmental Justice
6. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

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1. Introduction

The environmental crisis has severely worsened in recent times due to both natural and anthropogenic processes. Extreme weather events, pollution and war situations have intensified the environmental crisis on a global scale (Dominelli 2014; Peek et al. 2020). These factors have exacerbated socio-economic, political, and cultural inequalities, thereby subjecting vulnerable communities to environmental injustice (Dominelli 2014). Dominelli (2014) had defined *environmental injustice* as *society's failure to ensure environmental security and sustainability*. However, according to The Office of Environmental Justice of the USEPA,

environmental justice is defined as *the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, colour, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies* (Stephens et al. 2008; Stephens & Chang 2025). This definition addresses the special injustice of unequal exposure to environmental harms.

In present society, environmental security is not included within national security at any level (extending from local to global). Hence, there are no military solutions to environmental security (Mukherjee 2017). Environmental insecurities are often seen to stem from scarcity of natural resources and pollution caused by the lifestyles of the affluent. Exploiting the environment for ensuring economic growth leads to a rise in poverty, unemployment, and spread of diseases. This cannot truly be considered development. Furthermore, rising living costs worsen the condition of the poor (Mukherjee 2017). Unsustainable planning and development with unequal distribution of power and resources aggravate structural inequalities and exert the worst impact on poor and low-income people (Dominelli 2013). These also impact the risk mitigating potential and resilience of low-income communities (Dominelli 2013).

Such environmental crises experienced in recent times have significantly worsened the environmental and social injustice suffered by poor and vulnerable communities of developing countries like India (Agnimitra & Sharma 2023). Indigenous communities have lost their land and access to natural resources due to the pervasiveness of globalization and the influential multinational corporations. This has transformed the *'ecosystems people'* into *'ecological refugees'*. Climate extremes, displacement, physical and mental health issues, and economic crises are some of the challenges affecting these communities. Recent studies have reported that these challenges have a higher probability of affecting densely populated countries with significant socioeconomic inequality, such as India (Madhanagopal et al. 2022a). Therefore, it has become imperative for social work professionals in India to proactively address issues like discrimination, inequality, marginality, and oppression.

Ensuring environmental justice has been a primary agenda for social workers all over the world. Social workers play a significant role in assisting and mobilizing people and natural resources for formulating models of sustainable development and ensuring environmental justice (Dominelli 2013). Social work professionals actively undertake initiatives for achieving environmental justice for affected marginalized communities (Wu, Karabanow & Hoddinott 2022). Social work professionals assess the situation of these communities and administer interventions for the affected. These interventions emphasize how different parameters of environment, industry, urban development, and human society impact environmental and social justice in an interrelated manner (Breen et al. 2023; Dominelli & Ku 2017; Wu & Bryan 2021). They also ensure that concerns regarding human and citizen-based rights are included in relevant curricula (Dominelli 2014). *Green social work* (GSW), a concept introduced by Dominelli (2012a), reportedly combines theories of social and environmental justice to equip social workers to address environmental crises. GSW is expected to provide a holistic understanding of these social issues by including environmental parameters and analysing their impact on the same (Rajput & Jadhav 2021).

2. Objective and Research Design

The present study is a systematic literature review of two related inquiry areas including social work practice and environmental consciousness. This study explores the role of GSW in India, analysing its potential to address ecological and climate concerns through community organization, social action, and policy advocacy. Pertinent environmental issues of India have

been critically discussed herein for identifying the sectors requiring active GSW interventions for ensuring environmental justice and security for people of this country. This study also discusses different initiatives, policies, and grassroots interventions that strengthen resilience and sustainability of vulnerable communities in India. Moreover, this study highlights the need for an interdisciplinary approach by GSW professionals for ensuring social and environmental justice for vulnerable communities across India. This is followed by a discussion about their inter-relations as well as future research agendas.

3. National Initiatives for Ensuring Environmental Justice in India

As the world's most populous and diverse nation, India is presently at a critical stage in its trajectory for achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs). Major environmental issues like urbanisation, environmental degradation, climate crisis, internal displacement, and disasters pose significant challenges to achieving sustainable development (Didenko et al. 2021; Hasnat et al. 2019; Kumar et al. 2022). The constitutional initiatives included the addition of articles 48A and 51A(g) under State Directives and Fundamental Duties specified in The Constitution of India respectively. The legislative mechanisms safeguarding the environment of this country include The Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act of 1974, the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act of 1981, the Environmental (Protection) Act of 1986, etc. Moreover, judiciary initiative like the formation of the National Green Tribunal have also been proactively preserving and protecting the environmental sustainability of this country (Devarhubli & Shrivastava 2024; Gill & Ramachandran 2021; Meena 2023). Furthermore, in recent times, significant emphasis has been given to sustainable human development which is expected to empower every community to become environmentally sustainable (Parida et al. 2023). The initiatives, policies, and schemes undertaken in recent times reflect India's commitment to achieving the SDGs (Kumar & Shobana 2023). The plans and policies listed in Table 1 have been undertaken by the Government of India for achieving environmental justice and sustainability as well as for addressing the major environmental issues of this country.

As of now, India is yet to undertake any comprehensive national initiative for major environmental issues like hyper-urbanisation or internal displacement (Rajan & Bhagat 2021). However, the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) is India's most comprehensive strategy to address a few major environmental issues of recent times (Deshpande et al. 2025; Pandey et al. 2024). This is comprised of the following national missions (GoI 2025) that are aligned with global initiatives related to the same concerns:

- *National Mission for a Green India* (for protecting, restoring, and increasing forest cover).
- *National Mission for Sustaining Himalayan Ecosystem* and *National Mission on Strategic Knowledge for Climate Change* (for research, development, and capacity building)
- *National Solar Mission* (for enhancing the usage of solar energy)
- *National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture* (for addressing impacts of adverse climatic conditions)
- *National Mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency* (comprised of the PAT scheme and the Financing Energy Efficiency Programme for increasing energy efficiency of industrial sectors).
- *The National Programme on Climate Change and Human Health* (for addressing health concerns posed by climate change).
- *National Water Mission* (for encouraging the development of Rain Water Harvesting Structures).
- *National Mission on Sustainable Habitat* (implemented through the Atal Mission on Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation, the Swachh Bharat Mission, and the Smart Cities Mission).

Table 1. Initiatives undertaken to achieve environmental justice in India

| Initiatives (Year of Initiation) | Environmental Issue Addressed | Focus | Key Features |
|---|--|--|--|
| Antyodaya Anna Yojana (2000) | Food security | Affordable food for the most vulnerable households | Ensuring highly subsidized food grains for the poorest households |
| National Environment Policy (2006) | Environmental degradation and sustainable development | Integrate environment in development | Protection of ecological systems, and sustainable resource management |
| State Action Plans on Climate Change (2009) | Climate crisis | Localization of climate strategies | Develops state-specific actions aligned with NAPCC |
| National Water Policy (2012) | Water security | Water resource management | Manages transboundary rivers; Guides planning and development of water resources |
| The PAT (Perform, Achieve, Trade) scheme (2012) | Climate crisis | Energy efficiency in large industries | Sets targets for energy reduction; Those exceeding targets are issued Energy Saving Certificates which may be traded with those unable to do so |
| Swachh Bharat Mission (2014) | Environmental degradation | Sanitation and waste management | Improves domestic waste management; Promotes waste segregation |
| Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (2015) | Environmental degradation | Improved infrastructure and living standards for urban areas | Improves water supply and storm water drainage; Improves sewerage management; Enhances green spaces; Promotes non-motorized transport |
| Unnat Jyoti by Affordable LEDs for All (2015) | Climate crisis | Energy efficiency of households | Reduces electricity consumption; Encourages usage of energy-efficient appliances |
| National Policy on Biofuels (2018) | Climate crisis | Alternative source of energy | Reduces dependence on fossil fuels; Enhances production and use of biofuels; Encourages conversion of waste to wealth |
| Jal Jeevan Mission (2019) | Water security | Domestic water supply | Ensuring access of potable water for every rural household |
| National Electric Mobility Mission Plan (2020) | Climate crisis | Reduce fossil fuel use in transport | Targets hybrid/electric vehicles; FAME India scheme and PM E-DRIVE scheme are primary components of this plan; Focuses on developing shared transportation and charging infrastructure for all |
| National Bioenergy Programme (2021) | Climate crisis | Promote biomass and waste-to-energy | Cleaner energy, waste reduction |
| National Action Plan on Climate Change (2025) | Climate crisis | Addressing climate change | Comprises of nine national missions in specific areas of agriculture, energy efficiency, green India, Himalayan ecosystem, human health, solar energy, strategic knowledge on climate change, sustainable habitat, and water |
| International Environmental Commitments | Climate crisis; Natural disasters; Resource conservation | Aligning with global targets and commitments | Implementing climate actions; Achieving disaster resilience. Ensuring resource sustainability |

Despite the aforementioned initiatives, India needs stronger policy enforcement and monitoring, public-private partnerships in green technologies, awareness, and behavioural change at the grassroots level as well as investment in research, innovation, and climate-resilient infrastructure for ensuring environmental justice for vulnerable communities (Bhattacharya & Stern 2023). This may be actively achieved by engaging professionals trained in interdisciplinary programmes based on social work, environmental studies. GSW professionals may work in collaboration with other professionals from fields of engineering, economics, public health, architecture, forestry, agriculture, etc. to develop sustainable solutions for vulnerable communities. GSW professionals can play a lead role in interdisciplinary collaborations by articulating the needs, interests, and circumstances of the people, groups, and populations most at risk of environmental harms (Saleh et al. 2024).

4. GSW as Preeminent Promoter of Environmental Justice

Conventional SW professionals have reportedly been found to be on par with the general population in terms of consciousness regarding environmental factors. Moreover, a dearth of focus on environmental issues has rendered the existing social policies unsustainable and detrimental for social well-being. Hence, with an increase in environmental concerns in recent times, national and international organizations of social work (SW) have urged SW professionals to include environmental issues within their professional practice (Shaw 2013). Global aggravation of climate change, natural disasters, and ecological crises recorded in present times have subjected the field of conventional social work to new challenges. In this context, GSW has emerged as a specialized paradigm of conventional social work to enable GSW professionals to respond more appropriately to the needs of communities facing environmental crisis and injustice (Dominelli 2013). Table 2 provides a comparative account of conventional SW and GSW professionals.

As evident from Table 2, GSW may be considered an extension/evolution of conventional social work that focuses on human-environment interdependencies and addresses the impacts exerted by one on another (Närhi & Matthies 2025). Specialized and interdisciplinary trainings gained by GSW professionals render them more appropriate for working with vulnerable communities as they may provide both immediate human support and participate in advocacy or planning for sustainable mitigation and ecological restoration. GSW professionals are extremely critical of unsustainable development initiatives stemming from neo-liberal capitalist trends of production and consumption as the same results in social and environmental injustice (Dominelli 2023). GSW professionals engage in long term transformative initiatives which pave the path for environmentally just and sustainable communities.

Table 2. Comparative account of conventional and green social work

| Dimension | Conventional Social Work (CSW) | Green Social Work (GSW) | Reference |
|--------------------------|--|--|-----------------------------------|
| Primary focus | Supporting individuals, families, groups, and communities to enhance social welfare, address life challenges, and access services. | Besides conventional priorities, GSW encompasses well beings of ecological systems, understanding of human-environment interdependency, and socio-environmental justice. | Dominelli 2013 |
| Conceptual framework | Based upon the impact of social/environmental context on individuals and groups. | Based upon the fact that humans are not only affected by socio-environmental issues, but are a part of them. Rather they are interdependent with each other. | Närhi & Matthies 2025; Saleh 2024 |
| Challenges addressed | Social issues including poverty, inequality, health, welfare of women and children, addiction, homelessness, discrimination, etc. | Besides social issues addressed by CSW, GSW also addresses environmental issues like ecological degradation, climate crisis, disasters, pollution, loss of biodiversity, overpopulation, environmental injustice (especially for vulnerable populations). | Kumar & Suhel 2024 |
| Justice aimed for | Social justice including individual/group rights, equity, empowerment, and human welfare. | Both social and environmental justice. The latter includes recognition of the fact that environmental impacts often disproportionately affect the marginalised and vulnerable communities, and that sustainable ecosystems are essential for human well-being. | Dominelli 2012 |
| Levels of practice | Micro, mezzo, and macro | Same as CSW but with new or modified practice areas including but not restricted to disaster resilience, climate adaptation, ecological restoration, capacity building, community engagement, inclusivity, advocacy for sustainable development, etc. | Breen et al. 2023 |
| Sites of activity | Health facilities, educational facilities, social agencies/NGOs. | Besides conventional settings, GSW operates with environmental NGOs, disaster relief organisations, climate crisis response teams, community sustainability initiatives, urban/rural ecological planning bodies, etc. | Wu et al. 2022 |
| Training and skills | CSW professionals are trained in counselling, case management, human behaviour, social policy, group work, ethics, advocacy, etc. | GSW professionals possess additional/expanded trainings regarding environmental issues and policies, sustainability frameworks, disaster management, environmental justice, and systems thinking. | Maheswari & Yesudian 2025 |
| Primary assumptions | The welfare and functioning of human beings within social and environmental systems. | Promotion of sustainable “eco-social” well-being (by considering human society and environment as integrated systems). | Kumar & Suhel 2024 |
| Challenges & limitations | High caseloads, burnout, and limited resources hinder the addressal of complex interdisciplinary issues | GSW is an emerging field necessitating specialized training and structured curricula. Practice models are gradually evolving. Yet to gain global institutional recognition. | Wu et al. 2022 |

GSW professionals are specially trained to engage with the following concerns (Dominelli 2012):

- Violation of human rights;
- Degradation of the environment;
- Dearth of equality and corporate accountability in the prevailing economic system;
- Exclusion of cultural diversity and indigenous lifestyles;
- Dearth of inclusive communities (especially ones with sustainable economic development);
- Insufficiency of health and social services;
- Disregard for the physical environment;
- Acknowledgement of interdependency between the natural ecosystems and the human societies;
- Unavailability of resilient societies, infrastructures, and resources.

In keeping with these concerns, GSW professionals engage in the following tasks (Dominelli 2012):

- Affirming the social, environmental, and human rights of vulnerable communities;
- Facilitating protection of the environment;
- Securing justice for both vulnerable communities and ecosystems;
- Mobilizing people and organizations to undertake collaborative initiatives for achieving environmental sustainability;
- Facilitating the inclusion of the marginalized and the vulnerable sectors of the society in policy and decision making.

Knowledge and training regarding the functioning of environmental systems helps GSW professionals develop sustainable interventions that facilitate long-term, prevention-oriented environmental justice. GSW professionals carry out their practice in alignment with global SDGs addressing environmental concerns, resource consumption, sustainable development as well as peace and justice. This enables their participation in global policy dialogues and improves their access to interdisciplinary tools that link sustainability with human and environmental welfare (Mavely et al. 2023).

5. Application of GSW for Securing Environmental Justice in India

In India, the aforementioned initiatives have been undertaken to address conventional environmental problems. However, these problems have been further exacerbated with time and changes in dynamics of the society, thus rendering them more complex in nature. Therefore, in recent times, it has become imperative to ensure environmental justice for vulnerable communities affected by major environmental concerns for progressing on the path towards sustainable development (Prameela & Sundaram 2024). GSW professionals, equipped with the knowledge of both social work and environmental parameters, may effectively address complex socio-environmental issues. They can engage with the vulnerable communities and ensure environmental justice and sustainability for every individual. Scope and application of GSW for addressing major socio-environmental issues affecting this country in recent times have been discussed as follows.

5.1. Hyper urbanisation

Hyper-urbanisation has exerted severe negative impacts on the environment (Dominelli 2012, 2019; Faxriddin o'g'li et al. 2022; Gizelis et al. 2021). Rural to urban migration has been largely

responsible for hyper-urbanisation in developing countries (Awasthi 2021). Such migration is motivated by lack of employment, adverse environmental conditions (like droughts or floods), lack of proper infrastructure and services, better job opportunities, etc. (Marta et al. 2020; Medina et al. 2022; Dominelli 2019). In recent times, India is rapidly undergoing transformations in urban landscape and infrastructure development, which is also referred to as hyper-urbanisation. Such extensive intra-regional migration occurring as a result of hyper-urbanisation in India is faced by challenges like insufficient health care services, inadequate employment and housing, discrimination against rural migrants in existing urban communities leading to social insecurity of the former, and lack of natural resources (Awasthi 2021). Social work educators are responsible for producing trained professionals who can effectively address such complex challenges posed by urban transformations (Claes et al. 2021). Inclusion of GSW as separate or integrated academic courses will help facilitate such training.

GSW professionals can address issues of hyper-urbanisation by identifying underlying environmental causes, considering the accountability of different decision makers responsible for it, and engaging with the affected communities for increasing resilience and promoting sustainability. They can contribute to the empowerment of rural communities and in turn reduce forced internal migration (Keyvanara & Sarfaraz 2024). They can design and implement programs and projects that exert positive socio-economic impacts while ensuring environmental justice. These initiatives include sensitization to and awareness of environmental issues, creation of job opportunities, development of sustainable infrastructure and communities, establishment of local social networks, enhancement of community participation, etc. (Keyvanara & Sarfaraz 2024). GSW professionals can also address public health issues as social issues, i.e., with a concern for the entire community and not just an individual.

Moreover, GSW professionals may collaborate with The World Urban Forum and UN-Habitat in addressing issues arising from hyper-urbanisation by raising awareness regarding sustainable urbanisation, facilitating collaborations between different stakeholders and organizations involved in developing sustainable cities, planning and implementation local initiatives, and encouraging public participation (Dominelli 2019). They are reportedly trained to endorse the SDG targets related to food security, sustainable economy, poverty alleviation, and decent employment for everyone. These professionals can participate and present at conferences where they will find ample opportunities to collaborate with other stakeholders engaged in similar commitments. Such collaborations are expected to highlight social work in initiatives for achieving sustainability (Dominelli 2019).

5.2. Climate crisis

Climate change is one of the most pressing global environmental concerns. Climate change is exacerbating existing environmental challenges, leading to displacement and migration, both within and across borders. Extreme environmental events, such as droughts, floods, and sea-level rise, are forcing people to leave their homes due to loss of livelihoods, food and water insecurity, and increased risks of natural disasters (Islam & Khan 2018). The Paris Agreement adopted in 2015 addresses mitigation, adaptation, and financial issues related to the global climate crisis. This agreement is reckoned to be the most important in terms of scope and impact (Mukherjee 2017). India was the 62nd country to ratify this agreement in October 2016. Hence, India needs to undertake every possible initiative for ensuring climate resilience of vulnerable communities. This will only be achieved through coordinated community participation and individual initiatives (Mukherjee 2017). Social work professionals play a significant role in ensuring the same (Cwikel 2025). For some of these professionals working at levels of intervention, environmental activism may be a personal initiative.



Figure 1. Levels (left) and themes (right) of interventions for green social work professionals
 Source: Reproduced with permission from Wu & Greig (2022)

Climate challenges include direct (physical stress) and indirect (vector-borne) health issues, mental health issues, exposure to extreme weather events and disaster induced displacement. GSW professionals assist with relocation, provide mental health support, and facilitate access to resources for populations at risk or those that are adversely affected. GSW professionals have been reportedly involved in micro (supporting populations at risk), mezzo (educating professionals and working with vulnerable communities) and macro (advocating for enhanced policies) levels of intervention for addressing climate challenges (Cwikel 2025). Schematic representation of such involvement is shown in Figure 1.

According to Madhanagopal et al. (2022a) students pursuing social work will be better prepared to respond to climate crises if they participate in social-work internships and certificate programs as part of their course curricula. Adding translational classroom content on relevant topics is also expected to prepare them better. In a recent study by Madhanagopal et al. (2022b), authors discussed GSW practices for recovery and rehabilitation of disaster-affected communities of India and Nepal. According to them, practicing decolonized social work and ensuring human rights of vulnerable communities will help achieve environmental and social justice for such communities and in turn help build disaster-resilience in these regions. Social work professionals working with disaster-affected communities reportedly enhance community participation in disaster management (Hossain 2013). Similar findings have been reported by Samuel et al. (2018). According to them, culturally relevant GSW practices implemented during floods in Chennai had played a crucial role in disaster management and promotion of ecological security. In comparison to conventional social work, GSW is found to be more effective for addressing complex disasters due to its holistic and transdisciplinary approach (Devassy et al. 2024). GSW professionals also play a crucial role in advocacy for national and international climate policies (Nagoshi et al. 2025).

5.3. Environmental Degradation

Environmental degradation is a transboundary phenomenon that globally exerts multifaceted impacts on both human communities and ecosystems (Ofem et al. 2023). Environmental

degradation is resulting from pollution, erosion, rising temperatures and sea levels, and an increase in frequency of extreme weather events. Untreated toxic industrial wastes released into the environment are also major causes of pollution (Tariq & Mushtaq 2023). This in turn is exerting detrimental impacts on Earth's fertility and productivity (Dominelli 2014). Environmental disasters have reportedly intensified socioeconomic and gender inequalities, destroyed homes and livelihoods, suspended essential services, and hindered economic growth of developing countries (Wu & Greig 2022). These events threaten sustainability at all levels from individual to societal (Peek et al. 2020; Wu 2020; Wu & Etienne 2021).

Moreover, environmental degradation has also caused significant forced displacement in the Global South (Hameed et al. 2025; Nguyen et al. 2023). Vulnerable ecosystems are under continuous pressure from migrating populations, which are rendering them even more fragile. Moreover, studies carried out in India reveal that women from poor rural households are worst affected by environmental degradation (Agarwal 2019). Hence, it is essential to understand the role of each gender and their interaction with the environment in order to ensure that development will be sustainable over a long term. GSW is a broader version of conventional social work, as it encompasses ecological considerations as well. GSW acknowledges the intricate manner in which the well-being of humans and environment are interconnected. Interdisciplinary approaches are essential for dealing effectively with such situations (Das 2020).

GSW aims to ensure environmental justice for such communities. Besides enhancing the resilience of these communities for future crisis, GSW professionals also undertake initiatives for designing environmentally benign models of development (Dominelli 2014). In a recent study by Madhanagopal et al. (2022a), the authors highlighted that social work educators and curricula should cover environmental degradation and associated challenges of environmental justice to work better with marginalised communities affected thereby across India. Social workers involved in interdisciplinary community development work are able to engage with the most vulnerable and disenfranchised individuals of a community (Rambaree et al. 2019). Besides focusing on the cultural, economic, social, and political aspects, GSW professionals also consider the biophysical relationships within a community. GSW, therefore, is expected to promote the concept of sustainable community development in a holistic manner.

5.4. Food and Water Security

All over the world, agriculture systems depend on climatic parameters. However, agricultural productivity has widely changed due to various anthropogenic activities and excessive use of farmlands. In 2020, almost 2.37 billion people lacked access to adequate nutritive food (Mrabet 2023). In present times, both developed and developing nations are striving to maintain a balance between securing food for their increasing populations and conserving the environment and natural resources in order to ensure sustainable food and farming systems in the near future. Marginalized communities of India are significantly affected by environmental issues like water and soil degradation, climate change, and natural hazards which in turn exert detrimental impacts on food and water security of these communities. Moreover, food insecurity has negatively affected initiatives of rural women empowerment in Assam (Sikdar & Anand 2025), Uttar Pradesh (Jhaveri et al. 2023), Gujarat (Pattnaik & Lahiri-Dutt 2024), Maharashtra (Nanda & Ray 2025), West Bengal (Dasgupta 2023), Odisha (Mishra 2021; Sam et al. 2021), etc. According to Dominelli et al. (2018), India needs to focus on GSW initiatives to effectively engage with these vulnerable segments of the society. In India, social work professionals may support farmers and citizens through adoption of proper Information, Education, and Communication

strategies that facilitate intergenerational transmission of indigenous farming practices and their documentation.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to climate action, hunger or natural resource management will not be attainable without involving the essential parameters of sustainable agriculture at both local and global scales. These parameters should be emphasized in policies, technologies, institutional settings, and the distribution of funds (Mrabet 2023). However, it has been observed globally that simply ensuring land for agriculture has not been enough to achieve food security (Dominelli 2013). Engagement of social work professionals in celebration of local food fests, responsible tourism, protection of farmer rights, ensuring advocacy support, and gender equity, as well as research on policies, methodologies, and economical aspects will help achieve food sovereignty in India (Thampi 2023). Social work interventions also reportedly play a significant role in ensuring food security and livelihoods for rural women in India (Joseph 2020).

5.5. Capacity Building

Disasters including environmental degradation destroy natural habitats as well as homes and livelihoods of those exposed to them. GSW professionals help build the capacity of these affected communities by assessing requirements, coordinating and delivering essential services, reunifying families, improving resilience for combating future disasters, as well as advocating and actively participating in protecting the environment (Dominelli 2013). GSW practitioners undertake these long-term initiatives for developing sustainable and environmentally just communities. Social work practitioners reportedly design, implement and promote inclusive growth, strengthen social welfare and pave the path for achieving sustainable development in India in collaboration with government bodies, NGOs, community-based agencies, and other stakeholders (Simkhada 2024). Social workers are significantly contributing to areas like capacity building of marginal communities, environmental preservation, disaster response, women empowerment, as well as child and youth welfare in India (Saha & Das 2023). Introduction of interdisciplinarity through GSW are expected to make their outcomes more efficient. Application of social work to environmental justice and sustainability of rural communities is shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Social work for environmental justice and sustainability of rural communities
 Source: Reproduced with permission from Wu, Greig, & Bryan (2022)

6. Discussion

So far, environmental issues have not been widely considered in conventional social work practices. GSW integrates the aspects of natural and physical environments with classical practices of social work and in turn enhances the well-being of both their clients and the ecosystems they depend upon. In recent times, GSW has gained significant attention due to student interest and an increasing need for integrated social work practices which holistically addresses issues related to natural and social environments. Furthermore, GSW differs from conventional social work frameworks addressing environmental issues as it considers cultural, economic, social, and political factors in a holistic manner as well. Thus, GSW advocates for unbiased access of natural resources for all (Ramsay & Boddy 2017).

The addition of environmental paradigms reportedly strengthens the structural dimensions of conventional social work by addressing the needs of the most disadvantaged groups of the society (Närhi & Matthies 2018, 2025; Wu 2021). Hence, in recent times, a strong need has been felt for social work professionals of India to include environmental issues in both teaching and practice (Madhanagopal et al. 2022a). In India, academic social work programmes are considering the incorporation of concepts of environmental systems, climate crisis, disaster management, sustainable communities, and environmental justice within their curricula for training learners to become GSW professionals. Interdisciplinary training will enable these professionals to assume leadership roles in collaborative initiatives. Though GSW has gained significant global attention over the previous decade, several aspects of it require more extensive research and development (Wu & Greig 2022). In recent times, this limitation is evident in the scholarship and practice of several professionals working in relevant fields. It is reportedly considered crucial in recent times for social work professionals to proactively engage in disseminating environmental awareness, supporting initiatives and movements undertaken by grassroots actors, ensuring protection and preservation of the environment and participating in community-based activities (Agnimitra & Sharma 2023).

Trained GSW professionals may engage in the following activities:

- **Community development work:** Professionals will connect social welfare with environmental sustainability in terms of waste management, resource conservation, disaster mitigation, and livelihood diversification for vulnerable communities;
- **Policy advocacy:** Professionals can advocate for policies that protect both people and environment;
- **Intersectoral collaborations:** GSW often necessitates working with architects, economists, engineers, forestry and agriculture experts, public health experts, scientists, urban planners, etc., besides traditional social service agencies. An integrated model for interdisciplinary social work is shown in Figure 3. Such a model is expected to efficiently engage with communities affected by disasters.

GSW professionals also strive to achieve sustainable development for vulnerable communities of developing countries through interdisciplinary interventions. While public health experts, engineers, scientists, and other relevant professionals address the technical aspects of environmental challenges (like disease vector dynamics, pollution metrics, resilient-infrastructure, etc.), success of these interventions are completely dependent upon human acceptance, social trust, community participation, and local context. These are areas where green social workers are uniquely trained. GSW professionals bridge this gap between collaborators by translating scientific and technical innovations into socio-environmentally just, community appropriate, sustainable interventions. The same is evident from the work of

Dominelli (2023) who demonstrated that community acceptance and participation are primary essentials for the success of technical interventions. Few studies where GSW professionals have been found to be more effective than CSW professionals have been presented in Table 3.

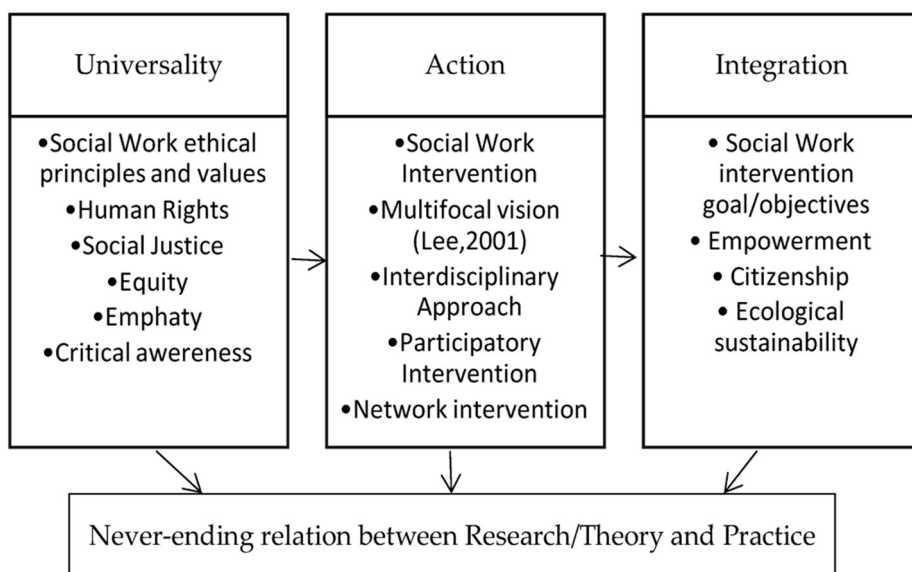


Figure 3. An interdisciplinary model for social work practice
 Source: Reproduced with permission from Rocha (2018)

GSW professionals are equipped to identify and address the multidimensional factors leading to socio-environmental impacts. GSW professionals possess a holistic understanding of the environmental and societal dimensions. Therefore, they advocate and actively participate in ensuring both environmental and social justice for these vulnerable and marginalized communities. GSW professionals are concerned with violation of human rights, degradation of the natural environment, factors triggering disasters, interactions between human society and ecosystems, unsustainable development and resultant economic inequalities, advocacy for cultural diversity and indigenous lifestyles, as well as improved access to essential services and capacity building in vulnerable communities (Dominelli 2014).

Multi-dimensional impacts of adverse environmental situations affect the physical and mental health, as well as the well-being of the people exposed to environmental harm. These complex issues are well addressed by professionals trained in integrated and interdisciplinary curricula (Mitchel 2025; Wu & Greig 2022). Professionals pursuing integrated courses are better equipped to address real world issues. Interdisciplinarity is gradually being more emphasized in GSW curricula and training all over the world as it is essential for developing interventions to be implemented at micro-, mezzo-, and macro-levels of community development. A GSW practitioner can actively participate in community organization, social action, and policy advocacy to achieve sustainable environmental justice by assuming the roles of facilitator, coordinator, community mobiliser, resource mobiliser, negotiator, mediator, consultant, advocate, educator, trainer, cultural interpreter, interdisciplinary translator, therapist, and protector as and when required (Dominelli 2014). Hence, the component of interdisciplinarity in GSW ensures more effective practitioner engagement in achieving environmental justice and sustainable communities.

Table 3. Studies highlighting GSW professionals as more effective agents of socio-environmental justice than conventionally trained professionals

| Sl. No. | Major findings | Reference |
|---------|--|---------------------------|
| 1. | GSW frameworks implemented in disaster settings yielded more benefits for the vulnerable/marginalised populations than CSW. | Breen et al. 2023 |
| 2. | Interviews of practitioners and educators from Canada/US about green/eco social work, highlighted how GSW was an upgradation of conventional roles. | Kowalski 2025 |
| 3. | Results obtained in terms of achievement of SDGs in an Indian context indicated that GSW can more directly address integrated socio-environmental issues which are commonly overlooked by CSW professionals. | Kumar & Suhel 2024 |
| 4. | Highlighted how professionals trained in GSW facilitated capacity-building more than conventional SW professionals. | Maheswari & Yesudian 2025 |
| 5. | A survey carried out with 337 US CSW professionals revealed that <40 % were prepared to respond to cases of environmental justice. This highlighted the need for an interdisciplinary approach as included in GSW for achieving environmental justice. | Mason et al. 2024 |
| 6. | A study carried out with children from urban slums of Sri Lanka depicted the effective implementation of GSW interventions for securing environmental justice in terms of children's well-being. This study investigated the impact of environmental factors on mental health of children and highlighted the need for GSW professionals over CSW ones for ensuring environmental justice in such scenarios. | Mitchel 2025 |
| 7. | A comparative study on SW professionals (engaged in disaster management) from Australia and Finland suggested a greater need for stronger GSW uptake/practice in Finland, where environmental concerns were comparatively less connected to human services. | Nöjd et al. 2025 |
| 8. | In this recent study, the author proposed a leadership model tailored for GSW practice, which in turn reflected upgradation of CSW models. | Park 2025 |
| 9. | This study emphasized the application of GSW for facilitating sustainable development in Indonesia. This study reported the expanding implementation of GSW in a non-Western country and highlighted the gradual rise in its global relevance. | Putri et al. 2024 |
| 10. | This study integrated GSW practice with human rights in social work. It depicted how inclusion of issues related to natural environment in social work practice enhanced the achievement of justice for vulnerable communities. | Stamm 2023 |

Moreover, in an interdisciplinary collaboration, GSW complements other professions rather than competing with them. Funding for the same facilitates integration of social expertise with multisectoral initiatives aiming for sustainability. Funds allocated for GSW enhances the impact of investments made for infrastructure, education, health, or technology by rendering the

concerned projects socially accepted, understood, and effective for the intended recipients. For instance, in a recent study, Kumar & Suhel (2024) reported that community-based sustainability projects implemented in India managed to achieve long-term outcomes when facilitated by social work professionals. In a similar study on community-based adaptation, cost incurred per beneficiary for social inclusion and capacity-building at local levels were much lower than that incurred for technical interventions necessitating constant maintenance, when tested over time (Maheswari & Yesudian 2025). Hence, any investment in GSW results in multiplier effects in terms of infrastructure, service, and governance outcomes.

In a recent study, Ramajo & Prat Bau (2024) have proposed several strategies for orienting social work practices toward ensuring environmental justice. They have suggested broadening and intensifying the political and ethical basis of this profession for addressing environmental concerns. According to them, community skills and participation may be strengthened by promoting skilling-emancipatory models. Multidimensional approaches including multi-level assessment and holistic understanding of concerned issues undertaken by GSW professionals will also help ensure environmental justice. GSW professionals need to identify novel sectors of practice like disaster response, transition to eco-friendly processes, development of community resilience and environmental security, economic sustainability, etc. Moreover, inclusion of interdependent, intersectional, and intergenerational aspects of environmental justice in social work curricula will lead to more efficient professionals and interventions.

7. Conclusion

GSW endorses sustainable development in every essence. The concept of GSW was developed on the basis of a holistic idea that acknowledged the entitlements of every member of society, the realization of human rights, the interdependencies among multiple systems of society, the interconnectedness among the various social and environmental factors as well as environmental justice. GSW critically analyses and assesses problems related to resource exploitation, environmental adversities, neo-liberalism, and social injustice as well as expert-recommended solutions to these problems. GSW also emphasises honing values and skills for promoting and protecting environmental justice. Improved GSW education and training necessitate the inclusion of interdisciplinarity and multi-stakeholder engagement within the course curricula. For effective GSW training, interdisciplinarity and multi-stakeholder engagement should be addressed from the perspectives of both the supervisor/trainer and the student/trainee. A GSW professional with sound interdisciplinary training will be extremely suitable for addressing the complex socio-environmental issues of present times.

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