

# Conceptualising Social Workers Role in Achieving Sustainable Development Goals

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## ABSTRACT

Beyond the ongoing societal challenges like severe poverty, hunger, diseases, violence, and injustices, the most pressing and critical concern today is the issue of climate change and environmental deterioration. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which have replaced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), provide a comprehensive framework for addressing these vulnerabilities. At their core, the SDGs advocate for sustainable development as the solution to the world's current crisis. Social work, closely intertwined with social development, serves as an instrument to intervene and alleviate vulnerabilities, promoting societal well-being. Historically, its primary focus has centered on tasks such as alleviating poverty, addressing hunger, and empowering women, among others, with relatively little attention to climate and environmental issues. Nevertheless, social workers, functioning as social scientists, can harness their roles as educators, implementers, and researchers to devise strategies aligned with the SDGs for sustainable development. This paper emphasizes the pivotal role of social workers in advancing the SDGs to achieve sustainable development and address climate change and sustainability challenges.

**Keywords:** Green Social work, Sustainable Development, Sustainable Development Goals, Environmental Degradation, Climate Change

## INTRODUCTION

Problems and vulnerabilities in society are as ancient as society itself. Environmental problems can by their nature be problems of justice. [1] In addressing these problems and challenges a more collaborative effort by man and stakeholders around the world is essential. The world saw the United Nations Millennium Declaration endorsed in September 2000 which aligned leaders around the world in working along strategic goals to contribute in development of their jurisdiction and hence leading to development for the world as a whole. Eight (8) goals were born from this declaration; referred to as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which targeted important fields as combat poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, discrimination against women among others. The aftermath of the MDGs led to the initiation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or Global Goals which was an expansion on the MDGs. The SDGs however called for a more sustainability approach towards world development. The continuous activities of industrialization and globalization kept the world environment at peril which brought about dangers such as climate change issues and other environmental injustices.

The SDGs involves a collection of seventeen 17 interlinked goals to guide member states of the UN in achieving development which is more conscious of sustainability. [2] The United Nations on the 25<sup>th</sup> September, 2015 adopted this resolution themed "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" [3] Agenda 2030 was designed to direct global development for the period of 2015 and 2030. Environmental degradation problems such as increase in natural disasters, global warming and climate disruption among others urgently calls for a change of our relationship with the environment towards a more sustainable lifestyle. In one way or the other timely steps have been captured under the United Nations (UN) Global Goals for this course. The hard truth is that nature and environment will

continue to serve the human race with resources now and future depending on wise usage. The acceptance of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by major governments and member states of the UN around the world is a milestone. These SDGs have been under considerable research, support, politics, and civil society engagement. [4] Since its inception many state actors and governments have embraced the discourse and gathered timely momentum to realize targets under SDGs. On one side, the SDGs have been said to be an improvement to stage a revolution in world development because of civil society contributing to its creation [5] and also the integration of environmental targets into each of the goals.[6] The framework of the SDGs calls for a more synergy and integrated approach for its realization. [4] While member states and government, international communities and organizations have a critical role to play, the realization of the Global Goals calls for a whole society approach and participation. Civil societies are keenly involved as implementers and advocates.[7] Also, various offices of social service providers need to be at the frontline in adjudicating this just cause. The social work profession and discipline should therefore be keen in playing roles for the realization of the SDGs.

The activities of social workers are of much essence in realizing SDGs at the individual, community and societal level. Social development and social work is closely aligned matching the aim of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. “Social work is denoted as a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people”. [8] The social work enterprise endeavors to create an enabling environment to address tough issues in life that hinders social development. An enabling environment also involves utilization of available resources in a way that it can serve present needs with no strain on meeting future generation’s needs hence sustainability is in succession to social work. The Agenda 2030 is a platform which initiates social workers’ involvement in performing their roles in empowerment of people, environment, and socio-economic development. [9]

There has been some amount of partnership between social workers and the United Nations on the international level. On the 21<sup>st</sup> March, 2017, marking the celebration of world social workers at Geneva emphasized the cooperation of social work organizations and UN- agencies to promote SDGs. Some amount of synergies have been discussed and explored based on core areas such as how UN involves social workers in the implementation of SDGs, support extended from the UN to social workers in form of training to foster unique contributions of social workers in achieving SDGs and also how concrete partnerships can be formed with social workers for the future.[10] Despite these stepping stone it can be deduced that there is a gap in the involvement and activities of social workers in realizing sustainability the world needs now. The vibrant and continuous activities of globalization and industrialization throughout the world have brought us to a number of perils such as climate change, global warming, and depletion of the ozone layer among others. These issues have further contributed to major problems such as increase in the number of hunger, poverty and social inequalities among others. Social workers are on top of working with people to solve problems such as poverty, address inequalities, addiction among others. However, they seem to continue to be less interested in environmental issues that lead to climate change and global warming which contributes to deterring development in society.[9] Although the SDGs have these areas social workers mostly pay attention to, it remains that for the life of people to be better, and their environment should be well protected and managed. It is not surprising that the SDGs do not just focus on infrastructural or economic development but focus on sustainability. True sustainability comes if considerable efforts are employed to address environmental issues especially that which come up due to the processes of development.

Also, although Social workers continue to play their role as educators, organizing and providing intervention to assist people and communities interact with nature and the environment, they seem narrowly involved in issues of climate justice, and environmental protection among others. Major work of social worker’s has been in mitigating impacts of disasters where people are displaced due to natural disasters or helping out individuals who have had tough childhood upbringing, addressing issues of poverty, working

with school dropouts and convicts among others. [9] A crucial aspect the initiation of SDGs seems to target; sustainability which is dwelling on environmental protection, seems to be left out or has minimum attention by social workers. Nonetheless, to be able to discharge effectively and efficiently these critical duties social workers care about calls for judicious use of present resources so as to solve present needs with no strain on the future. Therefore, it is very essential for social workers to get involved in issues of sustainability then function in realizing the Global Goals.

The objective of this paper is to emphasize the importance of fostering collaboration between social workers and the United Nations in the pursuit of sustainable development goals. It also aims to outline the shared responsibilities and capabilities of social workers and the United Nations in the achievement of SDGs. The paper extensively explores this context, shedding light on the significance of SDGs in contributing to global improvement and subsequently outlining the roles and functions of social workers in the realization of SDGs for sustainable development.

## METHODOLOGY

This research project employs qualitative research methodology to ensure the thoroughness and accuracy of its investigation. The primary goal of this study is to delve into and assess the collaborative efforts of social workers in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for sustainable development. This exploratory research endeavors to evaluate both the challenges and successes within this subject area. The research approach emphasizes the use of descriptive language over numerical data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic. To achieve this, data was gathered through theoretical sampling, drawing from peer-reviewed journals, original articles, and relevant documents. [11]

The assessment of reading materials primarily relies on original articles and book chapters but extends to encompass other academic literature. This initial stage involves a thorough examination of books, scholarly articles, and general media reports. These reading materials were identified by conducting keyword searches related to the study, primarily utilizing the Scopus and Web of Science portals. Keywords used for the search included ‘SDG,’ ‘Social workers and SDG,’ “Green Social Work,” “Sustainable development,” and “Climate Change.” This approach was employed to ensure that the search results align with the study’s scope.

Adhering to a systematic process, documents were carefully selected for in-depth review, with the search conducted on academic search engine databases such as Scopus and Web of Science. Additionally, papers were reviewed using Annual Review and Google Scholar. The timeframe for this comprehensive review extended from December 14, 2021, to May 21st, 2023. The literature obtained through this search process was further appraised, with a focus on documents related to green social work, sustainable development, and SDGs, while also ensuring that they were published in English. Furthermore, materials were cross-verified to originate from sources with input from at least two independent experts in the field before proceeding with further scrutiny. This rigorous selection process helped accumulate a substantial body of materials relevant to the study’s objectives. [11]

During the concluding phase of the research endeavor, the amassed collection of materials underwent a meticulous and methodical examination, meticulously directed by the application of theoretical coding. This intricate process entailed the categorization and systematic arrangement of relevant strands of information, encompassing both theoretical constructs and empirical observations. These strands were organized into discernible and discrete timeframes, each representing distinct eras of contributions within the realm of social science. The overarching objective of this exhaustive review was to make a substantial and meaningful contribution to the comprehension and knowledge base surrounding the multifaceted domains of sustainability, green social work, and the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This

contribution was executed with the utmost dedication to scientific rigor, ensuring that the analytical process remained free from any potential sources of bias or distortion. [11]

## **Theoretical Framework**

A theory is essentially a structured framework of logic that is amenable to empirical testing [12]. Within the realm of research, theories serve as invaluable roadmaps, offering guidance on how to conduct research and aiding in the interpretation of research outcomes. It is noteworthy that the field of social work operates within the ambit of numerous theoretical frameworks, which practitioners, whether consciously or unconsciously, integrate into their professional practice. The central theory underpinning this study is the Social Systems Theory.

Social Systems theory can be traced to Talcott Parsons as the first to propose a systemic theory of social systems. Systems theory analyzes how society adapts to its environment through adjustments in its structure thereby revealing the complexity of social evolution. It involves the patterned network of relationships that forms a coherent whole which exists between individuals, groups, and social institutions. This gives a complete view of an individual situation within his or her environment. In application to social work and the scope of discussion, the systems theory enables professionals (social workers) to look holistically at an individual condition and environmental factors to gain a better understanding of why a condition persists. Applying systems theory provides a valuable framework for understanding and addressing environmental and social issues in a holistic and integrated way. [12] Systems theory provides a perspective for social workers to regard the environment and human society as interconnected systems. This approach helps in identifying the complex relationships that exist between environmental factors, social conditions, and individual well-being. Therefore, this leads to analyzing the interdependencies in order to develop comprehensive solutions to aid in monitoring progress toward the SDGs and making adaptive changes when necessary.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that this particular theory aligns harmoniously with the overarching domain of social work due to its inherent emphasis on fostering progress and advancement within communities and societies, with the ultimate goal of enhancing and elevating the overall quality of life for individuals residing therein. When applied within the context of the ongoing discourse, this theory underscores the critical and indispensable role played by social workers in fostering synergistic collaborations within communities to drive and facilitate development endeavors. This accentuates the significance of their collective efforts in steering and catalyzing positive changes that have far-reaching implications for societal growth and well-being.[12]

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) serve as a platform for governments and policymakers to actively engage in fulfilling the sustainable development requirements of their societies. Furthermore, various independent organizations are encouraged to make their contributions, while social workers, who serve as welfare agents, are also urged to play an active role in this endeavor. A key theme in this theory is structuralism, which implies that certain societal structures can either impede or facilitate development. Consequently, there is a need for collaborative and dedicated support among various actors and entities to promote development. Therefore, the social system theory vividly illustrates that efforts toward development should not be unilateral but should instead promote synergies, making it highly relevant and pertinent to the topic at hand.

## **RESULTS**

### **Background of Social Work and United Nations SDGs**

Social work is an academic discipline and practice based profession that extends assistance and creates

interventions for people and communities in societies to make life better. The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) recommended definition of social work is; a profession that seeks to enhance societal change, solving problems in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of individuals to improve well-being.[8] The profession also navigates the interaction of individuals and their environment to make it more meaningful. It incorporates theoretical framework of humanities, social systems, social sciences and indigenous knowledge to engage people and institutions to battle challenges in life and improve on wellbeing. [13]

The core mandate of social work is to bring about changes in society geared towards development, social cohesion and capacity building of people to improve upon quality of life. The profession strives to create intervention to alleviate poverty, deal with issues of injustices against human rights, liberate the vulnerable and deprive, promote social inclusion and cohesion and the environment of man. There is therefore a sync between what the United Nations seeks to achieve with the initiation of the UN 2030 Agenda and the core mandate of social workers and the discipline.

The United Nations is an international organization formed after the Second World War in 1945 to ensure international peace, social progress and quality standard of living for people. Over time there has been an increase in its member states hence granting the UN autonomy for its decided decisions made by the committed member states to affect every aspect of the globe. The UN is mainly noted for peacekeeping, conflict prevention, peace building and rendering other humanitarian efforts. In recent times the organization set to work on a broad range of issues dealing with sustainability. The activities of the UN are backed by international laws. The atmosphere of the UN is one of unique leadership, communication and group dynamics which combines and fosters framework for the UN activities.[14]

The UN bureaucracy is molded by its history, geopolitical and cultural traditions. It is highly centralized as well as specialized functionally. [14] It seeks to bring about considerate development in the world through its efforts. The United Nations Millennium Development Goals processed in September 2000 consisted of eight international developmental goals to be achieved by 2015. The MDGs were backed by 21 individual targets to stimulate development.[15] Although it brought about some amount of development that several member states profited from the MDGs, the world still faced challenges that plagued development. One key challenge has been issues of our ecosystem and climate. In the year 2018 the United States National Climate Assessment made a deduction that the climate of earth is changing fast as a result of human lifestyle, habits and activities.[16] Activities of production and continuous industrialization to cater for our over consumption lifestyle has led to large emissions of greenhouse gas which has further destroy our climate and brought about some dangers such as occurrence of natural disasters such as flood, earthquakes, typhoons, among others and depletion of the ozone layer among others. Therefore, with all urgency, all people as global citizens need to embrace the idea of sustainability to redeem our planet. The current need of the world calls for a more sustainable lifestyle hence the UN during 2015 General Assembly, featured its members in drafting the Sustainable Development Goals, also known as Global Goals. These goals superseded the MDGs and were to be realized by the year 2030. The set of 17 SDGs are interlinked. Each of these goals have various targets and about 169 indicators to aid in addressing the goals. [8]

The goals consist of the following: (1) No Poverty (2) Zero hunger (3) Good Health and Well-being(4) Quality Education (5) Gender Equality, (6) Clean Water and Sanitation (7) Affordable and Clean Energy (8) Decent Work and Economic Growth, (9) Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, (10) Reducing Inequality (11) Sustainable Cities and Communities, (12) Responsible Consumption and Production, (13) Climate Action (14) Life Below Water (15) Life on Land (16) Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (17) Partnership for Goals. The SDGs are interrelated, meaning success or failure in one aspect of the goal will bring about direct or indirect success or weakness in the other areas. Notwithstanding, a specific goal

relevance for maximum action could vary by region and geographical space. The SDGs opens room for major collaboration of governments, stakeholders around the world, professions, and other agencies. Therefore, as social service providers, the social work profession is to play an active role in realizing SDGs across the globe.

First of all, social workers, as social scientists, have been working with the UN since its birth. [14] Social workers play a variety of roles in terms of content; they play active roles as advocates, educators and implementers. They have been working on top issues under notable UN programs such as United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) AND United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) among others. Some issues they have been catering for are on the international relation scene. For instance, in Liberia, when a minor soldier reunites with his family, also minor girls in Cambodia and Thailand are at risk of dropping out of school and being recruited as prostitutes and assisting street children from being killed in Brazil among others. [14] Also, social work practitioners aid in mitigating the impact of disasters that destroy the operation of individuals, families, communities and societies. They play roles in battling structural and individual forms of oppression that handicap people who are already vulnerable or in case of poverty. They also are on the top working to promote socio-economic development that includes environmental justice and regulating policies to ensure environmental and vulnerable people protection.

The SDGs form an integral part of global communication among governments, non-governmental organizations and the business sector. As published by the IFSW, social workers are playing leading roles to realize the SDGs.[17] However, the UN Secretary General call of all professions to work towards creation of innovative remedies, strategies and strong policies to fulfill the goals [18] means there is a gap in efforts needed to be kept in my social workers to tackle the SDGs in all its urgency. Social workers interpret sustainability as a solution for long term wellbeing positioned for current and future generations. Sustainability looks at how we reduce the burden we place on the environment and ecology. Climate change is currently a global crisis due to human strenuous relationship with the environment. The IFSW calls to inculcate environmental responsibility and environmental care in social work practice.[17] Apart from goal 13 which generally focuses on climate issues, other goals such as goal 6, 12, 14 and 15 focuses on the direct natural environment preservation, and again each of the goals have targets inculcated in a way that their realization leads to protect the common climate and natural environment of man and promote sustainable development. Mankind's quest for development at all cost and continuous activities of mass production, industrialization and economic extension have a negative impact on our today's environment. [19] All nations around the world are looking for ways to climb the development ladder and even though sustainability is being preached there is much left desired. However, with regards to the social work discipline and to its practitioners, the concept of development is not keen on economic progression and attainment alone; development is all inclusive to the social worker therefore in line with what the UN SDGs.

Goal 17 of the SDGs calls for partnership for the realization of the goals. All member states are to align policies and plans to meet this. Multi- stakeholder's partnership is also needed. Just as the UN Secretary General has made a clarion call, for various professions as well to get involved, social workers who are aligned for social development and this being the focus on the Agenda 2030 calls for their involvement. [20] To social workers collaboration and partnership is a means of exchange and contributing to sharing knowledge and insights to solve challenges and establish solutions. [17] Social workers work closely with individuals, families and communities to bring about hope and change to make a difference in life. Table 1 below summarizes the collaboration and connecting role of the United Nations and social workers for sustainable development.

Table 1 Examining the discipline of Social Work and the United Nations institution to come out with their relevance

Scope of Social Work	Scope of United Nation	Relevance and Application to Sustainable Development
Social work is a discipline and profession	United Nation is an international organization	Expertise for social development in a more sustainable way.
Collaborates and partners with governments and other organization	Their activities are made autonomous by member states around	It possesses a broad outreach to influence individual, families and communities with their aims
Aspires to improve the quality of life of individuals, families and communities by interacting with people and environment	Aspires for the welfare of the world by interacting with member states made up of nations of the globe.	Serve as intermediaries to communicate the essence of sustainable development to people and educate them on how to adapt to a sustainable lifestyle.
Their work is related to the objectives and aims of the SDGs	Originators of the SDGs	Ensure governments formulate and implement policies to back sustainable development

### Roles of Social Workers in realizing SDGs

Social workers as professionals have always been top on cases that seek to grant humanitarian assistance and counseling help to the marginalized and vulnerable. [21] In 2012, the IASSW and IFSW as international organizations for social work and the International Council of Social Welfare (ICSW) formulated a joint policy as the combined effort to address the major crises of our societies and further describing relevant social issues for the profession. [10] This joint effort was dubbed the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development. This joint effort showed firsthand collaboration of social workers and social development agents in working towards a better future.[22] This is to create room for more social, economic, cultural and political justice. The priority of this venture reflects what the Global Goals seeks to achieve. To focus on issues of people and the planet.[3] Despite the broad vision of this joint initiative, environmental challenges and its consequences on populations across the globe seems to elope social work practice. [21]

Natural Scientists have generally been involved and on top concerning issues of environmental crisis such as ozone layer depletion, climate change issues, and biodiversity loss and urban air pollution among others. [23] To add to this there has been some spring up work from social science to tackle the issues of environmental protection and sustainable development. For instance, social researchers have led some amount of education and creation of awareness to promote issues such as access to potable drinking water, safe life living environment, and fruitful livelihoods.[23] The introduction of ‘Green Social work’ and ‘Ecological social work’ brought about a new image for the social work province. This showed how it was important for the discipline to get involved in environmental and sustainability issues. Yet social workers’ voice seems very low on these issues.[21]

In the idea of Sachs (2015) the elements that make a good society consist not only of an economically prosperous society with high per capita income but one having socially inclusive, environmentally sustainable and well governed elements as well. [24] The 17 interlinked Sustainable Development Goals with their 169 targets supersede the horizon of the previous Millennium Development Goals in a way that the SDGs endeavors to address the root causes of challenges that prevent development for the globe. The goal targets three key dimensions of sustainable development. These include economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection.[15] The Agenda 2030 focuses on 5 thematic areas which are

usually considered to be the 5 P's; which are People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership. Human consumption habits have also fueled massive and continuous production and industrialization which has led to large emission of greenhouse gas contributing to the world's environmental issues at stake. [19] It is of no wonder that the UN Global Goals has been launched with the aspiration of maintaining and protecting the ecosystems and dealing with climate change. [15] The SDGs have proposed a clear goal on climate change to be addressed by member governments around the globe. Climate change is a global challenge and if not battled may hinder any development by fostering hardships further in life such as poverty, hunger, disasters and inequalities among others.

The goal 13 further has been fortified subsequently by the 21<sup>st</sup> Conference of Parties, Paris Agreement to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. (UNFCCC) The major drive of global climate change is embedded in social structure, social institutions, cultural values, beliefs and social practices. [19] This drive has and continues to drift society from any sustainable lifestyle hence hindering any chance of proper sustainable development and putting the world at some peril such as natural disasters, ozone layer depletion, and loss of arable farmlands among others. If this pressuring issue of climate change is not addressed then it will affect other areas of development. For instance, imagine creating intervention for a deprived community to get them out of poverty and hunger and at the end of the day, harsh climatic conditions bring about a flood that destroys the whole community. This will bring the world to a place of back and forth on developmental issues with little or no improvement at all. So, firstly for any systematic development to be achieved issues of climate change needs concentration is to be dealt with. Also, as we aim to address tough issues of development in life such as poverty, hunger, unemployment, injustices among others, steps has to be taken to achieve this in a more sustainable way so the environment can duly serve us well.

The idea of sustainable development is associated with the UN conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972. [25] As a concept it came of relevance in 1987 in Oslo with the publication of the Brundtland Report.[26] Thereafter, sustainable development has been considered of much importance and attracted much attention to the level that it is the key driving factor in the UN Agenda 2030. Sustainable development will see to it that development occurs in a way that it leaves no strain on the natural environment so it can serve us now and our future children and grandchildren. Sustainable development throws insight on the complex interaction of economic, social, environment and political aspects of life.[24] Persistent problems in society as the extreme poverty, environmental degradation, economic struggle and political struggle can be corrected should we pay more attention to sustainability. Thus aligning efforts to manage and protect the environment addressing issues such as excessive emission of Greenhouse Gas by individuals and organizations which leads to climate change and ozone layer depletion will aid in satisfying all other vulnerabilities and problems in life. Efforts and actions needed to amend and adapt to global warming and climate issues provides an insight of social processes and relations at diverse scales from global to the local.[19] Herein, calls for the involvement of the social work profession as key professionals who are at the root of working with individuals, families and communities to delve into the implementation of SDGs with to ensure sustainable development. Climate change is the greatest disrupting challenge the world is facing today [27] and social workers as social scientist gathering efforts for its adaptation and mitigation will ensure expectant amount of sustainable development and the SDGs will be realized on the strength of this basis.

### **Conceptualizing functions of Social workers for SD**

As discussed above, the concept of Sustainable Development is what is necessary in our time like this. Due to the fact that without sustainability our present will be bleak and there will be no future to look out for. The main challenge to sustainable development today is issues on climate change and environmental degradation. It is in addressing this that the SDGs will run smoothly into realization.

Therefore as social service providers, social workers need to fill in the gap and play their role as implementers, researchers, educators and advocators to reach this cause. The functions and important roles



that social workers can play to aid in realizing these are deliberated on below.

### **Transitioning Worldwide View from Unsustainable to Sustainable Lifestyle**

The SDGs also seeks to address ancient societal plagues and challenges such as poverty, illiteracy, injustices, unemployment among others. It should be established that taking care of the environment which serves with resources and managing this resource will help in addressing these deficiencies in life. The SDGs are blueprints in realizing this and in achieving there is a mandate in addressing environmental vulnerabilities that confront us. The root cause of the present environmental issues has been increases in greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere and the changes in the amount of sun albedo.[27] This was mainly brought about due to human activities and their interaction with the environment.

Consumption habits by humans, and activities of corporations, organizations and governments around the world to nurture consumption has put the world at mercy of our greatest ecological, equality and health risks we are facing today.[28] Consumption decisions taken by the individual are inhabited in institutional, political, economic and cultural circumstances. These elements that regulate the individual consumption preference are also being regulated by historical processes plus globalizing impacts framed by events and cultural continuities and routes in previous conclusions at the individual, institutional and political levels of aggregation.[19] The highest levels of greenhouse gas and fossil fuels emissions were seen during the age of the industrial revolution. This was the period between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century where there was a massive transition of manufacturing processes from small shops and homes to large factories and industries. Mass and constant production of goods and services served this cause with little efforts done for environmental preservation. With regard to this history the hypothesis towards development and modernization in recent times has been the same. The introduction of capitalism along the lines of industrialization has fostered profit oriented producers creating a cultural consumption demand which has made them able to invest and create more goods and services to satisfy the increase in demand and hence make more profits. [29] The activities of humans are primarily responsible for the continuous addition of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) and the change of land cover. [19]

The rise of production leads to a rise in large emissions and further depletion of our environment. Thus sustainable development can be achieved by making it a point to inculcating people as global citizens from unsustainable lifestyles to sustainable ways. The economist William Greider and many others have posited that should industrial growth march in regards to consented patterns, then the world and everyone in it is imperiled. Juxtapose, should industrialization be suppressed, then majority of the world's citizens will be handicapped to some basic life comfort and industrial artifacts, tools and machinery that enhances the quality of life.[30] Since we face this dilemma, our lifestyle should gather momentum to a more sustainability so that excesses of modernization and industrialization will be checked and production can continue to surf the world on higher scales of development.

Individual Consumption is extensively backed by culture. Culture may refer to the manmade aspect of life. The idea of culture frames the values, beliefs, customs, norms and preferences of individuals' consumption preferences in society. Therefore tackling cultural make up of individuals' consumption patterns gives a lead in battling the root cause of the problem. The work of social workers as social scientists is very essential here. Social workers have the ability to be able to interact and understand individuals' diverse cultural backgrounds and in various communities. An attempt to interact with people in their environment will grant the social worker insight into knowing how mechanisms can be employed to ensure a shift from unsustainable consumption. In the first place, the social worker can develop indicators which can be tapped into to draft a resolution for change. As global citizens individuals have to pursue the SDGs in their daily life and contribute their parts responsible to help the world reach a more sustainable development.

Hence, social workers could set out to establish and understand why people consume as they do and manage the situation through education.

Social workers can work in schools and communities as they already do when creating intervention to address some challenges such as poverty and injustices, but in this stead seek to address the challenge of un-sustainable lifestyles. They can create awareness and build the capacity of individuals, families and communities to develop sustainable lifestyles. Starting out like this will go a long way to affect the broader societies and the goal will be reached. In the 'Global Agenda for Social work and Social Development' a dedication to enhance social, economic, human rights, social relationships and environmental sustainability is recognized. [22] Therefore, to be able to achieve this, social workers who have always considered the bottom-up approach could build the capacity of individuals to be responsible in playing their role to realize the SDGs. For instance, if an individual could be enlightened to adopt and consume sustainable lifestyle such as not leaving the light on when not in use, utilization of renewable energy and conserving water among others; the individual who belongs to a family will affect his or her family by this and the family that belongs to a community will pass this on. This could be transmitted as the culture of that community.

Culture is manmade. It may be considered as the role of values, beliefs norms plus other socio-psychological parts that determine human choices accompanying consequences for the environment. [31] Social scientist work on addressing the connection between values, beliefs, norms and consumer preferences is still emerging.[32] Social workers as social scientists need to be well emerged in this discourse now more than ever. Drawing from the cultural perspective, sustainable consumption lifestyle, ways, preferences, norms and beliefs could be designed as a blueprint for individuals to follow. Social workers can influence the course and facilitate in transmitting sustainable culture to individuals. Again, creating awareness on the SDGs to the individual will remove any form of abstract feeling people have of the SDGs and contribute their efforts to the realization. Social workers can act here as educators, communicators and leaders in this regard. Reframing the worldwide view from un-sustainability to sustainability should start from targeting individuals across the globe and social workers as social societies that work hand in hand with people and groups in society should organize and lead this discourse.

### **Engaging Social Institutions and structures in the course of Sustainable Development**

As already been induced, the activities of continuous production to cater for consumption demand is mainly the cause of emissions leading to un-sustainability. When nations set out to develop, they institute structures and mechanisms to foster economic production of goods and services to bring about development. Institutions and structures in society form the backbone in shaping and accelerating the economic markets and activities of development thereby removing general hindrances to development activities and projects. Hence conventional development has always been about ways to boost economic operations by increasing demand for commodities and enlarging capacities of industries and factories to foster it.

Social institutions consist of institutional structures in societies such as hospitals, churches, police stations and prisons among others. However, their activities go beyond the services they render. Social institutions can be referred to as ways and mediums that regularize how a person can behave in a particular place at a particular time. It is social institutions that organize interactions in society, hence initiates and shows accepted forms of behavior.[33] This brings about some amount of order in the organization of society. It sees how people communicate; adopt ways of behavior, means of production and distribution of goods and socialization among others. It is about mechanisms and structures that aid in meeting needs and solving problems in society. Therefore, they can be considered as the institutional feature or elements of social life.[12]

Overtime, the relationship between institutions and societal development has been continuous use of resources with little consideration for replenishing or avoiding environmental degradation. Thus, activities of production and consumption in society have been institutionalized. As has been discussed that culture guides consumption choices of individuals, demand and supply have also been institutionalized by structures in society. Social institutions and structures serve as catalysts and accelerators in the demand and

supply processes of production. Some of these institutions include government, economy, education, religion and family among others. These institutions enable social organization in simple societies and even in complex societies. Institutions and structures from the primary family group to the larger corporations and nations shape human preferences and choices; to a large extent. [34] Market systems in which organizations operate consist of power relationships [35] which are being regulated by institutions that guide their operations. [35] Unfortunately, recurrently, market systems and organizations have been structured by institutions in society that have disregarded the environmental impacts of production. [36] The consumption of beef has been precipitously promoted by food corporations because steaks and hamburgers are more profitable than others. The production of beef generates great profits for food corporations and large greenhouse gas emissions in the form of carbon dioxide and methane.[19] Most production and economic organizations have contributed their deadly quota to environmental hardships. There exist a set of institutions that foster these organizations to operate without making it a mandate for them to consider the environmental harm being done. Rather, they introduce accepted justification of pollution [19][37]which results in dense emissions and pollutions in poorer communities to global commodity chains [38] distancing and shading out ways in which information about corporate environment practice.[39]

The government as social institutions also plays a role in supporting this system with much said about environmental management but little done towards it. This is because the government tends to support constant production and activities of economic market organizations at all cost. They tend to be reluctant in drafting policies and instating laws and regulations to govern economic markets activities and production with fewer impacts on the environment. For instance, the United Nations still remains one of the top countries that emit the most GHG. In the United States, the major generators of carbon pollution constitute coal, oil and gas, electric utility and agricultural industries. These enterprises have mighty lobbies in Congress. Thus it seems, in their scenario, organizations, industries and market economy are the main and the government agents considering policies and regulation to global warming and climate issues.[40] Pricing carbon initiative could be employed to limit emissions from these organizations.

However, this seems undoable in the United States, as it keeps being under considerable debate in legislation with massive attacks.[41] The coal and oil organizations are doing very well in increasing profits. In 2008, their profit was estimated to be about 1 million dollars. Some of these profits could be used in investing in renewable energy to cater for production that has a reduction in emission but sadly this is not the case. They manage to buy more shareholder values, purchase government subsidies and fought GHG emissions regulation.[40] Governments generate huge revenues from tax collected from activities of these organizations and companies are being used to cater for some infrastructural development such as good roads, building of hospitals and health facilities, schools and other developmental projects. Therefore, cannot implement harsh restrictions against their emissions which leads to environmental degradation. As this goes on our environment continues to be degraded.

In addition, on another level the family as basic and one of the oldest social institutions also contribute to some emissions although may not be the same as that of industries and companies. The family as the main socializing agent in our society continues to socialize their members in consumption lifestyle and Nonetheless, as the basic social institutions and main socializing agent, the family, they also have to be responsible in contributing their part to the realization of SD. For instance, if families stop continuous usage of old electrical appliances and replace them with Energy-star-qualified models to save energy as recommended by the Environmental Protection Agency then the level of emissions will go down. Also, using energy-efficient Compact Fluorescent Lamps in place of incandescent light bulbs and reducing garbage production, sorting out trash and recycling are all sustainable behaviors which families in society as social institutions could uphold to contribute to sustainable development. Social workers as close agents who work with families and communities can lead the front of educating, creating advocacy and re-socializing families into these helpful practices.

In totality, the main focus of the SDGs is to reach sustainable development; therefore families can start out by practicing sustainable lifestyle as governments and other bodies join in realizing targets of SDGs. On one

hand, industrial organizations and companies also contribute in developing initiatives in analyzing the problem of global warming. [27] In some countries, the private sector activities have been recognized in playing leading roles in the process of mitigation, however, they also lead in regards to emissions. [42] All the same, with the increase in information from scientific experts on the consequences of climate change and global warming, an increase in countries in both Global North and Global South engaging in activities for adaptation and mitigation have been recorded.[42] The involvement of social workers knowledge and competence is therefore of relevance to establish long standing adaptation and mitigation mechanisms. Social workers constantly interact with others in society and are therefore able to determine diverse societal contexts and the processes of decision involved in individuals, communities, governmental and organizational efforts regarding climate change adaptation.[19] It is first in knowing the existing efforts that its successes could be measured and ways to improve upon it can be determined.

Again, social workers can be unifiers and identify factors and forces in organizing social institutions for institutional synergies to reduce vulnerabilities and foster equitable decisions and actions. [19] The SDG 16 closely interlinked with the other SDGs focuses on peace, justice and strong institutions. This supports how social institutions can be partnered for realizing sustainable development. The essence of transparent, effective, inclusive and accountable institutions ensures collective efforts geared towards eradication of vulnerabilities in society and sustainable development. [43] It also brings about responsive, comprehensive, participatory and representative decision making at all levels. Even as governments have a crucial mandate in realizing the SDGs, the unique and efficacious nature of the SDGs calls for a whole-society-approach in contributing to its achievement. Social workers as social scientists and social thinkers have a leading role in assisting in directing social influence and interaction to inform sustainable development. Individuals and communities exposed to persistent structural inequalities are more prone to harm from climate change and environmental degradation.[44] Hence arresting the situation calls for meeting climate change issues to foster sustainable development to increase in quality of life.

The challenging roles of the social worker in realizing SDGs for Sustainable development have been captured in Table 2.

Table 2 Examining social worker’s role capabilities for sustainable development

<b>Thematic Roles of Social Worker</b>	<b>Approaches</b>	<b>Relevance to realizing SDG</b>
Transitioning Worldwide View from Unsustainable to Sustainable Lifestyle	1.Creating awareness to effects of consumption habits and lifestyle of man that disturbs the environment	1. Reduction and elimination of anthropogenic climate change and environmental damage factors.
	2. Educating people on some sustainable practices and lifestyles. Promoting Sustainable Culture	2. Aid in mitigating climate change and environmental damage
Engaging Social Institutions and structures in the course of SD	1.Collaborators and Partners	1. Pressuring governments to implement policies to check unsustainable production and consumption activities.
	2.Advocacy	2. Influencing governments to make and enforce climate justice laws and environmental protection rights.
		3. Influencing governments to set up and strengthen institutions that preside over environmental protection.

## Promoting Ecological Fairness for justice

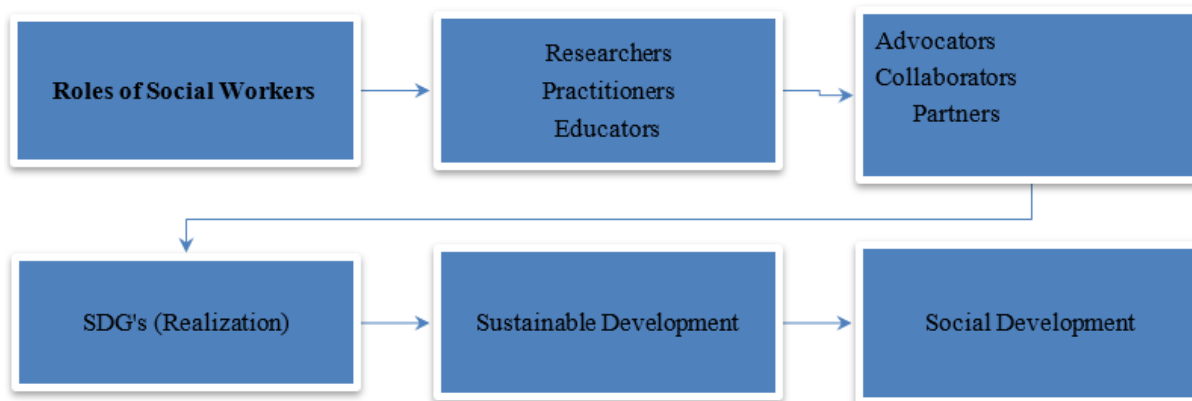
The rapid trend of modernization and urbanization has brought the world to a place where sustainability is no longer optional or a second plan to be considered. It is now very mandatory to take sustainable measures. The quest for sustainability has to start from the individual level to the global level. The Sustainable Development Goals which have been disseminated by the United Nations to assist nations around the world in pursuit of sustainable development calls for the involvement of all stakeholders. The province of social work themes, principles and ethics are of essence in realizing sustainable developmental goals for sustainable development. As a profession, social work practice is rooted in the concept of 'person-in-environment' (PIE). Usually, the 'environment' in this concept is argued to refer to the social scope and not the physical environment.[21] Therefore, the concept of 'person-in-environment' needs to be expanded to include the physical environment so that the social worker will see the profession closely aligned to environmental development and management. These will enable social workers to cultivate the thought of environmental consciousness in their work.

Moreover, a great work of social workers is to cater for the marginalized and vulnerable in society. Social workers in their line of work promote social justice. They see to it that diverse inequalities in society that put some individuals in deprived situations are addressed. The activities of continuous urbanization are bringing about unequal distribution of earth's resources. Advanced nations keep on tapping resources to boost their economy at the expense of simultaneous development of other nations. Their production also burdens the common climate shared by the human race whether developed or not. Some studies have explained the consequences of climate change may even affect underdeveloped and developing countries more than the advanced world. There are therefore marginalities in terms of environmental usage as a resource. This is a great environmental injustice as current developmental exploitations may compromise human needs now and future. Addressing issues of social justice is not too different from addressing environmental justice.[45] This is because they both concern human welfare. Hence, social workers can play roles in facilitating the promotion of ecological ideas among nations and organizations. This will promote collective action to project responsibility of individuals, families and society as a whole in the use of earth resources in a sustainable way.

Also social workers can develop and promote a binding legal framework that will govern the use of Earth's resources. This will be an intervention to check the excesses of people and organizations exploitation of the environment. Although there may exist environmental laws, having social workers as overseers in this regard will put them at the frontline in just checking for environmental problems but making sure people do not engage in any lifestyle or operations that may result in the problem in the first place. Also, it will put social workers as custodians of the environment which is the inhabitant of people they keep fighting for their welfare. Environmental pollution will be avoided other than making the pollution happen before steps are taken to fine or arrest culprits to serve as a lesson to others.

The profession of social work with the main objective of reducing vulnerabilities in life is being called upon to adjust social, economic and environmental priorities. This is because impacts of any of these factors have direct or indirect impacts on the welfare of people in society. The SDGs are clear goals that can assist the social work profession in achieving sustainable development. Social workers and sustainability are in succession because they seek to take on the welfare of all people, communities and the larger society as a whole. Figure 1 below is the framework of the linear model of role of the social worker in realizing SDGs for Sustainable Development. The thematic roles have been broken down into varying approaches for realizing SDGs for sustainable development to bring about social development.

Figure 1. The linear model of framework on roles of social work to realize SDG's for sustainable development for social development.



## DISCUSSION

The piece of work has illuminated the importance of social workers, who are considered social scientists, actively engaging in environmental and climate management and protection to ensure the just and effective achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This is critical because climate change and environmental degradation represent the most urgent challenges of our current century, leading to a cascade of other societal issues such as poverty, inequality, and injustice. Furthermore, safeguarding and managing the environment and climate create a solid foundation for achieving other developmental objectives. Given the interconnected nature of the SDGs, the discussion has emphasized the need for social workers to prioritize goals related to environmental protection and management instead of marginalizing them.

Social work is intricately linked with sustainability and social development, and practitioners in this field can play a meaningful and valuable role in addressing climate change and environmental degradation. Their functions as educators, advocates, implementers, and researchers can effectively align individuals, communities, and societies as a whole in tackling environmental challenges. The United Nations' vision and commitment within the Global Agenda aim to create a world free from violence, poverty, hunger, and diseases, while promoting social protection, equitable access to education, healthcare, and other essential elements for current and future generations. This vision led to the establishment of the SDGs. The fundamental mission of social workers and the field of social work is to combat life's vulnerabilities and contribute to making the world a better place. Consequently, social workers must collaborate with individuals, governments, corporations, organizations, and institutions to make meaningful contributions towards realizing the SDGs.

## CONCLUSION

The root causes of the numerous challenges, disparities, and vulnerabilities that afflict our world today can be largely attributed to our adversarial relationship with the environment. This antagonism has resulted in a surge in greenhouse gas emissions, disrupting the delicate balance of the climate and the ozone layer. To rectify this perilous situation, it is imperative that we take deliberate steps to address this fundamental flaw and safeguard our environment and climate. Pursuing development without considering the long-term implications for future generations is a futile endeavor. Hence, the linchpin to resolving the current social crisis lies in embracing the principles of sustainable development, a central focus of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Since the inception of the SDGs, governments, civil society, and various organizations have rallied behind this cause, and even social workers, who are typically focused on alleviating life's vulnerabilities, have joined the effort. However, realizing the targets of these goals necessitates a profound shift towards more sustainable environmental and climate management practices.

Despite their expertise in capacity building, empowerment, research, and other vital skills, social workers have traditionally been less engaged in climate change and environmental protection issues.

This paper has centered its exploration on the vital intersection of social work and sustainability, shedding light on this critical aspect. Social workers through their forged partnerships with the United Nations and other organizations, leverage these synergies to promote sustainable development. While a comprehensive examination of how the UN can empower social workers to effectively advance the SDGs lies beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, this presents a compelling avenue for future research. As we grapple the pressing global issues stemming from our environmental mismanagement, the engagement of social workers in this arena takes on greater significance. Their unique skill set and expertise can play a pivotal role in shaping a more sustainable future for us all, and further exploration in this direction promises to yield valuable insights for a harmonious coexistence with our environment.

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