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CHAPTER 6

Climate Change in Southern Africa: Any Role for Social Work?

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Abstract

Discussions and responses related to climate change have gained currency in Southern Africa in the last decade, especially in the social sciences and policy studies. However, it seems as if social work has not appropriately responded to the challenges of climate change, despite its humanitarian and social justice mission. As climate change accelerates, social work has not entirely found ways and means to help individuals, families, groups and communities to adapt to its ramifications. This chapter discusses the envisaged role of social work in climate change in Southern Africa. Whilst relying on secondary data, it argues that social work is playing an insignificant role in climate change discourses and interventions in the region. It calls for concerted efforts from the region's social workers to substantively address climate change. It concludes with suggestions and recommendations for future social work actions in climate change endeavours in Southern Africa.

Keywords: Climate change, social work, Southern Africa

6.1

Introduction

This chapter examines social work's role in climate change in Southern Africa. It notes that social work could contribute immensely to mitigating the effects of climate change in Southern Africa. This is because social work's mandate of helping vulnerable and politically marginalised people puts it at the centre stage of climate change solutions. Nevertheless, doubts about social work's role in climate change persist, not only in Southern Africa, but even globally. Thus, some authors argue that social workers addressing climate change tend to have a circular or insular

orientation. Others claim that because of the wide-ranging social implications of environmental and climate disasters, social workers tend to be in crisis response whilst addressing the immediate needs for food and water security, housing, safety, relocation and social supports. Hence, the social work profession seems to be less visible in policy and planning related to climate change, the environment and disaster risk reduction.¹

Some authors intimate that this invisibility is exacerbated by social work's focus on social systems and its historical and more limited engagement with the physical environment as a critical feature of health and well-being.² When it comes to the developing world and Africa in particular, another dilemma emerges and this pertains to social work's colonial and European heritage. Therefore, it is important not to lose sight of this fact when examining climate change.

6.2

Contextual and background issues

For purposes of this chapter, the political and economic grouping of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) is taken as Southern Africa. Population estimates of the region are scanty and unreliable. Nevertheless, the estimated population of the SADC region increased from 318.9 million in 2015 to 327.2 million in 2016 representing a 2.6% annual population growth rate. The largest population share in the region in 2016 was in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (26.6%), followed by South Africa (17.1%) and Tanzania (15.3%).³ Most countries in this region are low-income countries, except Botswana, Mauritius, Seychelles and South Africa. Despite having a wide array of natural resources, with minerals topping the list, most Southern African countries are poor. It can be argued that the region's socio-economic conditions have not markedly improved to date. In addition, one of the key features of Southern African countries seems to be their vulnerability to climate change. With this in mind, it is also important to consider that a large proportion of the region's population resides in rural areas.

The rural dwellers of Southern Africa are heavily dependent on climate-sensitive livelihoods such as agriculture, and on water and non-timber forest products.⁴ In early 2019, Southern Africa was ravaged by floods and a cyclone. Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi were adversely affected. Nevertheless, not everyone and every

1 Gray, M., Coates, J. & Hetherington, T. 2013. *Environmental Social Work*. Abingdon: Routledge.

2 Alston, M. 2015. "Social work, climate change and global cooperation." *International Social Work*, 58:355-363.

3 Southern African Development Community (SADC). 2016. *SADC Selected Social Indicators*. Available online: <https://bit.ly/2Gqy9s5> [accessed on 20 September 2019].

4 Omari, K. 2010. *Climate change vulnerability and adaptation preparedness in Southern Africa: A case study of Botswana*. Cape Town: Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

place in Southern Africa are equally vulnerable to climate change. Vulnerability to climate change varies greatly among regions, sectors and social groups in Southern Africa.⁵ Also, the effects of climate change increasingly compound the pressures on ecosystems.⁶ One important issue which needs to be underlined and answered when discussing climate change is culpability. Although the development and implementation of a global greenhouse gas reduction regime have dominated policy debates even before the Kyoto Protocol (which remains a critical element of effective mitigation), communities in developing countries do not have direct control of crucial sources of emission. In addition, they are not fully aware of the scale at which the potentially catastrophic impacts of climate change will play out.⁷

The foregoing issues are pertinent to a discussion on climate change in Southern Africa because this region has been ravaged by severe droughts and floods in the last two decades. Notably, the former could be attributed to climate change.⁸ It can be noted that in the last three years, droughts and floods have wreaked havoc on the region, with countless people suffering in the process. In 2015, when the region experienced another bout of floods, it was mainly the poor and rural communities of Southern Africa that had suffered the most. These floods were followed by the worst drought to affect this region in 35 years (in 2016). As the drought unfolded, the human costs also mounted. Thus, the drought compounded existing vulnerabilities resulting in severe food shortages, particularly in Lesotho, Malawi, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. Thus, an estimated 32 million people were food insecure between June 2016 and March 2017. The humanitarian impact extended beyond food insecurity. It resulted in increased levels of malnutrition and difficulty in accessing water. There were also higher school drop-out rates, increased incidences of communicable diseases, child protection violations and rural-to-urban migration.⁹

5 Eriksen, S., O'Brien, K. & Rosentrater, L. 2008. *Climate Change in Eastern and Southern Africa: Impacts, Vulnerability and Adaptation*. Oslo: University of Oslo.

6 Marshall, N.A., Marshall, P.A., Tamelander, J., Obura, D., Malleret-King, D. & Cinner, J.E. 2010. *A Framework for Social Adaptation to Climate Change: Sustaining Tropical Coastal Communities and Industries*. Gland: International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources.

7 Olowo, O.W., Olowo, O.A. & Filho, W.L. 2011. "Links between capacity and action in responses to global climate change: A climate response shift at the local level." In: W.L. Filho (ed.). *Experiences of Climate Change Adaptation in Africa*. Heidelberg: Springer, pp. 1-16.

8 Benson, C. & Clay, E. 1998. *The Impact of Drought on Sub-Saharan African Economies: A Preliminary Examination*. Washington: The World Bank.

9 United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs. 2016. *El Niño in Southern Africa* (2016). Available online: <https://bit.ly/2HUKjyt> [accessed on 19 October 2019].

6.3

The evolution of climate change discourse

It is safe to assert that, in the last four decades, global environmental concerns have caught the attention of both the United Nations (UN) and national governments. However, climate change has been unfolding since time immemorial. The only difference now is that human activities are contributing to climate change in fundamental ways and accelerating this phenomenon. Nonetheless, the initial anxieties regarding climate change were expressed by the UN and some multilateral organisations in the early 1970s. For instance, the UN Conference on the Human Environment which met at Stockholm, Sweden, from 5-16 June 1972, can be cited as the first significant symposium that sought to address issues related to the global environment and inadvertently climate change. Having considered the need for a common outlook and for similar principles to inspire and guide the peoples of the world in the preservation and enhancement of the human environment, the meeting proclaimed, *inter alia*:

Man is both creature and moulder of his environment, which gives him physical sustenance and affords him the opportunity for intellectual, moral, social and spiritual growth. In the long and tortuous evolution of the human race on this planet a stage has been reached when, through the rapid acceleration of science and technology, man has acquired the power to transform his environment in countless ways and on an unprecedented scale. Both aspects of man's environment, the natural and the man-made, are essential to his well-being and to the enjoyment of basic human rights – even the right to life itself.¹⁰

Notwithstanding the gender-biased narrative above, the UN recognised the ability of human beings to shape their environments and ultimately influence climate change. Later, the Brundtland Commission of 1987, also known as the World Commission on the Environment and Development (WCED), for the first time sought to galvanise the world around the objective of attaining sustainable development. In line with this thinking, environmental protection was seen as being part of the concept of sustainable development. There was also a shift in focus by looking at the sources of environmental problems, rather than the symptoms. The Commission argued that human activity that endeavoured to meet the needs and aspirations of the present had to do so without compromising the ability to meet those of the future.¹¹ Whilst recognising the need for an objective source of information about the causes of climate change, the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) established the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988. The IPCC's function is

¹⁰ United Nations (UN). 1972. *Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm, 5-16 June 1972*. New York: United Nations.

¹¹ United Nations (UN). 1987. *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future*. New York: United Nations.

to assess the best available scientific, technical and socio-economic information relevant for the understanding of climate change, its potential impacts, and options for adaptation and mitigation.¹² Subsequently, the UN convened a Conference on the Environment and Development, which was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 3-14 June 1992. In Rio de Janeiro, the world community agreed that the protection of the environment, as well as social and economic development were fundamental to sustainable development. The Rio Principles that spoke to the former issues were adopted at this summit.

Later, the UN convened another meeting in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 26 August-4 September 2002. At this conference, which is referred to as the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), commitments were made related to protecting the environment. Another milestone that can be cited is the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol in the city of Kyoto, Japan, on 11 December 1997. It came into force on 16 February 2005. This accord recognised that developed countries were responsible for most of the world's gas emissions. However, the United States of America (USA) refused to ratify the Protocol in 2001 when George Bush was president. This stance did not help matters and probably accelerated the world's greenhouse emission levels. Perhaps the USA redeemed itself under the leadership of the former president, Barack Obama (2009-2017), who was instrumental in driving the agenda of the UN's Conference on Climate Change in Copenhagen in December 2009. At this meeting, world leaders arrived at a political accord on climate change, namely the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Thereafter, the 21st session of the Conference of the Parties (COP) and the 11th session of the Conference of the Parties, serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol, took place from 30 November-11 December 2015 in Paris, France.

Nowadays, climate change concerns have become more nuanced as research evidence continues to show how destructive human beings have been on the environment. Since the mid-1990s, the enhanced greenhouse effect and global climate change have become issues around which much public debate has centred. Initially, this debate was characterised by heated discussions regarding the precision and relevance of temperature and impact models, even periodically calling into question the most fundamental assumptions of climate scientists.¹³ Also, climate change was seen principally as an 'environmental' problem. It was only after 2000 that there was a change in focus and approach. The main agenda of scientists working on climate change and those who determined climate change policy responses in industrialised countries was one of monitoring and

12 Eriksen, S., O'Brien, K. & Rosentrater, L. 2008. *Climate Change in Eastern and Southern Africa: Impacts, Vulnerability and Adaptation*. Oslo: Oslo University.

13 Olowo, O.W., Olowo, O.A. & Filho, W.L. 2011. "Links between capacity and action in responses to global climate change: A climate response shift at the local level." In: W.L. Filho (ed.). *Experiences of Climate Change Adaptation in Africa*. Heidelberg: Springer, pp. 1-16.

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measuring the changing climate, and then predicting future changes. The focus was on greenhouse gas emissions to deal with climate change, otherwise known as ‘mitigation’ in climate change circles.¹⁴ Essentially, the climate is about mitigation and adaptation because it stresses communities’ abilities, particularly those with the least capacity to adapt. Climate change mitigation and adaptation activities are often local; hence the involvement of local organisations is vital to adequately and appropriately respond to climate change.¹⁵ It must be noted, however, that climate change also directly impacts on an individual’s functioning and livelihoods in as much as it does so on the environment. Due to this, there is a direct correlation between climate change and the rise of refugee populations in the world or climate-driven migration.

In the recent past, the numbers of refugees and migrants from Africa landing on European shores have increased exponentially. These days, images in the print media and television abound where Africans have either drowned in the Mediterranean Sea or are being sold into modern-day slavery in Libya. Even though many of these refugees and migrants are driven from their countries of origin by wars, conflicts, political repression and economic meltdowns, rarely does climate change feature as a factor that contributes to their migration. Environmental refugees in an age of sectarian violence, civil wars and economic recession are not a flashy public policy project. Most policymakers wish the subject would go away. In an era when the world is being forced to bear witness to the fact that millions are fleeing their homes owing to sea rise, desertification, drought, unprecedented hurricanes, tsunamis and war, the topic is stubbornly resistant to the kinds of public amnesia, so often in effect, in the world theatre of nations.¹⁶

Indeed, the phenomenon of ‘climate change refugees’ is a new global reality which cannot be ignored anymore. For instance, in 1990 the link between climate change and human migration was identified by the IPCC.¹⁷ Environmental refugees are a problem of development policy beyond the scope of a single country or agency. This issue is fraught with emotion, human agency and political controversy.¹⁸ More recently, dramatic shifts have occurred within the climate change discourse itself, quite separately from the increased prominence of climate change as a political

14 Reid, H. 2014. *Climate Change and Human Development*. London: Zed Books.

15 Bowen, K. & Friel, S. 2015. “Health and social impacts of climate change.” In: R. Walker & W. Mason (eds.). *Climate Change Adaptation for Health and Social Services*. Clayton: CSIRO Publishing, pp. 3-13.

16 Wennersten, J.R. & Robbins, D. 2017. *Rising Tides: Climate Refugees in the Twenty-First Century*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

17 Mcadam, J. 2012. *Climate Change, Forced Migration, and International Law*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

18 Wennersten, J.R. & Robbins, D. 2017. *Rising Tides: Climate Refugees in the Twenty-First Century*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

issue in jurisdictions around the world.¹⁹ For instance, climate change is now seen these days as a human rights issue. Thus, the nascent interest in human rights in the climate change context can perhaps be attributed to some degree to widely felt frustrations with the pace and directions of multilateral diplomacy. To this end, consensus-driven welfare-based approaches stand in uneasy relief (in the eyes of many) against the very tangible climate change harms already evident in many countries.²⁰ Moreover, climate change debates have entered a new era whereby the issue is no longer about tackling an environmental or developmental problem, but about addressing climate change in the context of global justice.²¹

However, there have been some reversals in climate change actions globally. For example, the USA's president, Donald Trump, withdrew his country from the UN's 2016 Paris Agreement on Climate Change. He has even questioned the whole notion of climate change (and continues to do so) and has supported the position of climate change denialists. What is clear from the aforementioned interventions and actions, is that, from Stockholm to Johannesburg, the world community agreed on the urgent need to respond to the problem of environmental deterioration.²²

Given the foregoing, two definitions of climate change are advanced in this chapter. The first definition states that climate change "means a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable periods."²³ The second definition refers to climate change as "change in the state of the climate that can be identified (e.g. by using statistical tests) by changes in the mean and/or the variability of its properties and that persists for an extended period, typically decades or longer. Climate change may be due to natural internal processes or external forcings, or to persistent anthropogenic changes in the composition of the atmosphere or in land use".²⁴

19 Olowo, O.W., Olowo, O.A. & Filho, W.L. 2011. "Links between capacity and action in responses to global climate change: A climate response shift at the local level." In: W.L. Filho (ed.). *Experiences of Climate Change Adaptation in Africa*. Heidelberg: Springer, pp. 1-16.

20 McInerney-Lankford, S., Darrow, M. & Rajamani, L. 2011. *Human Rights and Climate Change: A Review of the International Legal Dimensions*. Washington: World Bank.

21 Reid, H. 2014. *Climate Change and Human Development*. London: Zed Books.

22 United Nations (UN). 2002. *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development: Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August-4 September 2002*. New York: United Nations.

23 United Nations (UN). 1992. *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*. Available online: <https://bit.ly/3nI4pO3> [accessed on 12 September 2019].

24 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. 2012. *Glossary of terms*. Available online: <https://bit.ly/34neWPW> [accessed on 10 September 2019].

6.4

Climate change: Why should social work matter?

This chapter's main contention is that social work has still not found a footing in climate change discourses and thus needs to respond to the effects of this phenomenon by providing solutions at practice and policy levels. Indeed, mainstream social work has yet to take up the challenge to play a role in climate change efforts, even though there have been repeated calls for social work's unique person-environment construct to be reconceptualised to incorporate not only the built and social environments, but also the natural environment.²⁵ Arguably, the social work profession has given the problem of climate change little attention.²⁶ This shortfall is compounded by conceptual and practice muddles on the part of those who advocate for a greater role for social work in climate change. Perhaps social work's key role in climate change is diminished by those parts of the globe in terms of organisations, scholars, policymakers and politicians that or who erroneously think that it has fewer impacts on public and climate policies as well as other macro responses.²⁷ While social workers have provided humanitarian assistance and counselling services to vulnerable people, their voices have scarcely been heard in the media. Their voices are absent from many decision-making structures formulating policy from preventing large-scale devastation in the future and addressing needs during calamitous events and their aftermath.²⁸

Moreover, social workers' lack of involvement in climate change is not unexpected because their tasks involve supporting those requiring assistance. Also, social workers rarely have time to engage with the wider issues of practice, including the development of social policies that draw lessons from micro-level practice and affirmation of their expertise – when other professionals extending their roles seek to appropriate it.²⁹ Indeed, the policy and macro levels are spheres where social work could play decisive roles given the profession's extensive knowledge of vulnerable people and their environments. In Southern Africa, this shortcoming is glaring and there seems to be not much that has been articulated by social workers in this region

25 Hetherington, T. & Boddy, J. 2013. "Ecological work with marginalised populations: Time for action on climate change." In: M. Gray, J. Coates & T. Hetherington (eds.). *Environmental Social Work*. London: Routledge, pp. 46-61.

26 Achstatter, L.C. 2014. *Climate Change: Threats to Social Welfare and Social Justice Requiring Social Work Intervention*. Available online: <https://bit.ly/3db7gEF> [accessed on 11 September 2019].

27 Gray, M., Coates, J. & Hetherington, T. 2013. "Introduction: Overview of the last ten years and typology of ESW." In: M. Gray, J. Coates & T. Hetherington (eds.). *Environmental Social Work*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 1-28.

28 Dominelli, L. 2012. *Green Social Work: From Environmental Crises to Environmental Justice*. Malden: Polity.

29 *Ibid.*

from conceptual or practice perspectives. Despite this challenge, it must be borne in mind that social work has a role to play in climate change as it is a profession that has been associated with the marginalised people of the world for centuries. Crucially, it has always analysed human conditions by placing an individual at the centre of his or her environment. Social work has theoretical approaches which provide ways of organising information and looking at the world from a perspective of social justice. For instance, a common theoretical approach to social work should pay attention to the interactions between individuals and various systems in the environment. The focus on the individual and the environment is important because the latter is where social workers direct their efforts at change.³⁰

Social work can examine society holistically because it extensively utilises the systems theory. The systems theory focusses on the dynamics and interactions of people in their environment. A system is a set of elements that are orderly and interrelated to make a functioning whole. Social workers work with and on behalf of various sized systems, namely: microsystem at an individual level; mesosystem at a group level, as well as macro systems that focus on organisations and communities.³¹ Hence, social work cannot be removed from climate change initiatives. Forays into this area should be emboldened and consolidated through innovative strategies. Even the definition of social work has wider implications which touch on the environment and by extension, climate change. Thus, social work as a practice-based profession and an academic discipline promotes social change and development, social cohesion and the empowerment and liberation of people. In addition, principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhances well-being.³² Social workers are part of development organisations and even governments, and whose actions could have accelerated climate change. That is why they need to respond to climate change. Social workers walk that tight rope between supporting and advocating on behalf of the marginalised individual, whilst being employed by the social, economic and political environment that may have contributed to their marginalisation.³³

For social work to respond to climate change around the globe and in Southern Africa, it must not be encumbered by colonial and neo-colonial paradigms of past epochs that had an overdose of clinical and rehabilitative responses. Therefore,

30 Kirst-Ashman, K.K. 2010. *Introduction to Social Work and Social Welfare: Critical Thinking Perspectives*. Belmont: Brooks/Cole.

31 *Ibid.*

32 International Federation of Social Workers & International Association of Schools of Social Work. 2014. *Global definition of Social Work*. Available online: <https://bit.ly/3nt2kQa> [accessed on 10 September 2019].

33 Horner, N. 2012. *What is Social Work?* London: SAGE.

social work must be developmental in content and outlook. In this case, the developmental approach in social work could be expressed through preventative strategies against climate change.³⁴ Hence, when moving from the developmental premise, social work has multiple roles to play and in climate change initiatives it will be the same. Work in this area should not be reduced to a specific intervention method or approach. To this end, social workers should be part of multidisciplinary teams and deal with climate change from a holistic perspective because people do not experience climate change in an isolated or discrete manner. Many other changes are occurring simultaneously, creating multiple sources of human insecurity. For example, the spread of infectious diseases (e.g. malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS) is occurring alongside trade liberalisation, water reforms and political or social conflict. Together, all these changes influence the capacity to respond to climate-related events, such as droughts, floods, or pest outbreaks. Yet, simple compilations of threats and collective assessments of their impacts do not adequately capture the nature and dynamics of vulnerability. Instead, it is necessary to consider how processes interact to influence exposure to climate change and the capacity to cope with or adapt to climate variability and long-term changes.³⁵

In this regard, social work in Southern Africa is uniquely placed to be a transformative vehicle for communities which still bear the scars of colonial domination and post-colonial government neglect. Therefore, social work that aims to mitigate against climate change should capture issues and problems which traditionally have been conceptualised as being outside the domain of social work. It should be imaginative and flexible to be relevant and ready for action in the hitherto uncharted areas.³⁶

6.5

New pathways for social work in climate change in Southern Africa

In this chapter, it is argued that social workers need to sharpen their interventions at two levels to engage substantively with climate change and its ramifications. This is namely at (a) macro-level and (b) micro level.

³⁴ Kumar, H. 2005. *Social Work and Developmental Issues*. Delhi: Aakar Books.

³⁵ Eriksen, S., O'Brien, K. & Rosentrater, L. 2008. *Climate Change in Eastern and Southern Africa: Impacts, Vulnerability and Adaptation*. Oslo: University of Oslo.

³⁶ Mupedziswa, R. 1992. "Africa at the crossroads: Major challenges for social work education and practice towards the year 2000." *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 7:19-38.

6.5.1 Social work and macro-level interventions in climate change

At a macro level, social work efforts should inform policy and planning efforts of national governments, not only from a humanitarian and social justice perspective but from indigenous knowledge perspectives. To this end, it is proposed that social work should play meaningful roles in informing climate change policies in the region by providing inputs into adaptation planning. This is because climate risks, and the measures to address them, are inherently linked with other policy measures. The efficiency and effectiveness of adaptation planning can be increased by integrating it with the relevant policy processes and decision cycles, for instance, regarding land use planning and resource management. By recognising that adaptation is one of many policy objectives, and not necessarily the dominant one, mainstreaming ensures that adaptation priorities are aligned with policy priorities.³⁷ As the characteristics of risks are increasingly difficult to predict over long time-horizons, the policy response should involve a proportionate, flexible and iterative risk management approach in adaptation planning. This includes:

- σ Improving knowledge about the risks of climate change through national assessments.
- σ Using these assessments to plan for a range of possible outcomes, and not one “most likely” projection.
- σ Accepting that zero risk is unrealistic and preparing the response and recovery systems to cope with the remaining risk.³⁸

Social work has been involved in planning for human beings’ well-being for a long time and it thus can play a critical role in climate change. Planning at this level could integrate mitigation and adaptation of local communities to climate vagaries. Hence, adaptation will be needed to protect livelihoods and food security in many developing countries that are expected to be the most vulnerable, even under moderate climate change. This indicates that the overall challenge of climate policy will be to find an efficient mix of mitigation and adaptation solutions that limit the overall impacts of climate change. This includes recognising that many mutually re-enforcing synergies exist between specific mitigation and adaptation solutions that can lead to a more efficient allocation of climate resources.³⁹

37 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. 2015. *Adapting to the Impacts of Climate Change*. Available online: <https://bit.ly/30uQwTB> [accessed on 10 September 2019].

38 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. 2015. *Adapting to the impacts of climate change*. Available online: <https://bit.ly/30uQwTB> [accessed on 10 September 2019].

39 Food and Agriculture Organisation. 2012. *Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation: Challenges and Opportunities in the Food Sector*. Available online: <https://bit.ly/30v2Enu> [accessed on 10 September 2019].

6.5.2 Micro-level social work responses in climate change

Micro social work practice involves work with individuals and families and is the primary focus of most social workers. This chapter proposes that micro-social work in climate change should be located at two levels, namely (a) short-term and (b) long-term. Short-term social work measures could be set aside for crisis intervention. Crisis intervention involves helping to restore people who have undergone a particular crisis to the previous levels of functioning, by aiding them in processing their feelings, experiences, and beliefs; providing education about common reactions to a crisis and the particular problems they face; helping them improve their coping mechanisms, building social support and providing information and referral for other services if needed.⁴⁰

The second facet of micro-level social work in climate change could focus on building the resilience of vulnerable groups and communities that are severely impacted by climate change. Social workers could intervene with strategies that are anchored in climate and disaster-resilient development approaches. Thus, the multi-sectoral nature of climate change impacts and the close interlinkages with local drivers of vulnerability and exposure remains a complex but unavoidable challenge. Thus, climate change needs to be integrated into the development planning process. This process is often referred to as climate-resilient development.⁴¹

6.6

Conclusion

This chapter set out to examine the roles that could be played by social workers in the sphere of climate change in Southern Africa. Southern Africa was used as a point of reference because of its susceptibility to climate change-induced natural disasters as well as extreme weather patterns. To this end, the discussion described the problem it was investigating and then located it in the context of Southern Africa. To shed more light on the issue, the chapter presented some background information to climate change and showed how ideas linked to the former issue evolved over the decades. The chapter then made a case for social work and argued why social workers had to be at the forefront of climate change actions. Lastly, it proposed new pathways for social work practice in climate change in Southern Africa.

⁴⁰ Corcoran, J. 2010. *Direct Practice in Social Work: Oxford Bibliographies Online Research Guide*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

⁴¹ World Bank. 2013. *Building Resilience: Integrating Climate and Disaster Risk into Development*. Washington: World Bank.

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