

**THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN PROMOTING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE
FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES FROM A GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVE IN
LILONGWE**

BY

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DECLARATION

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I declare that this mini dissertation is my own original work. Where secondary material was used, this has been carefully acknowledged and referenced in accordance with university requirements.

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2 September 2020

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ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN PROMOTING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES FROM A GOVERNMENT'S PERSPECTIVE IN LILONGWE

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Poverty has been and continues to be an ongoing global, regional and national challenge that is demonstrated through the interactions of individuals and their social environment. Reasoning from this fact, world leaders made a commitment for mutual action and adopted the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* for the full benefit of all; for current and future generations, in order to help eradicate poverty through the promotion of social, economic and environmental development (United Nations, 2015:10). Social workers are committed to advocate against any forms of inequality, “unsustainable environments related to climate change, pollutants, war, natural and human-made disasters, and violence to which there are inadequate international responses by promoting and endorsing the human rights of vulnerable communities, while working towards environmental sustainability (Global Agenda, 2012).

The goal of the study was to explore and describe the role of social workers in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities.

This was an explorative and descriptive study that used a case study design and qualitative approach. The study recruited ten social workers who were purposively sampled using a non-probability sampling method. One-on-one interviews using a semi-structured interview guide were used for data collection. Data analysis was performed using the six-step thematic analysis.

The findings reveal that social workers comprehend the issues involving environmental justice, advocate for the needs of communities to relevant stakeholders, and that they are challenged to implement interventions due to lack of resources that are unevenly distributed in government. Furthermore, there is less community participation from vulnerable communities on strategies and interventions that aim to promote sustainable development.

The study concludes that social workers need to shift their focus in social work practice and education by adopting an ecological approach and green social work model, that they are committed to helping communities have access to opportunities and resources that promote sustainable development, and educate communities on the inter-relatedness of human and environmental rights. Furthermore, government is using a top-down approach and do not comprehend the role of social work in community sustainability.

Recommendations include the integration of the green social work model in the social work curriculum and continuous professional development, strengthening community empowerment and participation and enhancing resource mobilisation for sustainable interventions through partnerships.

KEY WORDS

Social work

Green social work

Environmental justice

Sustainable communities

Sustainable development

Malawi

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CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development [hereafter 2030 Agenda] was adopted by state nations across the globe to eradicate poverty in all its forms, combat inequality, preserve the planet, create sustainable economic growth and foster social inclusion (United Nations [UN], 2015:5). Social work is committed to make a contribution to sustainable development through the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development [hereafter Global Agenda] (2012). The key dimensions of sustainable development are social, economic and environmental development (UN, 2015). In sustainable development, both people and the planet are equally important. Climate change and the rapid depletion of natural resources are affecting the lives of people in general, while the natural resource depletion and the adverse impact of environmental degradation and pollution undermine the ability of communities to develop and grow (International Association of Schools of Social Work [IASSW], 2016). Environmental disasters exacerbate existing socio-economic and cultural inequalities (Dominelli, 2014:344) which emphasises the link between social instability and the physical and human environment.

The four themes of the Global Agenda are interlinked, but theme three in particular refers to promoting environmental and community sustainability, which also has been the focus of intervention for the period 2017-2018. The commitment includes building community capacity to respond to environmental challenges and human and natural disasters (Global Agenda, 2012). It calls upon social workers to align their activities and programmes with development initiatives that integrate the environment with human dimensions (IASSW, 2016).

In the framework of sustainable development, social work concerns itself with broadening the notion of the environment to include the natural world; thus, shifting largely from an anthropocentric to an ecocentric focus (Gray, Coates & Hetherington, 2013:298). Social workers are compelled to act on environmental injustices because of their ethical mandate to address social injustice (Erickson, 2012:184). Social work engages in the environmental discourse with regard to issues that contribute to human

dilemmas. However, despite having much to offer to the debate, social work lags behind in claiming the territory of the natural world (Dominelli, 2014:339; Besthorn, 2013:184). This research study intended to contribute to this debate by emphasising the role of social workers within the environmental justice framework; which incorporates social justice and how the sustainability of communities is impacted from a government's perspective. This focus is aligned with the third theme of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development (2012), which stipulates promoting community and environmental sustainability.

The relevant concepts to the study are as follows:

- Social work and green social work

This research study embraces and incorporates both developmental and green social work approaches, and how it could be applied in practice in Malawi. Developmental social work affirms the social work profession's commitment to the eradication of poverty, recognises the link between welfare and economic development, and construes welfare as an investment in human capital rather than a drain on limited government resources (Gray, Agillias, Mupedziswa & Mugumbate, 2017:2). However, there is less focus on the environmental issues that affect communities. Therefore, green social work transcends a narrow focus on poverty eradication to include social workers working in close collaboration with local people in their communities, to develop empowering and sustainable relationships between them and their environments within a framework of human rights, social and environmental justice (Dominelli, 2012:196). This study embraced a developmental and green perspective for social work practice.

- Environmental justice

Environmental justice is important for ensuring that the human right to live in a clean, safe, and healthy environment is enjoyed by all people, as the world's poorest, vulnerable, and oppressed people often live in the most degraded environments and have no control over resources (Hawkins, 2010:68). For purposes of this study, the inter-relatedness between environmental justice and community sustainability was based on the view of Schlosberg (2007:57) that 'environmental justice is not simply an individual experience', but 'embedded in one's community'.

- Sustainable communities

Sustainable communities require that people act as stewards of their natural environment. According to Rainey, Robinson, Allen and Christy (2003:709) “...stewardship implies that current and future activities do not degrade local resources, such that the community becomes less productive and/or less attractive over time”. In this study, sustainable communities are regarded as healthy and inclusive societies, who have access to water and sanitation, renewable energy for all, inclusive and safe housing and food security (IASSW, 2016). Furthermore, sustainable communities promote social, economic and environmental justice by focusing on interventions that eradicate poverty and combatting inequality, while preserving the planet (un, 2015:5). In addition, the study regards community participation as a vital tool for sustainable communities (schlosberg, 2007:57; 64).

1.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A shift to ecological justice is important in the discourse of environmental social work and social work’s role in environmental and community sustainability, as it embraces environmental and social justice in responding to environmental issues. However, adopting an ecological justice perspective does not automatically translate into using the ecological approach as theoretical framework for environmental social work. Dominelli (2012:8) argues that the ‘deep ecological’ approach still privileges people by focusing largely on the interaction between people and social and physical environments, where people rather act upon the physical environments as opposed to integrating the physical, social, economic, political and cultural environments. Integrated environments are required for holistic social work practice that intends to change existing ‘inegalitarian social relationships, power relations and resource distribution systems’ (Dominelli, 2012:8).

Therefore, this study adopted green social work (Dominelli, 2012) as a theoretical framework, which the social worker is responsible for promoting it. Dominelli (2012:8) defines green social work as that part of practice “that intervenes to protect the environment and enhance people’s well-being by integrating the interdependencies between people and their socio-cultural, economic and physical environments, and among peoples within an egalitarian framework that addresses prevailing structural inequalities and unequal distribution of power and resources”. To realise human rights,

social and environmental justice and social inclusion, Dominelli (2012:198) states that there is a requirement for a more equitable sharing of the benefits from the earth for all, and new paradigms of production and consumption. In this, she sees a role for social workers in advocating for changes; doing research that shows the suffering of the poor and marginalised, promoting robust resilience in communities through capacity building and developing partnerships (Dominelli, 2012:198).

In this study, the role of social workers was explored in relation to how they are engaged in promoting environmental justice by integrating the environment into social and economic development interventions and/or activities. This includes their role in advocating for service users, building communities capacity, and working in partnerships for sustainable development outcomes.

1.3 RATIONALE AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

The 2030 Agenda with its seventeen (17) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and hundred and sixty-nine (169) targets emphasises that both people and the planet are important in human development that leaves nobody behind (UN, 2015). To this end, the call for integration of environmental preservation and human well-being is a growing movement of sustainable development (Erickson, 2012:187). Theme three of the Global Agenda (2012); “promoting environmental and community sustainability”, underpins the rationale for this study. The commitments of the Global Agenda are aligned with the 2030 Agenda which positions social work well to contribute to sustainable development. Sustainable development includes social, economic and environmental dimensions (UN, 2015), and implies a human and planet focus for social work.

Social work’s longstanding focus on people-in-environment emphasise the interaction between people and their social environment (Besthorn, 2013; Dominelli, 2014; Erickson, 2012). Within the context of sustainable development, the discourse on environmental social work has gradually shifted to include environmental justice and the natural environment. This implies an ecological focus where social work looks at environmental issues through both an environmental and social justice lens. Poor and marginalised societies, who are the key focus of social work, are more severely affected by environmental degradation and climate change (International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW], 2015). In view of their ethical mandate to address social

injustice, social workers are compelled to act in addressing environmental injustices (Erickson, 2012:184). However, the social work profession has been less involved and continues to so in a limited manner in both the social work curriculum and continuous professional development. To contribute to the sustainability of community development, social work should integrate issues of the natural environment with human development into existing social work practice models (Erickson, 2012:184), and develop integrated social and economic models that takes the natural environment into consideration (Dominelli, 2012). This study intended to explore the role of social workers in promoting environmental justice that contributes to sustainable communities.

The research question for the study was:

What is the role of social workers in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities in Lilongwe from a government's perspective?

The sub-research questions were as follow:

- What are social workers' understanding of environmental justice?
- What activities and interventions are social workers engaged in that address environmental justice issues?
- How do social workers contribute to sustainable communities?
- What strategies do social workers propose in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities?

1.4 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The goal and objectives of the study were as follows:

1.4.1 Research goal

- To explore and describe the role of social workers in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities in Lilongwe from a government's perspective.

1.4.2 Research objectives

- To conceptualise environmental justice and community sustainability in social work within the context of green social work.
- To explore social workers understanding of environmental justice.

- To explore and describe the activities and interventions that social workers engage with in addressing environmental justice issues.
- To explore and describe social workers' contribution to sustainable communities. To propose guidelines for the role of social workers in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities.

1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section gives a brief overview of the research methodology that was used in the study. Chapter three will give a more detailed outline of the research methodology. The research used a qualitative approach which allowed the researcher to collect data that represents the in-depth views of participants (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:91). For the purpose of this study, the researcher's main intention was to gain in-depth information on how social workers perceive their role in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities. The purpose of the study was both explorative and descriptive (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95). The research type was basic and applied with the purpose of suggesting possible roles for social workers in order contribute to the theory of green social work (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:94).

The study used a case study design; in particular, an instrumental case study which intended to help suggest possible roles that social workers could play to promote environmental justice which was suitable for attaining new knowledge (Leedy & Ormrod 2013:141; Fouché and Schurink 2011:321). The study population included all social workers that are working for the government under the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare in Lilongwe, Malawi. The study sample consisted of ten (10) participants who were purposively sampled from the Department of Social Welfare using the non-probability sampling method (Babbie, 2013:128-128; Nieuwenhuis, 2016:85). The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews as a data-collection method, and a semi-structured interview schedule was the data collection tool (Nieuwenhuis, 2016:93). Data analysis was accomplished by utilising a six steps of thematic analysis (Creswell, 2014:197-220; Clarke, Braun & Hayfield, 2015:230-245).

1.6 CHAPTERS OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

Chapter 1: General introduction and orientation to the study. The first chapter presents a general introduction to the study as well as the rationale, problem statement,

theoretical framework, the research question and sub-questions, goal and objectives of the study, and a summary of the research methodology. Key concepts have also been described.

Chapter 2: Literature review. The literature review includes a discussion of environmental issues in relation to sustainable communities, environmental and social justice, and the role of social work within the context of environment. It also includes the theoretical framework of the study, namely green social work.

Chapter 3: Research methodology, empirical findings and discussion. This chapter outlines the research methodology, the ethical considerations and limitations of the study. Furthermore, the research findings are presented and discussed.

Chapter 4: Key findings, conclusions and recommendations. The final chapter indicates how the study's goal and objectives have been achieved. It presents the key findings of the study and the conclusions derived from the findings. Finally, the recommendations from the study are presented and discussed.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Poverty has been, and continues to be an ongoing global, regional and national challenge that manifests through the interaction of individuals with their communities. In 2015, world leaders made a commitment for mutual action and adopted the 2030 Agenda for the full benefit of all; for current and future generations, in order to help eradicate poverty through the promotion of social, economic and environmental development (UN, 2015:10). In alignment with the world leaders' adoption of the 2030 Agenda, independent African states also took a landmark decision in 2015 to form the organisation of African Unity as they looked ahead to "*the Africa we want towards the next 50 years*" (African Union, 2015:1). However, it should be noted that it would be impossible to achieve "*the Africa we want*", if individuals in African communities do not realise their capabilities to reach their full potential in development, culture and peace and in doing so, contribute to establishing sustainable communities (AU, 2015:2).

Heads of states globally, regionally and nationally "recognise that social and economic development depend on the sustainable management of the planet's natural resources, by conserving the oceans and seas, freshwater resources, forests, mountains and drylands, in order to protect biodiversity, ecosystems and wildlife" (UN, 2015:13). The Global Agenda (2012) states that social workers "recognise that people's health and well-being suffer as a result of inequalities and unsustainable environments related to climate change, pollutants, war, natural and human-made disasters, and violence to which there are inadequate international responses". Therefore, there is a need to work towards environmental sustainability and promoting the dignity and worth of people, while strengthening recognition of the importance of human relationships (Global Agenda, 2012).

The chapter begins with a discussion on what environmental justice entails. The next discussion focuses on the legislation and policies pertaining to environmental justice in the context of Malawi. Next, sustainable development and sustainable communities are described and outline factors that affect sustainable development on a global, regional and national level. Thereafter, approaches on how social workers can make

a paradigm shift in the profession by utilising green social work are discussed. This is followed by a discussion on how social workers can utilise the green social work theoretical framework and challenges that they encounter in promoting environmental justice. The roles that social workers can play while promoting environmental justice follow next and finally the chapter ends with a summary.

2.2 CONCEPTUALISING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Beretta (2012:140) defines environmental justice as a “fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, colour, national origin, or income with respect to development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies.” Schlosberg (2007:5) describes that the fair treatment, distribution and involvement is not only focused on individuals but the communities as a whole by taking into account their capabilities, functions and the environment that they live in. In order to promote environmental justice, it is important that people; including the vulnerable have the right to live in clean, safe and healthy environments by having access to portable water and hygienic sanitation facilities while protecting and preserving the natural systems (Hawkins, 2010:68; Erickson, 2012:186). Environment injustice, according to Alston (2015:68), occurs when human populations are disproportionately exposed to toxins or have limited access to needed resources for survival because of their socioeconomic status, nationality, religion and culture. Those most affected by environmental injustices are people living in poverty and unstable conditions, while having limited livelihood options which results in affecting food and water security, and are considered to be most vulnerable (Alston, 2015:68). Pollution is a major factor that contributes to environmental injustice as it increasingly threatens the world’s limited resources and its effects are rapidly spreading from one country or region to another (IFSW, 2015:105). Another major factor contributing to environmental injustice is the uneven distribution of wealth because people living in poverty are more vulnerable to natural and/or human-made disasters, and the destruction of the limited assets and resources that they have in order to help sustain their livelihoods (Cannon, 2008:5). The legislation and policies are important instruments of government that help promote environmental conservation, create community awareness and education which will be discussed next.

2.3 LEGISLATION AND POLICIES ON ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN MALAWI

Shelton and Kiss (2005:2) explain that there is a growing global public awareness on the threats of the environment which have led to demands that the law protects the natural surroundings on which human well-beings depend. Currently, there are immense number of national and international laws, comprising of rules that aim to protect the earth's living and non-living elements and its ecological processes (Shelton & Kiss, 2005:2). In Malawi, the Environment Management Act 19 of 2017, section 3: National Environmental Policy states that

“Every person shall take all necessary and appropriate measures to protect and manage the environment, to conserve natural resources and to promote sustainable utilization of natural resources and to promote in accordance the Act and any other written law or policy relating to the protection and management of the environment or the conservation and sustainable utilization of the natural resources.”

In order to observe these regulations and be accountable, the Environmental Affairs Department through the National Environmental Policy (2004:11) emphasises that there is need for community participation in the identification, planning and implementation of community-based ecosystem management activities, to ensure that they take responsibility for, while also benefiting from sustainable management of natural resources. Malawi is also committed to international development frameworks which include the 2030 Agenda on the Sustainable Development Goals and the African Union Agenda 2063. In order to have a prosperous country “based on inclusive growth and sustainable development”, one of the key areas in The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy [MGDS] III is to “help protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss” (AU, 2015:2; MGDS III, 2017:11; UN, 2015:29). The environment is one of the dimensions of sustainable development (UN, 2015) and therefore of sustainable communities as will be next discussed.

2.4 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Sustainable development as cited in the Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987:16) means “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their

own needs”. In order for communities to attain sustainable development, they have to manage the human and environmental resources and financial capital to meet current needs while ensuring that adequate resources are available for future generations. This includes ensuring that the social, economic and environment development is met in the present without compromising the resources for the future (UN, 2015:14). The three main components of sustainable development as indicated by the United Nations (UN, 2015:10) are economic growth, environmental stewardship, and social inclusion. However, in order to achieve sustainable development, these three components need to be intertwined with peace (UN, 2015:10). Consequently, peace building is one of the core elements that is needed to “ensure responsive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels, in order to help ensure equal access to justice for all” (UN, 2015:30).

Sustainable communities have the following characteristics: 1) clean and efficient environment, 2) resilience to social, economic and the environmental shocks, 3) inclusive communities, and 4) competitive environment in order to create jobs in the community (World Bank Group [WBG], 2010:7). Therefore, sustainable communities require integrated social, economic and environmental development where both people and the planet matter. The ensuing discussion will focus on the factors affecting both environmental justice and sustainable communities.

2.5 FACTORS AFFECTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In this section, the environmental, economic and social factors that impact sustainable development will be discussed from a macro, regional and local context.

2.5.1 Environmental factors

One of the physical environment factors that affects sustainable development is poor land management which is visible, among other, in pollution and land degradation. People are more exposed to toxic substances due to air or water pollution, which has an impact on their health and development of communicable diseases such as cholera or malaria and in worst scenarios death (Finger & Zorzi, 2013:226). Industrial activities and growing urbanisation are some of the major causes of the deterioration of air and water quality globally, with 92% of the world population residing in places where air and water pollution exceeds the World Health Organization limits (WHO, 2017a:1). Concerning air pollution, the UN Sustainable Developmental Goals [SDG] Report (UN,

2019:36) notes that the increase effective cooking fuels and technologies is far too slow to meet the 2030 SDG target; thus leaving three billion (3,000,000,000) people worldwide to be dependent on inefficient and highly polluting cooking systems that result in four million (4,000,000) premature deaths annually. Air pollution has an impact on the sustainability of communities by increasing cardiovascular and respiratory diseases; especially among children such as asthma which was responsible for four hundred and twenty-thousand (420 000) deaths worldwide in 2016 (The Global Asthma Network, 2018:22).

Concerning water pollution, there is still a serious global shortage of clean drinking water. In Malawi, the Department of Water Resources in the national water policy (2005:5-6) emphasises that it is a mandate for all people to have access to potable water and sanitation services, in order to reduce the incidence of water related diseases by using appropriate cost-effective technologies that are sustainable. However, between 2000 and 2017, the proportion of the global population using safely managed drinking water increased from 61% to 90% (UN, 2019:36). Even though 90% of the world population have at least basic drinking water in 2017, it has been noted that seven hundred and eighty-five (785) million people still lacked basic drinking water services (UN, 2019:36). As in the case of air pollution, water pollution also affects sustainability of communities by killing human species, where inadequate potable water led to eight hundred and seventy thousand (870 000) deaths in 2016 caused by diarrhoea, thus contributing to the challenge to reduce communicable diseases by 2030 (UN 2019:31). In Malawi, the Malawi Demographic and Health Survey (MDHS) 2015-2016 (2017:10) reports that almost all urban households; 98% have access to potable sources of water compared to 85% of rural areas. A recent update on access to improved water in Malawi reports that in 2018, 85% of the population in households used improved sources of drinking water, which include piped water, protected wells and boreholes (National Statistics Office, 2019:35). However, 15% of the population, specifically from the rural areas are reported to be using unprotected water sources such as rivers, dams and springs (National Statistics Office, 2019:35). As a result, the use of unprotected water sources continues to elevate communicable diseases such as cholera, thus making it a challenge to “reduce the number of deaths caused by contamination by 2030” (UN, 2015:20). These environmental injustices impact on the sustainability of communities.

Land degradation is another environmental factor that affects sustainable development globally. Mckinnon (2008:259) explains that there is no doubt that a world-wide crisis exists because of the serious damage that humans have caused to the environment. Therefore, the escalating environmental degradation will continue to be a challenge in achieving global sustainability by 2030 (World Economic and Social Survey, 2013:29). Deforestation is one of the indicators of poor land management that has been affecting sustainable development and caused an extinction of both plant and animal species as people continue to practice poor agricultural practices (UN, 2019:53). The Red List Index [RLI], which helps to track overall extinction of species, noted that the animal species index declined from 0.82% in 1993 to 0.74% in 2018 and that biodiversity is declining rapidly compared to previous years (UN, 2019:54). Concerning the plant species, forest areas globally are still declining but at a slower rate. Between 2000 and 2015, forest areas globally decreased from 31.1% to 30.7%, which represents a loss of more than fifty-eight (58) million hectares of forests (UN, 2019:55). Unfortunately, if deforestation is not tackled effectively, there will be more consequences such as persistent drought which would affect the sustainability of communities by reducing the level of rainfall as is observed in the Africa region (Greenhill, King, Lane & MacDougall, 2009:322,323).

Deforestation, which continues to be cyclical has resulted in lack of rainfall in most African countries and desertification, where there has been no restoration of the landscape (UN, 2019:55). El niño; an abnormal weather pattern due to the further deforestation, continues to affect some parts of the African continent and making the drought situation worse. El niño is defined as a “climate pattern that occurs when the sea surface temperature in the tropical Pacific Ocean rises to above normal for an external period of time” (World Food Program [WFP], 2018:2) which has been a cause of either heavy rains in one country and less/no rain in another country (WFP, 2018:2). For instance, South Africa has recorded some cases on drought, which are of frequent occurrence in the country’s arid and semi-arid rangelands and have had severe ecological consequences, as has been the recent case in Cape Town (Vetter, 2018:29). Cape Town experienced severe drought which led to serious water crisis, where taps which supply water to four million (4,000,000) people were shut down due to water shortage caused by the drought (Welch, 2018). Consequently, the water

shortage has had an impact on the agriculture produce for consumption thus led to food insecurity and loss of revenue (Welch, 2018).

Malawi continues to encounter food insecurity in communities due to natural disasters. One of the key priorities as stated in The MGDS III (2017:53) is focused on agricultural and climate change management, in order to help contribute to Malawi's national food security, nutrition enhancement and environmental management. However, floods have proven that food security in Malawi has become one of the main challenges due to high food prices which has an impact on the development and wellbeing of all people vulnerable to climate change, but more particularly children (Mayena, Fordham & Collins, 2008:304). In 2015-2016, 37% of children under the age of five (5) were reported to be stunted in growth, while 12% were underweight (MDHS 2015-2016, 2017:161). Although the prevalence of stunting growth of children under five in Malawi has remarkably decreased since 1992 from 55% to 37% in 2015-2016; and malnutrition has decreased from 24% in 1992 to 12% in 2015-2016 (MDHS 2015-2016, 2017:161), malnutrition still remains a problem in Malawi.

2.5.2 Economic factors

Poverty is one of the economic factors that continues to have an impact on the sustainability of communities, where its manifestations are through the level of employment and the earnings of people to sustain their livelihoods (Bangura, 2010:50). The global distribution of the population living in extreme poverty decreased from 36% in 1990, to 16% in 2010 and 10% in 2015 (UN, 2019:24). In 2015, seven hundred and fifty-eight (758) million people were living in extreme poverty, in which they were deprived from basic human needs to support their livelihoods of whom four hundred and thirteen (413) million were in sub-Saharan Africa and three hundred and twenty-three (323) million distributed across the rest of the world (UN, 2019:6). This results in the world still not being on track to “end poverty by 2030 for all people globally; of which poverty is currently it's measured as people living on less than \$1.25 a day” (UN, 2015:19). Concerning those who are employed, “8% of the workers and their families globally were reported to still be living in extreme poverty in 2018, despite a decline in the working poverty rate” (i.e., the proportion of the employed population living in poverty despite being employed) (UN, 2019:24). This implies that their employment related income is not sufficient to support them and their families out of

poverty, while ensuring decent living conditions (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2019:2). Consequently, the slow pace of achieving economic growth by 2030, exacerbates income inequality. Income inequality is one of the global indicators that helps to differentiate the gap between the rich and those who are poor and marginalised (World Economic and Social Survey, 2013:41). Ten percent of those employed globally receive 48.9% of the total global pay; which is considered to be a global wage while the lowest 20% of income earners; that is six hundred and fifty (650) million workers, earn less than 1% of global labour income; a figure that has been constant for 13 years (ILO, 2019:15). Therefore, having a job does not guarantee a sustainable livelihood, especially for those that receive the lowest pay.

Unemployment is another economic factor that affects the sustainability of communities. The loss of jobs continues to be on the rise in most countries in Africa which has been a cause of the division of socioeconomic classes in communities, which are determined by social and economic factors (World Economic and Social Survey, 2013:40). For example, “the unemployment rate in South Africa has gradually risen over the last decade from 23.2% in the first quarter of 2008 to 27.7% in 2018” (African Development Bank, 2018:24). Some of the causes that have led to the rise of unemployment in South Africa are due to slow economic growth which has resulted in a reduction in job creation, and also retrenchment in industries or manufacturing companies, as they cannot afford to employ more people or sustain the current employers (African Development Bank, 2018:24). As a result, there is large gap of unemployment between the rich and poor as most jobs require mid-level to higher level skills; while marginalising those with low-skilled levels (ILO, 2019:40).

Malawi’s economy is heavily dependent on agriculture, in which the majority of its population continue to contribute to the deterioration of the physical environment; thus resulting in natural disasters. The National Statistics Office (2019:29) outline that twenty-eight percent (28%) of the population of seventeen million, five hundred and sixty-three thousand, seven hundred and forty-nine (17,563,749) were unemployed in 2018, of which fifty-four percent (54%) were female. Due to the excessive demand by the population to enhance their livelihoods through agriculture, Aldrich (2011:598) explains that “communities put much pressure on the physical environment, as more people living on low income levels are forced to populate smaller areas of land”, while struggling over limited and/or scarce resources. If the high levels of unemployment do

not remarkably decline, Malawi is prone to fail in improving the GDP per capita. New jobs are needed annually to support the growing population; especially for the youth entering the labour force (Zulu, Ciera & Musila, 2012:30; The Republic of Malawi, 2017:29).

2.5.3 Social factors

The lack of community participation has been one of the contributing factors impacting on sustainable development globally. The lack of community participation is a result of “discrimination and exclusion based on gender, age or ethnicity, which has an impact on decisions concerning sustainable development” (World Economic and Social Survey 2013:53). Lack of participation has a possibility of leading to different forms of oppression, where other members of the communities are deemed to have more power and authority over others who are believed to be inferior and/or vulnerable; thus excluding them from the opportunity to participate in developmental issues relating to their communities (Dominelli, 2002:73). This is in particular the case with women, as opposed to men, where their representation in decision making is very low on issues affecting the sustainable development of their communities (UN, 2019:33). This is the case because women spend more time than men each day doing unpaid care and domestic work such as taking care of children and/or domestic work (UN, 2019:34). As a result, women are considered to be included on issues pertaining to sustainable development that affect their communities.

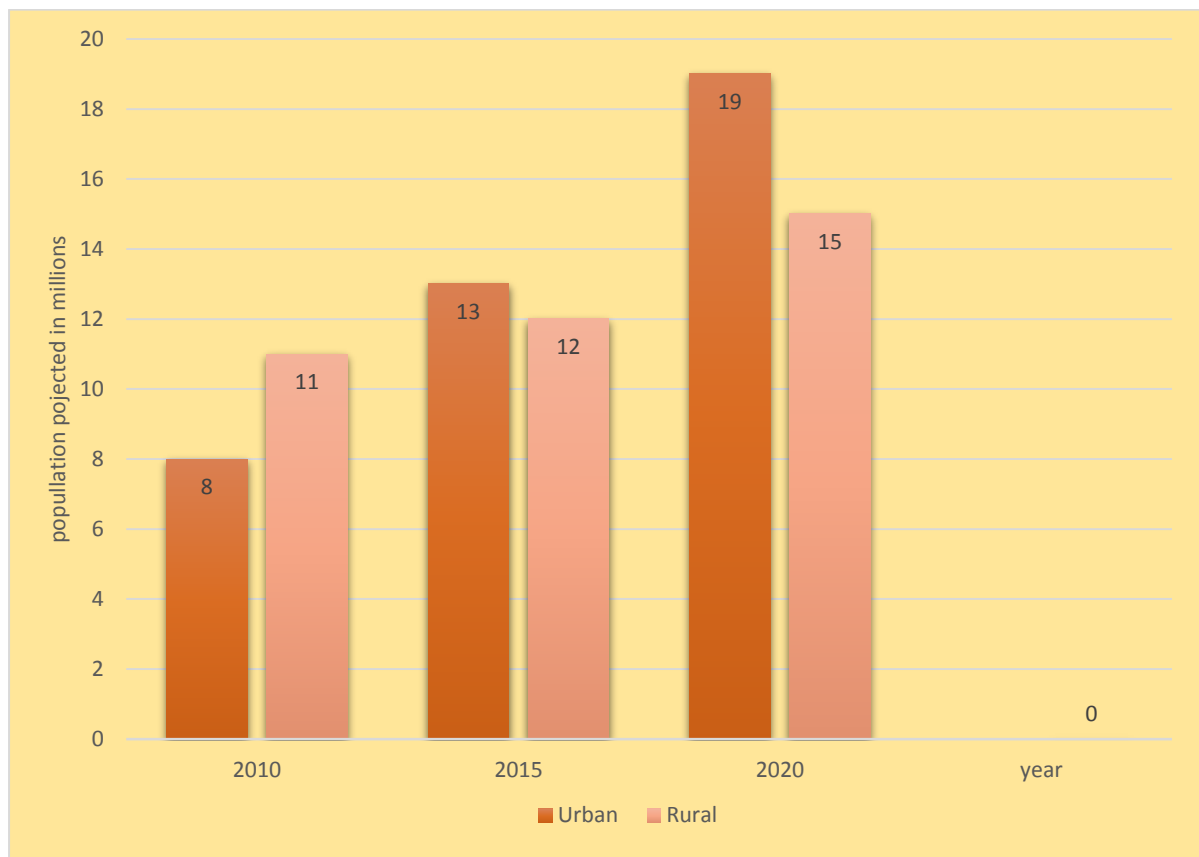
Population growth is another social factor that affects sustainable development at regional level. In the last decade, “the population of those above 65 years in Africa has grown from 3% in 2006 to 4% in 2016, (Nyamongo & Shilabukha, 2017:4). In terms of population distribution of those under the age of 30, in 2016, there was more than 60% in East and Southern Africa, while in the North and Western Africa it was more than 73% (Nyamongo & Shilabukha, 2017:5). As a result, population growth in Africa has a major impact on sustainable development as it increases issues of food insecurity, and demand for more employment and other basic needs such as equal distribution of water or land in order for people to sustain their livelihoods.

The level of education is another social factor that contributes to high unemployment rates and rapid population growth in Malawi. The National Statistics Office (2019:36) indicates that in 2018, nineteen percent (19%) people were uneducated of whom the

majority; that is fifty-six percent (56%), were female. This is the result of the high population rate which has an impact on the labour force as there are no more jobs being created to support the demand (National Statistics Office, 2019:36). Concerning the rapid population growth, the total population size in 2018 was seventeen million, five hundred and sixty-three thousand, seven hundred and forty-nine (17, 563,749) compared to thirteen million and seventy-seven thousand, one hundred and sixty (13,077,160) in 2008; thus, making a population growth of 34% (National Statistics Office, 2019:15). As Malawi's population grows and more children reach school age, there is an increasing demand for more school buildings of good quality, which would give them the platform to be educated on developmental issues (The Republic of Malawi, 2017:23). It is reported that among children in the primary level, there is little or no difference on the Net Attendance Ratio [NAR] between urban (95%) and rural (94%) areas respectively (MDHS 2015-2016, 2017:48). However, the NAR is reported to be much higher for adolescents in the secondary level in the urban (41%) and rural (13%) areas respectively (MDHS 2015-2016, 2017:48). The National Statistics Office (2019:26) indicates that one of the reasons of low NAR; particularly adolescents in the secondary level in the rural area is due to poverty, where their caregivers are not able to help support their educational needs such as school fees and books.

In order to have sustainable development, Zulu et al. (2012:7) emphasise that “the links between population dynamics; which is constantly changing, climate change and the environment” need to be well understood and addressed together. This is illustrated in Figure 2.1: **Projected** below on the projected growth in Malawi.

Figure 2.1: Projected population growth in Malawi



As illustrated in Figure 2.1, eleven million (11,000,000) people in Malawi were projected to be living in the rural areas, while eight million (8,000,000) were projected to be living in the urban areas by 2010. By 2015, the population rate in the rural area grew by 1%, while in the urban area it grew by 5%. As a result, the demographic changes between the rural and the urban areas have had an impact on the limited natural resources, increasing the need for clean and safe environments for people to live in (MGDS, 2017:80). The demographic changes have led to pollution, deforestation and drastic weather changes. Figure 2.1 projects that by 2020, the Malawi population would have increased by six million (6,000,000); with nineteen million (19,000,000) living in urban areas and three million (3,000,000) in the rural areas; eventually leading to urbanisation. As a result, rapid population growth, as stated by Zulu et al. (2012:6), would continue to put much pressure on the environment which has the following consequences;

- Erratic weather events have had an impact on the availability of agriculture crops in Malawi. For example, floods in Malawi have been known to contribute

to the decline of staple crops and soil fertility where the harvest of maize has been limited per capita from the 1980 and 1990s (Devereux, 2007:49). In 2017, the UN (2017:1) reported that after the 2016 drought, maize production was at an average level of three million, two hundred thousand (3, 200,000) tonnes compared to two million, one-hundred thousand (2,100,000) in 2016. However, not all households had adequate maize to take them to the next annual rainfall season due to some parts of the country being affected by floods (UN, 2017:1). This makes it a challenge to accomplish ending hunger and all forms of malnutrition and achieving food security by 2030 (UN, 2015:11).

- Devereux (2007:50) explains that since most households do not harvest enough maize to sustain their livelihood, in particularly farmers, they are forced to rely heavily on casual employment known as *ganyu* for cash or food to compensate for the limited tonnes of maize harvested. Even though many households depend on casual employment to compensate for the agricultural production deficit, Devereux (2007:50) states that the minimal wages that are earned by those able to get casual employment is not sufficient to meet their basic needs for survival.
- Even though communities in Malawi rely on casual employment to sustain their livelihoods, the government has also introduced emergency cash transfers as alternative interventions to help enhance household incomes among many households in Malawi (Devereux, 2007:55). Devereux (2007:50) justifies that cash transfers are seen as preferable because they are cheaper to administer, and avoid the risks of being associated with commodity transfers. They are also seen as “preferable because they help to contribute to pro-poor growth by being invested in as well as consumed generating income and have an employment multiplier effect” (Schubert, Schramm, Wiebe, Baak, Wolter & Wegener, 2005:20). However, not all households benefit from these cash transfers. Therefore, there is a need for the government to introduce strategies that would include every eligible household to benefit from the Social Cash Transfer (SCT) programmes while also training households on different entrepreneurship skills that would help sustain their livelihoods with the money given to them (Ungar, 2011:1743). Additionally, the government needs to also emphasise the importance of transparency and accountability towards the beneficiaries of the

SCTs and to introduce indicators that can help measure the impact of the programme (Reed, 2008:406).

The increasing amount of environmental destruction caused by human and natural disasters is of concern as habitats are destroyed, air and water pollution continue and people are being forced to migrate to new places (Norton 2012:304). Therefore, there is a need for social workers to take part in raising awareness and advocating for environmental justice by adopting new approaches; such as green social work, which was adopted as the theoretical framework of the study.

2.6 GREEN SOCIAL WORK

Dominelli (2014:133) states that “environmental injustice, or the failure to share the earth’s resources equitably, is rooted in environmental degradation that is caused by the normal processes of industrialisation and disasters”; whether natural or human made. The 2017 and 2019 floods in Malawi did not only have a devastating impact on the livelihoods of those that were affected by them, but also on the physical environment, which has led to a continuation of land degradation. The deterioration of the environment is proceeding rapidly, which is exerting excess pressure on the physical environment and leading to the exhaustion of the earth’s fertility; thus, reducing the agricultural yield (Dominelli, 2014:134). Environmental degradation and disasters do not impact people equally; but mostly affects the poor and marginalised populations, poor regions and poor environments (Miller, Hayward & Shaw, 2012:271). Ponje (2019) reported on a case during the 2019 floods where one of the families explained that half of their two-hectare maize field was destroyed; thus, significantly reducing their maize harvest and food security for the year. In order to promote environmental justice in Malawi, social workers can intervene to address ecological issues which focus on ways to respond to environmental crisis by using green social work as a practice model. Dominelli (2012:8) defines green social work as

“that part of practice that intervenes to protect the environment and enhance people’s well-being by integrating the interdependencies between people and their social-cultural, economic and physical environments, and among peoples within an egalitarian framework that addresses prevailing structural inequalities and unequal distribution of power and resources”.

Furthermore, according to Dominelli (2012:3), green social work focuses on how

“responses to environmental crisis must both challenge and address poverty, structural inequalities including unequal distribution of power and resources; poverty; various ‘isms; promote global interdependencies; and utilise limited natural resources including land, air, water and energy sources and minerals for the benefit of all rather than the privileged few”.

In addition, green social work is an interdisciplinary and holistic approach to environmental issues that continues to challenge the social work profession to incorporate its values, principles and concerns over environmental degradation and other forms of injustices associated with it (Dominelli, 2018:9). That being said, Miller et al. (2012:272) emphasise that the social work profession has to understand issues involving environmental and ecological justice, which is very similar to the social justice paradigm.

Dominelli (2012:7) explains that social work as a profession has engaged in environmental issues and continues to do so, even though in a limited rather than comprehensive manner. In order to make environmental justice more significant to the social work profession, there is a need for social workers to incorporate the profession’s core values and principles, through the strategies and interventions that would help tackle environmental injustice. In addition to this, Norton (2012:304) emphasises that the strategies and interventions that social workers implement to promote environmental justice and sustainability, it is important that they are done at all levels of practice, in order to promote an understanding of the person in environment relationship; hence incorporating an ecosocial approach. Norton (2012:304) defines an ecosocial approach as “an anti-oppressive model of social work practice that sees the natural world as a central variable in human development and well-being, and promotes environmental sustainability”. Miller et al. (2012:23) provide an expansive perspective in the social work profession on environmental justice and sustainability. Although not officially adopted, Miller et al. (2012:23) indicate that there are principles that can be taken into consideration when realigning strategies and interventions in ways in which people and the social environment fit within an environmental paradigm. The principles have been listed below and some of them have been categorised in ways on how social workers can use them to align their strategies and interventions that can include communities within the paradigm.

2.6.1 Green social work principles

Principle 1: “The objectives of management of land, water and living resources are a matter of societal choices.”

Principle 2: “Management should be decentralised to the lowest appropriate level.”

Principle 3: “Ecosystem managers should consider the effects (actual or potential) of their activities on adjacent and other ecosystems.”

Principle 4: “Recognising potential gains from management, there is usually a need to understand and manage the ecosystem in economic context.”

Principle 5: “Conservation of ecosystem structure and functioning, in order to maintain ecosystem services, should be a priority target of the ecosystem approach.”

Principle 6: “Ecosystem must be managed within the limits of their functioning.”

Principle 7: “The ecosystem approach should be undertaken at the appropriate spatial and temporal scales.”

Principle 8: “Recognising the varying temporal scales and lag-effects that characterise ecosystem processes, objectives for ecosystem management should be set for the long term.”

Principle 9: “Management must recognise the change is inevitable.”

Principle 10: “The ecosystem approach should seek the appropriate balance between, and integration of, conservation and use of biological diversity.”

Principle 11: “The ecosystem approach should consider all forms of relevant information, including scientific and indigenous and local knowledge, innovations and practices.”

Principle 12: “The ecosystem approach should involve all relevant sectors of society and scientific disciplines.”

Principle 1,2,5,10 and 11 advocate for public policy, affirms that there is self-determination for all people, abide to and apply international human right laws and recognise the existing relationship between the government and indigenous people (Miller et al., 2012:341). These principles stipulate that it is important that social workers take into consideration the socio-cultural aspect of people when introducing interventions to promote environmental justice in communities, as it plays a very important part in promoting sustainable development. Furthermore, it is also important that social workers educate communities on both their human rights as well of those

of the environment, in order help preserve and sustain the physical environment while bearing in mind the profession's principle of self-determination for all people. It is important that social workers make sure that the interventions that are being implemented in communities address the needs of communities and not the aspirations from government in order for them to take ownership of taking care of their natural resources. By utilising the ecosocial work approach, social workers at a mezzo level can make sure that social institutions like community members are made aware of the significance of the natural environment and how they could intertwine it with their cultural beliefs, in order not to affect the sustainability of their communities (Norton, 2012:305). Social workers could be involved in collaboration with other stakeholders; such as local leaders to help reduce the potential for jeopardising the health of community members through raising awareness; this includes discussions about the impact of disasters and their outcomes during and after a weather shock (Dominelli, 2012:200,201). In this way, social workers would be enhancing the knowledge and understanding of community members on the importance of "ecological unity, interdependence and to take ownership in reducing environmental depletion", by applying principle 1 and 11 (Miller et al., 2012:27).

Principle 3,4,6,7 and 8 demand that there be community participation at every level, caution social workers that some interventions aiming to promote environmental justice can be more harmful than anticipated and that objectives for ecosystem management must be long term (Miller et al., 2012:274). Communities' participation is very essential for sustainable development as Dylan (2013:75) states that it "helps the social work profession to be accountable and transparent to advocate for peoples' needs through interventions" that are being implemented. Social workers need to work in collaboration with communities and local leaders to introduce interventions that are innovative and lead to individualisation of people. In addition to empowering individuals, social workers must make sure that the interventions that are implemented are long term by including them in all levels of programmes and activities. Social workers can intervene by making initial contact and engaging the community members through the processes of interventions that are being introduced before and after weather shocks, and also acknowledging the existing skills and knowledge (Dominelli, 2012:200,201). In addition, the author explains that social workers could identify, together with the community members and their local leaders, areas of work and

formulate work plans that help promote environmental justice. The aim of the formulated work plans would be to help decrease vulnerabilities and increase resilience during and after an occurrence of a disaster, which would be translated into public policies with the goal to promote environmental justice and ecosocial work at macro level (Norton, 2012:305).

Principle 12 ensures that social workers advocate for the need of urban and rural ecological policies that respond to disasters through “restoration, advocacy and provide a fair access for all to the full range of resources” (Miller et al., 2012:275). Urbanisation is inevitable as the population growth continues to contribute to it. This puts the natural environment more at risk as there are limited resources that communities scramble for and result in climate changes such as drought or floods. Devereux (2007:50) states that natural disasters such as floods have recently caused a limit on non-agricultural employment where community members are migrating from rural to urban areas seeking for casual employment and thus causing an imbalance in labour supply and demand in both rural and urban areas. Social workers can facilitate economic development for communities while at the same time promoting sustainability of the environment. This can be done through supporting community actions such as encouraging community gardens owned by community members, which have numerous benefits such as improved access to food, nutrition, mental health and also a source of attaining income through selling of the agricultural produce (Norton, 2012:306).

Social workers need to educate and improve preparedness of communities concerning future disasters and ways of building resilience (Dylan, 2013, 75). Malawi has in recent years, according to Devereux (2007:51), had several factors that have reduced the capacity of communities to support their members through livelihood crisis. One of the factors is that Malawians are characterising themselves as individualistic and are becoming less community orientated. Therefore, there is a need for social workers to help communities to build community resilience by training people on valuing and respecting each other, and owning the responsibility of caring for their environment while protecting it (Dominelli, 2012:202).

Green social workers operating in circumstances aimed at empowering people and realising their rights and citizenship entitlements through different interventions, have to adopt different roles to promote environmental justice (Dominelli, 2014:136). The following section discusses some of the roles that social workers can take on while promoting environmental justice.

2.7 ROLES OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN PROMOTING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Social workers are obligated to align their interventions in their respective organisations and departments to promote capacity building, in responding to environmental challenges and human and natural disasters in communities; such as flooding, water degradation or food insecurity. The programmes and activities should include services that aim at prevention, mitigation and response to disasters (Global Agenda, 2012:4). In order to produce outcomes that are of evidence through different programmes and activities, social workers adopt a number of diverse roles “from being coordinators of practical assistance, to developing individual and community resilience in responding to disasters throughout the disaster cycle” (Dominelli, 2018:10). These roles, which will be next discussed, include counsellor, educator, catalyst, coordinator, advocate, broker, facilitator, networker and broker.

2.7.1 Counsellor

Dominelli (2012:2) states that social workers can provide humanitarian assistance and psycho-social services to communities that have become vulnerable to natural disasters, even though their role is still invisible on issues pertaining to climate change; thus, taking on the role of a counsellor. Social workers can take on the role of a counsellor during and after disasters because they have been trained and equipped with vast knowledge and skills on helping to alleviate their clients from human and social conditions that are prone to make them vulnerable. For instance, the natural disasters in Malawi are known to consequently cause food insecurity and poor quality of water, which impact the wellbeing of all people vulnerable to climate change as discussed in section 2.4.1. As a result, communities are traumatised by the fact that they are unable to sustain their livelihoods, including those of their families due to inadequate food for survival. In addition to this, poor quality of water affects the psycho-social wellbeing of communities where either parents have to take care of

children who are critically ill from communicable diseases such as cholera, or children being orphaned due to the death of parents caused by such diseases. In such cases, there is always lack of psycho-social services to help communities that are encountering such emotions. Even if these psychosocial services are available, there is a need for social workers equipped with experience in crisis management. Social workers could therefore take the role of counsellors after the occurrence of a disaster, where their major role is to provide support and help the communities cope with the trauma caused by natural disasters (Rodin, 2014:13).

2.7.2 Educator

The educator role as described by Patel (2015:143) is one where information is shared and exchanged, and there is a transfer of skills as part of lifelong learning, in order to help build human capabilities to strengthen the communities' livelihoods as a way of overcoming poverty, high rate of unemployment and education inequalities. Social workers can take on the role of educators, whereby they help communities to become resilient from pollution that is caused by poor land management resulting in respiratory and communicable diseases, food insecurity caused by climate change and helping people to unleash their skills and enhance their knowledge by starting income generating activities (Engelbrecht, 2008:2). This could be done by imparting knowledge on the impacts of environmental injustice on community sustainability and teaching them skills in preventing poor land management. Therefore, it is important that social workers empower all members of the community; particularly those that are poor, marginalised and mostly affected by the impact of climate change in Malawi.

2.7.3 Catalyst and coordinator

Social workers can act as catalyst and “bring community members together to identify their needs and issues and to take action to effect change” (Kirst-Ashman, 2007:107). Social workers can also take on the role of coordinator by working with local leaders to coordinate resources that are provided for community members, especially after a weather catastrophe by ensuring that there is transparency in distributing the resources to the right beneficiaries (Gittel & Vidal, 1998:13). For instance, social workers can help with mobilising communities by doing needs assessment with local leaders and people who would benefit from the SCT Programme, which would help

alleviate the high rates of unemployment and lessen the pressure that is put on the physical environment by scrambling for the limited resources.

2.7.4 Advocates

Social workers can also take on the role of being advocates. Advocacy as stated by Haynes (2012:264), is at the core of social work and a vital means of empowering their clients to be resilient; particularly after climate change causes a weather shock. An advocate is someone who speaks out on behalf of communities to promote fair and equitable treatment or gain needed resources (Kirst-Ashman, 2007:108). Hicks and Murray (2009:88) highlight that social workers need to be aware of dominant political structures that decrease access to opportunities, resources, and power for certain groups of people, especially during climate hazards; resulting in individual and collective experiences of oppression; as they are both important. This means that social workers need to help community members who have identified their level of oppression and work together on the challenging structural injustices.

2.7.5 Broker

Social workers can take on the role of brokers and help “link client systems with financial, physical, educational, social service, technical and environmental resources” to help meet their needs (Patel, 2015:144). For example, when the demand is high for agricultural products, Green (2012:87) states that communities that are mostly dependent on rain-fed agricultural crops are able to generate income by supplying to buyers; thus, sustaining their livelihoods. However, when there is reduced rainfall or a drought resulting in a reduction in crop production, Alston (2015:357) explains that when communities are only able to produce less crops, this puts them in a dilemma on whether to sell their agricultural products in order to generate income or to keep the crops for food security. Therefore, social workers could link affected communities to agricultural cooperatives that could help balance supplying the agricultural crops and also generating income to help sustain their livelihoods. Berzin (2012:187) points out a strong link between some elements of social work with those of social entrepreneurship indicating that the values of the two fields align. Social entrepreneurship according to Berzin (2012:186) is defined as the “effort of an individual, organisation, network or group of organisations to create largescale sustainable change, by shifting an approach to solving social problems”. Social

entrepreneurship is a strategy that even though its primary goal is not for financial profit, social workers could utilise this intervention as a way of being brokers and linking members of the communities to attain funds in order to promote social and economic development (Germark & Singh, 2009:196,198). Central to social workers' role is to work with communities by making them a priority and start where they are.

2.7.6 Facilitator and networker

Social workers could take the role of a facilitator by “guiding the community members, help facilitate interaction, decision-making and action plans” to alleviate poverty (Kirst-Ashman, 2007:108). Dominelli (2014:145) states that during disasters, there is less transparency in terms of the resources that have been rendered to the community members that have been affected most by the natural disaster; hence social workers could act as facilitators in the distribution of resources that have been mobilised so that they are distributed equally among all community members. In addition to facilitation, social workers can also take on the role of networker which Kirst-Ashman (2007:108) describes involves “formal and informal linking between people and organisations to share resources, contacts and knowledge; thus, promoting social capitalism. Social capital is significant because it emphasises the investment in people’s lives in order to participate in community activities that are in relation to social, economic and environmental development. It is important that social workers encourage community members to participate in programmes, activities and policy planning on issues concerning the promotion of their social, economic and environmental development, which will be sustainable for future generations (Midgley, 2014:103). For instance, if members of the community in Malawi are empowered to utilise their skills in addition to the SCT Programmes to enhance their economic development, this would help them to become resilient during times when there are issues of food insecurity.

2.8 SUMMARY

It is evident that environmental injustices that are becoming prevalent in the global, African and local level have an impact affecting the social and economic development of communities. Countries such as South Africa and Malawi have encountered disasters, which have highlighted that even though there are strategies to tackle the issue of drought and floods, there still remains a gap to focus on the fair and

meaningful involvement of people at macro level in order to advocate for the right to live in clean, safe and healthy environments.

There are factors that contribute to environmental injustices and affect the sustainability of communities in a global, African and Malawi context. Poor land management is one of the physical factors that affects the sustainability of community and it is visible in air and water pollution and deforestation. These pollutions expose people more to toxic substances that result in either respiratory and communicable diseases, while deforestation causes an extinction of plant and animal species, and in some instances result in desertification. Poverty as an economic factor manifests through high rates of unemployment and contributes to the deterioration of the environment. In addition to a lack of participation, rapid population growth is another social factor that affects the sustainability of communities. All these factors impact food security as more people scramble for the limited food resources. Lastly, lack of participation in communities is because of discrimination.

In order to help promote environmental justice, social workers could utilise the twelve principles of the ecological social work approach described by Miller et al. (2012:23), to come up with strategies, programmes and interventions. Social workers can take on the roles of counsellors, educators, catalysts and coordinators, advocates, brokers, facilitators or networkers by utilising the green social work model to promote environmental justice for sustainable communities.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY, EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapter three, the researcher discusses the research methodology used in the study and presents and discusses the empirical findings of the study. It begins with the research approach, the type of research, the research design, the research methodology that was used for the study, data analysis, trustworthiness of data and the pilot study. It then continues with describing the ethical considerations relevant to the study, followed by the limitations of the study. In the following section, the research findings are presented and discussed. The chapter ends with a summary.

The research question for the study was: What is the role of social workers in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities in Lilongwe?

The research question was informed by the following sub-questions:

- What are social workers' understanding of environmental justice?
- What activities and interventions are social workers engaged in that address environmental justice issues?
- How do social workers contribute to sustainable communities?
- What strategies do social workers propose in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities?

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

The study used a qualitative research approach in which the researcher was able to capture in-depth views of the participants during data collection (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:91). The aim of the researcher was to gain thorough information on how social workers perceived their role in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities.

The study used interpretivism as a research paradigm which focuses on the understanding of social workers' experiences in practice, and the meaning that they give to the role of social work in promoting environmental justice (Rubin & Babbie,

2013:55). As characterised by interpretivism, the researcher conducted the interviews with prior knowledge of the literature regarding the topic which, in turn, influenced the type of questions that were asked during the data collection (Nieuwenhuis, 2016:62).

The purpose of the study was both explorative and descriptive. Fouché and De Vos (2011:96) state that exploratory and descriptive research can be used together effectively. Babbie (2011:67) explains that exploratory research provides a better understanding of a phenomenon. The researcher gains insight into a specific phenomenon and answers the “what” question (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95). Therefore, the researcher explored the experience and meanings (Creswell, 2014:185) that social workers attribute to their roles as promoters of environmental justice. A descriptive focus refers to the researcher obtaining specific details about a situation and therefore the focus is also on the “why” question (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:96). The descriptive goal of the study aimed to answer why it is necessary for social workers to be involved in environmental justice practice and to describe how they engage or could engage in environmental justice issues to contribute to sustainable communities. Babbie (2011:67) explains that exploratory research provides a better understanding of a phenomenon. The researcher gains insight into a specific phenomenon and answers the “what” question (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95). Therefore, the researcher explored the experience and meanings that social workers attribute to their roles as promoters of environmental justice (Creswell, 2014:185).

3.3 TYPE OF RESEARCH

Basic and applied research complement each other in that basic research strives to formulate new theory or refine existing theory and, in this way, extends the knowledge base; whereas applied research aims to bring about change for a practical problem (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:94). The research study entails basic research in the sense that the researcher aimed to recommend new roles for social workers, contributing to the knowledge-base of green social work. The study was also applied in recommending roles for social workers to promote environmental justice, and in doing so, contribute to more sustainable communities.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

This research study was a case study, which as Leedy and Ormond (2013:141) explain was suitable for learning more about a situation which is not clearly described

or understood, and that the case study chosen by the researcher must consist of specific qualities to inform practice for similar situations. Creswell (2013:98) affirms that a case study entails the research of cases with specific characteristics and within certain boundaries, and adds that current, real-life cases should be studied to gather accurate data. For the purpose of this research study, participants were purposefully selected to explore their understanding of their role in promoting environmental justice to contribute to sustainable communities.

The instrumental case study in particular was selected for the study. Rule and John (2011:8) explain that instrumental case studies, also referred to as exploratory case studies, attempt to explain specific cases, test existing knowledge and generate new information. Fouché and Schurink (2011:321) add that this type of case study can be very useful to inform policy development through the generation of new theory and knowledge. Therefore, the researcher's recommendations on specific roles for social workers to promote environmental justice, could be used to influence the development of new policies for sustainable communities.

Nieuwenhuis (2016:75) states that case study research is essential in assisting a researcher to understand the dynamics of a specific situation which in the case of this study, is social workers' role in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities. The advantage of conducting a case study is that an in-depth understanding of the case is acquired (Creswell, 2013:98) which gives the researcher rich information. However, Leedy and Ormond (2013:141) warn that the results obtained from case studies cannot be generalised to all practice settings.

3.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section gives a thorough detail of the procedures and processes that were used for the research study. It includes the population and sampling method and the data collection method.

3.5.1 Study population and sampling

A population as described by Strydom (2011a:223) is a term that sets boundaries on the study units, and refers to individuals in the universe who possess specific characteristics. For the purpose of this study, the population was all social workers

that were working for the government under the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare in Lilongwe, Malawi.

A sample comprises a subset of the population considered for actual inclusion in a study (Strydom & Delpont: 2011:279). The researcher used a non-probability sampling method, purposive sampling, to select participants who were useful for the study and representative of the population (Babbie, 2011:179). Purposive sampling was suitable for this study because of the assumption that the researcher had knowledge of participants in relation to the research topic, in order to accomplish the outlined objectives (Babbie, 2013:127,128; Maree, 2016:198). Furthermore, purposive sampling was utilised because the researcher targeted the population who have similar characteristics, or typical attributes of the population that serve the purpose of the study best (Grinnell & Unrau 2008:168).

The sample population of the research study was comprised of ten social workers who were working for the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social welfare, and in particular in the Department of Social Welfare.

The following criteria was used to select participants that were willing to be part of the study:

- Social workers with at least one year of social work practice experience
- Social workers who were willing to conduct the interview in English
- Social workers who engage in community activities and interventions that promote social and/or economic development
- Social workers who are engaged in and/or interested in environmental issues, activities and interventions in relation to social work
- Both male and female social workers were included in the study

The above criteria enabled the research to align the study with Flick's (2009:138) comments that research participants are supposed to have the necessary knowledge and experience in the study of social work, and be able to answer the questions during the interviews.

The researcher firstly made an appointment with the director of the Department of Social Welfare to explain the purpose of the research study. As a result of a face-to-

face meeting with the director, the researcher obtained a letter of permission (see Annexure A).

After the permission was obtained, the researcher worked in collaboration with the director, on the process to recruit possible participants. The director explained the goal of the study briefly to the participants, and eventually the participants were approached telephonically by the researcher to confirm their participation and schedule an appointment date to conduct the interview. The researcher aimed to conduct the interviews at a convenient and private place, which for some, were their offices. However, others did not have a private office space. Although not the ideal venue, these study participants opted to have the interviews in the researcher's vehicle at the car park. On the scheduled day of the interview, the researcher gave the participants an informed consent form (see Annexure B) to read and sign after the researcher confirmed comprehension in order to proceed with the interviews.

3.5.2 Data collection method

Preliminary contact was established to introduce the study and also to make logistical arrangements for interviews. The researcher made sure that the participants were willing to spend enough time (60 minutes' maximum) to conduct the interview; no additional time was negotiated, as the researcher was able to capture the needed information in the scheduled time (Flick, 2007:78; Greeff, 2011:353). For this study, the researcher made use of one-on-one interviews as data-collection method, and a semi-structured interview schedule was the data collection tool (see Annexure C). This means pre-determined open-ended questions were asked and the researcher was attentive to the participant's responses, and then probed and clarified for further information (Nieuwenhuis, 2016:93). Data saturation was achieved by the time that the researcher interviewed the tenth participant and therefore there was no need to recruit further participants.

It would have been a challenge for the researcher to simultaneously make notes of all the information and be attentive to the participants. Therefore, the researcher, with the permission of the participants also recorded the interviews on a voice recorder for purposes of accurate transcription during data-analysis (Flick, 2007:82).

The interview questions were given to the participants before the interview to help them contextualise and give relevant information during the actual interview (Greeff,

2011:352). The interview schedule did not have pre-determined themes, but included aspects such as:

- Demographic area of service delivery;
- Participants' view on social workers' activities and interventions in environmental justice;
- Participants' view on social workers' role in social and economic activities and interventions and
- Suggestions regarding the roles of social workers in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities.

The benefits of using interviews as a data collection method is that the researcher obtains rich, descriptive data, has the opportunity to view social reality through the participant's lens, and allows the researcher to use open questions that can be probed and explored (Greeff, 2011:342). However, a few disadvantages of interviews include having to maintain control of a distractive participant (not focusing on the topic), the need for good rapport, and having an unsuccessful interview due to the lack of maintaining balance and flexibility at the same time (Greeff, 2011:349). The researcher, however, did not encounter any of these challenges because she remained flexible enough to allow the participants to share their views, but made sure that the information that was obtained was focused on the topic.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

Analysing data according to Wagner, Kawilich and Garner (2012:229) refers to the process of making sense of data through various ways. It corresponds with Schurink, Fouché and De Vos (2011:397) when stating that qualitative data analysis is about reducing raw data volume and identifying significant patterns. It can take forms such as reducing and displaying data and then making conclusions or verifications.

In this study, the researcher made use of the six steps of thematic analysis as suggested by Creswell (2014:197-220) and Clarke et al. (2015:230-245). In line with the case study research design, the researcher started with a description of each case followed by the analysis of data through the following steps:

In step 1, the researcher organised and prepared the data for analysis. The researcher transcribed interviews by writing the exact words of the participants from the audio

recording. The researcher also typed the field notes of what transpired during the interviewing of the participants in their different settings and then sorted and arranged them into different types; descriptive and reflective notes.

Step 2 involved reading, and rereading of transcripts, listening to the audio recording and looking at all the data. This was done to check for subtle descriptions from the participants, the tone of their ideas and the depth of the information. The researcher also recorded general thoughts about data on the margins of the transcripts.

In step 3, the researcher coded all the data by writing a word representing a category in the margins of the transcripts. Coding involved identifying patterns in the data because it helped group together similar data segments.

Step 4 included using the coding process to generate a description of participants with the aim to search for themes. The researcher also used the coding to generate themes or categories for the proposed study. The themes were used as headings and/or subheadings, which represent the major findings of the study. These display the multiple perspectives from the participants about their role in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities. Quotes have been used from the transcripts to support the themes.

Step 5 involved writing and presenting themes of each participant through conveying descriptive information about each participant. Themes and subthemes and any other information such as the biographic data of participants have been presented in table chart format.

In step 6 the researcher conducted data evaluation and interpreted the findings. The researcher checked how useful the data was in addressing the questions being explored and how they linked to the role of social work in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities. Finally, the findings have been reported in a narrative. The findings were submitted to the University of Pretoria in the format of this research report and be prepared for a possible scientific journal for publication.

3.7 DATA QUALITY

It is important for a researcher to ensure the trustworthiness and rigour of a qualitative study. According to Lietz and Zayas (2010:191), a trustworthy study represents an accurate portrayal of the views of the research participants and not that of the

researcher. A study conducted in the absence of trustworthiness and accuracy, can merely be viewed as a good emotional story (Carey & Asbury, 2012). Due to its impact on resource allocation and policy change, these authors indicate that research must be credible and have rigour.

For this study, the researcher evaluated the quality of the study's data by considering the four concepts listed below, that work together to achieve trustworthiness (Lietz & Zayas, 2010:191).

➤ **Credibility**

According to Krefting (1991:215), "true value or credibility is obtained from the discovery of human experience as it is lived and perceived by informants". The study has true value or credibility where the researcher has been able to establish with confidence that the study has indeed faithfully recorded the phenomenon under study (Shelton, 2004:64). Furthermore, Lietz and Zayas (2010:191) refer to credibility as a degree where the researcher will ensure that the findings are reported in such a way, that the participants can be able to identify their contributions in the study. In other words, true value has been established when the information gathered by the researcher truly reflects the perceptions and views of the participants rather than those of the researcher. In this study the researcher has achieved this by ensuring that during transcription and field notes, every piece of data has been presented as it is to ensure that the data is credible and reflects the view as reported by the participants.

➤ **Transferability**

According to Lietz and Zayas (2010:195), "transferability and fittingness is achieved when the findings of the research have applicability to another setting, theory, to practice or future research". Trustworthy research should therefore be able to be transferred to another context or setting. To establish transferability, the research details have been described in-depth to allow the reader to evaluate the extent to which the conclusions drawn could be transferable to other settings; such as other departments within the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare or other governmental ministries and/or times that would have similar studies (Amankwaa, 2016:20). The researcher documented detailed information on how the research has unfolded, with a clear outline of the step-by-step processes followed in

the research to help allow for transferability. Amankwaa (2016:20) views this as the researcher telling a story or painting a clear picture to the reader.

➤ **Auditability**

The third criterion for evaluating trustworthiness of research is to ensure that the study is auditable. Lietz and Zayas (2010:195) define auditability as the degree to which research procedure is documented in such a way that another person can be able to follow and critique the research process. The researcher has ensured auditability by recording every step throughout the research process. The researcher has created a file which includes a detailed account of each research meeting, that is, from the time when the informed consent forms were sent to the time that the participants signed informed consent forms. The audio records of the ten participants that were interviewed have been transferred and stored into an audio CD. The researcher also consulted her supervisor and also colleagues who are experienced in qualitative methodology, who have conducted a similar study and shared the research decisions and procedure. This was to ensure that the researcher is still on the right track in terms of the study.

➤ **Confirmability**

According to Shelton (2004:72), confirmability or neutrality is defined as “the qualitative researcher’s comparable concern to objectivity in research”. Confirmability eliminates the chances of the researcher’s bias to influence the research findings and allowing the participants to express their own views, perceptions and understanding of the phenomenon at hand. Confirmability can be achieved by applying one or more methods of triangulation to the research (Shelton, 2004:72) which was not possible in the case of this study as the researcher was only able to recruit participants from one department in a single ministry.

In addition, it is important to make use of opportunities such as peer scrutiny of the research by colleagues and other academics through presentations that are made throughout the duration of the research (Shelton, 2004:67). The researcher made a presentation on the research study at the 2018 Canon Collins Annual Conference in Cape Town; themed *Breaking the Silence* and peer scrutiny was provided. The fresh perspective that other people provided helped to challenge the assumptions of the researcher, whose attachment to the study frequently inhibits her ability to view it with

detachment (Shelton 2004:67). Furthermore, the study was supervised through the course of the research, which is important because it provides the opportunity for the researcher to gain awareness of any biases and allows her vision to be challenged (Shelton, 2004:68).

Through the process of reflexivity, the researcher remained aware of her personal and professional biases which may be caused by personal experiences, background knowledge, perceptions and interest in the research (Shelton, 2004:68). Therefore, reflexivity is the researcher's ability to acknowledge any bias when the research is conducted (Lietz & Zayas, 2010:192). Environmental justice in the social work context of Malawi is relatively unknown. The researcher conducted a debriefing session with each participant at the end of the interview to verify if the researcher's questions were not misleading to them and/or biased.

3.8 PILOT STUDY

Before conducting the main study, the researcher conducted a pilot study (Strydom & Delpont, 2011:394). According to Bless, Higson-Smith and Kagee (2006, cited in Strydom, 2011b:237), a pilot study is "a small study conducted prior to the main research to determine whether the methodology, sampling, instruments and analysis are adequate and appropriate". Yin (2014:96) points out that the purpose of a pilot study is to refine the data collection method and clarify the research design. The aim of the pilot study was to ensure that the research methodology chosen was appropriate and, most importantly, to determine whether the semi-structured interview guide was clear by representing what the researcher intended to capture in relation to the research topic. There was no need to make any adjustments after the pilot study. The interview guide was piloted with the first two participants of the main study. The findings were included in the main study.

3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations, according to Flick (2009:54), are formulated to regulate the relations of the researcher with the participants. Major and Savin-Baden (2010:53-54) explain that the relationship between the researcher and the participant is constantly "negotiated to deconstruct power, achieve and maintain trust, promote equality and ensure reciprocity". Therefore, it was important for the researcher to take into consideration the following ethical aspects in this study:

3.9.1 Informed consent

Flick (2009:59) cautions that it is important for the researcher to explain to the potential participants the goal of the study, to ensure that they make an informed decision on whether to voluntarily participate in the study or not before the collection of data. Babbie (2013:32) reiterates the importance that participation must be voluntary, based on participants fully comprehending what the research aims to attain and how it would be of benefit to them. Apart from explaining in person to the potential participants about the research study, Babbie (2013:34) explains that participants must also sign a consent form, which outlines the goal of the study.

The researcher explained in detail to the participants on the date of the scheduled interviews what the study was about. She also emphasised that the study was voluntarily, and if participants were for any reason uncomfortable to take part in the study, they could inform the researcher prior to the commencement of the interview and withdraw from the study at any point during the study without any consequences. This information was included in the informed consent. Additionally, the researcher requested permission to audio tape the interviews. The participants were informed that the research findings would be documented in a research report for the University of Pretoria and a possible manuscript for a scientific journal. Furthermore, that the data would be stored at the University of Pretoria for 15 years and only used for research purposes.

3.9.2 Confidentiality

Israel and Hay, (2006, cited Creswell, (2009:138), emphasise that it was the obligation of the researcher to protect their research participants, develop a trust relationship with them, promote the integrity of research, and guard against misconduct and impropriety that could reflect on the University and identified the offices where the social workers work. The social work community in Malawi is relatively small and many social workers in Lilongwe know each other. It was impossible to guarantee anonymity, but data gathered was reported with confidentiality in mind (Braun & Clarke, 2013:64). The researcher used pseudo names to protect the identity of the participants so that information could not be related to anyone specifically. The researcher emphasised to the potential participants, through the informed consent letter, that the information would be strictly shared between the researcher and the supervisor. In addition to this,

the researcher created an electronic data base for storage of the research data that was password protected, which was only accessible by the researcher.

3.9.3 Voluntary participation

All participants knew exactly what the interview entailed and that it was voluntary to take part in the research study. The participants also knew through the informed consent form that they did not have to answer a question if they wished not to do so. Furthermore, they were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

3.9.4 Actions and competence of researcher

The researcher acted in a professional manner at all times by being on time for the interviews, being well-organised and respecting different cultural opinions (Strydom, 2011b:123). Researchers, according to Walliman (2006, cited in Strydom, 2011b:123), are also obliged to have adequate skills in order to undertake the research study, and constantly be aware of his/her ethical responsibility. This includes being constantly aware of the social work code of ethics. The researcher completed a research methodology module as part of the master's programme. Furthermore, the study was undertaken under the supervision of an experienced research supervisor.

3.9.5 Avoidance of harm and debriefing

From practice experience, the researcher was aware that not all social work practice settings are rendering services according to a social development framework, or promoting environmental justice in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2015). It could thus have been possible that for some of the participants that the questions could have triggered feelings of incompetence (Strydom, 2011b:115). This could have resulted in emotional harm and therefore the researcher was mindful to identify participants who could have been vulnerable during the investigation, in order to exclude them from the study beforehand (Strydom, 2011b:115). It was the researcher's obligation to inform the participants beforehand that the research topic was not personal, but aimed at exploring a relative new topic in social work in Malawi. As Strydom (2011b:116) emphasises, it was important that the researcher had a reflective process after collecting the data to debrief the participants. Although it was

not necessary, the researcher was willing to refer participants to the Director of the Department of Social Welfare if they needed further discussion on the topic.

3.9.6 Publication of findings

Bless, Higson-Smith and Kagee (2008:146) indicate that the participants would want to use the research findings to inform their own practice and policies. The researcher is committed to report all findings in an honest way and give full recognition to participants for their contributions to the research study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013:108). The research findings were disseminated through this research report to the University of Pretoria, and will possibly be submitted to a scientific journal for publication. The researcher gave credit to all persons who have contributed to the research study, either in the form of authorship or acknowledgement (Bless et al., 2008:146).

3.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Limitations of a research study are research methodologies that have had an impact on the interpretation of the empirical findings (Price, James & Murnan, 2004:66,67). The following are some of the limitations that should be taken into consideration when interpreting the research findings. Firstly, the researcher only covered one department of Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social welfare, in Lilongwe. Secondly, social workers working in Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) were not included in the sample. However, since the researcher chose a case study as a research design, it gave her the opportunity to capture rich information by getting an in-depth understanding of the role of social workers in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities in the Department of Social welfare in Lilongwe. The information could be used by other departments within the ministry or other governmental ministries in similar contexts (Creswell, 2013:98).

3.11 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

This section outlines the biographical data of the participants and presents and discusses the themes and sub themes that emerged from the findings.

3.11.1 Biographical information of participants

The biographical information of the participants is captured in the following Table 3.1.

TABLE 3.1: Biographical information of participants

Participants	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Gender	F	F	F	F	M	M	F	F	F	M
Age group	30-35	30-35	30-35	36-40	24-29	24-29	53+	24-29	24-29	24-29
Highest Tertiary qualification	BSW	BSW	BSW	MSW	BSW	BSW	MDS BSW	BSW	MSW	MPH BSW
Social work experience	7-10	7-10	7-10	11+	1-3	1-3	11+	1-3	4-6	4-6
Geographical area	Rural	Rural	Urban	Rural	Semi-Urban, Rural	Urban, Rural	Rural	Urban	Urban	Rural

The requirement to be a participant in the research study was to have a background in social work and hence all participants possessed at least a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work. In addition, four (4) participants also obtained Master's degrees of which two (2) were in Social Work (SW), one (1) in Developmental Studies and one (1) in Public Health. Out of the ten (10) social workers that participated in the study, three (3) were male. Five (5) participants were in the age range of 24-29, three (3) were between 30-35 years, one (1) fell in the category of 36-40 and one (1) was above 53 years. Malawi's population is made out of young people in the age range of 10-29; accounting for 40% of the seventeen million, five hundred and sixty-three thousand, seven hundred and forty-nine (17 563 749) people (MDHS 2015-2016, 2017:220). This could explain why the majority of the participants were in the age range of 24-29. In terms of the participants' social work experience, three (3) had work experience between 1-3 years, two (2) had 4-6 years working experience, three (3) fell in the category of 7-10 years and two (2) had more than 11 years of working experience. Finally, seven (7) of the participants worked in a rural area of whom one (1) also worked in the semi-urban areas, three (3) participants worked in the urban areas, while one (1) of them also worked in the rural area.

3.11.2 Key themes and sub-themes

The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the findings are summarised in Table 3.2 below. The findings are supported by direct quotes from participants and were relevant, integrated with literature.

TABLE 3.2: Themes and Sub-Themes

THEMES	SUB THEMES
1. Common environmental injustices in communities	1.1 Poor housing and pollution 1.2 Lack of clean and safe water 1.3 Deforestation 1.4 Environmental inequality
2. Factors affecting sustainability of communities	2.1 Lack of community empowerment and participation 2.2 High rates of corruption of political leaders 2.3 Poverty 2.4 Change of government and discontinuity of interventions targeting communities 2.5 Lack of accountability
3. Programmes that social workers implement to promote environmental justice and sustainable development	3.1 Social Cash Transfer programme 3.2 Village Savings Loan programme 3.3 PumpAid Malawi programme
4. Roles of social workers in promoting environmental justice	4.1 Educator 4.2 Advocate 4.3 Facilitator and empowerment 4.4 Broker
5. Challenges hindering social workers to promote environmental justice	5.1 Lack of resources 5.2 Understanding of environmental justice 5.3 Mismatch between social workers intended output from interventions and the real outcomes in communities
6. Recommendations for social workers to play a role in promoting environmental justice	

Theme 1: Common environmental injustices in communities

Participants identified the common environmental injustices in the communities that they work in as poor housing and pollution, unsafe and contaminated water, poor land management and inequality. These environmental injustices will be discussed next as sub-themes.

Sub-theme 1.1: Poor housing and pollution

The participants referred to the poor housing conditions that community members reside in which have poor roofing and ventilation and expose them to air and water pollution caused by factories, sewerage spill and garbage, which pose health risks. Migration from rural to urban areas is one of the major causes of poor housing as cities become over-crowded and lack the infrastructure to accommodate the influx. The following participants' views express the impact of poor housing and pollution on the community:

- P1: *Most of the community members live in poor and delectated houses which is putting them into risking their health*
- P2: *I understand that the factories here in Malawi are being built close to the homes of the people. These factories are producing bad air, sometimes even the sewages are coming out from these factories. So I feel that this kind of pollution when people breathe, they get affected, their health get affected.*
- P7 *...their [community members] houses they are not well ventilated. Up to date, they live in thatched houses. There are a number of them who are sick like most of the elderly person who seem to be destitute; they have nowhere to stay and in Malawi we have no shelters to keep the elderly so it's very difficult to allocate them.*
- P9 *...there is congestedness [congestion] of the houses and a lot of garbage around the areas... we [social workers] see around from the areas that I work from there is overcrowding.*

Literature confirms the finding that industrial activities and growing urbanisation are major causes of the deterioration of air and water quality globally; with 92% of the population residing in places where air and water pollution exceeds the World Health Organization limits (WHO, 2017a:1; WHO, 2017b). Concerning the growing urbanisation indicated in the findings, population growth in Africa has a major impact on sustainable development. It increases unequal distribution of resources for the majority of community members living in poverty, which among others is poor housing with poor infrastructure and lack of quality services such as clean sanitation facilities which has an impact on their health (Nyamongo & Shilabukha, 2017:5). According to WHO (2018), air pollution has an impact on the sustainability of communities by increasing cardiovascular and respiratory diseases and cancer, especially among children.

Sub-theme 1.2: Lack of clean and safe water

The lack of clean and safe water; a basic human right, was pointed out by participants as a major environmental injustice concern in which community members draw water from water sources such as unprotected wells, streams and rivers. In addition, community members bath in streams and/or rivers which further pollute the water. Participants' expressed their concerns about potable water as follows:

- P1 *...and even access to clean water is not 100%...not even...maybe 40%. So, most of them [community members] they draw water from rivers and maybe the unprotected wells*
- P2: *So, the other one is people are not accessing clean water...they [community members] are supposed to get the necessities like safe water...*
- P7: *So, most of our clients [community members] are really suffering and when we [social workers] see water; because water is life and it's very important for every human being but you see that people are still fetching water from wells or from streams or beside the river. And these rivers are not well maintained [unprotected water sources]. You find that some [community members] are bathing in the same water, others are fetching the same water and they use that for drinking...*

Community members continue to be educated on the impact of unsafe and unclean water, even though they have limited water sources. One of the reasons that contributes to unsafe and unclean water is due to poverty (see sub-theme 2.3 for other reasons). For instance, communities are educated on how unclean water contributes to the breeding of mosquitoes, which results in its members developing malaria. Participant P8 expresses this challenge as follow:

P8: *It's very hard to change people's mind-set. For example, you can go into a community and teach people about the stagnant water is not good for you; it promotes mosquitoes and mosquitos promote malaria...but they are so used to that...*

The Department of Water Resources Management, in the National Water Policy (2005:5-6) emphasises the right of people to have access to potable water and sanitation services in order to reduce the incidence of water related diseases, and that the water shall be provided by using appropriate cost-effective technologies that are sustainable. This study's findings show that access to clean water is not accessible to all and corroborates with the National Statistics Office (2019:35) that 15% percent of the population, specifically from the rural areas are reported to be using unprotected water sources such as rivers, dams and springs. Unprotected water sources increase the levels of water pollution, as there is no enforcement put in place to reduce the contamination which means there is still a serious global shortage of clean drinking water (UN, 2019:36). The use of unprotected water sources continues to elevate communicable and infectious diseases such as cholera and malaria, thus making it a challenge to "reduce the number of deaths caused by contamination by 2030" (UN, 2015:20).

Sub-theme 1.3: Deforestation

The participants pointed out the environmental injustice of cutting down trees which has led to deforestation. Apart from deforestation, one of the major causes of deforestation is urbanisation which has led to land displacement. The participants highlighted that deforestation has had an impact on the environment by causing irregularities in weather patterns, and contributing to food insecurity that affects those who are considered to be vulnerable in communities. The participants voiced the environment injustice of deforestation as follows:

- P2: *...and also the cutting down of trees is also bringing climate change which sometimes leads to communities get affected with floods. Their [community members] homes get damaged...they get destroyed.*
- P4: *...and also there is this issue of land displacement. There has been a practice whereby the urbanisation is expanding.*
- P9: *...and then we have a very high deforestation rate where people are recklessly cutting down of trees and they are hindering tremendously the ecosystem that we have. And also, you will notice that there is a climate change...most of the weather patterns are not the same as before; if you go before like two to three years back, you will find that there is a lot of change in the climate.*

The findings of the study are aligned with the global decline of forest areas, where more than fifty-eight (58) million hectares has been lost between 2000 and 2015 (UN, 2019:55). Unfortunately, if deforestation is not tackled effectively, there will be more consequences, where it will cause weather changes and lead to either drought or heavy rainfall (Greenhill et al., 2009:322,323). Furthermore, climate changes, particularly floods, which is a result of deforestation, contributes to the issue of food insecurity in Malawi which is still one of the main challenges that has an adverse impact on the development and wellbeing of those vulnerable to climate change (Mayena et al., 2008:304).

Sub-theme 1.4: Environmental inequality

Findings pointed out that due to urbanisation, people who are living in poverty are displaced. This leads to unequal distribution of environmental resources and thus environmental inequality. Participant P4 articulated this displacement as environmental inequality:

- P4: *There has been a practice whereby the urbanisation is expanding. So, they displace people they move them to other places but there has always been injustice in terms of their payments, in terms of where they should settle. So, such things mostly affect the poor because those that are rich, they manage to move to better places. But these people that do*

not have enough resources economically, they suffer because it's always unfair displacement.

The findings highlight that vulnerable communities are more at risk of encountering environmental injustice than others. It points out the importance of people's right to be fairly treated in distribution and involvement in developmental issues regardless of their race, colour, national origin or income, while ensuring that all enjoy their right to live in a clean, safe and healthy environment (Beretta, 2012:140; Schlosberg, 2007:5; Hawkins, 2010:68).

Theme 2: Factors affecting sustainability of communities

Participants spoke about the factors affecting sustainability of communities and believed to have an impact on community members; particularly the elderly, women and children. The factors are lack of empowerment and participation of communities, high rates of corruption from political leaders, poverty, change of government, discontinuity of interventions targeting communities, and lack of accountability. These factors will next be discussed as sub-themes.

Sub-theme 2.1: Lack of community empowerment and participation

The participants believe that communities lack empowerment; particularly children and women as they are not educated and made aware of their rights. Participants considered that women passively take part in interventions that promote development, while children are not educated enough to comprehend their basic human rights in school. Furthermore, participants indicated that communities are minimally involved in policy formation and analysis in matters that concern them; hence their needs are not represented in policies. In addition to minimal involvement of communities on strategies and interventions that promote development, participants believe that there are governmental issues where there is a top-bottom approach in which communities are on the receiving end of projects, which in turn usually fail. This is because some of the projects have either been not a priority to the political leaders or are suspended. An in-depth explanation on the reasons of failed, stalled and/or suspended projects will be discussed in sub-theme 2.4. Other factors that play a role in communities' lack of empowerment and participation includes poverty, a lack of understanding of their rights and a lack of unity among community members and with political leaders, and in some instances, just accepting that this is their way of living. Participants'

experiences of communities' lack of empowerment and participation were expressed as follows:

- P1: *... if they [community members] were empowered enough, if the government was responsible and other organisations were responsible in terms of empowering the most, most vulnerable groups that means it could have worked...Yeah! And maybe in terms of those people [community members] understanding their rights. Yeah...basically if we [social workers] could make them be aware of their rights and how to fight for their rights so that the gap between the poor and the rich, it should be minimised then maybe this problem could be history.*
- P4: *There is minimal involvement of people in the communities in relation to the projects... in issues of policy formulation, policy consultation; the whole process... You can't see the voice of the people in the policy ...some of the projects they fail, they stall, some of them delay... also the issue of suspension of some projects because it's not their priority area.*
- P7: *...it seem [s] like women or the people down there [other marginalised community members]; let me talk about the rural, they have accepted that this is the way of life... I think most things can change with education... like at the moment in Malawi, education is free but it doesn't mean that it can help other children because of the condition that they are in ...they do not benefit from it because of issues like anger, cultural problems and so on and so forth.*
- P10: *...in places where there are issues of inequality, you will find that there is no unity among the people in the society... As a result, people are not participating in different community development that can help to improve the status of their communities.*

The World Economic and Social Survey (2013:53) confirms the finding on how either gender, race, age or ethnicity are contributing factors that have resulted in lack of participation by some members of the community and in particular children and women. Furthermore, the UN (2019:33,34) confirms the finding that children and

women are not aware of their role in contributing to developmental issues that promote sustainability, as a result of different forms of oppression based on age and gender.

Sub-theme 2.2: High rates of corruption of local and political leaders

The findings pointed out high rates of corruption among both local and political leaders. Concerning the local leaders, findings indicate that they are bribed by the wealthy to implement interventions that do not benefit the members of the communities. This has resulted in local leaders also expecting to get incentives from social workers when they are asked to mobilise community members and implement programmes and activities. The participants' raised their concerns on corruption from local leaders as follow:

- P2: *...only that these days' corruption is really affecting the development. Sometimes they [rich people] can go to the chiefs to change some things but because he [local leader] is being corrupted [corrupt]; his being given some things from the rich people, then the chief does not consider some decision that the community members have made.*
- P3: *So, most of the times, if let's say you [social worker] have to go through the chiefs, he would expect that he would receive maybe an allowance or something. And if you don't give them [local leaders] an allowance, it would be like they won't even tell their community members of what is going on.*
- P8: *...also chiefs always want incentives. So, if you do not have it, you will find that the chief will not be cooperative and will not let the people in the community know about what you are doing on that day and find yourself with a smaller audience.*

Concerning the political leaders, participants explained that social workers are threatened by political leaders when it comes to implementation of activities, because the politicians want to take ownership of the social work department's programmes, including resources so that they can manipulate community members and claim that it's from their own initiatives. This has resulted in programmes being delayed, or coming to an end before their timeline or eventually social workers end up using their personal resources to keep them running. Participants also explained that political

leaders misuse funds which affects the sustainability of programmes. Participants' concern of corruption is reflected as follows:

- P4: *Sometimes even the politicians they threaten us as social workers. So it's like we are doing it, we are trying but there are also other influences that are coming in. So either they delay us [social workers], they make us stop our projects or sometimes we use our resources that are so scarce to make sure that those programs are still running.*
- P5: *...right now there is that department of Social Cash Transfer programme, which is government's programme. But now even political leaders are using that to manipulate people to let them think that it's being done by the ruling party, of which it's not.*
- P6: *The sustainability is affected in the way that there is some misuse of funds that maybe some well-wishers or organisations provide to assist to develop these communities. So due to misuse of these funds, it is mostly difficult to have sustainable communities...*

Human rights are perceived to be everyone's responsibilities, including institutions, organisations and communities, where they are obliged to promote non-interference, protection and promotion (Androff, 2016:42). The MGDS III (2017:41) has created a national integrity platform which provides among others a space to fight corruption in the country. This is in alignment with achieving the alleviation of all forms of corruptions and bribery by 2030 (UN, 2015:30). Furthermore, local leaders play a principal role by being the primary reference in shaping communities' beliefs and actions, and promoting good conduct from them (The MGDS III, 2017:44). However, the findings contradict The MGDS III as it revealed that corruption continues to threaten the sustainability of development in both rural and urban communities in Malawi.

Sub-theme 2.3: Poverty

Participants described poverty as one of the factors that hinders the sustainability of development in communities. The participants identified the high rate of unemployment; particularly among women and people living with disabilities as one of the indicators of poverty in communities. Furthermore, poverty has also resulted in children dropping out of school; particularly the girls who eventually are involved in

prostitution to earn a living for themselves and support their families. Participants also described that death has caused a burden of responsibility among the elderly who are caring for orphans; thus, enhancing poverty for them as they earn less to sustain their livelihoods. The following are the concerns of participants on poverty:

P1: *The elderly people because they are weak and they are burdened with responsibilities since most of them are keeping orphans here in Malawi especially after floods or there is drought, especially in Lilongwe. They are keeping orphans in large number.*

P4: *Mostly they affect women and children. As you know, there is a certain percentage of women that are not employed, they are neither working, nor doing any business. So, such kind of people when they are relocated, or maybe when they face such challenges, they are at the disadvantage because they do not have the financial muscle [capacity] to support themselves. Even the children, some drop out school, some end up in prostitution because they at least would like to make ends meet.*

P7: *...even the people with disabilities, they are also affected because these vulnerable groups...because... their falling under this category because maybe they don't have access to...income.*

The finding aligns with the views of Bangura (2010:50) and National Statistics Office (2019:36) that poverty is linked to different levels of employment. In 2018, out of the total population of seventeen and a half million in Malawi, 14% were unemployed and did not earn sufficient income to sustain their livelihoods. People in rural areas are more affected which explains the NAR of learners in schools between the rural and the urban areas where there is a significantly higher rate of school drop outs among girls as compared to boys in order to support themselves and their families (MDHS 2015-2016, 2017:48).

Sub-theme 2.4: Change of government and discontinuity of interventions targeting communities

A concern was raised on the impact that change of government; particularly change in ruling parties has on the sustainability of interventions. This has resulted in a

discontinuity of interventions in communities, which explains the reasons why there is less community involvement as described in sub-theme 2.2. Furthermore, if a ruling party is not voted again into power, interventions that were already implemented are usually no longer a priority to the new government and are then suspended or terminated. Participant P5 explains the impact of change of government and how it results in discontinuity of interventions targeting communities:

P5: *...let me give an example. A certain regime has come and it has good plans on people. They want for example to come in with fertiliser and all those agricultural input subsidies; perhaps these social cash transfer programme and other programmes which are of the government. But we know that they are always affected by that ruling party. So, if the party changes, the other party comes in with a new different programme because they don't want to be supporting what the other ruling party was doing, of which it's not good.*

Larance (2001:9) emphasises that mutual trust and strong networks are built when both the government and communities work on attaining a mutual goal that promotes social capital. The findings suggest that trust is broken in the case where communities are not consulted and their vulnerability is not respected when government make one-sided decisions. Therefore, it can be assumed that when there is mutual trust among communities and strong networks with relevant stakeholders, a transition of government would have less impact on affecting the sustainability of interventions that have been implemented.

Sub-theme 2.4: Lack of accountability

Participants raised their concerns on lack of accountability and public scrutiny on plans that government intends to implement to promote sustainable development. Furthermore, the participants also raised a concern that the government is implementing programmes that do not address the needs of the people in communities but are of their self-interest and ambition. The participants' concern on lack of accountability is described below:

P8: *Well mainly there is no sustainability... right now we have so many politicians going into these areas promising to clear the garbage, promising to make better drainage systems just for a vote! And you have*

these people voting for them and then nothing ever changes in their environment.

P9: *...as I am saying that we [social workers] are doing developmental projects that are coming through but these projects are not looking into this area of work like intervention. So for me to say sustainability in terms of the environmental injustices that are happening, I don't think we are really tackling those issues of overcrowding, of overpopulation. So the sustainability component can only come in if we really have interventions that are bigger [tackling the main problems].*

The findings indicate that there is a gap in community participation, in which Reed (2008:2242) explains that communities are not empowered enough to develop technical capabilities that can be used to develop indicators that measure sustainable development; thus, holding government accountable. Findings also corroborates with Riley's (2001:250) explanation that the majority of existing indicators that facilitate progress of development have a top-bottom approach and lack understanding of local context and perception; hence failing to address and measure what is important to communities. Therefore, Reed, Fraser and Dougill (2006:406) emphasises that it is important that institutions and all relevant stakeholders have indicators in place that can help measure and facilitate the progress, and provide a balance between communities at grassroots level and the government at a higher level. These indicators would help communities, social workers and relevant stakeholders to hold government accountable for planned and implemented interventions.

THEME 3: PROGRAMMES THAT SOCIAL WORKERS IMPLEMENT TO PROMOTE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Participants identified the programmes that have been implemented to address environmental justice that promotes sustainable development as Social Cash Transfer, Village Savings Loans under the Foundation for International Community Assistance (FINCA) and PumpAid. These programmes will be discussed next as sub-themes.

Sub theme 3:1: Social Cash Transfer Programme

Participants explained the aim of the SCT Programme that has been implemented in the communities as to help those who are considered to be vulnerable. The beneficiaries receive money and initiate income generating activities. Part of the programme is to recognise the strengths of people and provide them with training opportunities; for instance, training in business skills to enable them to develop income generating activities that can assist them in obtaining sustainable livelihoods. Participants understanding of what the SCT Programme is intended for, is captured as follows:

- P1: *...the first one the government has that programme Social Cash Transfer that targets the ultra-poor [destitute people] and the labour constraint so that the living standard could be raised a bit so that those people [destitute people] should be able to meet their needs... after accessing the money they [destitute people] are also put in groups so that they should invest. So they are linked to business groups after being trained.... I think in terms of training, they are trained in business management and the businesses...*
- P3: *We have programmes like Social Cash Transfer, where it's not just about the people getting the social cash... that can help them in different kinds of things and where they stay*
- P4: *...We [social workers] also have the Cash Transfers that are running in the communities. So our department mostly depend on working with the structures that are there in the communities because we believe communities can do things on their own. They just need technical-know-how. They just need resources sometimes.*
- P5: *...we have social protection programmes where we have a programme called Mtukula Pakhomo (Social Cash Transfer) ...people [beneficiaries of the social cash transfer programme] are given certain amount of money after the month which can assist them in their daily live so that they can boost up their economic status.*

P9: *As the government department [Social Welfare Department], I think maybe with the way we are coming in where we are assisting much more would be in our programme of Social Cash Transfer which is really broadened and working and where we are providing funds for people to start their own initiatives.*

The SCT Programme targets the most marginalised in communities, particularly women who are unemployed and solely depend on their partners' income. The aim is to empower them to be economically independent. Participant P8 explains the focus on women as follows:

P8: *We are involved in programmes like Social Cash Transfer. So in the case where a woman is not able to afford anything, we assess the need and we approach our colleagues there at Social Cash Transfer and we ask them to assist these women. But sometimes you would find that these women would rather just sit and solely depend on their husbands especially if they are married. Even if that husband is a drunk, they would rather sit and just depend on him.*

Participant P10 explained that the Department of Social Welfare has partnered with UNICEF, who are the main sponsors of the financial resources, while staff from the department offer trainings on how to use the money.

P10: *Our main partner is UNICEF when it comes to issues of Social Cash Transfer because we are also trying to empower the communities economically. So we are giving the cash to help sustain their day to day activities.*

The findings of the study are aligned with the UN's (2015:23) notion on promoting sustained and inclusive social and economic growth in order to increase employment levels in Malawi. The UN (2015:22) also recognises and values the unpaid and domestic work of women through social protection policies that ensure their full participation and have equal opportunity in enhancing their economic development. Patel (2015:174) expresses that social protection programmes are evolving in developing countries; which in this case applies to Malawi, in order to render a stronger support system to vulnerable populations in both urban and rural communities. Therefore, the SCT Programmes are of significance to promote pro-poor growth in

communities in Malawi especially because it is grounded in an empowerment programme of training of beneficiaries in business skills to contribute to a sustainable livelihood.

Sub-theme 3.2: Village Saving Loans Programme

The Village Saving Loan; under the Foundation for International Community Assistance (FINCA) is a credit programme to help promote the livelihoods of communities. The Village Savings Loans programme targets only women who contribute a specified amount of money at the end of each month. The money is saved into an account to accrue bank interests and where the need arises, the members of the programme are able to borrow, but return with interest or split it at the end of their specified period. Participant P8 describes the Villages Saving Loans programme that promotes sustainable livelihoods:

P8: ...Village Saving Loans and FINCA. These are groups were women that are able to meet at the end of the month and they in a sense contribute a certain amount of money and then that money is saved; whether they create an account or they have one person that is able to save that money. And they are able to either borrow the money for things like school fees or home necessities or at the end of the year they end up splitting the money and it would have accumulated some interest.

The findings are comparable with Stokvel, a South African Founded informal saving scheme “where members agree to contribute a fixed amount of money to a common pool on a monthly basis” (Lukhele, 1990:10). According to Patel (2015:175), Stokvels assist communities in South Africa to purchase and/or make payments for items that support their daily basic needs, support their members during functions such as funerals, and take loans which are returned with interest rates.

Sub-theme 3.3: PumpAid Programme

The aim of the PumpAid programme is to promote a clean and safe environment by giving communities’ access to potable water from drilled boreholes as described by participant P10:

P10: ...we are also working with a number of organisations like Pump Aid which is there to promote good hygiene in the communities. So they

[PumpAid] are drilling boreholes so that they [community members] should access quality drinking water in the communities.

The contribution of the PumpAid programme to the community is reflected in the recent National Statistics Office (2019:47), stating that 85 % of the population in households; both in urban and rural areas, had access to used quality drinking water from drilled boreholes, stand pipes and protected wells; thus, promoting healthy lives for the people.

Theme 4: Roles of social workers in promoting environmental justice

Participants indicated and described that from the interventions that have been implemented in the communities, social workers are taking on various roles, including the role of educator, advocate, facilitator and broker. The roles are described next as sub-themes.

Sub-theme 4.1: Educator

Participants explained that they take on the role of educator where they transfer knowledge to members of the community on how they can take care of their environment, by refraining from frequently cutting down trees. Apart from being educated on the impact of deforestation, participants are also educating communities on how to use money that is given to them through the SCT programme so that they can be empowered to utilise their own capabilities. Lastly, participants educate communities on the significance of family planning to help reduce the rapid population growth that continues to have an impact on the physical environment. The educator role of social workers was expressed as follows:

P2: *So far, we are trying to educate the communities to refrain from damaging the environment like to refrain from cutting down of trees. Where they have cut down two trees, they are supposed to replant some...also we are trying to give out some cash so that people are able to build houses that are in good condition so that they [community members] should no longer face some problems that comes after the floods.*

P4: *...we teach them [community members], we help them out because those people have potentials; those people have abilities to change their lives.*

So what we do is help them understand that they can do things on themselves also by empowering them through education.

P10: *...We are also trying to control the issue of overpopulation. So we are encouraging family planning among the people in the communities...we understand that most of the challenges that people are facing in the rural communities are due to their level of understanding issues. So we believe that once we tackle the issue of illiteracy, if more people are educated and are aware of how they can take care of their environment, then I think it can improve the situation on the ground.*

The Global Agenda (2012) outlines that social workers are committed to empower members of the community to be aware of the capabilities that they possess in responding to challenges that result from the impact of both human-made and environmental disasters. Therefore, the findings confirm that education is a powerful tool that enables people to support themselves, enhances economic growth through the development and improvement of their abilities and improves peoples' livelihoods by opening up opportunities (IFSW, 2019:100). As findings indicate a role for social workers in how they use the SCT Programme, Engelbrecht (2008:2,3) concurs that social workers take on the role of educator by transferring financial knowledge such as financial literacy to clients. If the population growth in Malawi is not properly regulated, it will continue to contribute to the rising demand on limited resources, which among them is the physical environment (National Statistics Office, 2019:15; The MGDS III, 2017:46). Therefore, as the findings of the study indicated, there is a need for social workers to contribute to the imparting of knowledge that promotes family and sexual reproductive health rights to communities (The MGDS III, 2017:49).

Sub-theme 4.2: Advocate

Participants explained that social workers take on the role of advocate by representing the problems and/or needs of communities to relevant stakeholders within government. These problems include construction of infrastructure such as factories that contribute to the ill-health of people because they are built within communities. In addition to this, social workers are also committed to influence policy makers and politicians by advocating for resources that they can use to implement various intervention strategies which have been planned for communities, in order to promote

sustainable development. Participants highlighted the role of being an advocate as follow:

P2: *...and also as the government we are trying to advocate to the government never to allow those people doing those factories to do their services close to the homes of the people.*

P4: *...that's the only way that their [social workers] voice can reach those policy makers, politicians so that it can be shaken [released]...and those resources that belong to social workers and to reach the vulnerable people that need to be assisted] ...*

Social workers are committed to advocating for strategies which would develop interventions that encourage communities to take part in decision-making and participate in issues that would promote sustainable development (Global Agenda, 2012). However, Hicks and Murray (2009:88) state that dominant structures oppose and limit access to opportunities and resources for communities; especially the vulnerable, which result in experiences of different forms of oppression and injustices. Therefore, social workers need to address and fight against undesirable dominant structures that hinder access to opportunities and resources through policy reforms, campaigns and government meetings (Philip & Reisch, 2015:475).

Sub-theme 4.3: Facilitator and empowerment

Participants explained that social workers guide communities by empowering them to implement interventions through the programmes at the Department of Social Welfare. Furthermore, participants also explained that through the programmes, they empower community members to report any form of activities that promote environmental injustices. Participants also explained that they empower communities to utilise their capabilities to promote their own livelihoods and also assist other vulnerable groups. Through the communities' initiatives, participants reported that communities have been successful in sending children to school and being able to pay for their tuitions. Furthermore, the community could also assist widows to support their livelihoods. Social workers in particular encourage community members to use what they have to improve their situation. Participants explained the role of being facilitator and their role in empowerment as follows:

- P2: *We facilitate on the issue that we have planned...so we are empowering them [community members] to come out [report] whenever like somebody is affecting their environment.*
- P4: *Everything we used to do for them [community members] ... but then later on things changed. We said “Oh why can’t we use their own initiatives, why can’t we use their own programmes, why can’t we use structures that are developed and managed by them and we just facilitate”?... there has been a tremendous change because they manage to assist the vulnerable themselves, they manage to pay school fees for their children, they manage to assist the widows...*
- P5: *...we help them out because those people have potentials to change their lives. So what we do is help them understand that they can do things on themselves.*

Even though social workers facilitate and empower communities to implement interventions recommended by the department’s programmes, participants indicated that community members are still dependent on them; thus, making it a challenge. Participant P5 describes the challenge as follow:

- P5: *The big challenge can be the mind-set...I have gone into certain rural areas and people think that I have brought all the answers... I don’t know how it started but it is in our system and perhaps in our blood that we have this dependency syndrome.*

In line with the participants’ explanation on facilitating programmes and empowering community members, Dominelli (2012:38) indicates that social workers ought to facilitate the transfer of power to communities, where they can be able to realise their capabilities and influence change that enhances their livelihoods and community development. This can only be done if social workers tackle the mind-set of communities where they have accommodated structural difficulties that hinder development and limiting the use of their capabilities to improve their well-being (Dominelli, 2002:11,12). The finding corroborates with Midgley’s (2014:110) observation that it is important for communities to be empowered and have control over their development in communities that promote their livelihoods, by deciding on what interventions to implement. Human capital is very essential for the enhancement

of individuals and/or communities' livelihoods, in order to promote development (Rainey et al., 2003:711). Therefore, capacity recognition and building are vital for communities to participate and take ownership of implemented activities, whereby social workers take on the role of guiding them, in order to promote the development of their livelihoods (Androff, 2016:41; Kirst-Ashman, 2007:108).

Sub-theme 4.4: Broker

Participants described that social workers take on the role of broker by linking communities through their local leaders to relevant resources and programmes; including services and income generating activities that would help enhance their livelihoods, while promoting environmental justice. The participants' described their role as a broker in the following words:

P2: *...as well as taking some roles like broker; and linking the communities into reliable places where they can get the help that they need in terms of environmental justices.*

P7: *So we work with them [community members] and try to help the communities to develop themselves and link them to some other programmes in the communities so that at least they can be involved in income generating activities through the local leaders and village head men.*

Social workers take on the role of broker by linking communities with appropriate resources that support communities to meet their social and economic needs (Patel, 2015:144). This suggests that social workers should be well equipped with information and knowledge on appropriate resources that could benefit communities. Therefore, the finding is of evidence that the social work profession is concerned with the way in which communities receive an equal distribution of environmental resources that promotes their livelihoods and also community development (Peeters, 2012:287).

Theme 5: Challenges hindering social workers to promote environmental justice

Participants identified challenges that social workers encounter to promote environmental justice as lack of resources, understanding of environmental justice and lastly, the mismatch between social workers intended output from interventions

and the outcomes in communities. The challenges will be discussed next as sub themes.

Sub-theme 5.1: Lack of resources

Participants described that social workers lack resources such as fuel and funds, which makes it challenging to achieve their goals in communities to reach out to the vulnerable populations. Furthermore, the participants also explained that due to the increase in the population size, resources are also becoming limited. As a result, social workers are receiving resistance from communities in terms of participation because they are aware that allocated resources for their communities are not being utilised for their intended purposes. The participants' views on challenges that hinder social workers to promote environmental justice are described as follows:

- P1: *We have limited resources from the government, even from the partners...you can have that work plan that I am going to implement these activities targeting these category of people... but then maybe you don't have fuel... So I have been moving up and down but you don't even get even a lunch allowance... you cannot wake up tomorrow and then be motivated to proceed with your work-plan when there are no resources.*
- P2: *...but then our main challenge is on the funds. So far we don't have enough funding to try to further our wishes [goals] to try out to reach out to the people that we need the message to reach.*
- P4: *Sometimes is [its] scarcity of resources to assist us ...and also the resistance in community participation especially when they [community members] have discovered that their resources are not being utilised as they are supposed to.*
- P10: *...since the communities are overpopulated, you will find that the resources that we are bringing in to the community, they might be inadequate for the whole community to use. So it takes a long time for us to reach our target and it becomes a challenge...we are challenged economically...*

However, social workers have a passion to serve communities despite limited resources to accomplish goals. Therefore, they use their own personal resources in order to achieve their tasks. Participant P8 describes social workers' passion as follow:

P8: *It's very possible to wake in the morning and be set and no what you [social workers] are meant to do that day but you don't have transportation [resources] to get to the area that you are supposed to work in. So just from being passionate, you find that you go into your own pocket so that you can get the job done.*

The IFSW (2000:10) outline that one of social work's professional goals is to "promote social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance wellbeing", by putting public service above self-interest and personal gain. Therefore, the findings of this study coincide with the literature by pointing out that by putting public service above self-interest and personal gain, social workers use their own resources to make sure that they achieve their departments' goals. The findings of this study indicate the importance of addressing the unequal distribution of resources, which continues to marginalise the vulnerable and only benefit the middle class (Dominelli, 2012:196). Furthermore, Mwansa (2011:367) describes that those in positions responsible for allocation of resources and decision-making do not comprehend the role of the social work profession in human development. This explains the reason why social workers have a challenge on having adequate resources to accomplish their goals in communities. Concerning overpopulation, the findings align with the view of Zulu et al. (2012:6) that rapid population growth continue to elevate the demand of limited physical resources such as the land, which has resulted in further deterioration of the environment and also affecting the quality of water; thus contributing to unequal distribution.

Sub-theme 5.2: Understanding of environmental justice

Participants explained that the environment is currently not a priority topic that is included in the social work curriculum nor in the continuous professional development of social workers in practice. Social workers thus lack the skills to tackle environmental issues in communities. Social workers rather prioritise social problems while the impact of the environment on people's wellbeing is neglected. The following participant views reflect the lack of an environmental focus in the social work curriculum:

- P3: *...from the time that I was practicing social work in school, I am just realising that I think this is one of the topics that we [social workers] never really engaged much ourselves in. We only paid much attention to the social problems of the communities but not much on the environmental part... But now we can see that the environmental problems are affecting the way people are living.*
- P9: *...this is not a priority area for us even as social workers. I think we need to check, maybe when we go through our curriculum in Malawi in terms of social work on whether we are addressing issues of the environment...you come to the local context and you go to other institutions; like for me I did my undergrad here in Malawi... we are not equipped to work in the field of addressing the environmental issues and that becomes a challenge.*

McKinnon (2008:258) alludes to the social work profession's engagement with the concept of environment mainly in a sociocultural and psychosocial context, while the link between the person and the physical environment is unexplored. The study findings corroborate the findings of Chiwara and Lombard (2018:299) that social workers are not equipped with skills to mitigate the impacts of environmental injustices in communities. By integrating environmental justice into the social work curriculum, social workers could better understand how the environment affects the social aspect of people's livelihoods, and in the case where communities are already aware that they have to protect the environment, social workers could encourage them to be accountable in doing so. Participants articulated these sentiments as follows:

- P1: *Issues of maybe environmental justice maybe should be active[ly] incorporated in the social work curriculum even as we are practicing. We [social workers] should also embrace those issues of protecting the environment, even when people are aware of protecting the environment, then we should encourage them to be responsible.*
- P3: *I would suggest the thing that we will have to do is maybe educate the social workers because like I would mention previously most of the times we pay more attention on social issues that people are going through that we forget the environmental part.*

In order to raise communities' awareness on the significance of the environment, how it affects the social aspect of people's livelihood and its relevance in social work, participants were of the opinion that social workers can be mobilised to attend training workshops. Participants articulated the need for continuous professional development as follow:

P3: *...but now that we know the environmental actually affects the social part of it, so we know that we have to maybe organise and sensitise and educate the social workers that you know that this is actually one of the hot topic[s] that is affecting our work as social workers.*

P4: *...and also the issues of upgrading...so that they can be able to understand their communities that they are assisting. And they should understand the dynamics because things change...We can't say those problems that used to exist still exist... people should have these on-job training and whatsoever that would make sure that these people are updated on the challenges that are there in the communities*

The findings indicate that social workers are becoming more aware of the importance of the environment in practicing social work and that the environment should therefore receive more prominence in the social work curriculum and continuous professional development of practitioners. Dominelli (2014:136) expresses that social workers have a role to play in raising awareness on environmental justice by reducing the impact of climate change on the livelihoods of communities that consequently make them vulnerable. In promoting environmental justice that has an impact on communities' livelihoods, social workers have to adopt an ecological perspective. An ecological perspective will enable social workers to deal with the impacts of environmental injustices that affect communities and in particular people who are vulnerable (Alston, 2015:358; Norton, 2012:301).

Sub-theme 5.4: Mismatch between social workers' intended output from interventions and the real outcome in communities

Findings revealed a mismatch between what social workers intend to achieve through interventions and programmes and the real outcomes for communities. Social workers' views on strategies that would improve communities' livelihoods are different from what the communities desire to achieving in alleviating the socioeconomic issues that

affect them. Sub-theme 3:1 described the SCT programme as one of the interventions implemented to improve the livelihoods of communities. However, the participants explained that the intended purpose of the programme is not well understood by community members. From the social workers' assessments, they have identified that communities misuse the money given to them, which is intended to enhance their livelihoods. Furthermore, participants explained that when mosquito nets are donated to community members to help prevent malaria, community members use them for gardening and as window covers for their houses. Participants expressed their views on how they see communities should use their resources and how they actually use it as follows:

- P6: *Firstly, I could say that there is a misunderstanding of people on how to use the funds or to use the assistance that maybe some organisations or some partners that provide to our institution. For example; we talk about that we have some social protection programmes; Mtukula Pakhomo (Social Cash Transfer), where people are receiving a certain amount of money at the end of the month. But when we go in communities, when we do some assessments on how they use that little money, we find out that some people instead of using that money collectively, they misuse it.*
- P7: *There are times when the Ministry of Health gives out mosquito nets but when we [social workers] go into the communities, we find that the people are using for gardening and also as windows.*
- P10: *So, for us social workers when we go to the communities, we might go with different interventions because we are focusing on maybe improving their wellbeing in terms of maybe for example, economically. But when you go there, you will find that the people are facing a lot [of] challenges...they do not understand what you are trying to do. Instead of you trying to focus on what you want to do and achieve in the community, you will find that you are now be fighting to address the challenges first before you bring out the interventions.*

The findings reveal the implications of a top-down versus bottom-up approach for people's wellbeing and livelihoods. From the social workers' perspective malaria is a life-threatening disease and therefore nets should be used to prevent deaths. In 2017, an estimated of two hundred and nineteen (219) million cases of malaria and four hundred and thirty-five thousand (435 000) deaths from the disease were reported by the UN (2019:31) of which three and a half million (3.5) cases were from the most affected African countries. The Ministry of Health (2017:22) reported that the Ministry of Health has been having nationwide mass campaigns as part of their interventions to provide insecticide-treated nets, where at least 82% of households owned at least one. However, the findings concur with the Ministry of Health (2017:53) that 42% of households use the mosquito nets for other reasons other than sleeping in them to help prevent against malaria. There is clearly a gap in social workers' understanding why the communities are not using mosquito nets to prevent malaria and deaths but instead are using them to protect gardens and food sources and use them as curtains to ensure privacy. Reed, Fraser and Dougill (2006:406) recommends that a bottom-up approach could provide a good source of indicators to assess the knowledge community members have gained through interventions that aim to enhance their well-being. Fraser et al. (2006:124) also recommend community participation and taking lead on some of the development initiatives, in order to promote sustainability of implemented programmes.

Theme 6: Recommendations for social workers to play a role in promoting environmental justice

Participants mentioned that it is important for social workers to be courageous enough to lobby for resources that are needed to implement activities that promote environmental justice and enhance the livelihoods of communities. Furthermore, they must write funding proposals for resources to promote environmental justice and speak out, not only as advocates for people who are vulnerable but to also influence policy and political will to release resources that will benefit the most vulnerable. Participants also recommended that social workers need to be innovative in accessing appropriate resources that would promote environmental justice. The participants' recommendations on their attitudes in promoting environmental justice are as follows:

- P1: *In the first place you need to have that boldness to maybe to lobby for enough resources if you are to succeed in terms of implementing the environmental justice activities because it's like a new component.*
- P2: *I think for those that are to join us soon in the profession of social work, they should be clever enough, they should be able to write proposals to some organisations so that they can fund them to run these projects of promoting environmental justices.*
- P4: *...they need to be strong and vigilant because that's the only way that they can grab what is supposed to be for social workers. That's the only way that their voice can reach those policy makers, politicians so that it can be shaken and reach those resources that belong to social workers and to reach the vulnerable people that need to be assisted.*
- P5: *I would say, I think it's proper to take this service as social welfare services and all that we do in this office on heart; taking it as a mission, as really a calling... we can be a voice for the voiceless. We have not to entertain things which don't have to be entertained.*

Because social workers are change agents, they have to be adaptable and responsive to the local context of people in selecting appropriate interventions. Participant P8 captures a social worker's role to adapt in the following words:

- P8: *So always remember to be an agent of change and always make sure that you always have a plan B because plan A does not always work.*

Participants were of the opinion that the sensitisation of environmental justice at the policy level, should start at grassroots level, where everyone participates in protecting and preserving the environment and also understanding how it affects the sustainability of community development.

- P9: *Yeah, I think maybe that [environmental awareness] should trickle down. It should start from the social workers alone but from maybe as a nation; our key priority areas in terms of addressing sustainable development should start from the nation at large. We need to start forcing our legislator to start making these priority areas so that interventions can be done along those lines...*

The findings indicate a role for social workers in promoting environmental justice in Malawi. This commitment aligns with the approach of The National Association of Social Workers in Malawi [NASWM] (2018:1) who adopted the International Federation of Social Work's [IFSW] mission to make a difference in the lives of vulnerable communities, by working with and supporting them to achieve the best possible solutions that enhance their wellbeing. Midgely (2010:19) point out that social workers need to be familiar with diverse services, social policies and programmes, in order to be able to be involved in policy practice and lobby for the needs of not only individuals, but the community as a whole. Chiwara and Lombard (2018:302) emphasise that in order for social workers to lobby for the needs of communities; particularly those vulnerable to climate calamities, they need to function as change agents who advocate for policy changes, through mobilising community members, building their capacity and help identifying indicators that address their long-term needs. As indicated in sub-theme 5.3, participants have to engage in continuous professional development to prepare themselves for a role in promoting environmental justice. The findings corroborate IFSW's (2000:12) approach that social workers are responsible to leverage more resources and advocate for additional donor contributions to be used for social support activities that will enhance the livelihoods of community members and help to meet their needs.

3.12 SUMMARY

The chapter presented the research methodology of the qualitative study and the empirical findings on the role of social workers in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities in Lilongwe. Six themes emerged from the analysis.

The first theme presented common environmental injustices, namely poor housing conditions and pollution; a lack of clean water; deforestation and environmental inequality. The second theme discussed the factors affecting sustainability of communities. These included lack of empowerment and participation particularly among children and women; high rates of corruption from local and political leaders; poverty, which links with high rates of unemployment; the change of government resulting in discontinuation of interventions and also not making community members a priority, and finally the lack of accountability and public scrutiny on plans that the government intends to implement, which do not address the needs of communities.

The third theme indicated the programmes that social workers are implementing to address environmental justice, including the SCT Programme, Village Savings Loans Programme and PumpAid. The fourth theme discussed the roles that social workers undertake in promoting environmental justice, namely educator, advocate, facilitator and broker. In the fifth theme the challenges hindering social workers to promote environmental justice were discussed. These include lack of resources for social workers to achieve programme goals; understanding of environmental justice, and the mismatch between social workers' intended output from interventions and the real outcomes for communities.

The chapter concluded that participants see a role for social workers to promote environmental justice by lobbying and mobilising for resources to promote environmental justice; to advocate for people who are affected by environmental injustices, and influence policy and political will to promote environmental justice.

CHAPTER FOUR

KEY FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMENDATIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter four is the final chapter that concludes the study. The chapter begins with a description of how the objectives of the study were achieved. In the next section the key findings and conclusions are presented, followed by the recommendations from the study.

4.2 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of the study was to explore and describe the role of social workers in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities in the Department of Social Welfare at the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare in Lilongwe.

The goals of the study were achieved through the following the objectives:

Objective 1

- To conceptualise environmental justice and community sustainability in social work within the context of green social work.

Details on how this objective was achieved are provided in chapter two (see section 2.2, 2.3 and 2.5), where descriptions are provided on the concepts of environmental justice and community sustainability in social work in the context of green social work. Environmental justice was defined as a fair treatment and involvement of all people regardless of their demographic characteristics, by taking into account their capabilities with respect to development, implementation and enforcement of labour laws (Beretta, 2012:140; Schlosberg, 2007:5). Furthermore, environmental justice was conceptualised as the right of people to have access to portable drinking water and clean sanitation facilities, while protecting the environment from degradation and toxins (Hawkins, 2010:68; Erickson, 2012:186). Community sustainability as discussed in section 2.3, was described as an integration of social, economic and environmental development, where people and the environment are taken into consideration. This includes a fair management of the social, economic and environmental available resources, in order to meet the current needs of people, while

ensuring that they will be available for future generations (UN, 2015:14; WBG, 2010:7). In section 2.5, green social work was described as an approach that focuses on how responses to environmental calamities must challenge and address any forms of social, economic and environmental injustices that affect the sustainability of communities (Dominelli, 2012:3).

Objective 2

- To explore social workers understanding of environmental justice.

This objective has been covered in chapter three (see sub-section 3.8.2, theme 1). This section reports on the views that social workers provided on what environmental justice is and how it is encountered in communities. Most of the social workers' views described environmental injustices as communities having poor and dilapidated houses which puts communities' health at risk (see sub-theme 1.1) and deforestation which is a contributing factor to climate change resulting in floods (see sub-theme 1.3).

Objective 3

- To explore and describe the activities of and interventions that social workers engage in addressing environmental justice issues

This objective has been covered in chapter two (see section 2.4) where the discussion on interventions that help promote social and environmental growth for communities from a literature perspective have been reported. Additional information on this objective have also been reported in chapter three (see sub-section 8.8.2; theme 2). Social workers described that implemented interventions are failing because the government is using a top-bottom approach and the beneficiaries are at the receiving end of the activities (see sub-theme 2.1). Furthermore, social workers described that there is lack of sustainability on implemented interventions due to changes in priorities where there is a change of government. This has resulted in disruptions in the implementation of the interventions (see sub-theme 2.4). In chapter three (see sub-section 3.8.2; theme 3), social workers described some of the programmes that are implemented such as Social Cash Transfer, which targets the most vulnerable in communities who are given money to assist in meeting their needs to enhance their livelihood (see sub-theme 3.1) and the PumpAid Programme which aims to promote clean and safe water by drilling boreholes in communities (see sub-theme 3.3).

Objective 4

- To explore and describe social workers' contribution to sustainable communities.

This objective has been achieved in chapter two (see section 2.4) in an in-depth literature review on the roles that social workers adopt to advocate for environmental awareness to enhance the livelihoods of communities and promote community sustainability. These roles include counsellor, educator, catalyst, coordinator, advocate and broker.

In chapter three (see sub-section 3.8.2; theme 4), participants indicated the roles that social workers play when implementing the programmes that promote environmental justice to contribute to sustainable development as educator, advocate, facilitator, a role in empowerment and broker.

Objective 5

- To propose guidelines for the roles of social workers in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities

This objective has been covered by both the participants and the researcher. It has been discussed in chapter three (see sub-section 3.8.2; theme 6) where the participants gave their recommendations on how social workers could take part in promoting environmental justice in communities. The researcher's recommendations based on the findings and conclusions of this study, integrates the views of the participants. These recommendations are presented in this chapter in section 4.4.

4.3 KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

This section presents the key findings of the research study and the conclusions that have been drawn from them.

Findings show that social workers understand the common environmental injustices that have an impact on the livelihoods of communities; particularly on people that are regarded as vulnerable in regard to sustainable development. Participants identified environmental injustices as poor housing and pollution, lack of clean and safe water, deforestation and environmental inequality. However, the participants noted that environmental justice is not a priority focus area in both the social work curriculum and continuous professional development compared to social and economic justice which

are more reflected in the curricula. Consequently, social workers lack skills to tackle environmental issues.

- Based on these findings, for social workers to competently support environmental justice initiatives, there is need for social workers to shift their focus in social work practice and education to include environmental issues in social work values, principles and interventions by adopting an ecological approach (Besthorn, 2013:249;254) and using the green social work model (Dominelli, 2012) to guide the process.

The findings also show that social workers are raising awareness of the needs of communities to relevant stakeholders such as policy makers, the government and other non-governmental partners, and advocating for the provision of resources to these communities to promote community sustainability and development. Furthermore, the findings indicate that social workers collaborate with other stakeholders, even though in a limited manner to address the environmental issues that affect the livelihoods of individuals and the sustainability of communities. Social workers are raising awareness by linking community members to relevant programmes in order to reduce health impacts that result from environmental issues.

- Based on these findings, it can be concluded that social workers are committed to creating awareness, facilitating and acting as brokers for people to access opportunities and resources that would promote sustainable development in communities. Participants have indicated that social workers undertake the role of an advocate, which they could extend to advocate for environmental justice to promote sustainable communities.

The findings indicate that there is a strong link between poverty and environmental injustices, which has an impact on the sustainability of communities. Due to the status quo of marginalised people, it has made them so vulnerable that they are victims to the environmental issues in communities, such as the poor quality of water and irregular cutting down of trees which contributes to climate change. Furthermore, vulnerable communities are mostly at the receiving end of services that aim to enhance their livelihoods. Since they do not fully comprehend how they can benefit from government projects, they are not participating sufficiently in strategies and interventions that aim to promote sustainable development.

- It can be concluded that social workers can play a role in educating communities on the inter-relatedness of human and environmental rights and that both people and the environment are important in promoting sustainable development. Furthermore, by adopting a green social work approach, social workers can realign social and economic development strategies and interventions to incorporate a focus on the environment.

The findings reveal that social workers find it difficult to implement interventions that promote sustainable development because of lack of resources which are unevenly distributed in the government. The social workers' plea that the needs of communities are not met through the implemented interventions is not heard.

- The conclusion is that there is lack of transparency in the government structure, where social workers are not involved in assessing the standard operating procedures that are put in place to distribute resources to promote sustainable development in communities. Furthermore, the government structure is using a top-down approach and not taking into account the role of the social work profession in community sustainability (Mwansa, 2011:367).

4.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

In achieving objective five of the empirical study, the researcher makes the following recommendations based on the findings and conclusions:

- **Integrate the green social work model in the social work curriculum and continuous professional development**

As indicated in the key findings, social workers understand environmental justice but it is not prioritised as a focus area in both the social work curriculum and continuous professional development. Therefore, it is recommended that the social work curriculum includes the green social work model to prepare students for social work practice that includes environmental social work. Furthermore, continuous professional development is recommended by developing and providing regular training workshops or programmes to social work practitioners to raise their awareness of environmental injustices and enhancing their skills to tackle environmental issues through social work interventions. Adopting the green social work model for social work practice will prepare social workers to work transdisciplinary in dealing with environmental justices to promote sustainable communities. Universities and the

National Association of Social Workers in Malawi [NASWM] should take the lead in developing programmes and training opportunities for students and practitioners, supported by the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare.

- **Reinforce empowerment and participation**

The findings revealed that there is a gap reflected in the voice of and thus participation of both communities and social workers in policy making and formulation of sustainable development indicators, strategies and interventions for communities. It is recommended that the NASWM sensitises the Department of Social Welfare at the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare through all meeting platforms that aim to address the needs of communities, to comprehend the relevance of the participation of both communities and social workers in the formulation of standard operating procedures. This would help to provide a balance between communities at grassroots level and the government at higher level. This would also help communities and social workers to hold the government accountable for planned and implemented interventions.

- **Enhance the resource mobilisation strategy**

The findings indicated that resources are a challenge for social workers to promote environmental justice and community sustainability. Therefore, it is recommended that social workers explore other relevant partners such as the Centre for Environmental Policy and Advocacy (CEPA), the Department of Environmental Affairs at the Ministry of Natural Resource, Energy and Environment and/or United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), who have sustainable strategies on addressing environmental issues and work in collaboration with an aim of attaining skills in resource mobilisation. This is in alignment with a green practice model for social work, which would help “integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development process, poverty reduction strategies and accounts” (UN, 2015:29).

- **Further research**

Based on this study’s findings, the researcher recommends that social workers through the Department of Social Welfare pilot a project in communities which have implemented interventions such as Social Cash Transfer and PumpAid to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate the realignments of the programmes’ objectives to include the green social work model.

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ANNEXURE A: PERMISSION LETTER DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE

Telephone: +265 01 770 411/740/203
Telegrams: COMSEV
Facsimile No. +265 01 770 826



MINISTRY OF GENDER, CHILDREN,
DISABILITY AND SOCIAL WELFARE
PRIVATE BAG 330
CAPITAL CITY
LILONGWE 3
MALAWI

1st August, 2018

Prof. Antoinette Lombard,
Head: Department of Social Work & Criminology,
University of Pretoria.

Dear Antoinette,

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY

Reference is made to your letter of 2nd July, 2018 requesting for permission to allow your student TSOGOLOLATHU ITAYE, to conduct a research study in our organization.

Approval is hereby granted to Tsggololathu Itaye to conduct her research study in our organization.



Y.L. Chiwanda

For SECRETARY FOR GENDER, CHILDREN, DISABILITY & SOCIAL WELFARE

ANNEXURE B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities

Department of Social Work and Criminology

8/9/2018

Researcher: Tsogolo Itaye

Tel: +265 1 750 877

E-mail: tashaitaye@gmail.com

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

1. **Title of the study:** The role of social workers in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities from a government perspective in Lilongwe
2. **Goal of the study:** To explore and describe the role of social workers in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities.
3. **Procedures:** The study will use one-on-one interviews to collect data from participants. Each interview is expected to take approximately 1 hour. The interviews will be tape recorded with your permission. The tape recordings will be transcribed for purposes of data analysis. Only the researcher and the study supervisor will have access to the tapes and transcripts which will be stored in a secure place by the University of Pretoria for a period of 15 years. If data is used again, it will be for research purposes.

Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe
Departement Maatskaplike Werk en Kriminologie
Lefapha la Bomotheo
Kgoro ya Modiro wa Leago le Bosenyi

ANNEXURE C: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Social workers

The goal of the study is to explore and describe the role of social workers in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities

Section A: Biographical Information

1. What is your gender?

Female:		Male:		LGTBIQ:	
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2. What is your age group?

Under 24	24-29	30-35	36-40	41-46	47-52	53+
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3. What is your highest tertiary qualification?

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4. How long have you been practicing as a social worker?

1-3	4-6	7-10	11+ years
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5. In which sector do you work?

Government

Non-Profit Organisation

Parastatal

Other. (Please specify)

6. In which one of the following geographical areas do you work?

Urban

Semi-urban

Rural

Section B: QUESTIONS

1. What environmental injustices are common in the communities that you are working in?
2. Who are mostly affected by these injustices, and why do you say so?
3. How is the sustainability of these communities affected by environmental injustices?
4. What programmes and interventions are you, and your organisation/department engaged in, that promote sustainable communities and environmental justice? What impact to they make in terms of what has changed or is in the process of changing?
5. Who are your collaborating with as partners in promoting sustainable communities and environmental justice? Who do think you should engage as partners?
6. You have shared your views on what environmental injustices are prevalent and how it affects the sustainability of communities. How do you think, does it influence and challenge the role of social workers to shift focus to more sustainable practice that consider the environment, especially in the context of developmental social work?
7. What suggestions do you have in preparing and guiding social workers to play a role in contributing to sustainable communities and promoting environmental justice? What will be enabling factors to succeed, and what will be challenges in this regard?
8. Do you have any further comments on the research topic that we have not discussed, but what you think could strengthen the research findings?

ANNEXURE D: RESEARCH AND ETHICS COMMITTEE LETTER



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities
Research Ethics Committee

110 September 2018

Dear Ms Itaye

Project: The role of social workers in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities from a government perspective in Lilongwe
Researcher: T Itaye
Supervisor: Prof A Lombard
Department: Social Work and Criminology
Reference number: 17247480 (GW20180810HS) (Group research)

Thank you for the application that was submitted for ethical consideration.

I am pleased to inform you that the above application was approved by the Research Ethics Committee at the meeting held on 6 September 2018. Data collection may therefore commence.

Please note that this approval is based on the assumption that the research will be carried out along the lines laid out in the proposal. Should your actual research depart significantly from the proposed research, it will be necessary to apply for a new research approval and ethical clearance.

We wish you success with the project.

Sincerely

Prof Maxi Schoeman
Deputy Dean: Postgraduate and Research Ethics
Faculty of Humanities
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
e-mail: PGHumanities@up.ac.za

cc: Prof A Lombard (Supervisor and HoD)

Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe
Lefapha la Bomotheo

Research Ethics Committee Members: Prof MME Schoeman (Deputy Dean); Prof KL Harris; Mr A Bizos; Dr L Blokland; Dr K Booyens; Dr A-M de Beer; Ms A dos Santos; Dr R Fasselt; Ms KT Govinder Andrew; Dr E Johnson; Dr W Kelleher; Mr A Mohamed; Dr C Puttergill; Dr D Reyburn; Dr M Soer; Prof E Taljard; Prof V Thebe; Ms B Tsebe; Ms D Mokalapa