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

BY

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

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Moela joyce   31 October 2020

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Isaiah 40:31 reads……. But those who trust in the Lord will renew their strength, they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not faint.

ABSTRACT

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

STUDENT:	**JOYCE TSHELONG MOELA**
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In 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by 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 workers are compelled to act on environmental injustices because of their ethical mandate to address social injustices (Erickson, 2012:184). This study adopted green social work (Dominelli,2012) as a theoretical framework.

The goal of the study was to explore and describe the role of social workers in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities from a government perspective in the City of Ekurhuleni.

The study adopted a qualitative research approach, which had an exploratory and descriptive purpose (Fouché & De Vos, 2011). The case study design was an instrumental case study. The study sample was purposively selected and composed of ten social workers from three units of the Department of Social Development in the City of Ekurhuleni. Data was collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews using an interview schedule. Data was analysed by using Creswell's (2014) theme approach.

The findings of the study indicated that participants are aware of the environmental injustices in the City of Ekurhuleni. Furthermore, although participants understand the effects of these injustices on the lives of the poor, they believe they have little to offer to promote environmental justice. This is due to the specialised nature of the service delivery units of the Department of Social Development (DSD). The study concluded that participants need knowledge and skills in green social work. Furthermore, collaboration with relevant stakeholders and community engagement is essential in promoting environmental justice to contribute to sustainable communities.

The study recommends that the DSD adopts green social work as a practice model and that all the service delivery units of the DSD integrate an environmental justice focus. Furthermore, social workers in the DSD should be trained in the knowledge of and skills in green social work and how it relates to developmental social work and sustainable development.

KEYWORDS

Social workers

Green social work

Environmental justice

Sustainable communities

City of Ekurhuleni

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

DSD	Department of Social Development
ECD	Early Childhood Development
IASSW	International Association of Schools of Social Work
IFSW	International Federation of Social Workers
ISDM	Integrated Service Delivery Model
MSW	Masters in Social Work
RSA/SA	Republic of South Africa/South Africa
SD	Sustainable Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development

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1.1   INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (hereafter the 2030 Agenda) was adopted by states across the globe to eradicate poverty in all its forms, to combat inequality, to preserve the planet, to create sustainable economic growth and to foster social inclusion (United Nations [UN], 2015:5). Social work is committed to contributing to sustainable development through the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development (hereafter the 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. The depletion of natural resources 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); this emphasises the link between social instability and the physical and human environment.

The four themes of the Global Agenda are interlinked, but theme three refers to promoting environmental and community sustainability, which has also been the international focus of the intervention of social work 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 on 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 mainly 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 regarding issues that contribute to human dilemmas. However, despite having much to offer to the debate, social work lags in claiming the territory of the natural world (Besthorn, 2013:184; Dominelli, 2014:339).

The study intends to contribute to this debate by looking at environmental issues for sustainable communities from a government perspective through the lens of environmental justice, which incorporates social justice from a government perspective. The study's emphasis on the role of social workers in promoting environmental justice is thus intended to contribute to social work practice and policy that promotes environmental justice and sustainable communities and environments. As indicated above, the focus is aligned with the third theme of the Global Agenda (2012), promoting community and environmental sustainability.

The relevant concepts of the study are as follows:

- Social work and green social work

Social work in South Africa is underpinned by a developmental approach (Republic of South Africa [RSA], Ministry for Welfare and Population Development, 1997). The study embraces a developmental and green perspective for social work practice. 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). 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).

- Environmental justice

Environmental justice is important for ensuring that all people enjoy the human right to live in a clean, safe, and healthy environment. The world's poorest, most vulnerable, and oppressed people often live in the most degraded environments and have no

control over resources (Hawkins, 2010:68). For this study, the inter-relatedness between environmental justice and community sustainability is based on the view of Schlosberg (2007:57) that 'environmental justice is not simply an individual experience', but it is '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 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 combat inequality while preserving the planet (United Nations, 2015:5). Besides, the study regards community participation as a vital tool for creating and maintaining sustainable communities (Schlosberg, 2007:57; 64).

- Research site

The study was conducted in the City of Ekurhuleni, South Africa which is a metropolitan municipality that is part of the local government of the East Rand region of Gauteng, South Africa (City of Ekurhuleni, [SA]) at the following service points: Tembisa, Kempton Park, Etwatwa, Duduza and Germiston. The Gauteng DSD provides a variety of programmes aimed at fighting poverty and providing social protection and social development for the most vulnerable people in society (DSD, [SA]).

The DSD is responsible for the development and implementation of programmes for the eradication of poverty and social protection and social development among the poorest of the poor and the vulnerable and marginalised (DSD, 2006:11).

1.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A shift to ecological justice is essential 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 a 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 act on 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, the study adopted green social work (Dominelli, 2012) as a theoretical framework. 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 requires a more equitable sharing of the benefits of the Earth for all, and new paradigms of production and consumption (Dominelli, 2012:198). In this, Dominelli sees a role for social workers in advocating for change; doing research that shows the suffering of the poor and marginalised, and 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 activities. Their role in advocating for service users, building communities capacity, and working in partnerships for sustainable development outcomes, is included in this.

1.3 RATIONALE AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

The 2030 Agenda, with its 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) and 169 targets emphasises that both people and planet are important in human development that leaves nobody behind (UN, 2015). To this end, the call for the integration of environmental preservation and human well-being is a growing movement in 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 a planet focus for social work.

Social work's long-standing focus on people-in-environment emphasises the interaction between people and their social environment (Besthorn, 2013; Dominelli, 2014; Erickson, 2012). In 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 a 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 (IFSW, 2015). Social workers are compelled to act in addressing environmental injustices, given their ethical mandate to address social injustice (Erickson, 2012:184). Social work should integrate issues of the natural environment with human development into existing social work practice models to contribute to sustainable communities (Erickson, 2012:184), and develop integrated social and economic models that consider the natural environment (Dominelli, 2012). This study intended to explore what the role of social workers is 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 the City of Ekurhuleni?

The sub-research questions were as follows:

- What is 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 OF THE STUDY

The goal of the study was:

To explore and describe the role of social workers in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities in the City of Ekurhuleni.

The objectives of the study were:

- To conceptualise environmental justice and community sustainability in social work in 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 make recommendations on the role of social workers in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities.

1.5   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this section, a brief overview is presented on the research methodology used in the study. The research methodology will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 3, which will also include the ethical considerations of the study.

The study used a qualitative research approach, which allows the researcher to collect data directly as reported by the participants (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:91). In this study, the researcher was interested in gaining understating of how social workers view their

role in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities. The purpose of the study was both exploratory, in that it explored the role of social workers in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities, and descriptive because the study answered questions such as why social workers must be involved in environmental justice practice (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95).

This type of research was both basic and applied in contributing knowledge to a problem in practice (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:94). The study is basic research because the goal was to recommend new roles to social workers and to add to the knowledge base of green social work. A collective case study design was used by examining several cases to shed light on the role of social work in promoting environmental justice in the City of Ekurhuleni under governmental perspective at the DSD (Creswell, 2013:98).

The population for the study consisted of social workers employed at the DSD in the City of Ekurhuleni. From this population, the researcher employed purposive sampling based on the characteristics and objectives of the study. The use of semi-structured one-on-one interviews is one of the primary data collection methods in research. Data analysis was accomplished using a qualitative data analysis process (Creswell, 2014:196-200) and content analysis (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013:144). The ethical aspects relevant to the study are discussed in Chapter 3, Section 3.8.

1.6   DIVISION OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

Chapter 1 presents the general introduction and orientation to the study. It contextualises the study, presents the relevant concepts of the study, outlines the problem statement and rationale, the research questions, and the goal and objectives of the study. The research methodology is briefly discussed in this chapter. Finally, the division of the research report is presented.

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

Chapter 3 discusses the research methodology of the study, including the research approach, research type and design, the population of the study, the sampling methods, data collection methods, and the process of data analysis, pilot study and trustworthiness of the study. The ethical considerations are also discussed, and the limitations of the study are outlined. The findings of the research are reported and interpreted.

Chapter 4 is the final chapter and indicates how the goal and objectives of the research study have been achieved. The key findings of the research are presented, conclusions are drawn, and recommendations are made.

CHAPTER 2   LITERATURE STUDY

2.1   INTRODUCTION

Impoverished people are disproportionately located in degraded environments, with inadequate housing, polluted water, and air; therefore, they suffer from ill health. There is an interconnection between environmental injustices and poverty, which is why the researcher was interested in primarily exploring the interconnections. This would help in recognising the role of social work in promoting environmental justice concerning social justice. Social work can contribute to sustainable development through the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development (2012). The Global Agenda (2012) commits and guides the social work profession toward acknowledgement of their role and their responsibility to be involved in promoting environmental justice in society.

Erickson (2012:184) argues that social workers are compelled to act on environmental injustices because of their ethical mandate to address social injustices. Social work engages primarily with poor, marginalised, and socially excluded populations. This study will contribute to the debate on environmental issues in sustainable communities. As the study focuses on the City of Ekurhuleni, literature is directed towards the experiences that communities surrounding Ekurhuleni are faced with in terms of environmental degradations based on a governmental perspective.

The study adopted green social work (Dominelli, 2012) as a theoretical framework to discuss issues of environmental degradations, natural disasters, and the struggles faced by the communities of Ekurhuleni. There is an interrelation between green social work and developmental social work because both seek to address social issues in society (such as poverty) in promoting community sustainability. Developmental social work aims to promote social change through a dual focus on the person and the environment and the interaction between the two (Patel, 2015:127).

Dominelli (2012:25) explains that the aim of green social work is:
- to work for the reform of the socio-political and economic forces that have deleterious impacts on the quality of life of poor marginalised populations.
- to secure the policy change and social transformations necessary for enhancing the well-being of people and the planet, today and in the future.

- to advance the duty to care for others; and

- to underscore the right to be cared for by others.

Green social work compels social workers to address socio-economic related matters to ensure the existence of balance in the society focusing mainly on the underprivileged communities. Furthermore, developmental social work emphasises that sustainability in society could be achieved by incorporating the key dimensions of sustainable development, which are social, economic, and environmental development (UN, 2015).

The literature chapter is divided into four sections. The first section begins with an overview of green social work as a theoretical framework for the study. The second section addresses challenges in achieving sustainable communities and, more particularly, considers the City of Ekurhuleni, which will open a platform for the researcher to discuss contributing factors. Contributing factors, such as poverty, increasing population in informal settlements, environmental hazards, and poor health conditions, as well as environmental degradation and climate change, influence a population disproportionately affected by environmental injustices.

The third section will focus on social development as an approach to address environmental injustices to achieve sustainability in the community. It also considers activities that can strengthen economic development to contribute to sustainable communities. Last, the role of social workers in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities will be discussed at the three levels of intervention: micro-, mezzo-, and macro-levels. This discussion will help to understand the role of social work at all levels.

2.2   GREEN SOCIAL WORK AS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Miller, Hayward and Shaw (2012:274) acknowledge that the social work profession is rooted in addressing the needs of vulnerable communities, but they emphasise that the focus on social issues must extend to issues of the natural environment to build a framework for environmental justice. Furthermore, the authors propose that there must be a shift from focusing on the social aspect to include the natural environment in building bridges between humans and the environment, ensuring a balance between the two. Dominelli (2012) devised the term 'green' social work for a practice that

intervenes to protect the environment and enhance people's well-being. Since the theoretical model, green social work is intended to explore and describe different environmental injustices, social work activities and interventions in addressing environmental justice. Methods to achieve community sustainability are part of this process. Green social work can assist social work in understanding the social workers' role in terms of promoting environmental justice.

As Dominelli (2012:9) posits, green social work is a transdisciplinary, holistic approach to the environmental crises that have challenged the social work profession to integrate its principles and concern over environmental degradations and the disasters associated with environmental injustices into daily, routine, mainstreaming practice. Dominelli (2012:25) defines green social work as a form of holistic professional social work practice that focuses on the interdependencies among people, the social organisation of relationships between people and the flora and fauna in their physical habitats. Further, the focus is on the interactions between socio-economic and physical environmental crises and the interpersonal behaviours that undermine the well-being of human beings and planet Earth.

Green social work emphasises that there should be a balance between people and their relationship with the environment with which they interact. Patel (2015:204) states that social development practitioners must be well informed about new methods on how community development is applied to tackle broad contemporary issues. Therefore, in the case of environmental degradation, which is a global concern, social workers must be able to identify gaps that exist concerning their role in responding to environmental injustice and how they can align their activities to promote sustainable development in communities. Green social work can assist with addressing issues of environmental injustices and ensuring that communities are participating in activities that promote socio-economic development.

Dominelli (2014:150) indicates that green social work aims to reform the socio-economic and political forces that have a deleterious impact on the quality life of the poor and marginalised population. This aim includes securing policy changes that will enhance the well-being of people and planet. Caring for the poor is one of the fundamental roles of social work, and if marginalised communities are suffering because of environmental degradation, it fits into the social worker's role to ensure

that human rights are not violated. For social workers to work towards the attainment of SDGs, the well-being of people and their environment should become part of their daily service delivery. Social workers should help communities to build social capital and networks that will assist in developing programmes aimed at eradicating poverty.

McKinnon (2008:494) affirms that incorporating social sustainability as a core concept for social work calls for social workers to integrate ecological concerns into their practice at the micro-, mezzo- and macro-levels. Dominelli (2012:134) concurs that green social work seeks to create a specific subject of study in an area that was largely neglected by social workers by paying attention to the relationship between people, animals and the planet to promote environmental rights and social justice.

Natural disasters such as drought, floods and wildfires have significant effects on the environment and can be prevented only when human beings understand their interconnection with the environment.

Dominelli (2012:2) acknowledges that the social work profession has a wider-ranging remit in which social workers have played a minor role in debates about the harmful impact of environmental disasters on people's well-being in local communities and globally. Moreover, Dominelli (2012:2) further states that social workers might advocate for their clients to get new houses, but their voices have been absent from issues on climate change and other environmental issues that clients are confronted with daily. It can be argued that there is a broader need to define the social worker's role in terms of environmental justice. This study is an attempt to address the gaps in this regard by exploring and describing the role of social workers in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities.

In summary, green social work argues that social workers cannot advocate for or address environmental injustices without understanding the social issues that communities are experiencing daily. In the next section, the environmental challenges for sustainable development will be discussed by focusing particularly on the City of Ekurhuleni.

2.3 CHALLENGES IN DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

As the world faces challenges in all three dimensions of sustainable development – economic, social, and environmental (UN, 2015). Scholars such as Erikson (2012),

Dominelli (2012) and McKinnon (2008) comment that there is a need for social workers to shift from focusing only on social and economic aspects to include environmental matters. The researcher believes that in achieving sustainable development: social work needs to strengthen environmental protection, one of the major challenges that lead to the environmental injustices experienced mainly by the poor. In exploring these challenges, the researcher will focus on the City of Ekurhuleni as one of the developing cities of the Gauteng Province (Ekurhuleni Annual Report, South Africa) as an area of interest in the study.

It is known that the City of Ekurhuleni is a microcosm of South Africa, and in that it experiences chronic levels of unemployment, poverty, and inequality in comparison to other Gauteng metros (Gungubele, 2015). These triple developmental challenges are the root cause of most of the socio-economic ills that continue to ravage its communities (Gungubele, 2015).

The researcher is of the view that poverty, increasing populations in the informal settlements, poor health and climate change are challenges in Ekurhuleni that lead to environmental injustices and serve as barriers towards achieving a sustainable community.

2.3.1   Poverty

The poorer the society, the harder people are affected by environmental issues, which means that the employment opportunities of poor, excluded or deprived people are linked closely to the question of environmental sustainability. Therefore, it is important to look at livelihood opportunities in the context of environmental sustainability. Elliott (2013:85) supports the view that poverty is a major cause and effect of global environmental problems. Agyeman, Bullards and Evans (2002:17) infer that environmental problems are interlinked in relation to how human society is structured; hence, the exploitation of the environment implies the exploitation of the human population. The researcher is of the view that a strategy for poverty eradication should focus on improving the social and economic aspects of the communities, along with promoting environmental justice to maintain sustainable communities.

Healy (2014:106) states that the discourse on environmental social work challenges the profession's focus on the human environment only and the consequent neglect of the non-human environment and holistic responses to human need. Therefore, the

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protection of the environment must be prioritised to safeguard the poor from becoming even poorer. Based on the researcher's views, for social workers to gain insight into the impact of environmental injustices and hardships that disadvantaged populations endure, poverty should be studied more closely as poor people are more vulnerable to environmental injustices than any other population.

Elliott (2013:94) emphasises that poor people have regularly been portrayed as both victims and unwilling agents of environmental degradations. The research believes that any efforts to eradicate poverty does not include addressing issues of environmental degradation then it means poverty will remain a problem to many.

Different scholars, such as Dominelli (2012), Elliott (2013), and Chiwara and Lombard (2018) have mapped out the interconnections between poverty and environmental degradation. It can be concluded that sustainable development cannot be achieved if environmental issues are still ignored as an important aspect of fighting poverty and ensuring sustainability in communities.

Besthorn (2012:35) states that social work is required to take the lead from other helping professions by being fully involved in transactions between person and environment and its domain. Based on that, the observable social and economic consequences of degradation of the global environment negatively influence 'the ability of people and communities to achieve their potential as human beings and to give expression to their human rights' (IFSW, 2015:105).

It is important to engage with the experiences and living arrangements of the marginalised population which is vulnerable to environmental injustices and those who live in developing cities, to understand the consequences of poverty.

In conclusion, sustainable development can only be achieved in communities if poverty is viewed as a natural disaster that forces social workers to focus on addressing previously ignored environmental injustices. It is because of poverty that people migrate to cities in search of opportunities, which results in increasing the number of informal settlements.

2.3.2   Increasing population in informal settlements

Failure of local government to ensure the sustainability of projects and programmes that are aimed at improving the lives of communities has led to issues related to

environmental injustices, such as the fast-growing population of informal settlements. Gauteng has reported a high population compared to other provinces in South Africa, with a population of 15 176 116 (Stats SA, 2019). The City of Ekurhuleni, like other major cities in South Africa, is at the centre of the migration phenomenon, which comes with challenges.

UN-Habitat (2016:2) states that

> informal settlements are caused by a range of interrelated factors, including population growth and rural-urban migration, lack of affordable housing for the urban poor, weak governance (particularly in the areas of policy, planning, land and urban management resulting in land speculation and grabbing), economic vulnerability and underpaid work, discrimination, marginalisation and displacement caused by conflict, natural disasters and climate change.

According to the Integrated Developmental Plan for Ekurhuleni (2017/2018; 2020/2021), the in-migration confronts a city with a historical backlog of housing and municipal services. Furthermore, the interplay of rapid population growth spurred by in-migration, historical backlogs and slow housing delivery has resulted in a phenomenon of low-intensity land invasions and the growth of informal settlements (Integrated Developmental Plan for Ekurhuleni, 2017/2018 and 2020/2021).

People who live in informal settlements are often living under the threat of eviction, without permanent housing, sufficient living space, or access to clean water. These populations are often isolated from actively contributing to economic development because of the lack of government services and lack of opportunities.

Lombard (2015:241) states that the Global Agenda (2012) aims to recognise and respond to the profoundly unjust, unfair and, above all, unsustainable social, economic, and political systems of the contemporary world. Informal settlements in areas around Ekurhuleni have put the life of residents in danger due to the nature of their houses, lack of sanitation and proper infrastructure.

The following pictures were taken by the researcher at informal settlements called Pumazilwe, which is a Zulu name meaning, 'come out and fight'. Pumazilwe is one of the informal settlements located in an area near Oakmoor station at Tembisa, which is situated at Ekurhuleni municipality. Figure 2.1 illustrates the informal settlement and the living conditions of the area.

Figure 2:1   Environmental pollution at an informal settlement called Phumazilwe situated in the City of Ekurhuleni.

Source: Researcher

According to the City of Ekurhuleni Annual Report (2010/2011), many of the informal settlements are situated on land unsuitable for housing. Furthermore, well-located land suitable for housing development is not readily available. Sixty-six informal settlements in Ekurhuleni are in areas not suitable for development and were earmarked for relocation by the Department of Human Settlements (City of Ekurhuleni Annual Report, 2010/2011). Although some of the sections have proper infrastructure, the high number of people migrating to the cities to escape poverty in rural areas results in overpopulation, which is common in developing cities such as Ekurhuleni. The increase in the number of informal settlements in resources that support human life, but also on the number of humans who should share these resources (Schwartzman, 2008:155).

Issues of overpopulation often result in high rates of domestic violence, rape and mutilation of children, school dropout at primary level and environmental pollution. These are some of the challenges residents in informal settlements are confronted with daily. For the country to achieve the 17 SDGs by 2030, informal settlements should be prioritised.

As the quality of life of people in informal settlements declines and their health deteriorates, these environmental issues render them even less able to make a living. Poverty creates and worsens poor health because it forces people to live in environments that are characterised by pollution, such as informal settlements, which are located near dumping areas and polluted lakes as illustrated in Figures 2.1 above and 2.2 below.

2.3.3   Environmental hazards and poor human health conditions

There is a link between poverty and poor health, as Miller and Spoolman (2018:462) mention. The high death toll ultimately resulting from poverty is caused by malnutrition, increased susceptibility to normal nonfatal infectious diseases, and often-fatal infectious diseases transmitted by drinking polluted water.

As Figure 2.1 illustrates, pollution is a major problem in the City of Ekurhuleni, especially in the informal settlements, as some of them are situated near industrial areas and mining industries which can have drastic effects on water quality and the surrounding environment. The state of pollution in the informal settlements and the lack of proper infrastructure and sanitation contribute to people consuming polluted water from drainage and lakes, which can be very harmful, especially for the health of children.

According to Miller and Spoolman (2008:462), water pollution includes physical, chemical, and organic pollution at surface level (river, lakes, ponds, and the sea) because of industrial and residential sewer systems that discharge without any treatment. The researcher believes some of the pollution at Ekurhuleni is the result of poor management by the local municipality because issues of sewage and littering should be attended to by local government. Informal settlements are often the dumpsites of other people's waste material, exacerbated by the fact that municipalities often refuse to remove the waste from the informal settlements because people do not pay municipal fees. Water pollution is a concern for social workers because of its

dangerous consequences for the lives of vulnerable people from marginalised communities.

The following picture were taken by the researcher at one of the informal settlements in Ekurhuleni where shacks are situated near a polluted river.

Figure 2:2   Polluted water on the border of the informal settlement at the township, Tembisa.

Source: Researcher

Miller (2000:473) states that air pollution is the presence of one or more chemicals in the atmosphere in quantities and duration that cause harm to humans or other forms of life. Air pollution has severe impacts on the health and social well-being of people. Owa (2014:01) asserts that human activities, including industrialisation and agricultural practices, contribute enormously to the degradation and pollution of the environment. In turn, this has a negative effect on the water bodies (rivers and oceans) that are essential for life. The effect on these water bodies is identified as water pollution.

The picture in Figure 2.2 reflects living conditions at one of the informal settlements that Miller and Spoolman (2011) mention in support of the contention that air pollution is strongly associated with respiratory conditions, such as pneumonia, bronchitis and asthma, among others; if left untreated, some health complications related to air pollution can last a lifetime (UNICEF, 2016).

Water pollution and air pollution do not only affect people but also the environment people live in and the climate of the planet.

Coates and Gray (2012:231) state that the challenge today is for social work and other professions to break free from their academic silos and work co-operatively, or at least in unison, to better understand and respond to the many dimensions of climate change and environmental destruction.

2.4   ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is one of the significant problems facing the world today due to its effects increased temperature on the agricultural and farming. Climate change is having numerous evident effects across the world (Cumby,2016:04).

Climate change is the result of environmental degradation, which concerns social workers because of the challenges that it poses, especially since the harsh consequences are mostly experienced by the marginalised. Moreover, Ramsay and Boddy, as quoted by Rinkel and Powers (2017:78) state that it is important that social workers and students become aware of their responsibilities to promote environmental justice according to their respective social work codes of ethics. Therefore, the researcher is of view that social workers have a significant role to play in terms of the factors affecting climate change because climate change is also broadly identified as a threat to the global fight to end poverty (McKinnon, 2008:258)

Climate change poses a significant threat to society, human health, and health inequalities. The health and social impacts of climate change are becoming clear (Walker & Mason, 2013:20). For social workers to successfully address environmental injustices in a community, they should engage in addressing the crisis of climate change. Alston (2006:71) mentions that a wide range of social implications of environmental and climate disasters, social workers are often placed in crisis responses in addressing immediate needs for food and water security, housing, safety, relocation, and social supports. Bell (2016) adds to this explanation by stating that the effects of climate change – such as extreme weather conditions – will have a major negative impact in future, especially on poorer, hotter, and lower-lying countries. It will affect the growth rate of the global economy, trapping many people in poverty.

Because climate change negatively affects the poor; thus, social work is relevant in matters that affect the well-being of communities. However, extreme weather events do not only negatively impact on the financial well-being of people, but they can displace residents and even cause death (Bell, 2016)

In summary, the researcher believes that social workers' involvement in matters of climate change is essential because of the impact that climate change has on the development of the economy and its effect on the social well-being of society. Urban and low-income societies are mostly affected by the direct and indirect impact of climate change. Social workers must have knowledge and understanding of issues of climate change, disaster management and poverty eradication. This will enable them to engage in policy development directed at improving the livelihood of poor communities and contributing to sustainable communities by empowering and improving the living conditions of those severely affected.

In the next section, the researcher will highlight the population that is most likely to experience these injustices.

2.5 THE POPULATION DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECTED BY ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICE

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2015) recognises the importance of the environment in making development sustainable and, furthermore, while the aim of promoting sustainable development is to ensure that there is inclusivity in terms of economic development in society. Gender effects have been observed concerning the distress experienced from environmental disasters, with women's symptoms more strongly related to the social demands placed on them, rather than the traumatic experience itself (Stain, Kelly, Carr, Lewin, Flitzgerald and Fragar 2011:725).

Women, children, people of colour and countries or areas with less power in the global arena are more affected by poverty (Erickson, 2012:184). Women need special consideration in the development process as they are among the poorest in the world (Midgely, 2014:55). According to the expanded definition, the rate of unemployment among women in 2018 was 7.5 percentage points higher than that of males (Stats SA:2018). For Twikirize (2014:62), the position of women refers to their role and social and economic standing in relation to that of men. Twikirize (2014:570) posits that the gender and development debate usually focus on women because they have occupied a subordinate position in society for a longer period; they have suffered marginalisation.

Green social work is concerned with improving socio-economic status that influences the quality of life of the impoverished population and securing policies that will enhance

the well-being of people and the planet (Dominelli 2013:150). Promoting environmental justice will only be possible if social workers can prioritise services, especially among those who are more vulnerable to social injustice.

Children are very vulnerable to the influence of climate change, and they are also growing up with grave uncertainty about their future due to the ecological crisis. There has been increasing awareness that climate change is threatening the rights of children (Rabb as cited by Rinkel and Powers, 2017:136).

In terms of the effects of environmental injustices, children are equally as vulnerable as women, especially those living in informal settlements such as Ekurhuleni (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2). WHO (2019:9) confirms that air pollution is a global challenge affecting 93% of children as they are at greater risk than adults. Their organs, brains and lungs are still growing, and this makes them susceptible to air pollution. Manyema, Fordham and Collins (2008:310) argue that children were not initially included in development agendas, but, over time their involvement has been emphasised through the rights framework in the Convention on the Rights of the Child because of their vulnerability to environmental risks and disasters.

Social workers can attend to the natural environment and commit to sustainable communities by adopting a holistic approach to development that integrates social, economic, and environmental dimensions. The White Paper (1997) reports that welfare programmes should be available to all South Africans, but the focus must be on the poor, those who are vulnerable and those who have special needs. Social work in South Africa aim to promote social development through the adoption of developmental social welfare policy, outlined in the White Paper for Social Welfare (RSA, 1997).

The challenge is that the role of the social worker in organisations that aim to promote environmental justice is not clearly framed (Mutie, 2014:98). The researcher adopted social development as an appropriate integrated approach for green social work to deal with the social and environmental injustice that face marginalised populations.

2.6 SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AS AN APPROACH/STRATEGY TO PROMOTE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Social development is a process of planned social change designed to promote the well-being of the population in conjunction with a dynamic process of economic development. Lombard and Wairiri (2010:98) assert that social development has shaped a way in which developmental social workers could make an impact on attaining the millennium developmental goals, which are now referred to as sustainable developmental goals, 2030.

Social development can be used as a strategy to promote sustainable development in communities. Elliott (2011:104) argues that social development offers a progressive social work model in practice intending to achieve social justice and empowerment of the oppressed, marginalised, and excluded populations. In turn, this brings about a balance between the environmental and human concerns regarding these issues.

Social workers are compelled to act on environmental injustice because of their ethical mandate to address social injustices (Erickson, 2012:184). Moreover, it is important to identify the gaps which still need to be addressed to achieve a sustainable society by eradicating poverty and maintaining balance in the environment. Scholars such as Dominelli (2012), Elliott (2013), and Chiwara and Lombard (2018) map the links between environmental injustices and poverty and emphasise that poverty eradication can be achieved by addressing the key dimensions of sustainable development, which are social (people), economic (prosperity) and environmental (planet).

In the next sub-sections, the researcher will elaborate on social development as an approach to address the injustices. Social development as an approach will be conceptualised and how it contributes to structural equality, redistribution of resources, and promoting gender equality and human rights. The following sub-section will focus on the social workers' role in economic development for sustainable communities by focusing on human, social and economic capital.

2.6.1 Conceptualising social development as an approach

The social development approach uniquely integrates economic and social objectives. It not only recognises the critical importance of economic and social development in raising standards of living but actively seeks to harness economic development for

social goals (Department of Social Development, 2006:20). In agreement, Patel (2015:29) also defines social development as a process of social change that focuses on improving the well-being of a population by integrating social and economic development.

In achieving sustainability, social workers should take into consideration that environmental injustice cannot be addressed without implementing developmental ideas that will contribute towards economic development as well as promoting social justice for the oppressed. Their involvement and participation are of critical importance to ensure that their agency is respected and that their voice is heard. Patel (2015:130) states that the goal of social development is to promote social and economic development, elaborate on the participation of socially excluded people in development efforts; achieve tangible improvements in people's quality of life, and promote human development and social well-being.

Green social work emphasises the inclusion of the environment in social and economic development. It focuses on how responses to environmental crises must both challenge and address poverty, structural inequalities, socio-economic disparities, industrialisation processes, consumption patterns, different contexts and global interdependencies and limited resources (Dominelli, 2010:3). These are the realities that face communities across the City of Ekurhuleni where environmental injustices such as poverty, pollution, an increase in informal settlements, lack of resources and inequalities are still a serious concern.

Midgely (2014) argues that social development theory discourages the isolation of the social sphere from the economic sphere in societies. The social, economic, and environmental dimensions of development are intertwined and core to promoting sustainable communities (UN, 2015).

Social development interventions are projects, programmes, policies and plans that are deliberately implemented within specific socio-spatial settings, such as rural communities, inner cities, and geographical regions. For social workers to contribute towards sustainable communities, they need to address issues that are viewed as global challenges: structural inequalities, redistribution, or resources, promoting gender equality and human rights. These challenges will be discussed in the following

sub-sections, which should be taken into consideration when addressing environmental injustices.

2.6.1.1 Structural inequality

While the imperative of social development is to reduce and eradicate poverty as the major social problem impacting on many people (Landman, 2004:1), the structural inequality that still exists in South Africa makes it impossible in terms of achieving sustainable communities. It calls on social workers to engage in structural social work. Hick and Murray (2009:152) state that 'structural social work highlights how dominant structures decrease access to opportunities, resources and power for certain groups, resulting in individuals' and collective experience of oppression'.

Social work has ethical obligations to fight injustices and issues of inequalities in society. Environmental and social justice can be promoted by eradicating poverty and social inequality, addressing issues of industrialisation that only benefit the few, and by enhancing humanity and the well-being of the Earth (Dominelli, 2012:6).

Mining and other industrial areas are contributing to the socio-economic development of the country in terms of job creation, but this also has negative impacts on the environment and can affect the health of people. In promoting community sustainability, social workers must be involved in decisions that will affect communities, such as advocating for people's social and economic inclusion, to ensure that they benefit from economic growth. This will ensure that issues of structural inequality are properly addressed so that no one is left behind. In addressing structural inequality, social workers can engage in the redistribution of resources, promote gender equality, and promote human rights.

2.6.1.2 Redistribution of resources

The economic and social development elements of social development emphasise that development should always be accompanied by redistribution. To achieve sustainable development, Elliott (2013:20) argues that there should be a fair redistribution of resources, equal opportunities for the vulnerable population, specifically women and the elderly, and addressing of structural inequalities in society. Sustainable communities are healthy and inclusive and 'have access to water and

sanitation, renewable energy for all, inclusive and safe housing and food security'
(IASSW, 2016)

The researcher believes oppression is socially constructed through people's action
with and behaviours towards others. According to Dominelli (2012:6), environmental
and social justice can be promoted by eradicating social inequality, addressing issues
of industrialisation that only benefits the few and enhancing the well-being of humanity
and the planet. Furthermore, as Dominelli (2014:11) states, 'attending to structural
inequalities requires social workers to address the politics of identity and redistribution
of resources and not to treat the environment as means to be exploited for people's
need'. The researcher concludes that sustainable development can be achieved when
there is equal redistribution of resources among impoverished populations, especially
prioritising women and children as groups who are vulnerable.

2.6.1.3   Promoting gender equality

UNDP (2016) indicates that gender inequalities are embedded in social norms and
long-standing patterns of exclusion from household and community decision making
that limit women's opportunities and choices. In achieving sustainable development,
gender equality should be promoted, so that women will be granted opportunities to
participate in any developmental matters that will affect their lives and those of their
children. It is a human right to live in a healthy environment, and it is, therefore, a
logical conclusion to link human rights to sustainable development, because the right
to equality and access to resources cannot be achieved without the basic right to a
clean and safe environment.

In summary, social workers should prioritise development and empowerment,
especially among women, to ensure a balance in society. The Global Agenda (2012:1)
underscores the urgent need for social workers all over the world to promote equality.

2.6.2   Promoting human rights

Androff (2016:33) mentions that human rights provide the agenda that guides policy
and practice interventions, and it also assists social workers to develop different
strategies, especially those 'who are engaged in muddy work of transforming human
misery into its highest potentials of freedom, compassion, and healing'. Poverty is an
assault on humanity as much as through stigma, discrimination, and material

deprivation (Hartley, 2015:143). In terms of achieving sustainable development, it is important that people's rights are always treated with respect, which compels social workers to advocate for the rights of communities, because human rights, empowerment and advocacy are intertwined.

Lombard (2008:47) indicates that advocacy practice involves capacity building and empowerment. For social workers to be in a better position to advocate on behalf of communities, they need to be knowledgeable on environmental issues and how to manage disasters. Communities must be aware of their environmental rights in terms of environmental justice. Citizens need institutions that facilitate cooperation, and leaders who ensure that these institutions function and deliver on expectations; such leadership that can be provided by social workers (Lombard, 2008:49).

Dominelli (2012:6) states that green social work is based on the realisation of people's human rights, social and environmental justice, and citizenship. The human rights-based approach pursues a vision of realising the rights of every child, especially the most disadvantaged, and responds to the call to 'leave no child behind' (UN, 2015), so that the rights of every child, everywhere, will be fulfilled. Conversely, children are often left behind in decision-making processes that directly or indirectly affect their well-being. Social workers are thus also compelled to consider the role of children when mobilising communities because issues of environmental injustices affect children most severely. Manyema et al. (2008:412) maintain that children are often considered in terms of inherited vulnerability, but it is a mistake to think of them as passive bystanders or helpless victims in the climate change discourse and agenda.

It is the social worker's role to ensure and safeguard the rights of children through poverty eradication, and this can be achieved through sustainable activities, which are aimed at strengthening social capital and the economy of the communities. Lombard (2008:370) concurs that social workers are concerned primarily with the vulnerable and the poor, so they are challenged to accept their share of responsibility in addressing inequality and poverty by promoting the rights of poor people to social and economic development.

The Framework for Social Welfare Services (2013:14) contributes that social programmes should reflect an integration of human capital, social capital, and economic capital development. The next section will focus on how economic

development can be integrated with social development through human, social and economic capital development.

2.7 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THROUGH HUMAN, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CAPITAL

Poverty is both a social and an economic phenomenon and requires economic growth that will facilitate integrated social and economic development programmes (Lombard & Strydom, 2011:395). As indicated earlier, sustainable development focuses on the social aspect (people), economics (prosperity) and the environment (planet) (UN, 2015). To contribute to sustainable communities, social workers should integrate issues of the natural environment with human development into existing social work practice models (Erikson, 2012:184), and develop integrated social and economic models that take the natural environment into consideration (Dominelli, 2012:21).

Besthorn (2013:35) confirms that the human and (the) planet link in stating that social and environmental justice shares a common interest in human beings and the natural world. The author further says the social work struggle to clearly balance the commitment to both person and environmental justice falls squarely on the person side of the justice equation. Isbister (2001), cited by Lombard (2014:51) states, inequality is about people not having equal access to the goods and services provided by their economies, as their incomes are vastly unequal. Furthermore, social workers face the injustices of this inequality daily and cannot promote social justice without directly engaging in economic activities that work towards an inclusive economy.

The researcher is of the view that empowerment is vital to help communities to address their problems and to deal with the oppression that is experienced by underprivileged communities such as informal settlements across the City of Ekurhuleni. One of the purposes of the developmental approach as described in the Framework for Social Welfare Services (Department of Social Development, 2013:8) is to enhance social functioning and human capacities, as well as to promote social solidarity through participation and community involvement in social welfare. Empowerment and building peoples' capabilities relative to human capital will be discussed next.

2.7.1   Human capital

Human capital refers to improving people's capabilities by empowering them with skills and knowledge by investing in their health and their nutritional and general well-being

to enable them to compete in the open labour market (Green & Haines, 2008:85; Patel, 2005:104). Empowerment is a process of increasing personal, interpersonal, or political power so that individuals can act to improve their life situation (Gutierrez, 1994 in Kirst-Ashman, 2017:24). Social workers have a responsibility to empower clients, who are subjected to stereotypes, discrimination, and oppression. For the social worker to apply the empowerment approach effectively, Sekudu (2015:95) suggests that the social worker should empower the client to become aware of internal and external conflicts and tensions, to enable the client to free from constraints.

Human capital development through education and empowerment can contribute to sustainable livelihoods for families and communities. While the government has a role to play in social development, social security should be a measure that primarily provides immediate relief for those that can be taken off the system. They can then be redirected to developmental social welfare or community development services to ensure the sustainability of intervention efforts (DSD, 2006:12). When individuals are empowered, they are in the best position to identify their strengths on an individual and family level. They will then be able to formulate entrepreneurial ideas and take part in activities that will help generate income for their families. It takes empowerment for a community to identify available resources: this is called social capital.

2.7.2 Social capital

Pennar (1997), as quoted by Rinkel and Powers (2017:130), defines social capital as 'the web of social relationships that influences individual behaviour and thereby affects economic growth'.

Simpson's (2005:709) view on social capital is that it is an outcome of interaction and participation in networks, rather than a process. Social capital emphasises the building of community capacity to collectively engage in activities that can strengthen efforts to eradicate poverty. Social capital pertains to collective activities undertaken by community members, which are brought about by relationships and ties between them (Green & Haines, 2008:109).

The researcher is of the view that projects rely on unity in communities to be successful. It is, therefore, important that social workers engage with communities and encourage community participation. The social worker's role is to ensure that

communities are participating in activities aimed at eradicating poverty and ending hunger; this can be through social entrepreneurship (Katunga & Lombard, 2016).

Gittell and Vidal (1998:209) state that social capital matters, because it is a key determinant in predicting neighbourhood stability and neighbourhoods with large social capital are less likely to decline when other factors are held constant. The researcher concludes that communities with strong social capitals have better opportunities to build good relationships with local stakeholders, such as the local municipality and business sectors because of the solidarity that exists among community members. This solidarity will also enable communities to have access to funding. In this manner, it will also assist in maintaining the balance between people and the environment they interact in as emphasised by green social work.

2.7.3 Economic capital

Lombard (2003:244) says to achieve sustainability and economic stability, the alleviation of poverty is at the top of the agenda. The scholar further says that there is a close relationship between employment and poverty reduction at the micro- and macroeconomic levels and that fast-economic growth may help both to reduce poverty and to increase employment. Social entrepreneurship is one of the activities that will help alleviate poverty as a way of addressing the bigger effects of environmental injustice. Moreover, the primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the needs of all people with attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed and living in poverty (Berzin, 2017:77).

Lombard and Strydom (2011:393) emphasise that the role of social work in economic development is essential to contextualise social entrepreneurship as a strategy for community development. The researcher is also of the opinion that instead of just providing social grants to families, there should also be some form of empowerment in the form of financial education, which will enable the beneficiary of social grants to understand ways to use social grants to generate income for their families.

There is no doubt that social workers are well equipped to understand their roles, but when it comes to promoting environmental justice at all levels of intervention, it seems that it is still a concern. Researchers, therefore, seek to explain the social worker's role from all levels of intervention, to clearly define roles at the micro-, mezzo-, and

macro-levels of intervention. According to Hawkins (2010:73), it is instructive to note that the current literature on human rights, including social work, makes little or no mention of environmental justice, which is the reason the research seeks to address the role of the social worker at both levels of intervention to promote sustainability. McKinnon (2008:485) also states that there is a clear connection between social work and matters of the environment, which is what the researcher will elaborate on in the next section to show the connection.

The next section will explain the role of the developmental social worker in addressing environmental injustices from the micro-, mezzo- and macro-levels to ensure development and sustainability in communities.

2.8 THE ROLE OF DEVELOPMENTAL SOCIAL WORKERS IN PROMOTING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

The Framework for Social Welfare Services (Department of Social Development 2013:8) states that developmental social welfare interventions take place on the micro (individuals, families, and households), mezzo (groups) and macro (communities and organisations) levels. In other words, micro-interventions, aimed at individuals and families, are linked with macro interventions, which are aimed at changing the structures and institutions of society that result in socio-economic injustice.

Social work must extend its mission to reduce poverty by advocating for environmental justice, which, according to Hawkins (2010:68), is the human right to live in a clean, safe, and healthy environment. McKinnon (2008:264) states that the domain of social work needs to incorporate an understanding of the ecological environment as it affects humanity if social work is to maintain its relevance as a profession in a time of escalating environmental stresses.

The world's most poor, vulnerable, and oppressed people often live in the most degraded environments and have no control over resources (McKinnon, 2008:264). Poverty is one of the main causes of environmental injustice (Dominelli, 2012; Elliott, 2013; Chiwara & Lombard, 2018). Therefore, the eradication of poverty, which is also the primary goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, is key to environmental justice and community sustainability. To fight poverty, social workers should advocate for change in the lives of marginalised populations. Mathbor

(2007:367) avers that social workers are well connected to the people they serve; they know about their unique locations, they are familiar with community resources and leadership potentials, and they are equipped with the necessary knowledge base to address issues at the micro-, mezzo- and macro-levels.

Arevalo, as cited by Rinkel and Powers (2017:36), states that communities that are mostly affected by environmental injustices are often the same communities where social workers are entrenched in service provision at the individual, family, and community level. Addressing environmental injustices at community level can be achieved through community development. Matarrita-Cascante and Brennan (2012:297) describe this as a process that entails organisation, facilitation, and action that allows people to establish ways to create the community in which they want to live. The scholars further comment that communities with strong social capital are more likely to work together to achieve a common goal.

The DSD has the responsibility for streamlining social development interventions at a macro level, by ensuring the recognition of social workers as critical role players in these interventions**.** Furthermore**,** Rock, as cited by Rinkel and Powers (2017:22), states that the roles and skills of the social worker in working with community residents are key to implementing effective interventions geared toward both environmental and social sustainability. McKinnon (2008:266) argues that the same strategy of empowerment applies to individuals, families, and communities when social workers promote environmental justice.

Social workers are well equipped to be agents for social change, but such changes will only be sustainable when individuals, families, and communities work together to create and develop their own plans for sustainable social change (Rock, as cited by Rinkel & Powers, 2017:26). There are different roles that social workers can play to promote environmental justice; namely, the role of enabler, manager, educator, analyst/evaluator, broker, facilitator, initiator, negotiator, mobiliser, social planner, programme developer, administrator, networker and advocate (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2009:25–31).

The roles of empowering the members and the community as a researcher, public speaker, catalyst, organiser, co-ordinator, and motivator may be added to these (Weyers, 2011:133–134). Principles of social justice, human rights, collective

responsibility, and respect for diversities are central to social work (Taylan, as cited by Rinkel & Powers, 2017:25) and the roles that they play in promoting environmental justice. Next, the researcher discusses important roles that social workers could play in promoting environmental justice and sustainable communities.

2.8.1   Social worker as an educator

The social worker can educate communities about environmental injustices and their right to a clean, safe, and healthy environment (Hawkins, 2010:28). Alston and Whittenbury (2012:12) state that women are much more likely to be living in poverty, less likely to own land and resources to protect them in a post-disaster situation and have less control over production and income, less education and training, less access to institutional support and information, less freedom of association and fewer opportunities to take part in decision-making bodies.

Education is key to building peoples' capacity, which, in turn, empowers them to engage as equal partners in fighting environmental and other injustices. As Taylan, cited by Rinkel and Powers (2017:58), states: 'Empowerment is a process in which individuals, groups or communities become able to take control of their circumstances and achieve their goals, thereby being able to work towards maximising the quality of their lives'. Empowerment strongly relates to the social worker's role as an enabler.

2.8.2   Social worker as an enabler

Lombard (2015:487) alludes that the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development commits social workers to align their activities and programmes with development initiatives that integrate the environment with human dimensions to promote environmental justice and sustainability. However, for social workers to be fully involved in social planning and policy change, they should understand what environmental injustices are, what interventions and activities could address these injustices and which legislation and policies are relevant to fight these injustices. The researcher is of the view that social workers are working hard to promote the well-being of the people they serve, but their programmes are not fully addressing environmental issues. Social workers can align their activities based on what Gable, as cited by Rinkel and Powers (2017:247) says:

> We will promote within our own organisations, standards in education and practice that facilitate sustainable social development outcomes,

including the prevention, mitigation, and response to disasters. We will encourage and facilitate research into the social work role in relation to disasters and environmental challenges.

When activities are properly aligned to address the needs of the community, social workers should promote participation so that people will be fully engaged in their own process of learning, growth and change, starting from where they are and moving at their own pace. Social workers can assist communities to develop projects that will help them address poverty and other social injustices, such as empowering the community with small business skills and financial management, as well as educating them on ways to preserve and live in harmony with their environment. In support, Lombard (2014:266) states that in the context of sustainable development, social workers' engagement in promoting economic activities, such as income-generating projects and small business and social entrepreneurship, should not be separated from their responsibility to promote environmental justice and development.

As enablers, social workers facilitate and guide the processes of social transformation while encouraging the active participation of communities as equal partners in fighting injustices and promoting sustainable communities. Their role is to guide communities through the challenges they may encounter (Swanepoel & De Beer, 2016:96) to reduce poverty and promote environmental justice and sustainable communities. Given the fact that the most marginalised are hardest hit by poverty and degrading environments, the social worker must adopt a role where structural injustices can be tackled on systemic levels. The social worker's role as an advocate comes into play in achieving this goal.

2.8.3   Social worker as an advocate

Lombard (2014:262) comments that advocacy practice is where social workers act systematically and purposefully to defend, represent, or otherwise advance the cause of one or more clients at the individual, groups, and community levels to promote social justice. Patel (2015:145) mentions that the social worker as an advocate speaks on behalf of clients. Hawkins (2010:69) argues that for social workers to be relevant in the contemporary world, they must move beyond their traditional focus on social and economic justice. They must actively support environmental justice and pursue

sustainable development so that all people can live in a clean, safe, and healthy environment.

Rinkel and Powers (2017:215) state that social work practitioners need to know the challenges and opportunities of the new global context and identify their role in promoting environmental and social sustainability. This is the reason the researcher highlighted the living conditions of informal dwellers at City of Ekurhuleni (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2), which shows where poverty is the main problem, increasing in the informal settlements, and characterised by poor living conditions, water and air pollution. In these instances, social workers must advocate for the affected communities by ensuring that environmental and social injustices are exposed and that the communities receive basic services, such as waste removal, but also acquire access to health and education services and facilities, among others, targeting women and children.

For social workers to advocate for disadvantaged communities, they must be aware of the social, political, and economic contexts of the community and how they influence people's well-being and social change. Social workers can advocate for changes in social policies, reach out to government officials about pressing issues in the community, create awareness in the community on environmental and social issues, and mobilise the community for action. Social workers are also at an advantage because they have knowledge and relevant information that can be useful to assist in interventions when working with communities (Swanepoel & De Beer 2016:96).

2.9   SUMMARY

Environmental injustice is a pressing global problem, and it affects the most vulnerable people in society, such as women and children. Poor people are the ones who experience environmental injustices most severely because of their socio-economic status and the conditions that they find themselves in, especially those residing in informal settlements where there is poor infrastructure and lack of access to resources (Dominelli, 2012; Chiwara & Lombard, 2018). Social workers cannot respond to environmental injustices in isolation from the social and economic dimensions of sustainable development because they are intertwined and equally important for sustainable communities (UN, 2015).

Adopting social development as an approach to social work has opened a platform to address different social injustices, such as structural inequality, redistribution of resources and gender inequality. Social workers can engage in activities and interventions that invest in human capital, social capital, and economic capital to promote environmental justice and promote sustainable communities. For this purpose, social workers can employ their roles as educator, enabler, facilitator, guider, and advocate.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY, EMPIRICAL STUDY AND FINDINGS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

An overview of the research methodology of the study is provided in this chapter, which presents the research approach, type of research, research design, data collection methods, sampling method, pilot study, data analysis, ethical clearance and limitations of the study. The findings of the empirical study are presented and discussed, and the chapter ends with a summary. The research question that guided the empirical study is:

What is the role of social workers in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities in the City of Ekurhuleni?

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

The study used a qualitative research approach. The qualitative research approach allows the researcher to collect data that represents the in-depth views of participants (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:91). In this study, the researcher intended to gain in-depth information about how social workers view their role in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities.

The researcher used interpretivism as a research paradigm that focuses on the understanding of social workers' experiences in practice and, in the case of this study, 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 interviews with prior knowledge of the literature regarding the topic which, in turn, influenced the type of questions to be asked (Nieuwenhuis, 2016a:62).

The purpose of the study was both explorative and descriptive. Fouché and De Vos (2011:96) state that exploratory and descriptive research is used effectively where the descriptive purpose answers the sub-question of the proposed research on how social work can contribute to environmental justice for 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).

The researcher, therefore, explored the experiences and meanings that social workers attribute to their roles as promoters of environmental justice (Creswell, 2014:185). A descriptive focus, on the other hand, refers to the researcher obtaining specific details about a situation and therefore the focus is on the 'how' and 'why' questions (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:96). The descriptive goal of the study aimed to answer why social workers must be involved in environmental justice practice. Furthermore, the goal seeks to describe how they engage or could engage, in environmental issues, and how they contribute or could contribute, to sustainable communities.

3.3   TYPE OF RESEARCH

The type of research was both basic and applied. 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 was basic in the sense that the researcher aimed to recommend new roles for social workers, contributing to the knowledge base of green social work. The research was applied in that the study made recommendations on how social workers can promote environmental justice, and, in doing so, contribute to more sustainable communities.

3.4   RESEARCH DESIGN

Leedy and Ormrod (2013:141) explain that a case study as a research design could be suitable for learning more about a situation that is not clearly described or understood. The case study chosen by the researcher must consist of specific qualities to inform practice in 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 this study, participants were purposefully selected to explore their understanding of environmental justice, to explore and describe activities and interventions of social workers when they address environmental issues, and to determine their contribution

to sustainable communities. Through the exploration of social workers' current views and practice in terms of environmental justice, the researcher aimed to propose specifically formulated roles that social workers could integrate with their current approach to promote sustainable communities.

The specific case study used was an instrumental case study. Rule and John (2011:8) explain that an instrumental case study is also referred to as an exploratory case study, which attempts to explain specific cases, test existing knowledge, and generate new information. Fouché and Schurink (2011:321) are of the view that an instrumental case study can be very useful to inform policy development through the generation of new theory and knowledge. Therefore, this study envisaged that recommended roles for social workers to promote environmental justice could influence the development of new policies for more sustainable communities.

Leedy and Ormond (2013:141) warn that case studies may not necessarily be generalised to all practice settings. The advantage of conducting a case study is that an in-depth understanding of the case is being acquired (Creswell, 2013:98) that will present the researcher with rich information. In addition, Nieuwenhuis (2016a:75) states that case study research is essential in assisting the researcher to understand the dynamics of a specific situation. In this study, the aim is to investigate the role that social workers can play in promoting environmental justice and contribute to sustainable communities.

3.5   SAMPLING AND SAMPLING METHOD

According to Babbie (2017:117), the population for a study is that group of people about whom researchers want to draw conclusions. The total number of social workers employed by the DSD at the City of Ekurhuleni in Gauteng was identified as the study population (Strydom, 2011a:223). According to the human resource department at the DSD at the time of the study, there were 580 social workers in the Ekurhuleni region with seven service points. For this study, the researcher covered the five service points, which are Germiston, Etwatwa, Duduza, Kempton Park and Tembisa service points.

A purposive sampling method was used to select the participants that represent the characteristics of the population (Babbie, 2011:128–129). Flick (2007:80) indicates that the sample cases should be able to reflect and verbalise their experiences and be available for the duration of an interview.

The researcher selected ten social workers from the DSD in the Ekurhuleni region, based on an assumption about who will be available, useful, and representative (Rubin & Babbie, 2013:222) based on preselected criteria.

The following criteria were used in purposively selecting the participants:

- social workers with at least one year of social work practice experience.
- social workers who will be willing to conduct the interview in English.
- social workers who engage in community activities and interventions that promote social and economic development.
- social workers who are engaged in and are interested in environmental issues, activities; and
- interventions concerning social work.

The researcher requested permission from the Deputy Director General (Support Services) at the Gauteng DSD to conduct a study with ten social workers who met the above criteria. With permission from the DSD (see Appendix B) the researcher then submitted the letter to the Director of the Ekurhuleni service points and requested assistance to access the sample framework to inquire about their willingness to participate in the study. The first ten social workers who indicated their willingness to participate in the study were selected to form part of the study. The interviews were conducted at a convenient and private place, as agreed with the participants.

3.6   DATA COLLECTION METHOD

For this study, the researcher used one-on-one interviews as the data collection method, and a semi-structured interview schedule was the data collection tool (see Appendix D). Pre-determined open-ended questions were, therefore, asked, and the researcher listened to the participants' responses and then probed and clarified for further information (Nieuwenhuis, 2016b:93).

Preliminary contact was established to introduce the study and make logistical arrangements for interviews. The researcher made sure that the participants were willing to spend enough time (60 minutes) to conduct the interview (Flick, 2007:78; Greeff, 2011:353). The participants were interviewed until saturation of data was reached. After the researcher, had completed the ten interviews, there was no more new information. According to Lietz, Langer and Furman (2006:453), to reach saturation, it is important to spend enough time with the participant to obtain additional data through prolonged engagement.

It was a challenge for the researcher to make notes of all the information simultaneously and to be attentive to the participant. Therefore, the researcher, with the permission of the participants, used voice-recording equipment for accurate transcription during data analysis (Flick, 2007:82).

The literature study was used to conduct relevant and focused questions. The interview questions were given to the participants before the interview to help them contextualise and to give relevant information during the actual interview (Greeff, 2011:352). The interview schedule did not have pre-determined themes, but included questions that focus on:

- the demographic area of service delivery.
- social workers' activities and interventions in environmental justice.
- social workers' role in social and economic activities and interventions; and
- social workers' roles in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities.

The benefit of using interviews as a data collection method is that the researcher obtains rich, descriptive data and views social reality through the participants' lens. Interviews allow the researcher to use open questions that can be proved and explored (Greeff, 2011:342; Nieuwenhuis, 2016b:93). However, a few disadvantages of interviews include having to maintain control of a distracted participant (not focusing on the topic), the need for good rapport, and the possibility of having an unsuccessful interview due to the lack of maintaining balance and flexibility at the same time (Greeff,

2011:349; Nieuwenhuis, 2016b:93). In other words, the researcher needs to be flexible enough to allow the participant to share their story but should also be able to obtain information that can be used for comparison between different case studies.

3.7   DATA ANALYSIS

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

In this study, the researcher made use of the six steps of thematic analysis suggested by Creswell (2014) and Clarke, Braun, and Hayfield (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 for the theme.

In Step One, the researcher organised and prepared the data for analysis. The researcher transcribed interviews by writing the exact words of the participants from the voice recording, and typed the field notes of what transpired during the interviewing of the participants in their different settings and then sorted and arranged data into different types.

Step Two involved reading and rereading of transcripts, listening to the audio recording and looking at all the data. This was done to check the general ideas of the participants, the tone of their ideas and the depth of the information. The researcher also started recording general thoughts about data in the margins of the transcripts.

In Step Three, 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: it groups similar data segments together.

Step Four included using the coding process to generate a description of participants to search for themes. The researcher also used coding to generate themes or categories for the study. Themes were used as the headings and subheadings that were the main findings of the study. These displayed multiple perspectives from the participants about their role in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities. Quotes were used from the transcripts to support the themes.

Step Five involved writing and presenting the themes of each participant through conveying descriptive information about each participant. Themes and sub-themes and any other information, such as the biographic data of participants, were presented in table format in Tables 3.1 and 3.2 of Chapter 3.

In **Step Six,** 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 data was packaged into a text to narrate the findings. The findings were submitted to the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria.

3.8   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, 2012:21). Due to its impact on resource allocation and policy change, these authors indicate that research must be credible, and it must have rigour. The study should interpret the phenomena as reported by the participants.

The researcher evaluated this study by considering the four concepts that work together to achieve trustworthiness, as explained in Lietz and 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 must have true value or credibility so that the researcher can establish with confidence that the study has indeed faithfully recorded the phenomenon under study (Shelton, 2004:64). Furthermore, Lietz and Zayas (2010:191) also refer to credibility as a degree where the researcher will ensure that the findings are reported so that the participants can identify their contributions in the study. In other words, true value is 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 achieved this by ensuring that during transcription and field notes every piece of data was presented to ensure that the data is credible and reflects the view as reported by the participants. The researcher did member checking (Schurink, Fouché & de Vos, 2011:420) by emailing the transcripts to the participants to indicate whether the documented information presented a true reflection of what they said, as well as post-analysis, to validate the accuracy of the findings. However, only four participants responded that the information on the transcripts is a true reflection of what they have said, while the other six participants have not yet responded to the emails.

- **Transferability**

Lietz and Zayas (2010:195) states 'transferability and fittingness are achieved when the findings of the research have applicability to another setting, theory, to practice or future research'. Trustworthy research should be able to be transferred to another context or setting, like the research study. To establish transferability, the research details were described in depth to allow the reader to evaluate the extent to which the conclusions drawn could be transferable to other settings, times, situations or people (Amankwaa, 2016:20). Detailed information was also provided on how the research has unfolded, with a clear outline of the step-by-step processes followed to allow for transferability. Amankwaa (2016:20) views this as the researcher telling a story or painting a clear picture for the reader.

The inability to provide enough information about the procedure, data collection techniques, sampling procedures, and all other relevant information means that transferability would be impossible. Since the aim of the study was to explore the role of social workers in promoting environmental justice, the findings were transferred to develop a theory that will be beneficial in the social work field and will also inspire future research on this topic. The findings will help social workers in any state departments and non-governmental organisations to develop new strategies to address environmental justice to ensure the sustainable development of communities as a way of combating poverty in society.

- **Auditability**

The third criterion for evaluating the 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 so that another person can follow and critique the research process.

To ensure auditability for this study, the researcher recorded every step throughout the research process. The researcher created a file that included biographical details of the participants, venue and signed informed consent forms for each interview meeting. The voice notes and full transcripts of the interviews are also included. The researcher also consulted with colleagues who are experienced in qualitative methodology and who have conducted a similar study to share the research decisions and procedures to ensure that the researcher is still following the right course 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 researcher's bias to influence the research findings and allows 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).

In this study, the researcher ensured confirmability by transcribing every single word altered by the participants. The participants who had a chance to read their transcripts confirmed that the transcripts were a true reflection of what they said. The researcher also ensured that the saturation of data was reached by interviewing participants until they were no longer adding new information.

According to Lietz et al. (2006:453), it is essential to spend enough time with the participant to obtain additional data through the process of prolonged engagement. The researcher spent approximately 60 minutes per participant to assign sufficient time for each interview, even though some of the interviews were shorter than others. The researcher still managed to explore and ask for clarity to give the participants the opportunity to engage more on the topic.

Triangulation refers to 'the combination of two or more theories, data sources, methods or investigators on one study of a single contrast and can be employed both

in qualitative and quantitative studies' (Yeasmin & Rahman, 2012:154). Simply put, triangulation assists in strengthening research findings.

For this study, the researcher used triangulation of the data to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. Furthermore, observer triangulation by asking a colleague who is experienced in research to analyse the data to ensure consistency in how data analysis is linked with the findings and to ensure that no important information is left out (Schurink, Fouché & De Vos, 2011:420).

In addition, the researcher made use of opportunities such as peer scrutiny of the research by colleagues who are researchers in the same field and academics at any presentations that were made throughout the research (Shelton, 2004:67). The author stresses that the fresh perspective that other people bring may challenge the assumptions of the researcher, whose attachment to the study frequently inhibits their ability to view it with detachment. The study was supervised and supervisory sessions provide the opportunity for the researcher to gain awareness of any biases and allow their vision to be challenged (Shelton, 2004:68).

Through the process of reflexivity, the researcher needs to be aware of researcher biases that may be caused by personal experiences, background knowledge, perceptions, and interest in the research (Shelton, 2004:68). Therefore, the researcher must remain aware of her/his influence throughout the research process: this is reflexibility. Reflexibility is the researcher's ability to acknowledge any bias when the research is conducted (Lietz & Zayas, 2010:192).

During the study, the researcher was mindful of herself in her role as a researcher by reflecting and introspecting on the data collection and data analysis process. According to Krefting (1991:06), this can be done by putting feelings and emotions on paper throughout the research process; this helps to address any researcher bias.

3.9   PILOT STUDY

The researcher conducted a pilot study before continuing with the main study (Strydom & Delport, 2011:394). A pilot study aims to ensure that the research methodology chosen will be appropriate and, most importantly, to determine whether the semi-

structured interview schedule will produce responses that will answer the questions posed in the main study. The researcher also used a pilot study to test a voice recorder and check if the venue for the interviews would be conducive for the main study.

According to Bless, Higson-Smith and Kagee (2006:184), 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 pilot study highlights the feasibility of the research and brings possible deficiencies to the attention of the researcher (Yin, 2014:96).

This is important as it allows the researcher to adjust the research instrument to make it more effective in gathering the required data (Bless et al., 2006:184). The interview schedule was piloted with the first two participants of the main study. The findings were included in the main study. According to Ismail, Kinchin and Edwards (2018:6), in qualitative studies, data corruption is less of a concern so researchers can use some or all their pilot data as part of the main study.

3.10   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to Flick (2009:54), ethical considerations are formulated to regulate the relationship of researcher to the people, who in this research, were social worker participants in the field of environmental sustainability. Major and Savin-Baden (2010:53–54) explain that this is due to the relationship between the researcher and the participant, which is constantly negotiated to deconstruct power, achieve and maintain trust, promote equality and ensure reciprocity. The study was ethically cleared by the University of Pretoria (see Appendix A.) It was important for the researcher to take into consideration the following ethical aspects in this study:

3.10.1   Informed consent

Before the collection of data, Flick (2009:59) cautions that it is important that the researcher is competent enough to explain to the potential participants what the goal of the study is. He adds that the information should be adequately explained to ensure that they could decide on whether to voluntarily participate in the study or not. For

example, the researcher should not use language that would convey different interpretations to the goal of the study.

Babbie (2013:32) states that participation in a research study disrupts the participants' regular activities. Therefore, it is important that participation is voluntary, based on participants fully comprehending what the research aims to attain, and how it would be of benefit to them. Apart from explaining what the study entails to the potential participants, Babbie (2013:34) states that a consent form, which outlines the goal of the research study, must be signed by the participants.

On the day of the scheduled interview, the researcher explained in detail what the study entails. The informed consent form (see Appendix C) also explained that a voice recorder would be used with the permission of the participants. The participants were informed that the findings will be disseminated in written format and that the data will be stored at the University of Pretoria for 15 years. If the data is to be used again, the informed consent form indicated that it would only be for research purposes.

3.10.2   Confidentiality

The social work community is relatively small, and many social workers in the Ekurhuleni area know each other. It is impossible to guarantee anonymity, but data gathered was reported with confidentiality in mind (Braun & Clarke, 2013:64). The researcher ensured the participants of confidentiality by using pseudonyms when reporting the findings.

Israel and Hay (2009) in Creswell (2009:120) emphasise that the researcher is obliged to protect their research participants, develop a trust relationship with them, promote the integrity of research, guard against misconduct and impropriety that could reflect on the university and identify the organisations where the social workers work. Through the informed consent letter to the participants, the researcher emphasised that the information will be strictly shared between the researcher and the supervisor.

In addition to this, the researcher installed a database that is password-protected to access the collected data alone.

3.10.3 Voluntary participation

All participants knew exactly what the interview entailed and that it was voluntary to participate in the study (Strydom, 2011b:116). They 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 knew that they could also withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

3.10.4 Actions and competence of the researcher

The researcher always acted in a professional manner by being punctual for the interviews, being well-organised and respecting different cultural opinions (Strydom, 2011b:123). Researchers, as Strydom (2011b:123) states, are obliged to have adequate skills to undertake the research study, and to be constantly aware of their ethical responsibility; this includes being continuously aware of the social work code of ethics.

The researcher completed a research methodology module and two social development modules, which were based on the research topic in her first year of master's studies. Furthermore, the researcher has experience in conducting professional interviews, and the study was undertaken under the supervision of an experienced research supervisor.

3.10.5 Avoidance of harm and debriefing

From practice experience, not all social work practice settings are rendering services according to a social development framework or promoting environmental justice in alignment with the SDGs (UN, 2015). This could be due to numerous factors. It could be that the social workers could have been confronted with questions that trigger feelings of incompetence (Strydom, 2011b:115). These questions could result in emotional harm, and therefore, it was important that the researcher identifies participants who could possibly prove vulnerable during the investigation so that they may be excused from the study beforehand (Strydom, 2011b:115).

For this purpose, the researcher informed the participants in advance that the research topic is not personal, but intended to explore, because little is known in this study field in South Africa. Therefore, the study could contribute to making social workers active

in the promotion of environmental justice. After the researcher, has collected data from the participants, Strydom (2011b:122) emphasised that it is important that the researcher have a reflective process with each participant to work through their experiences.

The researcher engaged in this process by debriefing the participants. The researcher informed the participants that should there be a need for further intervention after the researcher had left, they could approach the DSD for employee wellness services, which are available to all employees of the department. The participants were also informed by the researcher that should they have any questions regarding the study or the literature, the researcher would respond, and if needed, strongly encourage them to contact the supervisor (who is also the head of the Department of Social Work and Criminology at the University of Pretoria) to help clarify any uncertainties (Strydom, 2011b:122).

3.10.6 Dissemination of findings

According to Babbie (2007:112), the purpose of disseminating research findings is to make known what the researcher has learned from the study, what conclusions were reached about these findings and what recommendations are made to influence changes in the phenomenon under study. The research findings for this study are presented in the form of this research report. Other methods may include a paper published in a peer-reviewed journal. The researcher will also present the research findings and conclusion for the social workers at the DSD, which is where the study was conducted.

3.11 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study's findings only apply to the DSD Tembisa, Kempton Park, Etwatwa, Germiston and Duduza service points and cannot be generalised to the whole Ekurhuleni region. The busy schedule of respondents made data collection difficult as some of the respondents who were selected by their supervisors to be part of the study were too busy. Instead, they referred the researcher to other participants who also met the requirements; this affected the study because those participants who were not able to attend had already received the informed consent. The research findings were also affected by this because the social workers who were nominated by their supervisors

to form part of the research were more active and knowledgeable about environmental matters. (This only happened at one service point, where the two social workers nominated went to place a child at a child and youth care centre).

3.12 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

This section presents the empirical findings derived from the study. The findings are categorised and discussed under two sections: namely, the biographical information of the participants and the emerging themes and sub-themes from the research data.

3.12.1 Biographical information of the participants

The biographical information of the participants covers gender, age group, highest qualifications, years of practical experience, the sector they work in and the geographical areas of their operation.

As indicated in Table 3.1, more female social workers participated in the research than male social workers, which is in alignment with social work being a female-dominated profession. Most social workers who participated in the study were between the ages of 36 and 40, which means that they have experience in the profession and are therefore more aware of the societal issues in the communities in which they work.

Table 3:1:   Biographical information of participants

Participants	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Male
Age group	36–40	41–46	24–29	24–29	30–35	36–40	36–40	36–40	24–29	24–29
Highest tertiary qualification	BA(SW)	BA(SW)	BA(SW)	BA(SW)	BA(SW)	MSW	BA(SW)	BA(SW)	BA(SW)	BA(SW)
Years practicing as a social worker	11+	11+	4–6	4–6	4–6	11+	11+	7–10	4–6	1–3
Employment unit/sector in DSD	Early Childhood Development	Field and intake	Field and Intake	Field and Intake	Field and Intake	Field and Intake	Field and Intake	Field and Intake	Sustainable livelihoods	Early childhood Development
Geographical area of practice	Semi-urban	Semi-urban	Urban	Urban	Semi-urban	Semi-urban	Semi-urban	Semi-urban	Semi-urban	Semi-urban

Most of the participants in the study have not furthered their studies since the completion of their Bachelor of Social Work qualification. Only one obtained a master's degree in social work. All the participants were employed by the DSD under different sections: namely, Field and Intake, Early Childhood Development and Sustainable Livelihoods. Most of the participants are working in a semi-urban area where their offices are situated to make them accessible to disadvantaged communities. A few participants also work in rural areas, but the study focused on the location of their offices, which explains the response from semi-urban areas.

3.12.2   Themes and sub-themes

The empirical findings of the study are presented in this section by the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data. The findings were supported by the voices of the participants and verified by the literature where relevant. The themes and sub-themes of the study are summarised in Table 3.2.

Table 3:2:   Themes and sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
1. The participants' understanding of what constitutes environmental injustice	1.1. Pollution 1.2. increasing informal settlements 1.3. Poverty
2. Population groups disproportionately affected by environmental injustice	2.1. Women 2.2. Children 2.3. People living in poverty
3. Interventions and programmes at the DSD	3.1. Field and Intake services 3.2. Early Childhood Development 3.3. Sustainable Livelihood Developmet
4. Roles of social workers in promoting environmental justice	4.1. Social worker as educator 4.2. Social worker as enabler 4.3. Social worker as co-ordinator
5. Challenges experienced by social workers in rendering sustainable developmental services to communities	5.1. Lack of resources 5.2. Inability to render certain services due to specialisation

Theme 1:   Participants' understanding of what constitutes environmental injustice

Findings indicate that the concept of environmental injustice is understood differently by social workers from different departmental units/sections of specialisation. This is because their area of specialisation determines the level of exposure to environmental injustices. Participants' responses indicated that environmental injustice affects every community where they render services. However, pollution, an increase in informal settlements, unemployment and poverty were mostly emphasised as environmental injustices in their communities by participants in the sections Sustainable Livelihoods, and Early Childhood Development. These environmental injustices are discussed as sub-themes below.

The views of the participants of what constitutes environmental injustices indicates understanding that environmental injustices are based mostly on the fact that some communities or certain groups are disproportionately subjected to higher levels of environmental risks than others. Elliott (2013:94) posits that poor people have been regularly portrayed as both victims and unwilling agents of environmental degradation. Efforts to defeat poverty and pursue sustainable development will be in vain if environmental degradation and depletion of natural resources continue unabated. The literature states that environmental issues are directly related to poverty and adversely affect those very societies that social workers seek to help, especially the poor (Gray & Coates, 2015:502).

Sub-theme 1.1. Pollution

Participants indicated pollution as more prevalent in the areas which they serve air pollution, such as smoke, plastic litter, water pollution and dumping of trash. Furthermore, pollution contributes to ill health, as when water is contaminated with chemicals.

The following responses capture the views of participants with regards to pollution:

> P3:   *'I can say its pollution, pollution is the main problem in our area, such as air pollution, for example, air pollution it has different sections. We have*

littering of plastics along the roads and air pollution, which can be caused by the smoke.'

P10: *'Okay, with regard to the injustices that are common within the community we [are] working in, that is in Nigel, it's water pollution because we have, we have a river, we have a river yeah down the line, and we also have the firms that are surrounding us, so what usually happens is that they usually dump things at the, within that river and then those chemicals when they, when they rot, or when they get expired then they, how do I put this, okay, they make some sort of a smell within that river so it comes out and then it affects us, so I'd say it's water as well as, yeah, it's water, it's water pollution because they dump the things there and then at the end of the day it affects us because that bad smell, it comes to us and then at the end of the day we have, we end up having people crying with sinus and so forth and so forth, yeah.'*

P5: *'I think that the most common things that I found is that there are a lot of dumping areas, where we find that there is a lot of trash. If I can put it that way, that people live in certain dumping areas, that itself causes [the] environment to be polluted because now if you are going to dump dead animals in the area it is going to smell and it will impact in the community at large, because people living around dumping areas will not be able to sleep well and even smell the environment well.'*

Furthermore, findings indicated that pollution, including noise pollution, does not only affect people's health, but it also influences social work service delivery, especially when social workers conduct interviews with clients amidst the noise coming from the companies where their offices are located.

P10: *'You can't, you really can't concentrate if you're having clients because most of, most of the time within the social work then dealing with the, with the one-on-one cases, so if there's noise then you can't really put a focus and then we've been laying complaints, but then there's nothing they can*

do because they're also working, you get what I'm saying so yeah it's really disturbing the services, but then yeah, I can't say we, we used to it but then yeah, it's, it's disturbing the services that we are rendering now.'

As is evident from these responses, pollution is a problem in the City of Ekurhuleni. Studies suggest that factories and other industrial facilities have produced air pollution since the emergence of the industrial age by burning fuels, carrying out chemical processes and releasing dust and other particulates (Kielmas, 2018). In line with what the participants mentioned, Miller and Spoolman (2008:462) are of the view that water pollution includes physical, chemical, and organic pollution at surface level (rivers, lakes, ponds, and sea) because the industrial and residential sewer system discharges without any treatment. In addition to air pollution, findings suggest that the constant leakage of sewage pipes is a major challenge in the City of Ekurhuleni.

Sub-theme 1.2: Increasing informal settlements

Findings show that increasing informal settlements is an environmental injustice, as experienced by communities at City Ekurhuleni. While people flock to the cities in search of job opportunities, this results in an increase of informal settlements, characterised by the lack of services and poor living conditions. The poor are mostly affected. The following statement represents the views of participants on increasing informal settlements and the associated challenges for their well-being:

> P9*:	'I think the issue of informal settlement, right, yes, that one I think it's a big issue for us as a country. In all our communities, there are informal settlements, right, so, I'm not sure if you'll want me to go through as to a sustainable livelihood, how did we identify that it's such a problem.'*

> P4:	'*I think people living in poverty, people living in poverty, especially those living in shacks and disadvantaged areas like locations.*'

> P9:	'*They don't have clinics, enough clinics, if there is a clinic, clinics are so far, far away from their communities, they don't, generally it's a struggle.'*

Participants indicated that people who reside in informal settlements find it difficult to break free from these injustices because of the living arrangements and lack of

resources at the settlements. Being captive in an overcrowded space intensifies exposure to pollution in the absence of resources such as electricity. These environmental injustices are reflected in the following statements:

> P4: **'**They *cannot even get away from the places that they stay in like such as shacks. If maybe they are staying in a shack and unemployed, they cannot go out of that environment. Instead, they just should live in such environment.'*

> P7: **'**So*, I'll say that also overcrowding, overcrowding it's also one of the environmental injustices that we experience in this environment.***'**

> P6: *'Yes, since it's semi-urban, there are squatter camps around the location so most of them they are using fire to cook the food.'*

Literature affirms the findings on informal settlements as Schwartzman (2008:155) states: achieving sustainability not only depends on the land, water, energy, and biological resources that support human life, but also on the humans who share these resources. Dominelli (2012:49, 52) mentions that urbanisation results in people sharing small spaces and limited resources, and for these people to make ends meet, the physical environment is often degraded. Likewise, Uniyal, Paliwal, Saun and Sharma (2017:04) note that overpopulation severely affects the quality of life by imposing a burden on existing resources to fulfil the basic needs of huge populations which exacerbate poverty.

Sub-theme 1.3: Poverty

A few participants identified poverty as a serious environmental injustice in the communities in which they work. They also regarded poverty as the leading cause of environmental injustice in these communities. According to them, pollution, lack of resources and increasing informal settlements (see Sub-themes 1.1 and 1.2) are due to poverty. Poverty also influences access to education and health services, as reflected in participants' views:

P3:   *'Its poverty, yeah but the main ones are poverty and lack of resources, lack of education, though the schools are available but lack education.'*

P9:   *'So, during that whole process of us collecting our database, doing all those profiling, that's how I've identified poverty, the issue of poverty in Gauteng, it's such an issue because you come across issues of sickness, people are sick there.'*

Furthermore, poverty results from high unemployment in the communities, which, in turn, leads to an increase in child abuse and domestic violence.

P4:   *'But now I am in, in statutory work and I have worked with so many people with different social issues and then the social-environmental injustice that I have realised it's poverty and unemployment, and because of that unemployment, so many problems unfolding from that problem because most of the time there is gender-based violence, there is child abuse, there is teenage pregnancy as well.'*

Poverty is the reason for many dysfunctional families in communities because families are not able to cope with the conditions that they find themselves in which in turn, contributes to children often being abandoned and the continuation of the poverty cycle.

P3:   **'Yes***, it is, these injustices affect the community so much because most of the family cannot survive under the circumstances. The family is breaking down once they have this problem then after having so much fights they, they separate, the children are growing up in a broken family, and then when children grow up in a broken family they end up in the street and then these social workers have to remove the children to a place of safety which is also not a good environment for the children as well because they are growing up without a love for the parent because they don't have their parent in those places of safety, so that's how children are being affected by this problem as well.'*

The findings emphasise poverty as a threat to environmental justice because marginalised populations are more subjected to the effects of pollution, lack of resources and unemployment due to their financial status. The 2030 Agenda (UN,

2015) prioritised the ending of poverty in 'all its forms everywhere' because poverty is the major cause and effect of global environmental problems.

Dominelli (2012) furthermore asserts that poverty is a disaster that is exacerbated by environmental degradation. Environmental injustices influence the sustainability of communities. The findings in terms of unemployment confirm what Lombard (2014:353) says that there is a close link between employment and poverty reduction at the micro- and macroeconomic levels.

Theme 2: Population groups disproportionately affected by environmental injustices

Findings showed that certain population groups in a community are more vulnerable to the influences of environmental injustices than others. Women and children are the most severely affected due to societal expectations of the role of woman, which limit their opportunities to improve their livelihoods. As indicated in Sub-theme 1.3, poverty is a major contributing factor to environmental injustice. Poor people, in general, are vulnerable to poverty, but more so if they are women and children. In their working environment, the participants singled out women, children and people who are poor as population groups most affected by environmental injustices. This will be discussed next as sub-themes.

Sub-theme 2.1: Women

The findings indicate that in addition to the skewed perception of the role of women in society, they often lack skills to break away from the cycle of poverty. Furthermore, participants indicated that women are more vulnerable because of the structural and gender inequality that still exists. The effect is that girls and women are often socialised to believe that they depend on men for financial support.

The vulnerability of women and girls is reflected in participants' views:

P6: *'So, in terms of, I don't have the statistics but based on my experiences and the cases that we work with, it's mostly females who seem to be more affected.'*

P4: *'Lack of education and more it's because of our societal roles that women are supposed to look up to men to be providers, so women are not*

motivated to be independent and that one we also see mostly when dealing with the roles, our girl children like often they have social problems, come to the office and you always like recently we deal a lot with cases plan, parental cases whereby fathers want access. So, most of those cases, 70% we are dealing with the youth, whereby the girls have certain expectations in terms of the males who must be the ones who must support and all that, yeah.'

The findings are supported by Erickson (2012:184), stating that it is communities of people who live in poverty, women and children, people of colour, and 'countries or areas with less power in the global arena', that are most affected by environmental injustices (Erickson, 2012:184). Participants' views are an indication that gender inequality is still a serious concern, especially when dealing with issues of environmental injustices in society. This shows the stigma and social exclusion that women are facing in the City of Ekurhuleni.

Alston (2006:17) highlights the issue of gender inequalities in terms of the roles that women are expected to play, such as childbearing, cleaning, cooking and fetching wood, which is not considered as a 'real' job while 'real' jobs are perceived to be done by men. UNDP (2016) points out that gender inequalities are embedded in social norms and long-standing patterns of exclusion of women in household and community decision making, which limits women's opportunities and choices. Midgley (2014:55) attests to the fact that women need special consideration in the development process as they are among the poorest in the world.

Sub-theme 2.2: Children

As indicated in Sub-theme 2.2, girls are affected as they grow up to be the women that mostly bear the brunt as a vulnerable group. However, participants also identified children, girls and boys, as falling into the category of being disproportionately affected by environmental injustices. As mentioned in Sub-theme 1.3, children are often abandoned and caught up in conflicts among families because of poverty. They also suffer more due to poor living conditions and lack of services such as day-care centres and safe playing areas. Views of the participants are captured below as follows:

P1: *'The, the people in the community which, actually everyone in the community can be affected, including the children.'*

P2: *'Okay, for instance, if people are playing, maybe it's boys they're playing with a ball, and there is some leakage of sewage running on the street, if the ball maybe can roll in that, in that sewage; obviously, they will, they will want to take that ball and it will be dirty, and will sometimes maybe it can even be mixed with some faeces there, and they will want to take it and continue with their games or playing.'*

P8: *'But I believe the most affected [are] the children because they are caught in the middle of domestic violence because most of the time when parents are not working, they fight so often because they cannot provide. The man feels that he is not good enough because he is not providing, and then they always fight. So, the children are the ones who are most affected because they grow in an environment which is not conducive, the environment which doesn't support them to grow as children [are] supposed to grow in that environment.'*

One participant also highlighted that lack of day-care facilities in the communities delays the developmental milestones of children:

P10: 'And then you'll find children, young children they are not attending crèches you understand, children they are supposed to be at crèche, you go there at 10 o'clock in the morning and then children are just sitting there, or they are just playing there and mind you they play in dangerous places whereby there are holes, toilet holes, you see all those things, and then you are thinking that but this child is missing out on a child's development.'

From these views, it is evident that children's safety, health, and education are directly influenced by environmental injustices. The human rights-based approach pursues a vision of realising the rights of every child, especially the most disadvantaged, and responds to the call to 'leave no child behind' (UN, 2015:15), so that the rights of every child, everywhere, will be fulfilled. Research by Rogge (2000:46) shows that poor children are

at even greater risk due to the combined effects of economic and environmental problems.

Sub-theme 2.3:   People living in poverty

The role of poverty in environmental injustices has been discussed in Themes 1 and 2. Therefore, all people living in poverty were identified by some of the participants as a population group that is severely affected by environmental injustices. The views of the participants in this regard are captured as follows:

> P3:   *'Mostly, okay I can say many people they are affected by this pollution; however, those who are vulnerable, they are those who are poor. For example, if you're not [a] poor person, you're still, you can still be affected because you are, you are staying around that community.'*

> P4:   *'… I think mostly is the poor because…'*

> P7:   *'Then it becomes a problem to develop those areas where [the] poor are living because now we can't say it affects the rich, because the rich are now staying in the suburbs.'*

The findings that poor people are vulnerable to environmental injustices resonates with the views of Kemp and Palinkas (2015:3), as well as Green (2012:167), saying that vulnerable groups are affected more severely when there are environmental challenges. However, Healy (2014:106) points out that the discourse on environmental social work challenges the profession's focus being exclusively on the human environment, and consequently neglecting the non-human environment and holistic responses to human need. According to the United Nations (2015:5), sustainable development 'recognises that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, combating inequality within and among countries, preserving the planet, creating sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and fostering social inclusion are linked to each other and are interdependent'.

Theme 3: Interventions and programmes that promote environmental justice

As mentioned in the biographical information, participants in the study render services in different sectors, including the Field and intake, Sustainable Livelihood and Early

Childhood Development at their respective service points across the City of Ekurhuleni.

Participants from the Field and Intake section explained that most of their work focuses on prevention and early intervention services, such as foster care placement, parenting, and life skills programmes. In the Sustainable Livelihood section, participants responded that their unit mostly focuses on identifying marginalised communities, empowering them with developmental skills and funding emerging business and Non-Profit Organisations.

Participants from the Early Childhood Development mostly focus on ensuring the safety of children at the early childhood centres and partial care services programmes and ensuring compliance with the South African Government Regulation Policy for Registration on Early Childhood Development. The sub-themes that are discussed next are in accordance with the specialised units in which the participants work.

Sub-theme 3.1   Field and intake

The findings indicate that participants in Field and Intake are more focused on outreach programmes, such as parenting skills and life skills, which they believe are not addressing environmental injustices in their communities. The objective of protection and statutory services is to help clients and families live in a safe environment where their rights are protected and respected, and their well-being is ensured, as stipulated in the constitution. However, most of the participants believed that their programmes are not in response to environmental issues, although one indicates the underpinning potential.

> P2:   *'I can't say in my department or our sector we are involved in any projects that deals with environmental justice because mostly what we are dealing with is statutory work. So, the programmes that we run are basically about parenting skills, promoting foster care, I think we are not, in our section that is not our core business but maybe those at sustainable livelihood section and other sections in the department, maybe they are the ones more focused in dealing with environmental projects.'*

> P5:   *'I really cannot think of any that we do directly that has such an impact, because my sector specifically works with social issues, and I do*

understand that sometimes if there is an environmental issue it can lead to social issues, but we don't work with that directly.'

P4: *'Yeah, we do have programmes of parenting skills.'*

P6: *'Okay, since like I could say we spent 80% of our time or of our, our work doing foster care, providing SRDs [Social Relief of Distress] and parenting plans, we can maybe shift our focus, or maybe balance our work by, by involving the members of the community in doing more of awareness and, and helping them to be independent. Instead of just providing money, money, money to the community members.'*

P8: *'[I] am currently doing statutory and fieldwork, from my organisation, I offer awareness on social services. Now, I do not think I am doing enough to the community looking at the environment side because my work only focuses on statutory, yes.'*

Some participants, however, recognised their involvement in environmental issues during life skills programmes where learners are educated about hygiene, and they are encouraged to look after their surroundings and avoid littering. Participants' views are captured as follows:

P7: *'Yes, we do, we do have such programmes whereby, sorry, whereby we go to the schools and, and render services like life skills whereby we teach children about, and we also can sometimes invite people from [the] health department to, to help our children in the communities that they must every time wash their hands and they must, they must not, they must not, they must not litter papers everywhere. So, we do have such programmes where we render life skills in, in as broad as it can be.'*

P2: *'Yes, we do have, we do run, like in most of our life skills programmes we also sometimes in, invite children who are in grade 10, 11 and 12 to teach them about career exhibitions and whereby we, we encourage them to study, that there are bursaries these days if they study and get their matric, there are bursaries to further their studies, their studies and there are some learnership[s], even at our department we do have*

learnerships that we issue in order to, to eradicate poverty in our communities.'

Findings indicated that although participants could identify environmental injustices in their communities, they have limited opportunity to attend to these injustices, which is mainly due to their job specification. Besthorn (2014:15) concurs by stating that social workers primarily focus on people and thus on social sustainability and less on environmental degradation and justice. However, scholars such as Erikson (2012), Dominelli (2012) and McKinnon (2008) mention that there is a need for social workers to shift from only focusing on social and economic aspects to include environmental matters.

Sub-theme 3.2:   Early Childhood Development

Participants from Early childhood development program are responsible for childhood development and partial care services programmes where they focus mainly on ensuring the safety of children by accommodating them at day-cares. Furthermore, they also ensure that pre-schools and crèche owners adhere to the safety rules and regulations to promote the well-being of children. These services include measures to protect children from neglect and possible abandonment where they may end up in the street. Participants' responses are captured as follows:

> P1:   *'Okay, the programmes that we do in our department, we, we are dealing with partial case service and Early Childhood Development programme in our unit, as well as developing and monitoring child and youth care centres.'*

> P1:   *'So, what we are doing in the partial care services is that we make sure that children on the streets are accommodated in the partial care facilities to, to limit the issues of child abuse on the streets or maybe abandonment of children or neglect of children. We also do door-to-door campaigns to the communities, to let them know of the partial care facilities that they can bring their children there. Irrespective of whether the parent can be able to pay for the child or not, so that we limit those experiences of child abuse in the communities, or abandonment, or neglect.'*

> P10:   'We don't fund the crèches who are, who we see, the crèches that we see that they are not in a good state of operating, we really not fund them. Instead, we encourage them, okay we, yeah, we do approach them, yeah and engage with them on how to do things right, if maybe there are near the pipeline, to find another place where it will be applicable, yeah and all that, yeah.'

The statement of Participant P10 reveals that social workers observe the infrastructure and environment or early childhood facilities, but maybe they are less aware that it relates to environmental injustices.

Early Childhood and Development program also renders educational and empowerment services to the parents and caregivers, which creates an opportunity to share information that benefits children:

> P1:   'We also are offering parental programmes in the Early Childhood Development centres to the practitioners so that they can share information with the parents in the communities so that parents can develop parenting skills and knowledge of what is required of them in terms of the Children's Act.'

Another participant from the unit emphasised the forums that serve as a platform to address any issue and challenges faced either by parents of the learners or ECD practitioners:

> P10:   'Yeah, another intervention is that we, in the ECD centres, we, we have created forums with the ECD owners, whereby we discuss issues, we discuss challenges, we discuss solutions with them, we make them share information among themselves so that they continue and remain sustainable by, through empowering themselves as they're discussing their issues and how they go about sorting out the, the issues that they encounter as they are rendering services to the children in the ECD centres.'

The findings on Early Childhood Developmental program indicate that participants from this unit are mainly focusing on ensuring the safety of children by making early childhood development centres available and accessible to communities. Their

services are not consciously and specifically focusing on environmental protection and the interrelation between the physical environment and the communities where they work.

However, they do see the potential in including more environmental issues in life skills programmes for the children and infusing environmental matters concerning child protection and development into the parental programmes. The views of the participants corroborate Erickson (2012:188), that if social workers do not change their mindset deliberately to include the environment in their practice, it will complicate their work in promoting social justice for the users of their services.

Sub-theme 3.3: Sustainable Livelihood Development

The Sustainable Livelihood is the section which focuses explicitly on addressing environmental injustices in the communities; it presents programmes that are aimed at alleviating poverty, empowering and funding small businesses and other developmental projects and programmes to ensure sustainability. The programmes are aimed at empowering communities to be self-reliant and participate in the economic development of society by referring people with skills for further training to the relevant organisations funded by the DSD.

The following quotes from Participant P9 reflect the different components of the approach to sustainable livelihoods:

> P9: 'Okay, we as sustainable livelihoods right, we, we are about community development, we have Non-Profit Organisation, youth development funding projects right, school uniform project, and then we have [the] dignity packs project whereby we provide dignity packs to needy young people, and then we have,

The same participant further elaborated that their projects incudes empowering youth with developmental skills.

> P9: 'We also accept them let's say for sewing, right, we also have Non-Profit Organisations that are training people in sewing so, some will even say no, after training we are interested in starting our own co-operative you

understand, whereby we'll be sewing clothes and school uniform[s] so that we sustain the what, our livelihood, like that.'

This approach includes community profiling to ensure that the marginalised populations are targeted to receive the services.

> P9: *'I explains the first two, on one project is the one that I've mentioned whereby we doing profiling of a community, and then after that, we do our analysis, and then after that, we do our referrals, we do our recommendations as well.'*

The different programmes in this section engage different stakeholders, including higher tertiary institutions and government departments.

> P9: *'I passed with such good results and I'll like to go and study at a college or university and then obviously you have to link those people with the relevant universities and departments.'*

The 2030 Global Agenda (UN, 2015) speaks about ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture. Access to food is a human right (Hawkins, 2010), and human rights are embedded in a developmental approach (Patel, 2015). Participant P9 pointed out that the focus on sustainable livelihoods does not exclude programmes that are aimed at providing food parcels to communities to promote their well-being.

> P9: *'So, and then you come across someone who will say we sleep without food in this house, so in such cases what we do, the programme, what we provide there is a food parcel'*

According to the Framework for Social Welfare Services (Department of Social Development, 2013:8), the developmental approach to social welfare covers socio-economic rights, including the right to social assistance and anti-poverty strategies. The finding is an indication that the social development approach is essentially a people-centred approach to development that stimulates citizen participation (Patel, 2015:30). The study has shown that environmental issues are complex challenges faced by communities, which requires social workers to employ a range of intervention skills in the system to deal with these challenges (Rinkel & Powers, 2017:21).

Theme 4:   Social worker's roles in promoting environmental justice

The participants identified three roles for social workers that could benefit communities and promote environmental justice. Although participants mentioned different social workers' roles, they still felt that they should be capacitated to better understand what environmental justice entails by attending training and engaging with departments that are custodians of ensuring that people are living in favourable environments. The findings indicated that the units of employment played a role in social workers' views on having a role to play in environmental justice as Participant P5 observed:

> P5: *'I don't know if I can say my role as a statutory social worker because it will be a different thing, I think I would have to change altogether from what I am doing and focus on a new thing which will be a new thing because I have never done it before.'*

The roles of educator, enabler and co-ordinator featured as sub-themes are now discussed.

Sub-theme 4.1:   Social worker as educator

The participants indicated that social workers have a role as educators in promoting environmental justice, mostly through awareness campaigns and parenting skills. The participants explained their roles as follows:

> P4:   *'Unfortunately on our side, those are situation[s] that we cannot address, the only thing that we can is only to have programmes, especially in June time, just to make awareness concerning fire burns and everything.'*

> P3:   *'If we can all understand that, that we really have to help the disadvantaged people in the communities by giving them information, taking them by hand and showing them what to do and then encouraging them to move out of the situations that they find themselves in.'*

> P1:   *'As a social worker, as social workers, we need to act as educators to our communities sometimes by empowering them, you can do that by making them aware of the danger that can damage our environment. If our communities are empowered, obviously, there will be a good*

> *sustainable environment in the future, and our next or coming generation will be able to be sustained.'*

> P5: *'Therefore, educational programmes awareness campaigns will be the best way to address the situation.'*

The view of the participants that their services are not yet integrating environmental justice with their daily practice is supported in the literature, stating that while social workers might have an interest in the physical environment, they may not yet have an integrated model of intervention that integrates an environmental focus (Coates & Gray, 2012:233; Peeters, 2012:288).

To play the role of educator more effectively, Cumby (2016:70) recommends that social workers have access to training if they wish to organise activities around specific environmental issues. They could also be encouraged to develop new ways to think of, talk about and incorporate environmental issues into social work practice.

Sub-theme 4.2.   Social worker as enabler

Participants recognised the importance of empowering communities to facilitate capacity building for self-reliance and independence. This, in turn, will enable them to deal with social issues, including poverty, child neglect, abuse and gender-based and domestic violence. Participants' views in empowering communities are captured as follows:

> P10: *'… and then people should be empowered regularly.'*

> P3: *'Like we must take even the communities as part of our work, and so I feel like that if maybe it can be, it can be considered and taken into consideration that rendering community development and helping people to be independent out there is still part of the work that must be done on at least a monthly basis and we must also report on it in terms of our stats just like we do with foster care and parenting plans and so forth.'*

> P6: *'You know, building the capacity of the people and making sure that they can stand up for themselves and not depending on the system.'*

> P4: *'Maybe we can allow or assist families in, in engaging in small businesses where they will be able to, to earn an income because of those businesses and then we can, by doing that, then we will be sustaining their family, and then we will be dealing with all the problems of poverty, we will be dealing with the problem of domestic violence, we will be dealing with the problem of child neglect and child abuse, and teenage pregnancy. So, if we can assist them in small businesses, then I believe we would have solved almost all those other problems.'*

The findings emphasise that a shift in the focus of service delivery to sustainable development is in line with the premise of the DSD (2012:12) that while government has a role to play in social development, social security should be a measure that largely provides immediate relief for those that can be taken off the system and be redirected to developmental social welfare or community development services, to ensure the sustainability of intervention efforts.

Sub-theme 4.3:   Social worker as co-ordinator

Participants recognised the importance of the co-ordinator role of social workers in bringing various role players together, including the community, and coordinating their resources and activities to promote environmental justice. Participants further mentioned that their work at times requires expert opinions, and therefore partnering with stakeholders is important. The importance of partnering with stakeholders is reflected in the following statement:

> P10: *'Okay, I believe the only suggestion is just for us to work together with other stakeholders just to keep our relationship alive so that we can be able to render more effective services with other stakeholders because the services that we need to render it will also require us to, to have a good relationship with other stakeholders to tackle all the environmental injustices in our community.'*

Moreover, participants believed that collaborating with different stakeholders will only depend on the positive involvement of the DSD with other government departments and Non-Profit Organisations. This sentiment is captured as follows:

> P2: *'I think it will be important for our department [Social Development] not to exclude itself in partnering and to be actively involved, for us to have that expertise where we can get to that point to say we know about environmental justice, then we can be able to empower our communities and our clients.'*

Most of the participants identified local municipalities and the Department of Agriculture as relevant stakeholders to work with, especially when addressing environmental injustices, since they already have programmes, such as gardening projects, which directly address environmental and related injustices. Participants were of the view that they need support from the municipal offices and other small businesses in the communities to direct their service towards the promotion of environmental justice. Participants articulated their views on the municipality and Department of Agriculture as follows:

> P4: *'I mean municipality, I believe they can assist as well, yes, the municipality I believe they can assist because they also do have programmes as well.'*

> P3: *'I think maybe even the people from almost all the departments like since we have, we have Department of Agriculture in our building but we never had any programme that we, we've rendered together with them. So, I think maybe if we can approach them and try to understand how, in which way can they assist our, our communities in eradicating poverty by working with their own hands, and by ploughing and maybe making their own food instead of buying every, every little thing.'*

> P10: *'Okay, that's where they come in, when we doing our assessments, that's where the health come in because we as social workers we not familiar with how the structure should be built and what not or how infertile the soil is or what not, so the health that's where it comes in, usually maybe if I'm not assessing the environment that the crèche is operating in, or the firm, let me say, let me example with the firm.'*

Participants highlighted the inclusion of communities as stakeholders in partnerships to promote environmental justice.

> *P4:*   *'I think the best way is to get community involved.'*
>
> *P1:*   *'I think the best way is to get community involved; it is very important that the municipality [does] promote sustainable healthy environment, but it is also, it is also the role of the community members to keep their environment clean, so yes, the dumping areas should not be there, and people responsible for waste should remove it, but the people should not be dumping in those areas, so we need to encourage littering that littering is wrong and people need to know exactly where to put their cabbages instead of just dumping them in area because it does not only impact the environment but also people living in that area.'*

In corroborating the findings of this study, Rainey, et al (2003:573) affirm that creating sustainable community development programmes will require participation from citizens and several local and regional institutions. Chiwara and Lombard (2018:300, 304) argue that green social work can enable social workers to influence communities in respect of socio-economic and environmental aspects, especially by forming significant partnerships.

Theme 5:   Challenges experienced by social workers to promote environmental justice

Participants concurred that several challenges make it difficult for them to render sustainable services to communities, especially services which address environmental injustices (see Sub-themes 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 for environmental injustices prevalent in the City of Ekurhuleni). Participants indicated the lack of resources and too-specialised services as challenges to promote environmental justice to contribute to the sustainable communities mentioned by participants. These challenges will subsequently be discussed as sub-themes.

Sub-theme 5.1.   Lack of resources

Participants were generally of the view that the lack of resources makes it difficult for them to render services that promote environmental justice and contribute to sustainable communities, even though they do have an interest in doing so. However, they also acknowledged that they should reach out to other stakeholders to share and

coordinate resources (as discussed in Sub-theme 4.4). Participants' views on resources were articulated as follows:

> P4: 'The challenges right, will include, if like, I also said the lack of resources.'

> P9: 'No matter how passionate you are, but it just becomes a struggle, even impossible sometimes if the resources are not available for you to do your job. And yeah, I think once we start that then we can go to.'

> P4: 'We can, I believe social workers can succeed. But there will be challenges as well. It will also depend on the, on the availability of resources that may assist them to start those businesses hence I said we need to, we need to have other relationship[s] with other stakeholders that can have those other resources for the clients to start over or to start their own businesses. Because as social workers, we can only assist with ideas, but other department[s] and other stakeholders maybe can assist with other resources that we cannot offer.'

The findings resonate with the view of Lombard and Kleijn (2006:223), who state that social workers who work from a developmental approach have difficulties with following it through due to high caseloads, few resources and low salaries and that a deliberate mind shift is necessary to overcome these challenges. McKinnon (2008:259) contributes another viewpoint, that social workers are not always encouraged by their organisations to engage with the natural environment as their roles are exclusively to promote social justice.

Sub-theme 5.2:   Specialised social service delivery

The participants' views were that social workers are not sufficiently involved with environmental justice issues because of the job specification at different units in the department. Their views were captured as follows:

> P10: 'I think social as I said that, as social workers, we don't work with everything. There are those who're specialising with other thin[gs], for me, I think is, it would be better if all of us we are given that chance, to work with, with different sections, so that we'll be able to intervene from different angles.'

P4:   *'Unfortunately, on our side, those are situations that we cannot address.'*

P2:   *'I am currently doing statutory and fieldwork, from my organisation, I offer awareness on social services. Now, I do not think I'm doing enough to the community looking at the environment side because my work only focuses on statutory, yes.'*

Findings indicate that participants also believed that for them to be fully engaged in rendering services that promote environmental justice, they should be trained and read literature on the topic so that they can have a clear understanding on how they can incorporate environmental aspects into their day-to-day functions. Their views are captured as follows:

P9:   *'Yeah, I said within every unit in the department, even community development, and then obviously, we'll need trainings, we need to be trained on such issues of how to deal with environmental what, what injustices and all those things, training should be provided. Yes, and then, I think yeah, provide training, yeah and then resources as well for us to do our job out there in the communities, 'cos if you don't have resources it becomes hard to do your job.'*

P9:   *'But for individual development for myself as a social worker I think I just need to read but, for me to read I think firstly, I must know that I need information on this aspect. If the department does raise awareness to us as social workers'*

P10:   *'Firstly, like empowerment in terms of education, a social worker, 'cos remember what we learned from university, on what social work is all about, but I think that will be considered also as, you know, sort of a specialised, a specialised field or if we can consider generic, but maybe like it will start from the education, the social work degree itself on what like, what can we do and how can we restructure our, our course, our social work course, so, it needs to, yeah start with the, the, what can I say, the training itself.'*

P10:   *'I think I'm (getting), I think that will really help a lot like as I mentioned the ecosystems approach because most of these programmes that we*

deal with, they stand from the, like the surrounding itself so if we can deal with that as the core, like we will be getting to the core of the problem rather than to just look at the social problems only, not realising that it is the bigger environment that has an influence. So, if we can look at the social workers, then we will definitely be dealing with like the real issue rather than to just touch on issues that stands from the bigger environment.'

However, one participant added that there is a gap at the academic level, which should also be taken into consideration, more specifically in terms of including environmental justice as part of the curriculum.

P9: *'Yeah, I think the problem is the curriculum as well plus they, they do try to, to give us as much, but I think there need to be changes as well, social work must be more realistic now 'cos for me, it's more theoretical.'*

The findings resonate with the need for social workers to make a shift to embrace an ecological perspective (Besthorn, 2014) and understand the role of social work in relation to environmental justice and sustainability (Hawkins, 2010:69). McKinnon (2008:256) points out that literature on environmental social work is scarce and Dominelli (2012:80) adds that the role of social workers is unclear regarding working in the environment.

3.13 SUMMARY

This chapter provided an overview of the research methodology, the ethical considerations considered throughout the study and the limitations of the study. Five themes emerged from the data. The participants identified pollution, poverty and increasing informal settlements as environmental injustices prevalent in the City of Ekurhuleni. In addition, the findings showed that the populations disproportionately affected by environmental injustices are women, children and people living in poverty.

Findings revealed that participants were more inclined to integrate environmental issues in the services that they are rendering at their respective units. The Sustainable Livelihood Unit is more engaged in promoting environmental justice and sustainable development than the other units. The participants identified the roles of educator, co-

ordinator, and enabler as prominent in promoting environmental justice. Challenges to promote environmental justice and contribute to sustainable communities included a lack of resources and too-specialised services in the DSD. The key findings of the study are summarised in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4   KEY FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter concludes the study. It starts with a discussion on the extent to which the goal and objectives of the study were achieved. In the next section, the key findings of the study are presented and discussed, followed by the conclusions drawn from the study. Finally, recommendations are made, based on the findings and conclusions.

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 City of Ekurhuleni.

The goal of the study was attained by achieving the following objectives:

Objective 1

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

The objective was achieved mainly in Chapter 2. The theory of green social work (Dominelli, 2012) was outlined in Chapter 2 (see Sub-section 2.2) as a framework to enable social workers to integrate the physical environment with their practice to build sustainable communities. In Sub-section 2.3 of Chapter 2, Elliott (2013:85) mentions that poverty is a major cause and effect of global environmental problems. Bullards and Evans (2003:17) point out that environmental problems are interlinked in relation to how the human society is structured and hence, the exploitation of the environment also implies the exploitation of the human population.

To achieve sustainable communities there should be a balance between the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development; hence, promoting social, economic and environmental justice can be achieved by focusing on interventions that eradicate poverty and combat inequality while preserving the planet (United Nations, 2015:5).

Objective 2

- To explore social workers' understanding of environmental justice.

This objective was addressed in Chapter 2 (see Sub-section 2.3) where Erikson (2012), Dominelli (2012) and McKinnon (2008) refer to a need for social workers to shift from only focusing on social and economic aspects to include environmental matters.

Furthermore, in Sub-section 2.5, Elliott (2011:104) indicates that social development offers a progressive social work model in practice with the goal of achieving social justice and empowerment of the oppressed, marginalised and excluded populations, which, in turn, brings about a balance between environmental and human concerns regarding these issues. The objective was also addressed in Chapter 3 (see Theme 1) where the participants indicated their understanding of environmental injustices as pollution, increasing informal settlements and poverty. Participants' understanding of environmental injustice was expanded in Theme 2, where they identified the population groups that are mostly exposed to environmental injustice and its consequences in the City of Ekurhuleni as women, children, and poor people.

Objective 3

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

In Chapter 2 (see Section 2.5), the researcher discussed different approaches and livelihood strategies that can be put in place to address the challenges that society experiences because of environmental degradation in which poverty is a key driver. Patel (2005:291) states that poverty reduction strategies are aimed at breaking the structural forces that cause poverty through the achievement of both economic growth and social investment in human development.

This objective was also achieved in Chapter 3 (see Theme 3) where participants in Chapter 3 (see Sub-theme 3) indicated that they contribute to safe environments for children through protection services, life skills programmes where learners are educated about hygiene and where they are encouraged to look after their surroundings and avoid littering. The Sustainable Livelihood Unit is involved in programmes that reduce poverty and contribute funds for small emerging business as a way of creating employment in the community.

Objective 4

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

The objective was addressed in Chapters 2 and 3. In Chapter 2 (see Section 2.6), Erikson, (2012:184) was referred to, indicating that social workers should integrate issues of the natural environment with human development into existing social work practice models if they want to contribute to sustainable communities. The argument was strengthened by Dominelli (2012:21) view that integrated social and economic models should be developed that take the natural environment into consideration.

In Sub-section 2.5.1 Midgely (2014) comment that social development theory discourages the isolation of the social sphere from the economic sphere in societies. The social, economic, and environmental dimensions of development are intertwined and are core in promoting sustainable communities (UN, 2015). In Chapter 2 (Section 2.7) the researcher discussed social workers' roles to promote sustainable communities as educator, enabler, and advocate under micro-, mezzo- and macro-levels of intervention.

In Chapter 3 participants identified the roles of educator, enabler, and co-ordinator as roles for promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities (see Sub-themes 4.1–4.3). However, some participants indicated that they experience challenges in promoting environmental justice due to the specialised nature of the services that they render (see Sub-theme 5.2). They said that they needed further training on promoting environmental justice (see Sub-theme 4.3).

Objective 5

- To propose recommendations for the role of social workers in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities.

This objective was addressed employing the recommendations made in this chapter (see Section 4.4) based on the findings and conclusions of the study.

4.3   KEY FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The key findings and conclusions drawn from the findings will be discussed in this section.

- Findings of the study indicate that participants understand environmental injustices such as pollution, increasing informal settlements and how these relate to poverty as the major consequences of environmental degradation. Furthermore, findings indicate how women, children and the poor are proportionally more affected by environmental injustices.

The conclusion is that social workers have a pivotal role to play in tackling environmental injustices, given the vulnerable population groups that they work with. The role becomes more prominent if social workers understand environmental injustice in relation to poverty and how it is intertwined with social injustices that keep vulnerable people excluded and exposed to environmental risks and social ills.

- While findings indicated that participants contribute to promoting environmental justice, their contributions were defined in relation to their scope of practice. Participants working in child protection, statutory services and early childhood development saw a limited role for social workers in promoting environmental justice, compared to social workers working in the unit for Sustainable Livelihoods. Life skills programmes include hygiene and a clean environment on a limited scale, while Sustainable Livelihoods target a broader scope through poverty alleviation and other developmental projects and programmes, empowerment, and funding of small businesses.

In the absence of a wider scope of implementation, it can be concluded that the participants do not yet fully grasp what green social work entails and how social workers can contribute to promoting environmental justice by integrating an environmental focus with social intervention strategies. Even the sustainable livelihood strategies do not show a strong integration of socio-economic models that consider the environment. Early childhood development programmes create an ideal platform to teach children about recycling by engaging the children, for example, in dropping waste in different bins, but also to learn about the environment, personal hygiene, water risks and sanitation in formal lessons and play activities. It is thus concluded that early childhood development cannot be seen in isolation from child protection services, and, in turn, in isolation of the child's right to a clean and healthy environment.

- The study identified three main roles for social workers in promoting environmental justice: educator, enabler, and co-ordinator. However,

participants indicated that they did not possess sufficient skills to play these roles competently, which explains the previous finding on the limited scope of practice in responding to environmental injustices.

The conclusion is that social workers have a significant role to play in increasing public awareness of people's environmental and other rights and how environmental injustices impede on their well-being. The roles of educator, co-ordinator, and enabler are not sufficient to address poverty and promote environmental justice. It can be concluded that social workers should see a pertinent role for themselves in fighting injustices by advocating for social, economic, and environmental justice to contribute to the well-being of women, children, and poor people. Included in this is fighting the structural injustices that exclude vulnerable groups, such as women and children, and challenging the systems that impede an inclusive and just society for all.

- Findings pointed out the importance for social workers to work in partnership with stakeholders, such as local municipalities, the Department of Agriculture, local business owners, and with communities in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities.

In conclusion, social workers have an essential role to play in facilitating meaningful partnerships to promote environmental justice for sustainable communities. Furthermore, social workers should work with various role players and with communities to protect the environment and address environmental degradation. Although social workers have a vital role to play, the achievement of environmental justice and sustainability not only depends on the intervention of the social worker but on the willingness and commitment of a community to change their behaviour and systems.

- The findings indicated that lack of resources, specialisation in service delivery in different units in the DSD and insufficient knowledge of how to deal with environmental injustices creates a barrier for social workers to render services and implement programmes that promote environmental justice and contribute to sustainable outcomes for communities.

It can be concluded that social workers need information and skills training in terms of green social work so that they will be able to incorporate socio-economic and

environmental aspects in the services and programmes that they render across the different units in the DSD.

4.4   RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the researcher makes the following recommendations in guiding the social workers' role in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities:

4.4.1   Incorporate environmental justice in all service delivery units of the DSD

The findings indicate that poor people are disproportionately located in degraded environments and exposed to poor housing, polluted water, and air. These vulnerable groups are the service users of the DSD. It is, therefore, important that the department develops programmes to fight injustices and inequities and focus on environmental justice to contribute to sustainable communities. These programmes should be developed across all the service units of the DSD. To facilitate this, the department should adopt a green social work practice model which is in alignment with developmental social work. Service delivery and programmes will be aligned in a way that will promote development in the communities where the natural environment and people are equally important and respected.

4.4.2   Training opportunities in environmental issues

The findings indicated that social workers from the City of Ekurhuleni possess insufficient knowledge and skills in their role in promoting environmental justice. Training should include a thorough understanding of green social work and how it relates to developmental social work and sustainable development. The DSD should work with relevant stakeholders and accredited training institutions to provide training on environmental issues. Jarvis (2017:28) aptly indicates that social work education must contribute to the existing scholarly research and connect social work's long-established social justice values and commitments with environmental justice issues.

4.4.3   Strengthening stakeholder partnerships

Findings revealed how important it is for social workers to collaborate with relevant stakeholders such as the Department of Agriculture, local municipalities, and local business owners to promote environmental justice successfully. However, sustainable

communities can only be achieved when environmental justice is promoted in close collaboration with communities. Community engagement will enable social workers to engage relevant stakeholders in support of the community's needs and strengths. Stakeholders, including social workers, should have clarity on their respective roles as required in a green social work practice model (Dominelli, 2012).

4.4.4   Further research

Further research is recommended in the respective units of the DSD to explore how environmental justice can be integrated in programmes by adopting a green social work practice model.

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APPENDIX A: UP ETHICAL CLEARANCE

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities
Research Ethics Committee

110 September 2018

Dear Ms Moela

Project:	**The role of social workers in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities from a government perspective in the City of Ekurhuleni**
Researcher:	**J Moela**
Supervisor:	**Prof A Lombard**
Department:	**Social Work and Criminology**
Reference number:	**25443799 (GW20180806HS) (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 Bomotho

Research Ethics Committee Members; Prof MME Schoeman (Deputy Dean); Prof KL Harris; Mr A Bizos; Dr L Blouland; Dr K Booyens; Dr A-M de Beer; Ms A dos Santos; Dr R Fasssel, Ms KT Grover der Andrew; Dr E Johnson; Dr W Kelaher; Mr A Mohamed; Dr O Putlaajili; Dr S Reyburn; Dr M Soer; Prof E Taljard; Prof V Thebe; Ms B Tsebe; Ms D Moxalapa

APPENDIX B: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH FROM DSD

GAUTENG PROVINCE
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Enquiries: Dr. Sello Mokoena
Tel: (011) 3557949
File no.: 2/9/02

MS JOYCE MOELA

Dear Ms Joyce Moela

**RE: APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE GAUTENG
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

Thank you for your application to conduct research within the Gauteng Department of Social Development.

Your application on the research on **"The role of social work in promoting environmental justice for sustainable communities"** has been considered and approved for support by the Department as it was found to be beneficial to the Department's vision and mission. The approval is subject to the Department's terms and conditions as endorsed on the 22nd of June 2018. In order for the department to learn and draw from the findings and recommendations of your study, please note that you are requested to provide the department with a copy of your dissertation/thesis once your study has been completed.

May I take this opportunity to wish you well on the journey you are about to embark on.

We look forward to a value adding research and a fruitful co-operation.

With thanks

Ms A HARTMANN
Deputy Director General: Support Services
Date: 4\ 7\ 2018

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANTS' INFORMED CONSENT

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities

Researcher: Joyce Moela
Tel: 011 242 3000
E-mail: mogoshadit.jm@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 the City of Ekurhuleni

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.

4. **Risks and discomforts:** There are no known risks and discomforts that may be endured by participants in this study.

5. **Benefits:** Participants will not receive any incentives for being involved in the study. The study will benefit the participants indirectly in that they will contribute to social work theory regarding social work and environmental justice.

6. **Participants' rights:** Participation in the study is voluntary and participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants have the right to refuse to answer any question that they do not wish to respond to.

7. **Confidentiality and anonymity:** Information collected in the study will be treated confidentially and the names of participants will not appear in the research report or the scientific journal in which the results will be published. Findings will not be presented in a way that could be directly linked to any specific participant.

8. **Person to contact:** If participants have questions or concerns relating to the study, they may contact the researcher at 011 242 3000 or email her at mogoshadit.jm@gmail.com

Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe
Lefapha la Bomotho

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW SCHEDUE

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:	

2. What is your age group?

Under 24	24-29	30-35	36-40	41-46	47-52	53+

3. What is your highest tertiary qualification?

……………………………

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

1-3	4-6	7-10	11+ years

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 do 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 they affect the sustainability of communities. How do you think, do they influence and challenge the role of social workers to shift focus to more sustainable practice that considers 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? What you think could strengthen the research findings?