

## Co-building and Co-existing in an Eco-Social World

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### Abstract

Co-building a new eco-social world calls for redesigning the policies and programmes that promulgate sustainability and equity. A sense of eco-social justice is a prerequisite to shaping the eco-social world. This article looks at existing socio-economic and environmental systems from a critical perspective and refers to the stands on which social workers should approach this issue. The article also calls for specific interventions and active engagements of social workers.

**Keywords:** Eco-Social World; Eco-Social Justice; Socio-Economic Systems; Social Work; India

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## Introduction

All over the world, Social Work Day is being celebrated with the advocacy of creating a new eco-social world, conserving equity and inclusiveness. 'Ubuntu' ('humanity towards others') in 2021 has led to the espousal of building a more sustainable 'eco-social' world, vesting the architectural role with social workers in 2022. The eco-social world is the conflation of the 'ecological' and 'social' world, where human and non-human worlds exist with equal significance (Jones, Miles, Francis, & Rajeev, 2011). Being a large landmass teeming more than 1.25 billion people, India has to think vehemently about maintaining a world that balances ecological and social considerations. The priorities like protecting the natural habitats of the wild, which are surrounded by human-dominated landscapes, require strong policies, partnerships and responsible field interventions (Reddy, Karanth, Kumar, Krishnaswamy, & Karanth, 2016). There are also many instances where the people reprimand the social order due to the natural resource requirements. Pulla, Ahmed and Pawar (2018) mention that a man in Maharashtra, India, married three women to ensure that sufficient water is being fetched to their household from far-off places by them, considering it as their sole responsibility. The inequalities created advertently and inadvertently continue to maintain disequilibrium in the country's socio-economic and environmental system. They are to be critically analysed so that social workers can act on those unbridled inequalities with effective policy practices.

### A new eco-social world

We live in an environment, and we are part of a larger environment. All organisms in this universe do have an environment, and also, they are part of it, and the interconnectedness can be called ecology. Therefore, the ecology consists of all of 'us' and its existence depends on sustainable interdependence. When the ecology is said to consist of all of 'us,' it is not coherent in itself with mere 'anthropocentric' elements but all the living and non-living entities in the

universe. The ecological and social systems are intertwined and cannot exist totally in isolation (Reddy, et al., 2016; Jones et al., 2011). Our environment encompasses the 'space' we occupy and even the culture we maintain in that 'space', which contribute to the ecology. The 'ecocentrism' emphasised in the 'co-building' practices needs to find the innate values in all of nature, which is impeded in the culture of a community and a nation. One of the inherent values of 'ecocentrism' is the interconnectedness of all the organisms in the universe. Dimauro (2016), denotes the interconnectedness between social contexts and the ecological processes in creating the impacts that affect both human beings and the non-human. An eco-social world represents the ecology where human beings are the centre of it signalling that, it is the 'human-centric ecology'. This very well reflects the reason for human beings at the centre to act as the best reason to maintain that co-relatedness. The 'co-building of the eco-social world, leaving no one behind' places the responsibility of acknowledging, restoring and enhancing the interconnectedness of all organisms with equity on human beings.

### Socio-economic systems in co-building an eco-social world

In an era where anthropocentrism dominates academics, practices, and policies, a call to build an equitable eco-social world is a call to recognise the challenges and needs to sustain life on earth. The social world requires to lead the 'co-building process' but it is the same construct called 'society' that has become a buzzword to monopolise the entire universe. The social world has dominated, its environment for exclusive growth, and many systems have become dominant in the society, including capitalism. When human-created society acts as the reason for all norms and policies, the universe's interconnectedness is snubbed and instigates inequality. Globally, the principles based on 'profit 'maximisation' "quickly weakened the ecological tenants' interrelatedness. The 'richness' has found new meaning, and society endorsed the accrual of

the resources in a few hands and calibrated success in terms of maximum accumulated 'resources'. This further corroborates the creation of an 'unjust', and 'unequal' society with many out of resources, and even without a society to represent in.

The human-created global demarcation, 'global north and global south' still persuade each other to take the responsibility of protecting the environment. The so-called developed nations (global north) is looked at by the global south for 'developing' strategies because the indices of development dictated by the global north (primarily to find excuses for the damage they create to the environment) is believed to be universal. A highly consumerist part of the human world detracted the interconnectedness of the ecology and advocate for others to roll out programmes and policies to sustain the ecology by placing the burden on the millions who are starving.

All beings are eco-dependent, but some are more dependent on the ecology, and in the current social order, the tribal community, aboriginals, fishers' community, farmers and the like are more dependent on the environment. Their life is centred around the conductivity of the ecosystem and even a small alteration in the system affects their life heavily. The communities for years that have been following a life pattern in cohesion with the environment and who never hindered the interconnectedness of the ecology have been further pushed to the peripheries of the modern society and several socio-economic systems have accelerated the marginalisation. Today's affirmative actions are not equal to the opportunities denied to them or the self-sacrifice they have sustained. Communities at risk of marginalisation or living in poverty have always been a primary concern for the profession of social work, which has always worked to mobilise and advocate on their behalf (Pulla, 2014). Therefore, the co-building of a new eco-social world requires professionals to foot on equitable eco-social justice.

### **The development we envisage: Are we on the right path?**

India, being one of the most populous and largest economies in the world, has a pivotal role in the co-building of an eco-social world. The country, like other countries has both eco-centric people and eco-dependent people. The former segment of the society does not have a life when their ecology is unbalanced, and the latter die to live when their environment is altered. Many contemporary environmental problems have arisen as a result of the depletion of natural resources, resulting in people losing their means of subsistence and livelihood. People living on the peripheries of industrial estates around the world, particularly in developing countries, have suffered grave human rights violations as a result of man-made pollution of waterways caused by the discharge of industrial and domestic effluents or the resulting adverse health effects caused by toxic wastes (Pulla, 2014). It is high time for India to brood over whether we need to follow a euro-centric development paradigm or indigenously balanced and sustained development practices. Many economic forces have triggered capitalist economic practices and thereby privatisation in India. When a few enjoy the tall of the luxuries of development and capitalism, is it sufficient to alleviate the majority with the rationing of the bare minimum? Are we compromising with the opportunity for all to be equal or letting a few take advantage of the others who possess no means? Such issues have led the eco-centric people to march against the structural policies in the country recently.

### **Responsible policies and responsible partners in action**

The policies that regulate, realign, reverberate and reassure equitable and sustainable living needs to be a priority in India. The efforts of the farmers in India have changed the condition from 'from ship to mouth' to 'from farm to store and then to mouth' in terms of production and consumption. When a policy becomes sceptical to the people, especially the goodwill in the policy needs to be re-analysed and changed, and not the 'incremental changes need to be brought

in. 'Privatisation' as followed in the capitalist economies hardly consider the 'inter-connectedness' of life on earth and its rhythm. India needs to stand out and bring in new models of defining inclusive development, wherein the divide between the 'rich' and the rest needs to be minimised. This is not a target for centuries, but at the earliest, because an opportunity delayed is an opportunity denied, just like 'delayed justice'.

It is astonishing to witness the way the Indian private sector is modulated. The eye on the profitable assets or holdings in the public sector (certainly with a few exceptions, recently). The specimen is that the private sector takes up the custodianship of only profit-making compartments (similar to the AC compartments of a train) and the rest is retained with the public sector. The policies have to answer specific questions: Is it the partial privatisation we refer to? What is the role of the corporates in ensuring equity? Don't they have any role in it? Parallel governments are within the hand's reach when the entire public assets are owned by the private, overlooking the goodwill of a healthy public-private partnership. Costs to life and Cost to a Decent Life (CDL) cannot be different for different people when a public system steer the economic policies. When you set a dollar as the threshold to promote one to the 'above poverty line', it is almost ten times of which is used for toilet papers by the 'rich'. Here, we talk about the co-building of an eco-social world'. For people who were pushed to the peripheries of the socio-economic world for the reason that they have less ignored the interconnectedness of the ecology, many opportunities were taken away, and the opportunities once delayed are opportunities denied.

To promote a sustainable eco-social world India needs policies wherein all Indians respect the right of other organisms and contribute to the 'interconnectedness' of human beings, other animals, plants and thereby of the entire environment we are part of. It is sometimes beyond the formal policies; therefore, a culture of 'sustainable' thinking needs to be inculcated among the generation. Spiritually empowered

India believed in moderate living and hailed the inter-connectivity of nature by teaching that the body is made of this universal material and 'atman' is the divine presence, which is universal. This maintained a balance between the entire organisms in the universe and respectfulness to one another, which was the world's order.

### **Social Workers as the architects of building a new eco-social world**

Global Social Work Day, 2022 has chosen 'co-building an eco-social world, leaving no one behind as a theme, (rather would like to see as a mission) reminds us of the responsibility of social workers to be the ambassadors of change. We need global ambassadors to advocate international policies supporting the 'global south' to compact the environment crisis and local leaders to practice a more sustainable eco-centric social work. While social workers are renowned for their articulated holistic practise approach, which often places them at the forefront of complex responses. The profession indeed has a fondness for the metaphor of the 'person in the environment,' in reality; this interest has been largely absent from the ecological domain and human interactions within the natural environment (Pulla, 2013). The interconnectedness of ecology and society cannot be limited to 'person in the environment' rather it needs to be reciprocated so that the curriculum, practice and professional research will look into the human impact on the environment, contribution to the 'cohesive eco-social order in the universe. The professional developments, especially the latest shifts in the approaches to strengths-based practices, consider the environment and human beings as inseparable units of resilience that mutually contribute. As Antony (2011) denotes the Social Work profession, with its paradigm shifts from problem-dependent and remedial models to strengths-based initiatives, has brought sustainable development and environmental justice to the forefront of its practice. Expectantly this would prepare the social workers to actively engage in the co-building process.

## Conclusion

It is ingeminated that human beings cannot exist in isolation but in interdependence. Co-dependence is to be promoted by human beings by engaging effectively with all organisms in the world. The new eco-social world we envisage requires bridging the gulf between different segments of people eventually widened due to the elitism of policies. The new world order requires to be rooted in the values of moderation and not in the rampant greed that has been instrumental in exploiting fellow beings. The most significant question that the social workers need to ask themselves is 'why do we need to co-build an eco-social world. The answer is, for **co-existence, to co-exist with dignity, worth and freedom**. Therefore, social workers must strive to co-building of a new human-centred ecology, where everybody and everything is nurtured and human beings protect their interdependence.

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