The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): A Framework for Intersectoral Collaboration

by JOHN STANSFIELD

Article

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ABSTRACT

After several years of negotiation and collaboration, the United Nations Goals for Sustainable Development (SDGs) came into effect in January 2016. The 17 goals, which include issues such as ending poverty and hunger, reducing inequality, and a call for climate action, gender equity, quality education for all as well as health, housing, clean water and sanitation, provide a potential framework for participation and partnership. In force for the next 15 years, the goals are unlike any previous UN policy tool in that they are applicable to all member states and include public and private sectors as well as civil society. States will report against progress towards the goals, and the development of collaborations and partnerships to achieve them.
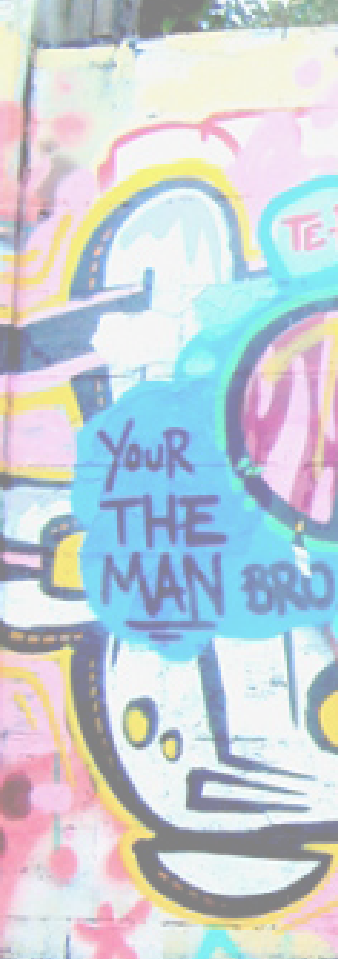
This paper examines the development of the goals and the implications and opportunities for practice in the social work profession, and draws on the author's experience in India and Aotearoa New Zealand. In this paper the author argues that social workers' experience with poverty and inequality can add a rich context and potential for leadership in an international effort for peace and social justice.

INTRODUCTION

The 17 United Nations goals for Sustainable Development (SDGs) are the latest expression of the evolving paradigm of sustainable development. The term has its contemporary roots in the late-twentieth-century understanding of impending environmental crisis and emerging theories of development, which sought to address a rapidly growing wealth gap between the least developed and most developed countries (Du Pisani, 2006). Rachel Carson's (1962) seminal work *Silent Spring* was a clarion call to environmental concern. But the separation of people from planet as a locus of concern has not served either well. The bringing together of these two themes is evident from the time of the Bruntland Commission (1987) and thereafter through the major international governance conferences and resolutions such as Agenda 21 in 1992, and the Kyoto Protocol in 1997.

As a discipline, social work has come relatively late to the importance of sustainability, which is perhaps surprising given the strong influence of systems theory, interdisciplinary theory about the nature of complex systems in nature, society, and science, and on the ecological systems model (Siporin, 1980). However, in the sustainability discourses and social work literature there is now much evidence of a rapid catching-up.

In this paper I will introduce the importance of the SDGs for social work, concentrating for brevity's sake on the first seven goals. Further, I will describe how Agenda 2030 is a unique opportunity

to utilise the SDGs and reposition social work as an essential partner in the progress towards the achievement of the goals.

SDG GOAL 1: END POVERTY IN ALL ITS FORMS EVERYWHERE

Whilst I would argue that all 17 of the goals for sustainable development need a voice in social work practice, that voice is strongest in Sustainable Development Goal 1. This goal has very deep roots in social work and many would argue that social work developed as a response to the iniquities of poverty.

The United Nations, in its assessment, reports that 1.2 billion people still live in extreme poverty. The UN defines poverty, from an income perspective, as a per person per day income of less than US$1.25. There are two problems with this measure. Firstly, most researchers acknowledge that poverty needs to be understood within a distinct social, political and historical context and an international average is therefore problematic, and secondly there are very large numbers of people (the World Bank estimated 2.7 billion people in 2008) who live in moderate poverty on less than US$2 a day (UN, 2016).

As a result of its long history in examining and engaging with poverty, the profession of social work has a much more sophisticated and comprehensive understanding of poverty. Absolute poverty – a measure of, in the case of income poverty, a dollar amount of income per day regardless of country – has been superseded in social work with 'relative poverty', a measure which is context-specific, such as a percentage of the national average wage. Nevertheless, this very stark and simple UN measure is of great value when identifying the communities who are most affected by extreme poverty. Moreover, the sheer simplicity of the analysis enables rapid identification of the associates of poverty. For instance, almost three-quarters of the poorest people on the planet live in rural areas and are food producers. Two thirds are from an ethnic minority and perhaps more surprisingly, 960 million of the poorest live in countries that have been identified as middle-income countries (MICs). Nearly one half of the poorest households are headed by a person who has no education, and in one third where the household head is not in work (Bailey, 2011).
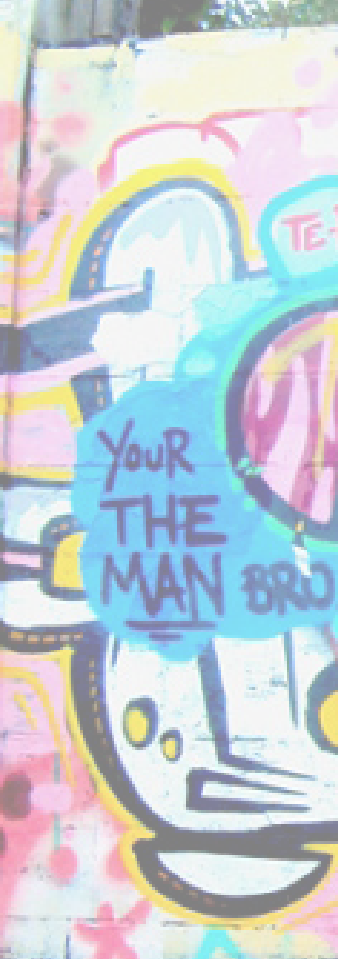
The US National Association for Social Work (NASW), cites poverty as a significant problem to be addressed by one of its six ethical principles, 'working for social justice', and notes that in its understanding of poverty we are dealing with both a dynamic problem and one exacerbated by inequalities:

> A close examination of poverty reveals that it is about much more than money alone. Poverty results from a number of factors that include political, social, and economic dynamics. For instance, as the country shifts from a manufacturing to a service economy, wages have been dramatically lowered for the average "nonprofessional" worker. In addition, the feminization of poverty has been exacerbated by persistent disparities in salaries for men and women, as well as the disproportionate economic burden that single mothers face in raising children alone. (NASW, n.d., para 3)

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), in its paper on a social work response to extreme poverty, notes:

> Extreme poverty is the result of permanent or long lasting forms of precariousness that undermine the capacity of individuals, families, communities and population groups to assume fundamental rights enshrined in the International Bill of Human Rights. Extreme poverty cannot be overcome by material aid and capacity building alone, nor can poverty reduction initiatives be successful unless they are based on the recognition of the inherent dignity and on the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights preamble. (IFSW, 2012, para 1.2)

The expression of poverty as an issue for human rights resonates well with the sustainable development goals which seek to ensure human rights for everyone, equality and an end to discrimination. The goals are built around a full set of human rights from civil and political rights, cultural rights to social and economic rights, including the right to development. This is expressed in the slogan which

accompanies the SDGs of "no one left behind".

Social work, then, understands that poverty is a multilevel problem which requires a systemic approach to change, which recognises and addresses structural inequalities. The SDGs may be a powerful tool in creating a platform to unite stakeholders around the goals, and have recently been adopted by the IACD as its primary policy in its new strategy (IACD, 2016).

Poverty is gendered. Rates of poverty are consistently higher amongst women than men across all ethnic groups (Cawthorne, 2008); moreover, this is not only because women care for children. In 2008 over half the women living below the poverty line in the US were single women without children. The declining value of universal pensions places a growing number of women at risk of poverty. In addition to being paid less than men, while doing identical work, women's incomes are lower because they are less employed, more often part-time; female dominated occupations and industries pay less and they are more likely to be out of the workforce caring for others. They are also more likely to bear the costs of care. In the US, eight out of ten custodial parents are women (UN Women, n.d.).

Increasingly, the social work literature identifies not just the existence of poverty but growing inequality which sees wealth and power concentrated in the hands of the few. Whilst extreme poverty has decreased significantly in the developing world, (most pronouncedly in China, down to 13% from 60%) the proportion of the world's population in relative poverty has been on the rise in the developed world (UN, 2016).

Alongside this often dramatic rise in poverty has been what is emerging as a growing empathy gap (Chattanooga, 2015). The empathy gap is a real concern to the social work profession because a decline in empathy is an outright attack on core social work values and principles. Researchers have proven that empathetic social workers are more effective, i.e., empathy works (Gerdes & Segal, 2009). The decline in empathy is encouraged by a return to the Dickensian values of blaming the poor, and this has the effect of limiting solidarity across society and thus protects the unjustly wealthy.

Blaming the poor is functional to the creation and continuance of inequality because it excuses the beneficiaries of an unequal society from any responsibility for the consequences to marginalised communities. In "a poverty of imagination" Dorey (2010) observes:

> ...many people tacitly accept that 'the poor will always be with us'. Moreover, much of the British public believes that there are sufficient opportunities to succeed for those who try hard enough, and also that it is the middle class which actually struggles the most, economically or financially. (p. 1)

One of the most interesting responses to the increasing tolerance of inequality in Aotearoa New Zealand has been the rising prominence of discourse around child poverty. Because it simply isn't credible to blame children for their own poverty, it is much more difficult to target this group of victims as deserving of a diminished status and opportunities. A multidisciplinary clamour, which has included teachers, identifying children from overcrowded households, and now increasingly children living in cars, as likely to have learning problems and unlikely to succeed in education, has been joined by nurses identifying the same group as likely to suffer lifelong health consequences from the childhood deprivation. Criminologists and sociologists have joined the discussion, drawing attention to the societally-self-defeating nature of the paradigms, whilst economists have been recruited to prove that the problem is completely preventable and its solution utterly affordable.

One of the traditional social work responses to poverty has been to help secure access to paid work. At an individual level, the social worker's role might include ensuring a client has access to the appropriate training and support services to enhance employability. At a community development level, it might include working with communities to help them identify their assets and aspirations, and brokering the support of central and local government as well as civil society (Mantle & Backwith, 2010). However, in recent times, it has become apparent that employment is not in itself a pathway out of poverty. Recent studies in the United States have shown that whilst overall labour market participation is trending down, an increased proportion of lower income households are in in work. Forty-four percent of lower income households in the US are now in work, but the stagnation of
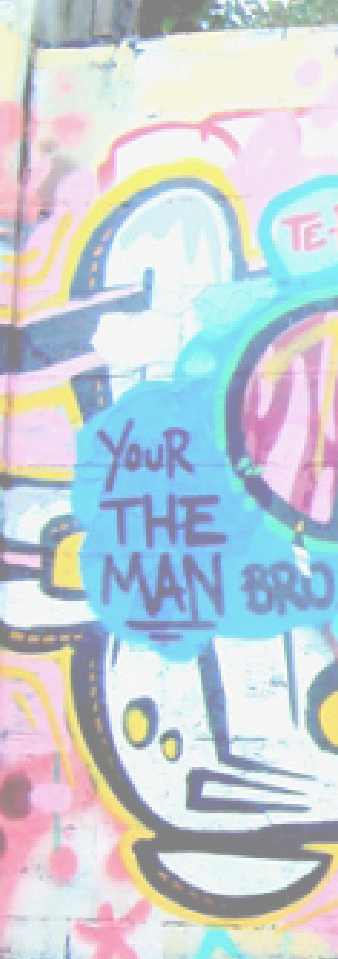
real wages, falling wages, reduced working conditions, de-unionised workplaces, and a precarious uncertainty of hours as a result of casualisation have created the contemporary phenomenon of the working poor (Povich, Roberts, & Mather, 2013).

The IFSW has a comprehensive policy on poverty and the role of social work. The policy, which like the UN SDGs utilises a rights-based framework, commences:

> 6.1 IFSW recognizes that human rights are fundamental to all persons, as individuals and collectives and these rights cannot be guaranteed when almost a billion people around the world live in extreme poverty. (2012, p. 6.1)

The Goal includes some very challenging targets, including by 2030 eradicating extreme poverty. The challenge for social workers will be asserting their influence and unique understandings in the achievement of this and other targets, including those applicable in their own countries.

SDG GOAL 2: END HUNGER, ACHIEVE FOOD SECURITY AND IMPROVED NUTRITION AND PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

Hunger is an assault on human dignity and in a world where there is enough food for everyone to be well fed, hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition are evidence of a failure of world governance.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) estimates that one in nine of the world's population suffers from chronic under-nourishment. 780 million of the 795 million hungry people in the world live in developing countries. Food and trade policies of wealthy countries have often contributed to food insecurity. Most recently, a switch from agrarian crops for food to biofuel has been identified as creating price pressures which have exacerbated hunger (Whalberg, 2008). Hunger activist Eric Holt-Giminez (2008) dismisses the notion that hunger is a result of natural causes and contests:

> Though hunger is coming in waves, not everyone will "drown" in famine. In fact, the world's recurrent food crises are making a handful of investors and multinational corporations very rich – even as they devastate the poor and put the rest of the planet at severe environmental and economic risk. (para 2.)

A broken food system produces not just hunger but malnutrition. Fifty-two million children are too thin and require special treatment, yet 43 million children are overweight, some as the result of poverty (UN, 2016).

Malnutrition and food security are relatively complex problems, which have in the past been reduced to simple formulas of calories. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), for instance, addressed hunger but not malnutrition, whereas a more sophisticated approach looks at both, as well as under- and over-nutrition including micro-nutrient deficiencies.

There are structural problems which impact on our food security; these include climate change, nutrient transition, the shift from plant-based foods to meat, food price volatility, and an economic system which treats food as an opportunity for profit and not a fundamental right.

Social workers are engaged in a variety of programmatic responses to the issue of hunger. At the most basic of casework levels this encompasses work in administering food to the hungry, whether in disaster-relief aid or in the urban soup kitchen. At the community social work or community development end of the spectrum there is a great deal of work being done to help communities take greater control of their food systems. This includes helping communities organise community gardens and food forests, as well is advocating for sustainable food policies in urban design.

The Council on Social Work Education (2014.), in its policy paper *Understanding Food Insecurity: Human Rights and Social Work Implications* identifies four roles for social work:

1. Provide education to groups about the importance of the food they eat and empower them to protect their rights to food.
2. Advocate on behalf of the vulnerable communities that experience discrimination against
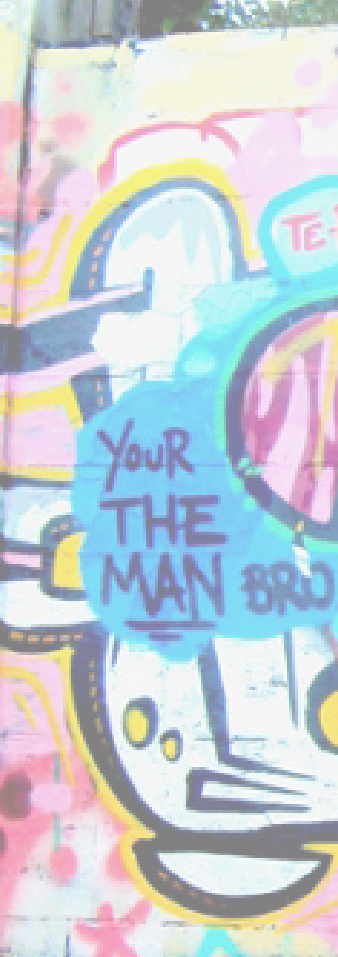
their right to adequate food supply.

3. Provide meaningful interventions to vulnerable populations' food security, such as community garden programs.
4. Build coalitions of multiple stakeholders to address issues of food security globally and locally. (para 4)

Because food fulfils human cultural as well as nutritional purposes, social workers are involved in communities' cultural rights concerning food. New Zealand social worker Tiffany Apaitia-Vague (2011) observes "Social work's core value of social justice directly responds to the need for those within our community to not just have food, but to have fulfilling, nutritious, culturally appropriate food" (p. 69). Increasingly there is contest to protect access to traditional and indigenous foods. The understanding of cultural rights, embodied in the social work values, provides a new opportunity for social workers to show solidarity to marginalised communities.

SDG 2 has some ambitious targets. These include:

• By 2030 end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round.
• By 2030 end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving by 2025 the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under five. (UN, 2016, para 3)

SDG GOAL 3: ENSURE HEALTHY LIVES AND PROMOTE WELL-BEING FOR ALL AT ALL AGES

The confluence of inequality and discrimination serve to visit the least favourable health outcomes on the poorest nations, and even within these on the least powerful citizens. In 2015, 5.9 million children under the age of five died. This statistic is worse in the WHO African region, with 81 deaths per thousand live births, more than seven times higher than in the WHO European region where the rate is 11 deaths per thousand live births (WHO, 2015).

Advancing policies and actions to achieve the goals is not without its challenges. The health MDGs have not been fully met, and remain priorities in a world where there is a rising tide of a more recent threat in non-communicable diseases (obesity, diabetes and heart disease). While progress has been made against some Millennium Development Goals, such as maternal mortality, which fell by 45% against a target of 75%, unconscionable inequalities still apply and the maternal mortality rate is still 14 times higher in developing regions than in the developed world (UN, 2016).

Poor health is both a cause and consequence of poverty. Vulnerable individuals and marginalised groups are often the worst affected, deprived of money or information or access to health services, causing health conditions to deteriorate and people to become more vulnerable to disease. The NGO Health Poverty Action describes the health poverty cycle:

> Poor health increases poverty by reducing family's work productivity and leading families to sell assets to cover the costs of treatment. This increases current poverty and vulnerability to shocks in the future. Poverty increases the incidence of poor health through poor nutrition, overcrowding and lack of clean water. (HPA, n.d., para 3)

In its health policy the IFSW (2012) asserts that:

> Health is an issue of fundamental human rights and social justice and binds social work to apply these principles in policy, education, research and practice. (para 1)

This gives a clear direction to social workers that it is their responsibility to work for the realisation of these universal health rights through speaking out and striving for socially just health policies and the social policies that support these. This guides our work with individuals, families and communities and steers interventions in casework as well as social policy.

Policies for the achievement of the goals include a renewed effort on the remaining health MDGs, promoting equity and access to services, addressing the needs of people with disabilities and strengthening health systems through the adoption of universal health coverage. Non-communicable
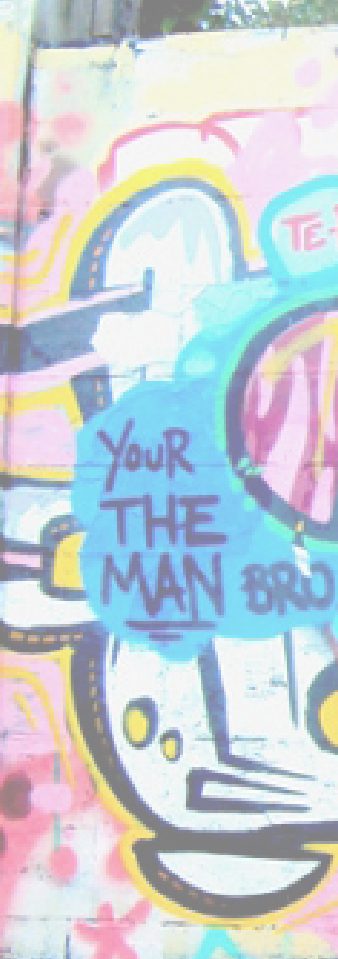
diseases will see an increased emphasis on prevention as well as treatment and a policy approach which looks beyond the sometimes hostile health sector to address the social determinants of health. This latter point is a particularly useful role for social workers because it involves the social and economic determinants of education and the physical environment, as well as individual lifestyles, and the social and economic forces which shape them.

SDG 3 has some very specific targets including:

3.1   By 2030 reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per hundred thousand live births.
3.2   By 2030 ending preventable deaths of new-borns and under-five-year-old children as well as the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and neglected tropical diseases.
3.3   By 2030 reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and the promotion of mental health and well-being. (UN, 2016, para 3.4)

Another sub-goal in which social workers have traditionally played an important role is ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health services. An important feature of the SDGs is that they harness the expertise and energy of the state, the private sector and civil society. Sexual and reproductive health is an area where such collaborations have previously been very successful.

SDG GOAL 4: ENSURE INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE QUALITY EDUCATION AND PROMOTE LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL

One in 10 children of primary-school age was still out of school in 2012, and around 120 million children either never make it to school or drop out within three years. The problem is more pronounced in rural areas, and even where education is accessible it is not always effective. At least 250 million children are not able to read, count well or write, even amongst those who have spent at least four years in school (UN, 2016).

Literacy rates are rising, but women and girls continue to lag behind. Youth literacy has risen steadily to 91% globally, as a result of increased access to education. However, these gains have not been equally shared:

> In sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia, youth literacy rates are still just 71% and 84% respectively. For young women in sub-Saharan Africa, the rate remains dismally low at 65%. (UNESCO, 2016, para 2)

Internationally, we understand that education is a fundamental human right which is essential for the exercise of all other human rights. Yet in all societies there are individuals and groups whose access to education is significantly compromised. Using a rights-based framework is useful in understanding the ethical position of the social worker in advocating for access to effective education. As with other compromised rights, the burden falls unequally on the poor, particularly people in rural areas and in developing countries. A stagnation, and in some cases decline, in international aid means there is now a need for an extra US$26 billion annually to achieve basic education for all in poor countries (UN, 2016).

In social work we act to ensure common human needs, and to prevent or alleviate individual and community problems. We stand to improve, for all people, the quality of life, and in doing so seek to uphold the rights of individuals or groups with whom we are working. Human rights are most at risk and most compromised where populations have been denied the right to the most basic education, including literacy and numeracy.

The IFSW (2012) is clear and forthright in its policy statement on the role for social workers in securing and protecting human rights for all people:

> The social work profession, through historical and empirical evidence, is convinced that the achievement of human rights for all people is a fundamental prerequisite for a caring world and the survival of the human race. It is only through the recognition and implementation of
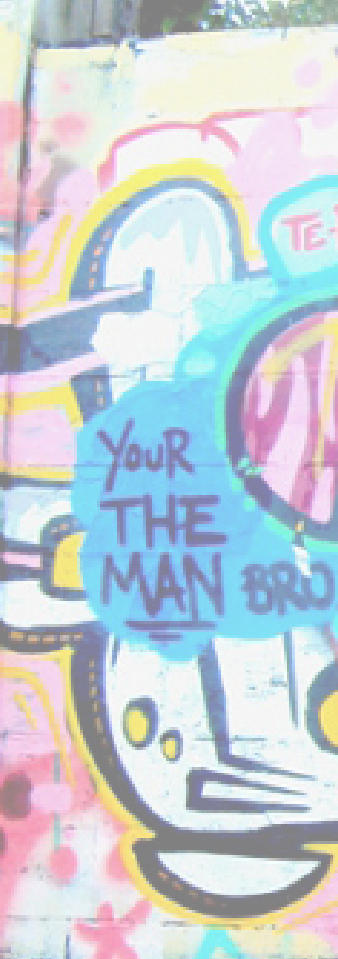
the basic concept of the inherent dignity and worth of each person that a secure and stable world can be achieved. Consequently, social workers believe that the attainment of basic human rights requires positive action by individuals, communities, nations and international groups, as well as a clear duty not to inhibit those rights. (para 23)

In addressing Goal 4, we incorporate the completion of the MDG on primary education, particularly in the rural areas of the less developed countries. In the new goal, while it is still important to ensure access and completion, greater emphasis is placed on learning outcomes and quality to ensure that children achieve basic skills.

A major challenge in achieving the goal is conquering the inequalities which see so many excluded from education. Social workers must advocate for both the individuals and the groups who are suffering this discrimination, because without education they will suffer a lifetime dependency and be unable to realise their true human potential or exercise their human rights.

Education is inextricably linked with all of the goals. A lack of education ensures poverty and poverty often results in limited education. Similarly, in countries where meals are not provided in schools, hunger prevents children from learning. Decades of growing inequality have visited this problem on relatively wealthy countries such as New Zealand, and as a response the advent of child poverty charities (Feed the Need, n.d.).

UN policies to achieve the goal include ensuring equity and reaching out to disadvantaged children and youth using innovations, including school feeding programmes, and partnering with non-formal education providers (UN, 2016). Again we see a reference to Goal 17, Partnering for the Goals, and there is a role for social workers in brokering the collaborations which will make achieving the goal possible. Social workers might particularly identify and address the inequalities in education, particularly gender inequality.

The goal has specific targets to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, including:

- By 2030 ensuring that all children complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education, leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.
- By 2030 ensuring that all children have access to quality early childhood development care and pre-primary education so that they might be ready for their primary schooling. (UN, 2016, para 4.2)

SDG GOAL 5: ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS.

The pervasive and systematic discrimination against women is both a gross injustice and a waste, which a world struggling to be sustainable just cannot afford. The failure to achieve gender rights goes beyond unfairness – it is deadly. Of all women killed by homicide in 2012 almost half were killed by intimate partners or family members. The WHO (2013) estimates that worldwide, 35% of women have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate-partner violence, or sexual violence by a non-partner at some point of their lives.

At an economic level, women on average earn just 77% of what men earn, and in many countries the gender pay gap is growing. Moreover, almost one fourth of women globally are defined as unpaid contributing family workers. Not only are women paid less than men for the same work, but occupations with high numbers of women attract lower salaries than occupations dominated by men. Social work is an occupation, like many of the caring professions and occupations, which is dominated by women. As a profession, social workers have an ethical duty to stand against all discrimination.

The challenges associated with meeting Goal 5 include the utter global pervasiveness of the problem, the sheer scale of the issue which impacts on every aspect of daily life, and the very strong resistance of the men who are privileged by the discrimination. This problem is structural, and will require a concerted and strategic effort at every level of society and in all social institutions, public policies, laws and social norms. Improving the economic plight of women through access to education, decent work and social protection is seen as one part of the solution. However, the persistent gender
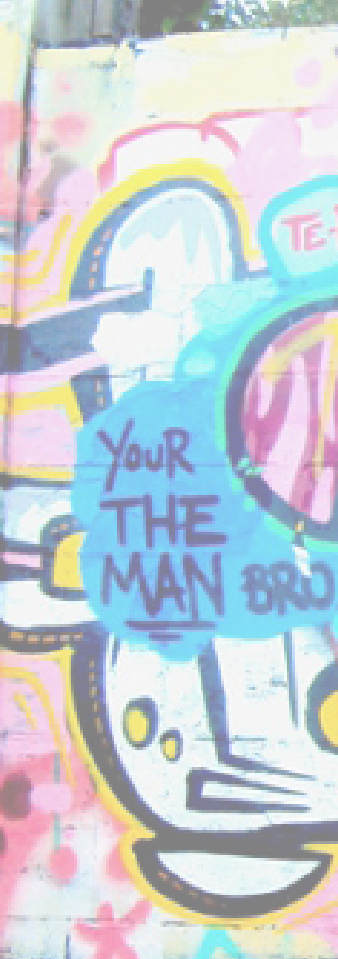
pay gap, even in developed societies, suggests that this solution alone is not enough to eliminate discrimination and that a more structural, legally-based universal intervention will need to be made. Economic solutions are unlikely to be sustained in a context of violence, trafficking and exploitation, so access to justice, as well as a profound shift in the societal norms which allow this discrimination, will be required.

To achieve such a significant shift in societal norms will require a new kind of governance, where women equally participate at all levels of society, particularly in the corridors of power. In 2016, just 22.8% of parliamentarians worldwide were women, and in more than a handful of states less than 10% (IPU, 2016).

Targets for the goals are very high, including to end all forms of discrimination against all woman and girls everywhere.

SDG GOAL 6: ENSURE AVAILABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF WATER AND SANITATION FOR ALL

Contaminated water and no access to sanitation is a leading cause of infant mortality in the developing world. More than 800 children die each day from diseases which are caused by unsafe water, and no access to sanitation and hygiene. 2.4 billion of our poorest citizens have no access to a toilet, and over 650 million have no access to clean water. Children in conflict zones are most at risk. Climate change is rapidly increasing the risk of unsustainable management of water, and the UN estimates that by 2025 two thirds of the world's population could be living in water-stressed countries (UN, 2016).

While the UN Millennium Development Goal target on ensuring safe access to drinking water was met five years ahead of schedule, there is still a very significant community health problem to be solved. Again we find that poverty is both a cause and a result of the problem faced by communities without secure access to clean water and sanitation.

Much has been learnt about the effective approaches to reducing poor sanitation risks and improving health. In recent years the paradigm change has begun to emphasise sanitation as the most important part of the equation, and interventions have moved from providing communal infrastructure to more social psychology interventions through water, sanitation and hygiene (W.A.S.H.) programmes. These highly successful community-development initiatives use very carefully scripted motivational exercises to forge community commitment for improvement (Wolfer, 2014).

The targets for the goal are bold, and include achieving universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water, as well as adequate and equitable sanitation for all, by 2030. This will require political commitment and will be challenging in an era when water has become commodified and is increasingly in the hands of private corporations.

SDG GOAL 7: ENSURE ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE, RELIABLE, SUSTAINABLE, AND MODERN ENERGY FOR ALL

While the summer barbecue might be a novelty and a treat in some parts of the world, almost 3 billion people use solid biofuel for everyday heating and cooking, and as a result nearly 3.5 million people each year are killed by indoor air pollution: most are women and children (WHO, 2016).

In 2012 fossil fuels accounted for 87% of all global primary energy consumption and it is predicted that if energy policies do not change, the world's energy demand will increase by almost 50% by 2035 (González & Lucky, 2013).

As with the other Sustainable Development Goals, access to energy is another inequality. Ninety-five percent of people without access to modern energy services live in sub-Saharan Africa, and in Asia 78% of people without access to modern energy services live in rural areas (UN, 2016). As well as inequality, climate justice is engaging social workers in this goal. Gamble and Hoff (2005) note the social worker imagination is now actively exploring how social work, especially community development, can contribute to the goal.

in mid-2016, community development leader Kalyan Paul noted in his address at the IACD side-event to the UN high-level political forum on sustainable development that we cannot protect
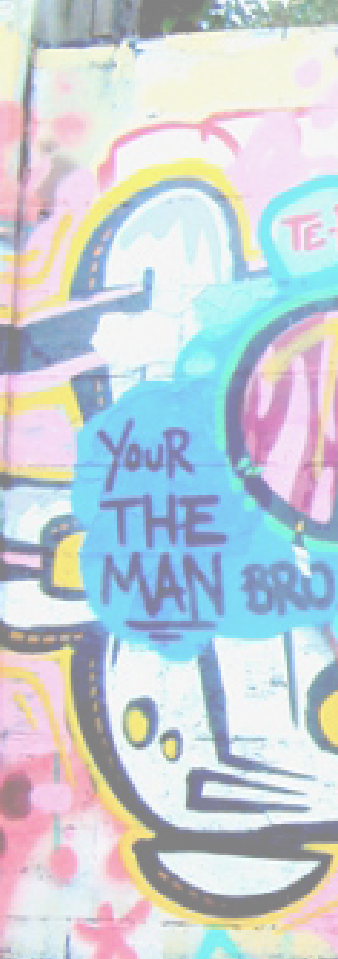
the forest if the people have no fuel. And in the explanation of the work of the pan-Himalayan grassroots development foundation, he warned that failure to address the sustainable energy needs of populations would result in further environmental degradation and increase atmospheric carbon, contributing to climate change.

Our unsustainable energy use, and its impact on a fragile climate, will visit on our world catastrophic climate change. Thus, Polack, Wood and Smith (2010) argue that the reduction of fossil fuel use is an act which addresses social justice, and that the values of social work have progressively expanded to include ecological and sustainability values.

Challenges in addressing the goal include the poor policy linkages between associated topics such as energy and food, energy and water, energy and health, and energy and women's empowerment. The increasing privatisation of energy, which is understood in a commodity paradigm as opposed to an essential service, means that clean energy is often priced at an inaccessible rate for poor communities. The result is these communities rely on wood as fuel, contributing to a depleted environment.

It's not all bad news, however. Huge technological gains in energy efficiency are yet to be fully exploited, and moving away from carbon-based energy as well as improving efficiency could lead to a reduction of 70% of the projected global energy demands in 2035 (UN, 2016).

The goal seeks to double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency by 2030, substantially increase the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix by 2030, and ensure universal access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy services for all.

SDG GOALS 8-16:
Within the limitations of this paper it is not possible to map each of the goals against their potential for social work, and some, such as Reducing Inequality (Goal 10), or Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (Goal 16), will have a more obvious link to contemporary and future social work practice. For the sake of completeness, the goals are:
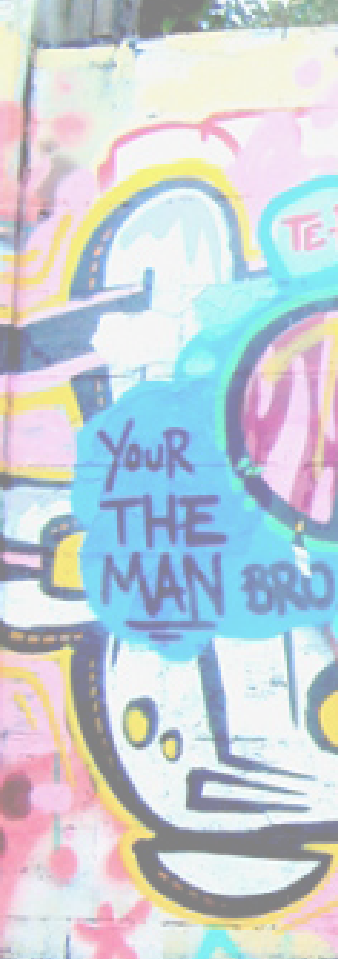
- SDG Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full employment and decent work for all.
- SDG Goal 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.
- SDG Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries.
- SDG Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
- SDG Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
- SDG Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.
- SDG Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.
- SDG Goal 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.
- SDG Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.
- SDG Goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

CONCLUSION
The practice of social work is the exercise of the values, knowledge and skills which are essential for the achievement of the SDGs. As Jayasooria (2016) notes, "Social work theory can both inform and draw upon the SDGs" (p. 27).

However, the task will not be without its challenges. The pervading neoliberal economic agenda, with its emphasis on privatisation, commodification, individualisation, and the reduction of regulation and government, stands in stark contrast to the peaceful and collaborative exercise of rights which are required to achieve the SDGs.

The collaborations between state and private sectors and civil society, acting together to achieve

the goals, represent a unique opportunity for social work to re-assert its relevance. Social workers' knowledge and understanding of the interrelatedness between poverty and other inequalities, and our experience in standing with poor communities as they identify and address the root causes of these inequalities, means we are well positioned to participate in the effort and influence its direction. Social workers' relevance and capacity to engage with the SDGs will be enhanced by embracing the environmental and ecological concerns, which have too often been annexed as the responsibility of other professions. A renewed and holistic, green social work will emerge if we have the courage to pursue it.
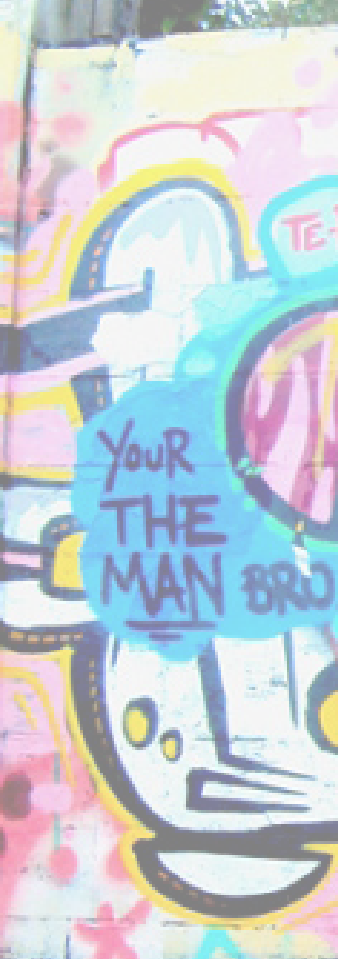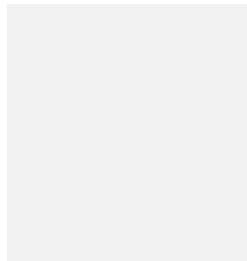
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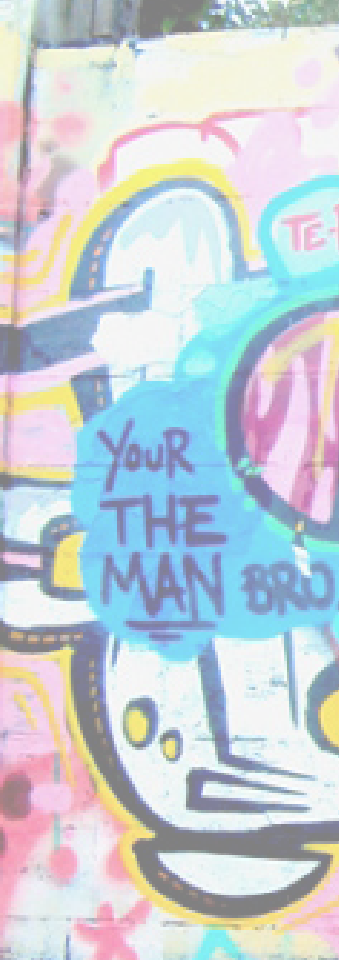
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