Chapter 8
The Critical Role of Community
Development in Social Work Education

Narayan Gopalkrishnan

Abstract  Social work, and social work education, is increasingly challenged by the changing nature of the globalized environments that it works within. The local and the global are deeply intertwined, leading to complex transnational problems and shared risks that continue to impact heavily on communities. Cultural diversity plays a key role in this, providing a number of opportunities as well as threats to the ways in which people and communities interact. This chapter explores some of the responses of the social work profession in India and Australia to the challenges experienced in the globalized world and discusses these responses in relation to human rights and social justice. The role of community development in this context is then examined, and its relevance to social work education is discussed. We argue that traditional forms of community development have not been very effective at working with diversity and look towards new ways in which professionals can engage with this realm of activity. The chapter closes with an exploration of possible future directions for social work educators to consider.

Keywords  Community development · Cultural diversity and social work education

Context

Social workers and other human service professionals work within an overarching context of globalization, where people across the world are increasingly interconnected with each other through global flows of ideas, finances, media, technology and where people are increasingly becoming globally mobile (Almeida & Chase-Dunn, 2018). The processes of globalization are getting exponentially quicker and involve a deepening and expansion of global networks across a range of stakeholders (Dominelli, 2010; Held & McGrew, 2007). These changes are fueled by technology and infrastructure growth and do not necessarily represent problems in themselves. However, the processes of globalization that are of most concern for social workers
and others working in the area of human services are those that are based on neoliberal principles that work primarily towards supporting the interests of the rich’ (Alphonse, George, & Moffatt, 2008; Beck, 2007). As Sen (2004, p. 20) suggests, the “central issue of contention is not globalization itself, nor is it the use of the market as an institution, but the inequity in the overall balance of institutional arrangements - which produces very unequal sharing of the benefits of globalization”.

Some of problems rest at the economic level, where increasing trade within and across countries has led to greater income inequality and greater marginalization of labour rather than improving their quality of life (Antràs, de Gortari, & Itskhoki, 2017). Dominelli (2010) illustrates the levels of inequality by pointing out that 86 per cent of the world’s wealth is concentrated in the top 20 per cent of society, while the bottom 20 per cent have only 1.3 per cent of the world’s wealth. The impact of income disparity is further exacerbated as neoliberal ideology leads to the withdrawal of the state from many of its traditional roles and a shift of costs from the state to the individual (Forde & Lynch, 2013). The state is often forced to adopt these positions due to competition for increasingly mobile flows of international capital and institutional lock-in mechanisms such as the agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) that allows for governments to be sued for infringing on corporate property rights (Harmes, 2006; Yu, 2017). Governments are increasingly losing their abilities to undertake the tax and expenditure policies that are essential to support the marginalized sections of their populations (Stiglitz, 2012).

Interestingly enough, George Soros, as someone who has profited extraordinarily from international currency flows and global neoliberal systems, has been very critical about unbridled economic globalization. As he argues, there are three ways in which neoliberal processes of globalization impact adversely on individuals and nations:

First, many people, particularly in less-developed countries, have been hurt by globalization without being supported by a social safety net; many others have been marginalized by global markets. Second, globalization has caused a misallocation of resources between private goods and public goods. Markets are good at creating wealth but are not designed to take care of other social needs. The heedless pursuit of profit can hurt the environment and conflict with other social values. Third, global financial markets are crisis prone. People living in the developed countries may not be fully aware of the devastation wrought by financial crises because… they tend to hit the developing economies much harder. All three factors combine to create a very uneven playing field. (Soros, 2002, pp. 4–5)

The globalization of risk is another significant factor where social, political, economic and environmental events in one region of the world have direct, often immediate and sometimes lasting impacts in other parts of the world, such as the global impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Population growth, reduction of biodiversity, food and energy security and other such issues are both global and local in terms of both their causes and their impacts, and they tend to impact disproportionately on poorer nations and peoples. Overarching issues of climate change impacts and disaster impacts also affect marginalized groups in society such as people in poverty, ethnic and racial minorities, women, as well as people with disabilities (Doherty & Clayton, 2011; Haskett, Scott, Nears, & Grimmett, 2008) Globalization has also increased the ability of countries and corporations to export risk, so that, for example,
polluting industries are steadily moving from the richer and more powerful nations to the poorer nations that are least able to cope with the fallout of pollution (Frey, 2015).

International social, political and economic forces are also some of the drivers of the dynamics of human degradation and social injustice found in local communities, and they combine to sustain social inequalities in particular locales (Dominelli, 2010). Existing social problems such as poverty, hunger, ill health and unemployment are further exacerbated by neoliberal globalization, and the poor and marginalized are increasingly falling through the gaps as welfare systems are privatized or dismantled (Dominelli, 2010; Forde & Lynch, 2013). Global issues such as the drug trade, diseases, pollution, terrorism and political instability are impacting dramatically on the weaker sections of every society across the world (Nissanke & Thorbecke, 2006).

With the overwhelming evidence gathering around climate change, the fact that human destiny is closely intertwined with the destiny of the earth is also inescapable (Coates, 2003). As the Royal Society (2011) argues, climate change, energy and food security, biodiversity, poverty and population growth will shape the twenty-first century, altering the way we live, the risks we face and the ways we govern in an increasingly interdependent world. Beddington (2009) warns of a ‘perfect storm’ of food, water and energy scarcity that could lead to escalating public unrest, cross-border conflicts and mass migration. The challenges of global sustainability clearly point to the need for radical policy change, new ways of shaping human development and innovative thinking and solutions (Lee, 2009).

Globalization is also increasing levels of migration as a response to economic hardship, environmental degradation and violence, as well as migration in search of work and a better quality of life. The current estimate of international migrants is 272 million globally, with nearly two-thirds being labour migrants, a number that has steadily increased from about 173 million in 2010 (IOM, 2020; Segal, 2019). There are over 17 million refugees and people in refugee-like situations across the globe, who have been forced to move due to circumstances beyond their control (UNHCR, 2017). The International Organization for Migration argues that migration is “in large part related to the broader economic, social, political and technological transformations that are affecting a wide range of high-priority policy issues” (IOM, 2020, p. 1).

The movements of people as migrants and refugees also lead to increasing levels of intercultural transactions and interactions. Often host populations and migrants can be very different from each other in many ways including language, dress, culture, socio-economic status and social norms to name a few, differences that can lead to intercultural misunderstanding and, in some cases, intercultural conflict (Castles, 2013). As Chao, Kung, and Yao (2015) argue, these cultural differences and differences in access to power and resources can lead to defensive behaviours on the part of the majority cultural groups and aggressive responses from the minority communities. Racism, discrimination and xenophobia are also behaviours that flourish in these settings (Hage, 2014). The movements of people in search of a better life
combined with a growing sense of helplessness in the face of international forces have also lead to increasing nationalist tendencies in many different countries and the coalition of right-wing groups around anti-immigrant and racial exclusion lines (Almeida & Chase-Dunn, 2018).

These are just some of the issues that emerge in the context of globalization, and there are a host of other complex and vexed issues such as health, mental health, digital inclusion and exclusion, pollution, changes in social relations and urbanization to name a few. The next section explores the nature of social work and its role within this context.

Social Work in a Globalized World

The social work profession places a strong emphasis on social justice and human rights as core values that the social work theory and practice are built on, values that are enshrined in both international and national code of ethics for the profession (AASW, 2010; IFSW, 2012; NASW, 2012; Smith & Cheung, 2015). Sewpaul and Jones (2005, p. 218) describe the profession of social work as one that “promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships, and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilizing theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work”.

Historically, the social work profession had an emphasis on two distinct areas of practice, the micro and the macro. Mary Richmond’s pioneering work centred around service to individuals and families (the micro), while her pioneering counterpart, Jane Adams, emphasized social reform through environmental change to meet broad human needs (the macro) (Rothman & Mizrahi, 2014). Currently, the methods adopted by a social worker can be classified as the individual reformist, the reflexive therapeutic and/or the social collectivist, a typology of social work delineated by Payne (1996). However, over the years, the strong elements of community organizing and activism that sit within the social collectivist approaches have been overshadowed by the broader emphasis on individualized clinical and therapeutic approaches and much of the scholarship in the field of social work points to the continued focus on clinical and case managed approaches at the cost of macro approaches such as community work (Chaudhry, 2018; Maritz & Coughlan, 2004; Mendes, 2009; Sousa, Sousa, Yutzy, Campbell, & Cook, 2019).

Too much focus on the individual reformist or the reflexive therapeutic can lead to situations, where the social worker can feel overwhelmed and powerless to effect change in the social environment, even while they understand the broader social forces that impact negatively on their clients (Knight & Gitterman, 2018). These individual therapeutic approaches tend to overlook the broader structures of society and neoliberal globalization and their (often oppressive) impacts on the individual,
and instead, focus on “fixing the individual” or developing resilience in the individual rather than addressing the problem itself. As an example of this approach, poverty could be seen as a problem of individual deficits and/or trauma, rather than an issue that is perpetuated by the structures within which it exists (Kaufman, Huss, & Segal-Engelchin, 2011). This is particularly an issue in communities that have been already marginalized, such as many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities in Australia, who struggle with issues of poverty that are exacerbated through decades of colonization, intergenerational trauma and continued racism and discrimination (Bottoms, 2013; Hollinsworth, 2006). This is not just an issue in the countries of the Global North, (an inaccurate term in the Australian context but representing the countries with high per capita wealth) but also those of the Global South where Indigenous people are often marginalized, for example the tribal communities of Central and Eastern India (De, 2014; Pande, 2007). Individualized approaches also tend to be adopted and resourced in urban settings thereby marginalizing communities in rural settings wherein collectivism and interdependence matter, as in the case of the countries where the majority of the populations in the Global South live.

Clearly, there is a need for social workers to respond to some of the complex issues of today by incorporating community development approaches along with the micro reflexive therapeutic approaches (Mendes, 2009). A community development approach is described by Ife (2013, p. 9) as a ‘process of establishing, or re-establishing, structures of human community within which, new ways of relating, organizing social life, promoting human rights and meeting human needs becomes possible’. Kenny and Connors (2017) describe this as working towards heroic change and new ways in which society is organized. These approaches work within a framework of empowerment and rights, especially those of marginalized groups in society, and as such, enable the practitioner to go beyond individual case work, to work at a level that can challenge oppression in society, promote social justice and work towards strengthening a human rights agenda (Ife, 2016; Mendes, 2009). Forde and Lynch (2013) emphasize the transformational nature of community development practice in social work, its focus on values, collaboration and democratic processes as well as the nature of resistance it presents to many of the negative impacts of globalization. It also means going beyond the overwhelming emphasis on individualism that has its roots in the Global North and developing aspects of interconnectedness and interdependence between people in various roles that they play as parents, citizens and consumer (Ife, 2016).

While community development approaches have considerable potential to challenge some of the negative impacts of neoliberal globalization, much of the literature suggests that these approaches are being utilized less frequently over the last few decades (Kaufman et al., 2011; Napier & George, 2001). The number of social workers associated with community development approaches and activism has been declining in the Global North for a variety of reasons including underfunding of projects, reduction of placement opportunities, state licensing laws as well as the general attitudes within the schools themselves (Hill, Ferguson, & Erickson, 2010).
Fisher and Corciullo (2011) posit that in more conservative environments, such as those we are experiencing since the 1980s, social work tends to move away from the macro and community development approaches and emphasize therapeutic work with individuals and families.

The decline in community development approaches in general, and within social work practice in particular, is also compounded by a decline in community development content in social work education (Hill et al., 2010). Generally, community development is a required subject at all schools of social work in the Global North and Global South, but increasingly these approaches are not often viewed as central to social work practice and education (Fisher & Corciullo, 2011; Mendes, 2009). Kaufman, Huss and Segal-Engelchin (2011, p. 914) suggest that, despite the ubiquity of the subjects, there is a dominant view that community development is ‘not generally regarded as an integral part of the types of activity undertaken by social workers within social work agencies, but rather its practice is peripheral to the profession and is performed by individuals within organizations outside the realm of social work’. Netting, O’Connor, Cole, and Hopkins (2016) describe the experience of macro social work academics, who were shaped, socialized, and who first assumed faculty positions at a time when the wave of macro content in social work focusing on activism, community organization and change reached its crest, only to have it come crashing down during the 1980s and 1990s. Mendes (2009) further points to this marginalization at the policy level in Australia, reflecting on the fact that the Australian Association of Social Workers’ ‘Practice Standards for Social Workers’ document only mentions community development as a two-word mention in a thirty-one page document.

Some of this marginalization of community development approaches appears to be reflected in the attitudes of students, who appear to prefer individualized therapeutic approaches to broader community development approaches (Hill et al., 2010; Maritz & Coughlan, 2004). Some possible reasons for this are delineated in the literature as unfamiliarity with the area of study, its broad and overwhelming nature as compared to other studies they undertake, negative attitudes within the faculty, lack of field placement opportunities and perceptions of job availability in the field (Kaufman et al., 2011; Mendes, 2009; Pawar, 2000). The nature of students who are attracted to social work degrees is also a factor to consider in this context. Many of those entering the degrees have a yearning to ‘help’ people and have very little experience in political activism or working towards macro change (Fisher & Corciullo, 2011; Kaufman et al., 2011). This leads the students to a greater interest in individual therapeutic approaches rather than community development and other macro approaches, even when they realize that the complex problems faced by their clients need broader responses.

One of the responses to the issue is possibly greater integration of community-based approaches with individualized therapeutic approaches. An example of this would be the development of a project involving the use of effective counselling skills to enable individuals to work together to deal with broader community issues (Heenan, 2004; Knight & Gitterman, 2018). Other responses could include better orientation and support of students in community organization settings so that they
can apply social systemic theories rather than be overwhelmed by individual suffering (Kaufman et al., 2011) more investment in community-based projects that will offer students active learning opportunities (Mendes, 2009) and more marketing to attract politically active students into the social work degrees (Fisher & Corciullo, 2011).

In countries of the Global South, this marginalization of community development approaches in social work appears to be less of an issue at first glance. In India, for example, the majority of social work degrees have several streams of specialization in the social work degrees, and community development is one of these streams. However, Dash (2017) argues that over 350 schools of social work in India continue to be urban-based and producing social workers who remain focused on remedial and curative approaches. As he points out:

Trained social workers’ inability to reach the marginalized sections of society has established an image of social workers as paid middle class, employed to help a small number of people afflicted with problems of psychosocial adjustment. In a society such as India, where nearly three quarters of the people live in rural areas; the urban location of the schools of social work are ineffective for this populace. Trained social workers, unlike voluntary social workers, are not inclined to move to rural areas. (Dash, 2017, p. 71)

The extreme effects of neoliberal globalization on the large populations of marginalized people in countries of the Global South make it imperative that community development approaches are emphasized and grown within social work schools (Chaudhry, 2018; Nissanke & Thorbecke, 2006). Alphonse et al. (2008, p. 155) reinforce the need for change in the context of the Global South when they state that “the current global context calls for a paradigm shift in the social work curriculum…. from its current emphasis on clinical and generalist practice, including the person-in-environment fit, to more critical theories”.

As social work practice is deeply impacted on by the neoliberal structures within which government and non-government organizations operate, it is not sufficient to maintain that renewed emphasis on community development approaches. Dominelli (2010), among others, points to the inability of workers to respond effectively to the needs of their clients, because the demands of financial and managerial accountability overwhelm client and community needs. The dominant discourse is leading to the increased distance between workers and their clients, lack of access to necessary resources, the adoption of techno-bureaucratic solutions at the cost of human ones and the increased competition with private, profit-based providers involving the lowering of real standards while maintaining the façade of quality (Forde & Lynch, 2013; Ife, 2016; Westoby, Lathouras, & Shevellar, 2019).

Social workers working in the area of community development need to go beyond some of the conservative forms of community development such as ‘urban or neighbourhood renewal’ that essentially maintain the status quo to more active forms of community development that build power in the communities and enable them to work towards constructive change (Mendes, 2009). Given the extreme issues raised by the impacts of neoliberal globalization on the one hand and climate change on the other (although both have their roots in the same paradigm), the adoption of processes that place development in the local community and help develop an active citizenry that defends, looks out for and advocates on behalf of the community becomes more
urgent (Kenny, 2011). This is particularly important as the neoliberal context in which community organizations work causes these organizations to work in ways that are not necessarily reflective of the needs of their client populations. Social workers can play a role in terms of enabling communities to come together and ensure that their needs remain central to the functioning of governmental and non-governmental agencies (Mendes, 2009).

The cross-border implications of globalization also require responses that are international and collaborative in nature. The choice as described by Dominelli (2010, p. 8) is “to continue with oppressive forms of practice that impoverish people rather than help them or become allies in the endeavour to create liberating forms of practice that affirm people’s rights and redistribute power, goods and services across the globe”. Caragata and Sanchez (2002) suggest that maximum benefits would be derived from social workers using collaborative learning models to solve international problems with a clear understanding of the differences and similarities that exist between countries and cultures.

Further, the adoption of traditional community development approaches needs to be modified in the context of the impacts of climate change that were discussed in the previous section. Much of the community work projects undertaken across countries like India and Australia in the second half of the last century were localized and did not address some of the broader issues of sustainability. As the impacts of climate change become more immediate and urgent, macro social work approaches, such as community work, need to modify their frameworks to work effectively in this context. One clear direction forward is the adoption of alternative frameworks that draw on eco-social justice concepts and that focus on sustaining and enhancing the capacity of human systems and the natural world to cope with environmental change and neoliberal globalization, while both challenging these processes and ameliorating their impacts (Armitage, 2005; Folke, Hahn, Olsson, & Norberg, 2005; Jones, Miles, Francis, & Rajeev, 2012). The notions of sustainable development are elaborated by Black (2007), who draws on the declaration of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development to speak of three interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars of sustainable development—economic development, social development and environmental protection: three pillars being likened to a three-legged stool, one that is inherently stable but would collapse if one of the legs were weakened or missing. He describes a number of other models that focus on these three elements of development as well as a fourth element in the form of cultural development.

For taking action in this context, social workers need to take on a multiplicity of roles, ranging from activist to teacher, so as bring in awareness of alternative value systems and rethink the human–earth relationship (Coates, 2003). Centralized bureaucratic governance or profit-based corporate governance does not necessarily allow for the level of innovation and entrepreneurship needed for the restoration of complex socio-ecological systems (Gibbs, 2008). Social workers can facilitate the development of adaptive co-management model of partnership, where networks and partnerships among stakeholders and formal organizations self-organize for collective action (Armitage, 2005; Folke et al., 2005).
Given the rapidly escalating numbers of intercultural interactions that are part of the globalization paradigm, the nature of diversity and cultural interaction needs to be carefully negotiated when working with and across communities. Community development frameworks often work with the assumption that there is one homogeneous ‘community’ that can be engaged with, and that is an assumption that does not work in practice. Diversity is a fact of life, and one that is increasingly changing with interaction. On the one hand, globalization is leading to homogenization, where for example, one language and one culture is gaining predominance, while at the same time there are increasing struggles across differences in values, ethnicities, sexuality, gender and ability, to name a few (Robson & Spence, 2011). Gender roles are changing rapidly in the globalization paradigm, both in the Global North and the Global South. Power relationships in the family are being renegotiated and many more women are entering the workplace, leading to economic and cultural shifts. Women are transforming the public and private spheres of life, and there is increasing conflict that emerged from these changes (Dominelli, 2006). These changing dimensions along with a range of related changes present challenges to social workers to work with individuals and communities and to enable them to negotiate these transforming roles and identities and to shape societies where gender injustice is reduced (Robson & Spence, 2011).

India, as the largest democracy with the second largest population in the world, is an interesting case in terms of diversity, especially in the context of ethnic identity. In this paper, the term ‘ethnic identity’ is used to refer to ascriptive group identities that include race, religion, language, tribe and caste. Indians have identities grounded in religion, with representation from all the major religions; identities grounded in caste, with a distinct caste structure and caste identities; identities grounded in language, with 22 official languages and an estimated 144 others; identities grounded in ‘tribes’ as scheduled in the constitution, with over 461 tribal communities and identities grounded on Aryan/Dravidian distinctions (Gopalkrishnan, 2013; Kux, 2007; LOC, 2004; MHA, 2010; Sooryamoorthy, 2008). Further, one could argue that these identities are relatively fluid, and that people move between them depending on strategic situational advantage (Behera, 2007). Despite these differences, and perhaps, because of them, India has successfully remained a functioning democracy for over seven decades (Gopalkrishnan, 2013). However, this has been at a cost, with thousands of incidents of violence across religious, linguistic and cultural lines, incidents that have caused enormous loss of lives and property over the years (Gebert, Boerner, & Chatterjee, 2011; Kux, 2007; Varshney, 2001). Both the Global North and the Global South are seeing multiple intercultural conflict events such as the racially based riots in Cronulla in Australia or the attacks on migrant labour in Mumbai, India, and more recently, the protests across India as a response to the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (Deka, 2019; OADBS, 2012; Smith, 2006).

Social workers working within this context need to be able to work with communities in ways that help them to empower themselves, while being cognizant of the impacts of conflict and the power relationships inherent in them and to be able to work with respect to human dignity, diversity and recognition of the support needed
by oppressed minorities. While community development approaches are an important way of working with these issues, historically there have been issues in terms of how well they work in terms of dealing with the conflicts that emerge across diversity lines (Botes & Rensburg, 2000).

Social workers looking to work with communities need to adopt the notion of social inclusion, where people are able to be ‘valued, appreciated equals in the social, economic, political and cultural life of the community (i.e., in valued societal settings) and to be involved in mutually trusting, appreciative and respectful interpersonal relationships at the family, peer and community levels’ (Crawford, 2003, p. 5). Accordingly, people, such as social workers, working towards more socially inclusive community development processes, have to develop appropriate skills and frameworks to enable them to be more effective in working across cultures (Van Oudenhoven & Benet-Martínez, 2015). One of the key frameworks that social workers will need to consider is the notion of cultural partnerships that go beyond the more popular cultural competence frameworks that are very popular in the Global North (Bean, 2006). Cultural competence is a very problematic framework in that it purports to be apolitical, thereby ignoring issues of power, racism and historical dispossession that may exist in communities, it depends on visualizing identity as relatively static, and it draws on the notion of ‘competence’ as an achievable standard which fits well within a colonial, top-down approach to working across cultures (Pon, 2009; Sakamoto, 2007; Spivak, 2006). All of these make the framework relatively unusable where there are large differences of power between individuals and communities, and where intercultural conflict merges from these differences (Gopalkrishnan, 2019). Cultural partnerships based on mutual learning and shared power would be a far more effective way of working across cultures, especially as they would incorporate the idea of dynamic cultural identities that change and modify with intercultural interactions (Taylor, 2015; Van Oudenhoven & Benet-Martínez, 2015). These forms of partnership-based processes would bring together all the stakeholders to address historic conditions of oppression and power differentials while developing sustainable and longer-lasting relationships (Gopalkrishnan, 2019).

Indigenization of social work and social work education is another key challenge for social workers. Clearly, ethics, standards, theories and practices need to draw on the local context to be relevant, and yet, to the greatest extent, it is those of the Global North that are grafted onto the Global South context and often prove to be very unsuitable (Dash, 2017). It is a complex area as there are those like Huang and Zhang (2008, p. 616) who present a range of arguments to debunk the proponents of indigenization as scholars who ‘blindly adhered to the existing indigenous cultural and social structure and questioned western social work’s values and principles’. These authors then go on to argue that indigenization is not necessary because adaption to the local context is an implicit requirement of social work as a profession. These kinds of arguments are extremely problematic as they completely ignore the power differentials that exist in the social work profession. As argued by Midgley (2008), the global expansion of social work has much to do with unilateral international exchanges that resulted in the export of approaches from the Global North to the Global South. The authors’ own experiences with international student exchanges
between India and Australia and further research with universities across Australia, India, Cambodia, Philippines, Thailand, Fiji and Vietnam confirm that the flow of the ‘exchanges’ continues to be largely from the Global North with very significant barriers to the participation of stakeholders from the Global South (Miles et al., 2016). The barriers that emerged from our research included financial disadvantage, workload imbalances as well as entry restrictions to the Global North, all of which ensured that academics and students from the Global South found it extremely difficult to travel the other way. These access issues are also further exacerbated by the easy availability of the academic literature from the Global North to the Global South, rather than vice versa, and the attendant privileging of the approaches delineated in this literature. Rankopo and Osei-Hwedie (2010) discuss this privileging of European and North American approaches, suggesting that African work institutions often design and modify their courses with these approaches in mind. They challenge this form of ‘privilege’, suggesting that a locally relevant social work discourse would not seek to privilege one form of knowledge over another and would take account of multiple perspectives and cultural explanations of social reality.

Conclusion

Globalization has significant impacts on the individuals and communities that social work professionals work with. Neoliberal globalization, in particular, has caused greater levels of income inequality and marginalization while at the same time forcing the state to withdraw from many of its traditional roles that would have helped to ameliorate some of the worst impacts. Climate change in turn is also impacting most on the weaker sections of society, and the rapidly increasing levels of natural disasters are testing the resilience of the poorer nations and the most vulnerable populations. Increasing levels of migration are also leading to greater levels of intercultural engagement and in some circumstances, greater levels of intercultural conflict.

In the increasingly complex and globalized world, there is a need for social work to transcend the well accepted individualized therapeutic approaches and to work more extensively using community development approaches that promote empowerment, social justice and human rights. The transformational and empowerment focus of community development approaches will enable social work professionals to mitigate some of the negative effects of neoliberal globalization, while enabling communities to work together and challenge some of the global forces that impact on them. It is extremely unfortunate that as the need for such approaches has become more pressing in the complex global environment, they are actually being used more infrequently by the social work profession and are being marginalized in social work education. While we argue that the adoption of community development approaches is necessary for social workers to respond effectively to the negative impacts of globalization, we also posit that the kinds of approaches would need to incorporate notions of social activism, social inclusion and eco-social justice, while being locally embedded through processes such as indigenization of curriculum to be relevant to
some of the key aspects of the globalized world. Finally, social work and social work education need to place itself within an environment of partnership and collaboration, where one kind of knowledge is not privileged over another and where there is a celebration of diverse worldviews and ways of being.

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