



ASWNet
Africa Social Work Network



Environmental Social Work

Philosophy, Aspirations, Decolonising,
Frameworks, Subjects and Strategies



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Topics covered

- Definitions
- Philosophy and theories
- Aspirations
- Decolonising
- Case studies
- Strategies
- Frameworks of Umoja kaAfrica (AU)
- SDG framework of UN
- Suggested strategies
- 6 pillars of environmental social work
- Assessment and exam questions
- Research topics and questions

These are text slides, readers should expect more words than usual per slide



DEFINING ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIAL WORK

Using the environment to enhance and promote development, social functioning and prevent social problems

Other names

Ecological social work
Environmental social work

DEFINING ECOLOGICAL/ENVIRONMENTAL OR GREEN SOCIAL WORK

Definition from *Fundi*, the dictionary and biography of social work:
<https://africasocialwork.net/fundi-the-african-dictionary-of-social-work/>

Developmental approach: a process of development that prevents and looks at needs in the long term as opposed to welfare

Developmental social work: a process of development that balances social and economic development

Ecological social work: Also known as environmental and green social work. It means using the environment to enhance development, promote social functioning and to prevent social problems.

Entrepreneur: an adventurous person with innovative skills and willing to take risks by investing in a risky project and shows great risk mitigation skills to succeed in their venture

False conservation: a situation where land or natural resources are taken away from a community under the pretext that they are failing to conserve it. This can be done by government, local government or non-

PHILOSOPHIES AND THEORIES RELEVANT TO ESW

- Ubuntu philosophy – the environment is one of the 6 levels of Ubuntu – the individual, the family, community, society, environment and spirituality
- Pan-Africanism – African land belongs to Africans and must be protected
- Afrocentrism - giving urgency to African philosophies, values, ethics, ways of doing, ideals, dreams etc as opposed to colonial ways.
- Africa family theory – land is an inheritance that will be passed on from generation to generation
- Wholistic approach – view that you can look at humans outside the environment and spirituality
- Livelihoods framework – the environment plays an important role in livelihoods
- Umachobane theory - sustainability is crucial
- Decolonisation theory – the environment (land, urban land, forests, minerals, water, wildlife etc) has been colonized and there is need to return to its owners
- Indigenisation theory – valuing local laws, values, theories, approaches and practices in relation to the environment
- African asset theory – the environment is an important asset that people should have access to, lack of access leads to poverty

PHILOSOPHIES & THEORIES..continued

- Environmental therapy – the environment can be therapeutic naturally, culturally or professionally
- Africa social development model – development has to consider the environment, there is a relationship between the two
- Developmentalist theory/Developmental social work – access to the environment is crucial for development
- Orature theory – knowledge about the environment can be oral, it is largely oral in Africa
- African feminist – importance of the environment to addressing gender inequality
- Ubuntu management theory – using ubuntu values and principles in management the environment
- African Strengths Theory – access to, and ability to use the land, water, wildlife, forests is a strengths that use necessary to deal with social issues

COMMON ASPECTS OF UBUNTU IN AFRICA

Relations

Culture

Indigeneity

Wholism/
holistic

Justice and
Freedom

Responsibility

Community/
collectivity

Respect

SELECTED UBUNTU ETHICS AND PRINCIPLES

Upenyu – valuing life.
The ethic is do not harm or kill

Umhuri – familyhood, valuing blood relations.
The ethic is protect families and marriages

Umuganda – service to others.
The ethic is help others in need or reciprocity

Ururami, Ubulungiswa, Ubutabera – justice.
The ethic is for people to be just

Ukama, Harambee – familyhood, valuing blood relations.

Ujamaa – familyhood or communityhood.
The ethic is promote cooperation and collectivism

Ubunyarwanda – nationhood.
There are many ethics including promoting peace

Uhuru – liberty/independence/freedom.
The ethic is liberate and protect African liberation

Umachobane – sustainability.
The ethic is to do programs that are sustainable.

Itorero – good members of society, and a strong sense of cultural values and leadership skills.
The ethic is to respect our cultures

Umoja – unity, peace and harmony.
The ethic is to promote oneness.

Kagisano – good neighbourliness.
The ethic is to promote harmony

Musha – permanent home in ancestral lands.
The ethic is to protect and maintain permanent homes

Simunye – strengths in numbers, we are one.
The ethic is promote cooperation and collectivism

Shosholoza – resilience.
The ethic is remaining strong despite adversity

Kuumba – creativity.
The ethic is not to imitate

Ujima – collective responsibility.
The ethic is to look after one another

Utungamiri – leadership.
The ethic is people centered leadership

Ushavi – workmanship, enterprising.
The ethic is hardworking

Urithi, Nhaka – inheritance.
The ethic is to protect inheritance

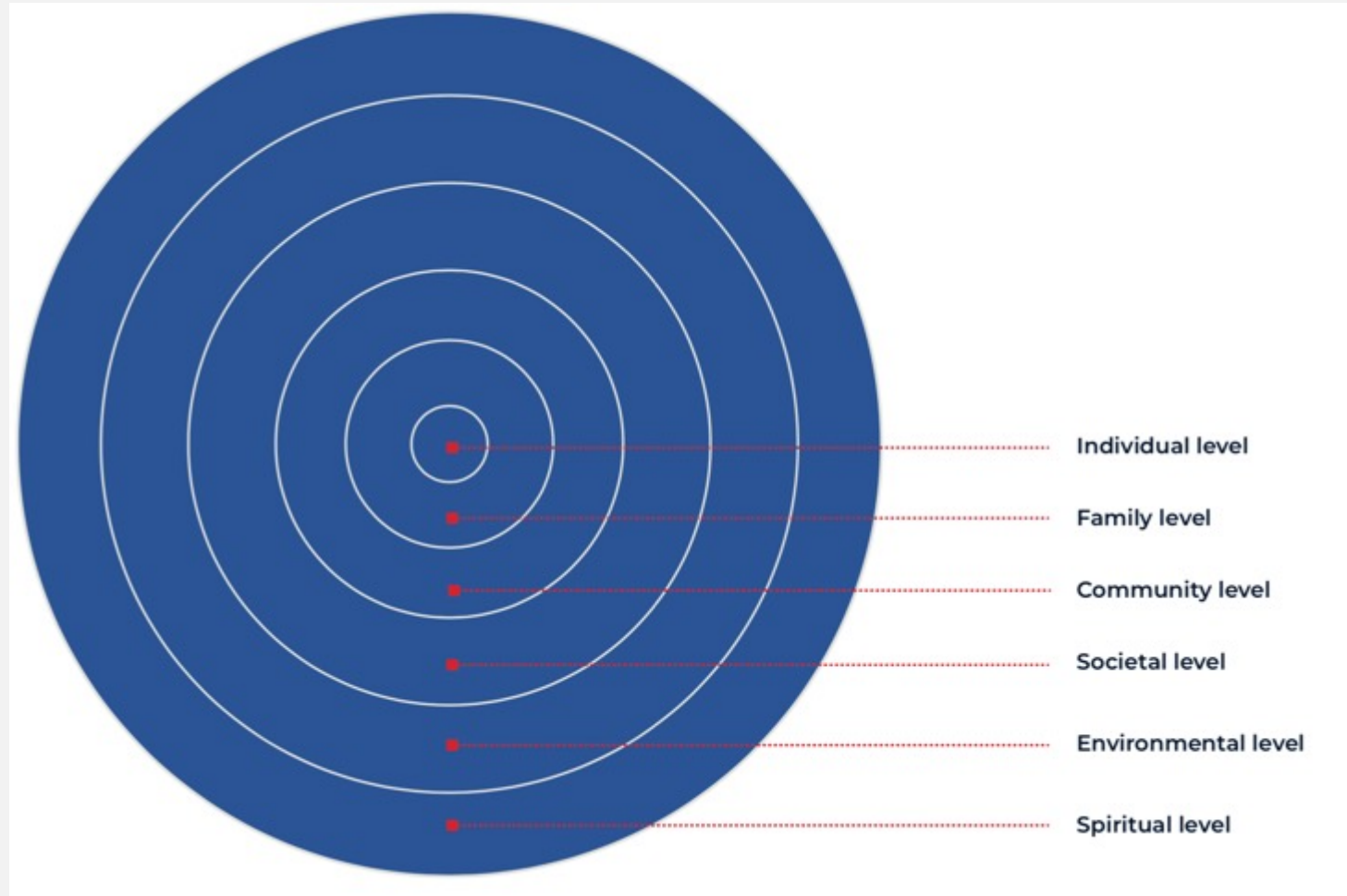
Uroho – spiritual connectedness.
The ethic is to be holistic

Unyanzvi – professionalism.
The ethic is to act professionally

Sankofa – look back to inform the future.

Ruremekedzo or Heshima – the ethic of respect

THE HOLISTIC OR INTEGRATED MODEL OF UBUNTU



Mugumbate and Chereni, 2020

ASPIRATIONS THAT ARE DERIVED FROM UBUNTU

- To understand how people interpret the environment, we need to understand their aspirations and problems
- People's aspirations are inspired by their philosophy
- Their interpretation of social problems is influenced by their philosophy
- What are major environmental aspirations and problems that Africans face? – see next slide
- Major problems are environmental dispossession as a result of colonization that has resulted in shortage of land or landless.
- Global warming is not a key challenge in Africa, it is a tertiary problem

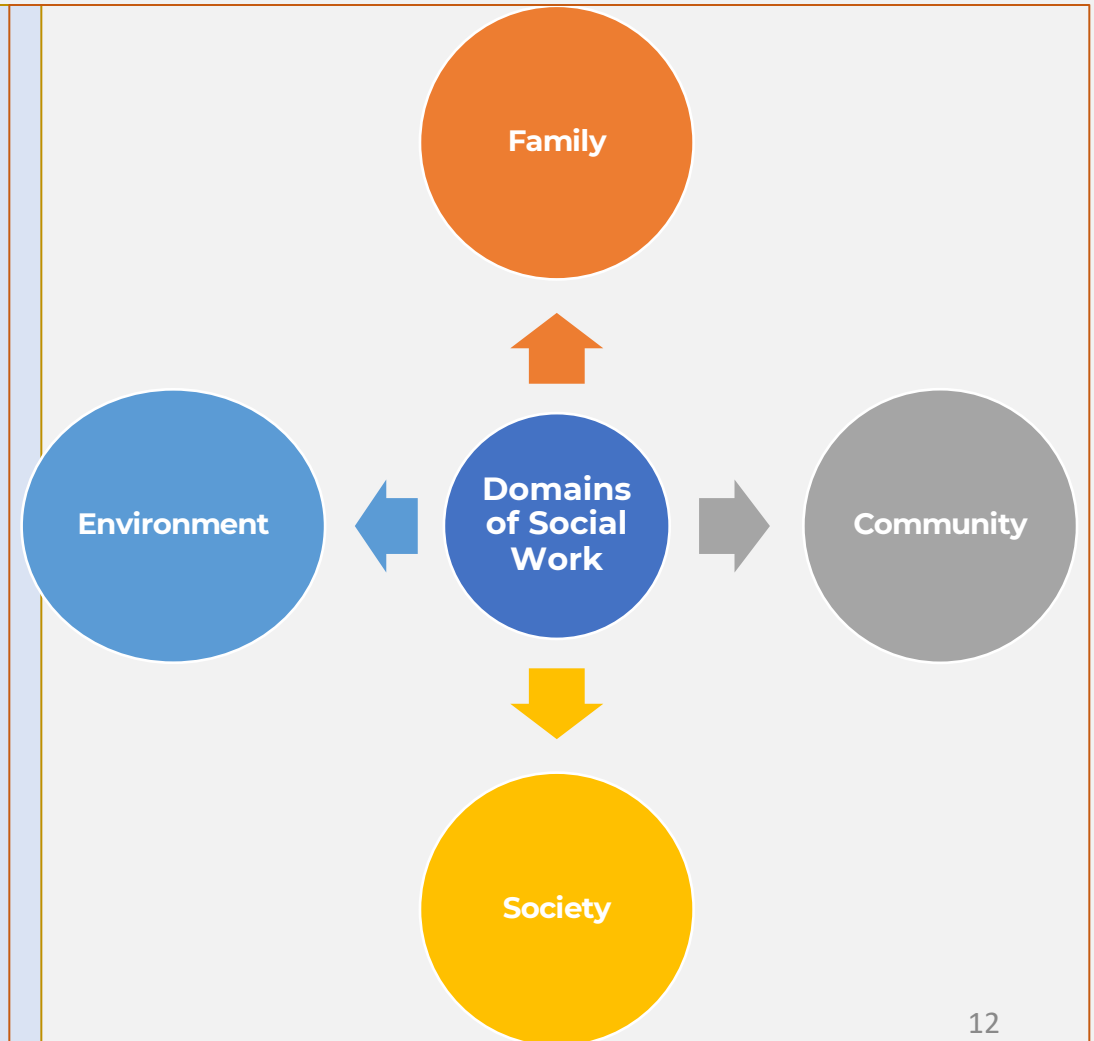
ASPIRATIONS – Ubuntu inspired

1. Owning land for permanent settlements, homes and housing
2. Land to belong to a permanent community
3. Owning land for food cropping
4. Land for livelihoods, income, economic activities – tourism, hunting,
5. Inheriting the land of your ancestors
6. Communal land for live stocking
7. Communal land for wildlife
8. Land for cultural rites – cemeteries for burial, trees for rain making prayers etc
9. Land for development – dams, roads, schools, dip tanks etc
10. Wholistic connection between land, people, ancestors and future generations
11. Responsibility – caring for the land, passing it on
12. Environmental laws that support these aspirations and African values
13. Environmental governance and custodianship that is just
14. Everyone is responsible for environmental development, care and protection (environmental ethics)
15. Benefitting from resource exploitation – water in oceans or dams, air, trees, wildlife, solar, minerals, tourism
16. Fair trade
17. Deriving medicines and healing from the environment.

**THESE ARE THE
COMPONENTS OF
ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIAL
WORK IN AFRICA**

THE 4 DOMAINS OF AFRICAN SOCIAL WORK ARE SHAPED BY UBUNTU

1. Understanding, Developing and Protecting **Families** and their members
2. Understanding, Developing and Protecting **Communities**
3. Understanding, Developing and Protecting **Society** and Nations (Socially, Economically, Politically and Spiritually)
4. Understanding, Utilising & Protecting the **Environment** (Domain 4)



ENVIRONMENTALLY GROUNDED SOCIAL PROBLEMS

GRASS ROOTS PROBLEMS

(foundation or primary social problems)

- Shortage of land for food production
- No land owned for establishing homes and communities

GRASS STEM PROBLEMS

(problems of growth or secondary problems)

- Poverty resulting from lack of access to the environment
- Lack of development resulting from lack of access to the environment

GRASS SEED PROBLEMS

(futuristic or tertiary problems)

- Global warming
- Climate change



IS AFRICAN ECO-SOCIAL WORK RESPONDING TO NEEDS, ASPIRATIONS AND REALITIES?

HAVING ADEQUATE ARABALE LAND AND WATER FOR CROPPING AND LIVESTOCKING IS MORE IMPORTANT FOR MY COMMUNITY (PICTURED) THAN DEALING WITH GLOBAL WARMING



OUR SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION MUST BE GROUNDED IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

What philosophy shapes our eco-social work? Can western or other philosophies adequately align with African values of on the environment? No.

THE VALUES AND ETHICS THAT WE TEACH IN SOCIAL WORK

African philosophy should shape our social work values, ethics and principles and should shape our eco-social work methods, strategies etc

OUR SELECTION OF LITERATURE

The books we use in eco-social work, together with the theories and frameworks should align with our philosophy.

WE NEED TO DECOLONIZE THE MEANING AND MOTIVES OF ECO- SOCIAL WORK

African knowledges, theories, values and voices that are often sidelined or silenced in ecological social work.

Ubuntu gives African social workers confidence, and makes social work more acceptable to our families, communities and society.

KEY SHORTCOMINGS OF COLONIAL, GLOBAL AND WESTERN ECO-SOCIAL WORK IN AFRICA

1. Focus on humans, human-centric as opposed to being wholistic
2. Focus on urban populations
3. Focus on global warming / climate change
4. Focus on western knowledge (theories, research and case studies)
5. Focus on western aspirations not African aspirations
6. No emphasis on poverty
7. Ignores Africans' rights to land
8. When they are talking about social justice and human rights, it does not include rights to land and land justice for Africans

AFRICAN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION/TRAINING HAS A PART TO PLAY

- Lecturers and tutors – teaching environmental social work subjects, decolonising content
- Librarians – ordering books, journals and textbooks that focus on African environmental social work
- Heads of schools – selecting environmental subjects to be taught and decolonising environment social work syllabi
- Publishers – publishing books, journals and textbooks relevant to African environmental social work
- Training regulators – ensuring that syllabi is adequate for promoting African environmental social work
- Researchers and authors – developing literature on African environmental social work

HISTORY OF ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIAL WORK IS INCOMPLETE WITHOUT THESE EARLY SOCIAL WORKERS

Charlotte Makgomo-Mannya Maxeke (1871-1939) – Mother of Social Work and Mother of Black Freedom in South Africa



Mkabuko Joshua Nkomo, 1917-1999

Started trade unionism in the early 50s, diploma in social work in 1952; liberator, vice-president of Zimbabwe

Land, freedom and justice for every person.

UMOJA WA AFRIKA/AFRICAN UNION MODEL ON THE ENVIRONMENT

The UA/AU lists the following as some aspirations of African people in Agenda2063:

1. A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and **sustainable development**
 2. An Africa with a **strong cultural identity**, common heritage, shared values and ethics
 3. An Africa, whose development is **people-driven**, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children.
 4. An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for **human rights, justice** and the rule of law
 5. An integrated continent, politically, united and based on the ideals of **Pan-Africanism** and the vision of Africa's Renaissance
 6. A **peaceful** and **secure** Africa
 7. Africa as a strong, united, resilient and **influential global player** and partner.
- More information available at <https://au.int/agenda2063/aspirations>

UNITED NATIONS SDG* FRAMEWORK

- **Poverty**
- **Zero Hunger**
- **Good Health and Well-being**
- Quality Education
- Gender Equality
- **Clean Water and Sanitation**
- **Affordable and Clean Energy**
- **Decent Work and Economic Growth**
- Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
- Reduced Inequality
- **Sustainable Cities and Communities**
- **Responsible Consumption and Production**
- **Climate Action**
- **Life Below Water**
- **Life on Land**
- Peace and Justice Strong Institutions
- Partnerships to achieve the Goals
- **SDG stands for Sustainable Development Goals. They are 17 goals. Those in bold relate to ESW.

SPECIFIC STRATEGIES FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

1. Ensuring households own land for permanent housing and home instead of renting, state/public housing, housing grants etc
2. Ensuring communities have access to environmental resources they need to flourish
3. Promoting food production as opposed to food hand outs, donations and remedial welfare
4. Advocacy to change colonial environmental law and value African laws
5. Advocacy to change colonial land tenure laws and value African laws
6. Environment based livelihoods and income – tourism, forestry, mining, fishing, wildlife etc
7. Communal environment management to prevent erosion, build water sources, avoid pollution etc
8. Global advocacy to decolonize land, for industrialised countries to reduce consumption, reduce waste,
9. Community gardens in rural and urban areas
10. Farming as therapy and exercise
11. Therapeutic gardening or walks

CASE STUDIES

1. In South Africa and many other countries, landlessness resulted from colonial occupation. Most of the land has not been returned. If people get their land back, this will reduce food, housing, cohesion and other problems. The people's aspiration in relation to the environment is to have access to the environment.
2. In Zimbabwe, diamonds were discovered in an area called Marange in the east of the country, the Marange Diamond Fields. Villagers and small scale diamond miners were displaced when commercial mining started. The community has not access to the land, and the proceeds of the mining. Their aspiration is to have both.
3. In Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Renaissance Dam along the great Nile River has been opposed by Egypt and Sudan based on colonial laws that gave Egypt and Sudan the right to control the Nile yet there are many other African nations that share the Nile. The people in those countries are getting their access to their river, it is their aspiration to their environment.
4. The Africans who were first to be involved in social services and social work all aspired for environmental decolonization, the likes of Mkabuko Joshua Nkomo, 1917-1999 of Zimbabwe and Charlotte Makgomo-Mannya Maxeke (1871-1939) of South Africa.
5. There are many other case studies

CASE STUDIES..continued

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SUGGESTED SUBJECTS/COURSES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIAL WORK

Subject	Add content/topics
Environmental Aspirations, Values and Ethics or Introduction to ESW	
Indigenising the Environment or Decolonising the Environment	
Environmental Law, Policy and Governance	
Global environmental social work	
Practice and Skills for Environmental Social Work or Environmental Social Work in Practice	
Environmental Disasters and Risk Management	
Collaborative Environmental Social Work	
The Environment, Social Functioning and Development	
Environmental Social Economic Development	
Honours Research (focusing on environment social work)	
Fieldwork (focusing on environment)	
Capstone subject focusing on EVW	
Gender, Environment and Development	

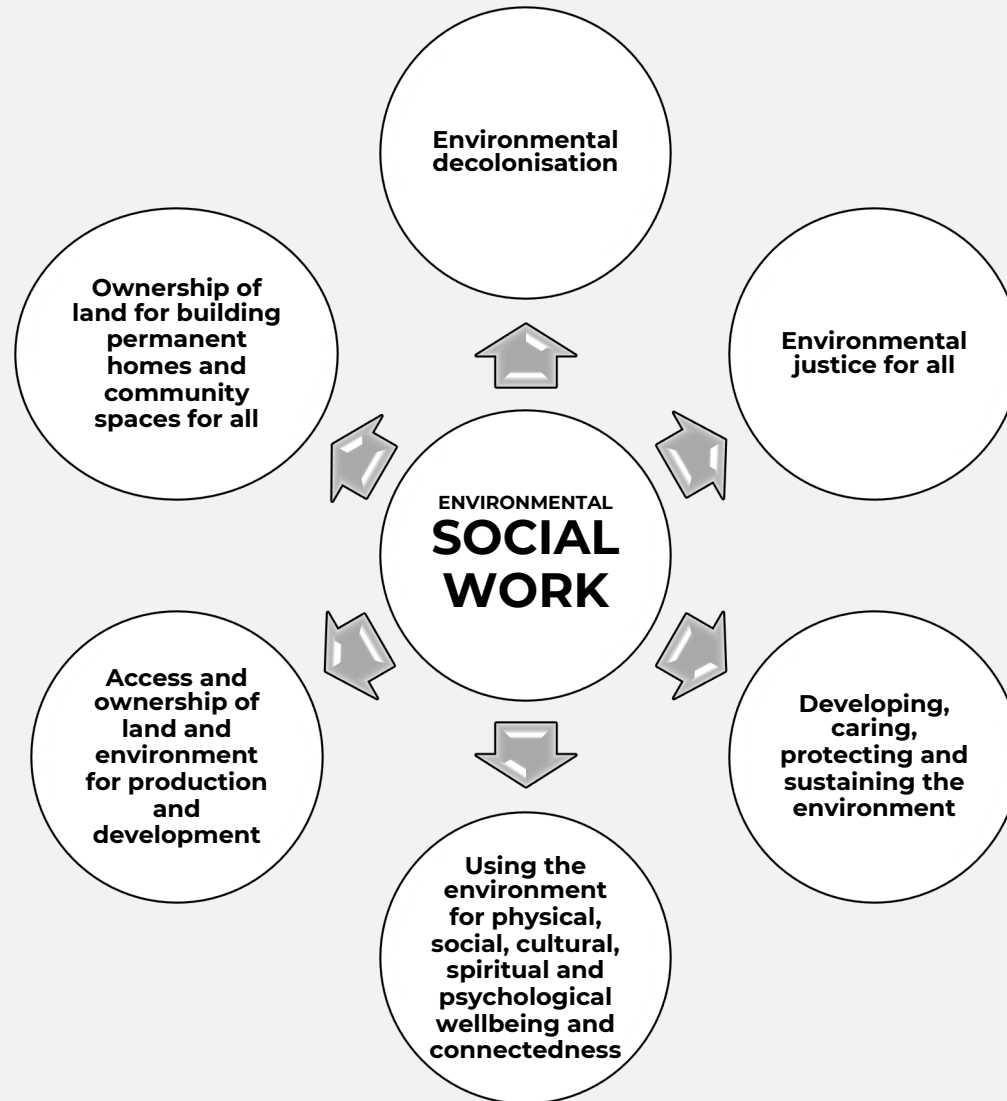


SUBJECTS/COURSES...continued

Subject	Add content/topics
Society, Environment and the Future	
Environment and Culture	
Indigenous Peoples and the Environment	
Sustainability and the Environment	
Housing, Settlements and Communities	
Community, Culture and Environment	
Environmental Employment and Income	
Environmental Equality and Justice	
Environmental Ubuntu or African Environmental Social Work	
Other options	
A minor or major or double degree including courses on the environment and social work	



THE 6 PILLARS OF ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIAL WORK (ESW)



PILLARS OF ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIAL WORK AND ASPIRATIONS

Pillar	Aspirations
Environmental decolonisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inheriting the land and environment of your ancestors • Political social work and action to reverse colonization • Advocacy for decolonisation
Environmental justice for all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just ownership and access to environmental resources including land at family, community and national level • Environmental laws that support African aspirations and values • Environmental governance and custodianship that is just • Benefitting from resource exploitation – water in oceans or dams, air, trees, wildlife, solar, minerals, tourism etc • Fair trade at local, national and global level
Ownership of land for building permanent homes and community spaces for all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Owning land for permanent homes • Land owned collectively for community purposes
Access and ownership of land for production and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Owning land for food cropping • Land for livelihoods, income, economic activities – tourism, hunting etc • Communal land for live stocking • Communal land for wildlife • Land and environment for medicines • Value addition at source to avoid trading, selling or exporting unprocessed cheap raw materials • Land for development – dams, roads, schools, dip tanks etc
Using the environment for physical, social, cultural, spiritual and psychological wellbeing and connectedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land for cultural rites – cemeteries for burial, trees for rain making prayers etc • Wholistic connection between land, people, ancestors and future generations • Deriving healing and wellbeing from the environment.
Developing, caring, protecting and sustaining the environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility – respecting and caring for the environment • Environmental ethics • Preventing and managing pollution, global warming, disasters etc • Environmental advocacy at local and global level



ASSESSMENT AND EXAM QUESTIONS

1. Select an African family or community of your choice. You can use. Visit them and do an assessment of their environmental aspirations and needs. Report back to the whole class. Submit a report showing how you assessed the needs, your findings and recommendations.
2. Discuss the strengths of ESW that is shaped by African philosophy?
3. Name and describe the 6 pillars of environmental social work.
4. Go in the library and internet and search for 4 environmentally related social challenges or problems that were reported in the past year. Write a report to the head of your university or social work training institution about what these 4 are and comment on your preparedness to address these social issues when you finish training.
5. Create 8 slides to place in a local museum about the roles of an ecological social worker.
6. Visit one agency providing green social work. Interview the green social worker about the methods and techniques they use and the challenges they face.
7. In pairs, visit a local cultural leader and discuss with them how the environment resolves social problems. You are recommended to use their language. Submit a transcription and translation of your interview for marking.
8. What were the major environmental issues in the history of your country and social issues they caused. Submit an essay.
9. Land is an important asset. Discuss.
10. Discuss any 6 African values and ethics crucial for environmental social work.
11. Discuss any 5 oral sources of environmental social work knowledge
12. Discuss any 4 theories that are relevant to environmental social work

RESEARCH TOPICS OR QUESTIONS

- The roles of the environment in promoting the goals of social work and social development.
- Identify a community and research its environmental problems and how they result in social problems.
- What are the views of selected key informants on strengthening environmental social work?
- What does literature say on the roles and strategies of environmental social workers in Africa. Use a systematic literature review process.
- Research the link between the environment and spirituality.
- Develop a theory or model of green social work in Africa.
- Research the relationship between poverty and the environment. A quantitative study is preferable.

FURTHER READING

1. Most of the content found in these slides is found on the website of ASWNet, www.africasocialwork.net unless otherwise indicated.
2. See Introduction to Social Work slides for information about definitions of social work, philosophy, history of social services and social work, values, ethics, process, principles, domains, methods, sources of knowledge, social problems etc
3. See Fieldwork in Social Work slides for information about placements, practicum or attachments.
4. See Decolonised Social Work slides for information about placements, practicum or attachments.
5. There are also more detailed slides about what colonization means in general and phases of decolonization.

THE END



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