

7TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON

“EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES: ROLE OF SOCIAL WORK FOR SUSTAINABLE FUTURE”

**November 14-16, 2024 (Speaking on November 13th at 11:00 P.M.
Dhaka, Bangladesh.**

Speaking as a Conference Speaker and Guest of Honor on Zoom

Respected Chair, Eminent Guests of Honor, Special Guests,
Renowned Speakers and Discussants, and Participants of this
international conference.... Aslamu Alaikum and Good Morning!

I am very pleased to join you all in this very timely and important
conference on **Empowering Communities: Role of Social Work for
Sustainable Future** organized by Community Social Work Practice &
Development Foundation (CSWPD) in partnership with Peoples
University of Bangladesh and other relevant organizations. I am
delighted to see here some of my good friends and leaders of global
social work education and practice, and of course, it is always a pleasure
seeing the faces of people from my country of origin Bangladesh. I
commend Social Worker and Professor M. Habibur Rahman for his
dynamic leadership, scholarship, and his tireless efforts addressing

pressing issues and social problems using social work strategies in the region.

The main theme of this conference **focuses on the role of social work in empowering communities for a sustainable future.** Evidently, the word “community” is a frequently used but controversial term. There is no unanimity as to the definition of the word "community." Different authors in this area use the word "community" to refer to different things. In some countries, community has come to be associated with locality development in a social, economic, and/or political sense, including the building of social support systems, mutual aid and community economic development. For others, it means community groups becoming empowered to undertake social action in pursuit of social development or social change goals in the larger society. Clearly, this touches or changes perceptions of what appropriately constitutes a community. Audre Lorde said “without community, there is no liberation.” Communities today are fragmented as a result of misinformation and disinformation spreading by vested groups of people that are contributing to extremism among community groups.

The United Nations remarks that social work can play a critical role to address radical extremism by “engaging communities, leading educational programs, promoting dialogue and conflict prevention, and empowering communities to fortify the social compact against extremism.”

Social work plays a vital and transformative role in nurturing sustainable communities. The global definition cites, “social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversity are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance well-being (IASSW/IFSW/ICSW).” Social workers have a role to offer in ensuring that progress is made in addressing systemic inequity, inequality, and injustice in communities.

Addressing the needs of diverse communities, we need to gain trust, build consensus, and commitment to shared interests. Social work is a profession of persuasion, and there is a need to cultivate on this strategy to mobilize communities to ensure a sustainable future. In order to foster solidarity, we need to develop more community and international partnerships. Solidarity among civil society organizations throughout the world needs to be fomented in order to hold violations accountable for a predator’s misdeeds that causes deprivation among billions of people (Mathbor, 2008).

Sustainability is not just about environmental conservation, but about ensuring that social, economic, and environmental systems are

interlinked in a way that benefits both current and future generations. Social work, as a profession, understands that true sustainability involves addressing social issues such as poverty, inequity, and marginalization, while also considering environmental impacts and the need for economic development. The profession is rooted in a set of core values, such as social justice, dignity and worth of the person, integrity and professionalism, that all align with the principles of sustainability. By embedding these values, social workers ensure that sustainability is pursued in a way that benefits all community members, particularly those who are most vulnerable. The social work profession is uniquely positioned to advocate for environmental justice by addressing the intersection of environmental degradation and social inequality. Social workers have a role to work with communities to raise awareness of the impacts of climate change, promote sustainable practices, and advocate for policies that protect vulnerable populations.

Social work, with its emphasis on social justice, human rights, and empowerment, is indispensable in creating sustainable communities. By addressing the inter-connectedness of social, economic, and environmental issues, social workers are uniquely positioned to help build a future that is equitable, resilient, and sustainable for all. In the face of global challenges, the role of social work in empowering communities is not just a professional duty, it is a moral imperative that

contributes to the well-being of both individuals and the global community as a whole.

In building community capacity, social workers can help to develop the skills, resources, and leadership capacity needed to address their own challenges. This could involve setting up community-based initiatives that promote environmental conservation, provide equitable access to resources, or improve local economies. Many social workers are involved in establishing or supporting social enterprises that combine business objectives with social missions. These enterprises provide sustainable livelihoods, foster local economic growth, and address social challenges, such as unemployment or the lack of affordable services.

There are three global institutions founded and led by social work professionals. These are the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), that serves and represents social work education globally; the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), that represents the interests of social workers around the world; and the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW), that monitors and influences social policy directives globally. These organizations require more collaboration and partnerships to influence social and economic policies that will safeguard the interests of our unique global communities. Unless we work together, our world will remain endangered.

I would like to end with the hope that each of you will become a part of the change needed to empower communities for a sustainable future by participating in productive community resilience discussions and by accepting that all communities and their members can be more empowered when communities are connected globally.

Thank you, and I wish you all a productive conference.

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