

# A Worker's DRReaM House: Social Workers' Roles in Planning for Local Disaster Risk Reduction and Management

Joyce B. Sy<sup>1</sup>, Carole Adamson<sup>1</sup> and JC Gaillard<sup>2</sup>

School of Counselling, Human Services and Social Work<sup>1</sup>; School of Environment<sup>2</sup> The University of Auckland

## Overview

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes the principles of social and economic justice.

Social workers can help in improving the quality of life for individuals, groups, and communities by counseling, community organizing, teaching, conducting research, advocacy and enacting policies.

Although social workers have important roles to play in all phases of the DRM, the least amount of social work involvement is in the prevention and mitigation phase.

Disaster Risk Management (DRM) planning, as an emerging field is the best arena to showcase social workers' competency in engaging in policy practice – an area in the social work profession which is taken for granted by most workers.

Policy practice generally refers to the use of social work skills to propose and change policies in order to achieve the goal of social justice.



**Promotion of Social Justice (Core value)**

**Social Worker**

**Engagement in policy practice (Competency)**

This Roof shows the interplay between the promotion of social justice as a core value of social work and one of its top competency—engagement in policy practice. At the base of the roof is DRM planning, a new area of concern that social workers can use as a platform to harness its skills in policy practice

## Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Planning

### Capacities and Trainings

To become a good advocate of social equity and justice, social workers need to possess an array of skills such as case work management, emphatic listening, strategic planning, counseling, and community organising.

These skills are gained in the course of their study and practice in the profession.

In the DRM, over 40% of all disaster mental health volunteers trained by the American Red Cross are professional social workers.



Figure 1: Seminar on Disaster Management from Social Work Perspective, November 2014



Figure 2: Social Work in climate change, disaster risk reduction & response: building capacity and global partnership, June 2013



Figure 3: Margareta Wahlström, at the Conference of the European Association of Schools of Social Work

*Social Work capacities & trainings in DRM*

### Participation

Social workers' participation in the DRM planning would secure that the social work values of *service to humanity, social justice, human dignity and worth, and integrity* would be incorporated in the national, regional and local DRM plans.

Currently, the majority of social workers are in the fields of: medical and public health; child, family and school; and mental health and substance abuse. Only a few social workers participate in policy practice.



What my family and friends think I do



What society think I do



What I think I do

Figure 4-6: Social work through different lenses Source: perception vs. fact.com

*Social Work roles and experiences*

### Experiences and Roles

Defining the roles and understanding the experiences of social workers in DRM planning can provide a picture of their contributions in DRM Prevention and Mitigation Phase.

It includes an analysis of a worker's functions in DRM like:

- Supporting the client's needs;
- Linking needs to available resources;
- Preventing severe psychosocial problems; and
- Instigating policy change.

## Strengths-Based Perspective

*focus on the social workers' skills, abilities, experiences and professional support when participating in DRM planning*

### Prevention and Mitigation

### Preparedness

### Response

### Recovery and Rehabilitation

- The national, regional and local DRM plans are formulated
- The understanding of roles and recognising the experiences of social workers and other DRM professionals should be defined and established
- The social work profession should ensure that social justice is promoted in the DRM plans, and translated into actual policies and/or practices

#### References

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#### Photo Sources:

Figure 1: Pooja Bhagavat Memorial Mahajana Educational Centre  
Figure 2: IFSW Asia Pacific Conference 2013, Oscar M. Lopez Center  
Figure 3: UNISDR  
Figure 4 - 6: Perception vs. fact.com