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EDITORIAL

SPECIAL SECTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE, DISASTERS, AND SOCIAL WORK IN THE CARIBBEAN

CARIBBEAN SOCIAL WORK IN AN AGE OF CLIMATE CRISIS

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Globally, the Caribbean has long been branded as a paradise defined by sand, sea, and sun, with the climate crisis nowhere in that postcard identity. Yet few regions have been as profoundly affected by climate change and disasters as the Caribbean. For a region of small island and coastal states, the climate crisis is not a future scenario to be modelled or a distant threat; it is a lived, recurring reality of hurricanes that grow fiercer each season, droughts that strain fragile water systems, flooding that displaces whole communities, and the slow, corrosive stress of watching one's homeland change shape.

I first heard of the term ‘Green Social Work’ in a presentation by Prof. Emerita Lynne Healy at the ACSWE conference in Curaçao in 2013. Since then, other scholars have advanced Caribbean-affirming social work practice and research on climate change, climate justice, and disaster risk reduction. The papers gathered in this special section, builds on previous scholarship and make one thing unmistakably clear: climate change is not simply an environmental or economic problem for the region. It is an issue that social workers must intentionally address, one that touches education, mental health, community organising, spirituality, and the everyday practice of helping people survive and rebuild.

This collection turns first to a specific and instructive case from the region's own history. In his Notes From Practice, Lionel Remy revisits the psychosocial response mounted by a team of Grenadian and regional mental health professionals in the aftermath of Hurricane Ivan in 2004, a response with direct implications for other small island developing states (SIDS) in the Caribbean. Readers are invited to engage with this piece not simply as a historical record, but as a practitioner-generated reflection for post-disaster counselling, built from lived experience rather than imported models. The invitation here is for other practitioners to interrogate, test against their own contexts, and carry forward.

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Nowhere is that need for sustained, culturally grounded support more visible than in schools. Shernett Grizzle's and Shakeisha Wilson systematic review of school social work during the COVID-19 pandemic offers a case study in what happens when an entire region's support systems are tested simultaneously. The authors remind us that schools are not just sites of learning but critical infrastructure for children's psychosocial wellbeing, and the lessons drawn from that crisis apply with equal force to the hurricanes, floods, and climate disruptions still to come. The COVID-19 pandemic, itself a crisis of sweeping and sustained disruption, offers a sobering preview of how the region's schools and support systems might fare under the compounding pressures of devastating crises still to come, chief among them climate change. Their review leaves practitioners with pressing questions of their own: What would it take to sustain school-based psychosocial support through a crisis without depleting the practitioners delivering it? And as climate disruptions become more frequent rather than episodic, can schools continue to function as this critical infrastructure, or does that burden need to be shared more deliberately across the wider community?

Aieka Yasheva Smith reminds us that disaster recovery does not end when the storm passes or the cameras leave. The study of diaspora support in Jamaica's hurricane recovery, “Holding Up Yaad…” captures something distinctly Caribbean: the way recovery is sustained not only by governments and NGOs but by networks of family and community stretched across borders. Smith traces how diaspora funding has supported Jamaican hospitals and schools after hurricanes since the 2000s, filling gaps left by public institutions while raising harder questions about trust and the state's own capacity for disaster recovery. Rather than treating diaspora outreach as emergency assistance, the paper reframes it as a strategic, ongoing partnership, one that challenges conventional state-centric models, and that formal disaster response and social protection frameworks would do well to integrate more deliberately.

Beyond the walls of institutions, the resilience of Caribbean communities themselves comes into focus. Jason Cotton and Richardo Aiken's work on strengthening community knowledge for resilience reminds us that professional expertise is only half the equation. Communities are already the region's first responders to climate disasters, absorbing not just economic but non-economic losses, and holding generations of indigenous knowledge and adaptive solutions that climate policy and analysis too often overlook. Drawing on a regional resilience programme evaluated through 2,810 community perception surveys across four Caribbean countries, alongside a document analysis of the Community Disaster Risk Reduction Fund, their case study finds that outcomes improve most when interventions are restructured around a modified project life cycle, one that puts real weight on assessing local capacity, evaluating readiness, and strengthening technical assistance rather than delivering solutions from the outside in. Effective social work, this research suggests, is less about delivering services to communities and more about recognising, resourcing, and amplifying the resilience that already exists within them.

If community knowledge points to solutions already in hand, the region's institutions of professional training still have work to do to catch up. Kareen Guscott and Roxanne Sanderson's

call to reimagine social work education in the Caribbean argues that professional competency can no longer be defined solely by clinical or casework skills. Rooted in an analysis of the region's colonial legacies, economic dependency, and structural inequities, their paper makes the case that climate literacy, policy competence, and intersectional justice frameworks must be embedded within core curricula. If the region's social workers are to be proactive in promoting climate adaptation and mitigation interventions, advocates for climate justice and responders in the disasters ahead, then the classrooms that train them must adequately and intentionally prepare social workers for the world they will practise in.

The collection also extends its reach into an institution not often considered a frontline actor in climate response: the museum. Shanice Martin frames cultural heritage sites as community anchors and education hubs rather than mere custodians of objects, arguing that museums across the Caribbean and other Small Island Developing States have a distinct role to play in climate adaptation. The roles that social workers can possibly play are built on the same foundations that animate social work practice: empowerment, inclusion, and cultural competence. Aligning institutional missions with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the case studies presented show museums co-creating climate action initiatives with local communities and facilitating the kind of intergenerational knowledge-sharing that keeps heritage, and the communities it belongs to, resilient in the face of a changing climate. Martin's work is an invitation as much as an analysis, as Caribbean social work practitioners are challenged to look beyond the usual sites of intervention and consider the museum as a genuine practice collaborator, one capable of anchoring education, intergenerational dialogue, and community-based resilience work in ways few other institutions can.

Perhaps the most quietly radical contribution to this collection is Paulette Henry's autoethnographic account of gardening as climate praxis and ecospiritual healing amid Guyana's triple crisis. Writing as a Black woman in academia navigating the convergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, an electoral crisis, and climate-driven flooding, Henry draws on Black feminist thought, Afro-Caribbean spirituality, and decolonial theory to trace how gardening became something more than a coping mechanism, an embodied climate praxis that fused ecological knowledge, spiritual practice, and political witness. Through journaling and hands-in-soil engagement with land, she recounts emotional unburdening, ancestral reconnection, and communal care, reframing ecospiritual healing not as a marginal alternative but as a legitimate, culturally rooted response to intersecting crises of health, race, and environment, one that unsettles Western mental health norms even as it deepens decolonial Caribbean social work discourse. It is a reminder that resilience is not only built through policy and programming but through the daily, intimate practices by which people reclaim a relationship with land that climate change has made precarious.

These papers resist any single, tidy definition of what “climate social work” in the Caribbean should look like. It is post-disaster counselling practice and school-based crisis response. It is diaspora solidarity and community-led resilience. It is curriculum reform, cultural heritage stewardship, and spiritual gardening. What unites them is a shared conviction, that the

profession's response to climate change must be as multidimensional, as regionally rooted, drawing from cultural practices and traditions ranging from remittances to gardening and as resourceful as the communities it serves.

The Caribbean has contributed little to the climate crisis, yet it is living consequences ahead of much of the world. That unwelcome position also affords the region's social workers, educators, and communities a hard-won expertise in adaptation and recovery, expertise this special section is proud to document, and one the rest of the world would do well to study closely. The storms will keep coming. The task before us is to ensure that the systems of care built to meet them are as resilient as the people they are meant to serve, as we weather the climate change threats, together.

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