

Editorial

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Before I introduce the third issue of the fifth volume, I am pleased and proud to share with you that in 2022, the Scopus cite-score of our *International Journal of Community and Social Development* was 4.2 (<https://www.scopus.com/sourceid/21101077475>). SCImago has listed our journal under Q1 rank with 0.84 impact factor and two years cite score 3.393 (<https://www.scimagojr.com/journalsearch.php?q=21101077475&tip=sid&clean=0>). This remarkable achievement would not have been possible without dedicated and high-quality work of authors, reviewers, the SAGE production team and most importantly, readers and research scholars, who continue to cite articles published in the journal in their writing and publications. I would like to immensely thank all of them, and I hope, with your increasing rigour of scholarship the journal will attain further heights.

At the time of writing this editorial, I was contemplating about how the mother nature is treating our planet earth with two contrasting elements, fires and floods, in their extreme forms! Television visuals of inflicting inferno and heat in Europe and North America, and devastating floods in Asia were shocking and deeply disturbing to watch. Repeated warnings of the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) appeared to have been inadequately heeded. The occurrence of frequent and extreme disasters has prompted the United Nations Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, to shift the climate change terminology from ‘global warming’ to ‘global boiling’. It would not be an exaggeration to further introduce the phrase, ‘global drowning’ due to floods. When the two elements occur simultaneously and excessively across different continents, the most impacted by them are human beings and other species in the ecological systems, particularly those who do not have capacity to cope with the consequences of such events. But in some respects, these are natural disasters, thus, people and their communities and institutions often find themselves helpless. However, human induced global warming activities can act as contributing factors (IPCC, 2022).

At the same time, I was also contemplating about some governments’ recent commitment to increasing spending on manufacturing weapons and related machinery and distributing them. Having learnt lessons from the two world wars and other conflicts and wars, the world had made relatively good progress in reducing defence spending and using the same resources to developmental and peaceful purposes. This slow and promising progress made over the years appears to be changing, though, this year, the 78th anniversary of the atomic bombing of

Hiroshima, Japan, is a stark reminder to not follow such path again. But the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS) stated that around 20 European countries have pledged to increase defence spending. The IISS estimates suggest that ‘the average level of defence expenditure among NATO’s European members will be 1.8%–1.9% of GDP by 2032, compared with 1.6% in 2022 and 1.3% in 2014’ (*The Economist*, 2023a). In the NATO summit (11–12 July 2023) in Vilnius, Lithuania, members have discussed the need to spend beyond 2 percent of GDP on defence and of this, at least 20 percent will be dedicated to military equipment (*The Economist*, 2023a). These trends are not just restricted to Europe as tensions are building up in the Indo-Pacific and Africa regions. Such growing tensions and insecurity may lead many governments to increase defence spending and acquire more weapons, creating more demand for manufacture and sale of armaments, both conventional and digital (see IISS, 2023; *The Economist*, 2023b). Except Africa, the world, defence spending is increasing (defenceWeb, 2023; Tian et al., 2023). The whole thing appears quite regressive, wiping out the progress made, and peace achieved so far.

It would be useful to research the contribution of the manufacturing and use of armaments in wars to the global warming and to death and destruction of innocent lives. As argued earlier, natural disasters cannot be stopped by human beings, but they can stop creating regional tensions and insecurity, creating demand for armaments, they can stop manufacturing and sale of armaments, they can stop conflicts and wars. These are not natural, but human made. Why are they not working towards stopping and preventing them? Rather than growing and sharing together, why is there so much competition for and of domination? What is its purpose?

While considering such questions and the impact of these global developments on local communities, this issue includes the following articles relating to financial inclusion and exclusion, the urban transport system for the vulnerable groups, ideas of a smart village for sustainable communities, teacher retention policy and community health in rural areas.

Despite so much of production and distribution efforts, many people are excluded from financial systems, more so the poor and disadvantaged people. But there are conscious efforts to enhance financial inclusion. Rather than national aggregate data, Muktazur R. Kazi and Akila Shemim analyse the district level data from the Indian state of Assam by looking at availability, access and usage indices and argue that some districts are financially excluded than others. Financial inclusion/exclusion factors are influenced by a range of factors, including literacy levels, rural remote areas, availability and access, trust and financial capacity. Just opening an account in the bank does not lead to financial inclusion. Their study has important implications in terms of targeting financially excluded and or low usage districts at local levels and initiating social development approaches, including awareness-raising and focusing on multi-dimensions of development such as education, health and economic activities.

As almost every city in developing countries is growing both in terms of the size of the population and geographic area, having a good transport system and

providing access to it are a necessity. Dalia Rahman and her co-authors interviewed a random sample of commuters in Dhaka city to ascertain whether the urban transport system is inclusive and accessible to vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities. Their analysis showed the lack of passengers' trust and satisfaction in the city's transport system. They make critical recommendations, including sensitivity and awareness training to relevant transport personnel and the public to improve the public transport system and experience of commuters in Dhaka. The study and suggestions are useful to similar cities in other countries.

Social development of disadvantaged regions is often challenging and more so if the regions are geographically disadvantaged in terms of weather conditions, isolation, remoteness and frequent disasters. Haor (wetland) in Bangladesh is one such region, which experiences frequent disasters and where living conditions are very poor. By looking at the problems and needs of people living in the Haor region and resources of their communities, Md. Ismail Hossain and his co-authors posit the ideas of 'Smart Village' to facilitate the sustainable development of the Haor community. I hope their analysis and suggestions attract policy makers and community practitioners to apply smart village concepts in such communities beyond Bangladesh.

COVID-19 pandemic has impacted many aspects of our lives and exposed pre-existing issues. Raturaj Patil explores how the pandemic has impacted the supply of teachers in schools and exposed teacher retention issues. Patil unearths the causes of teacher exits and shortages, and proffers policy options to enhance teacher retention in schools. He presents a convincing case for developing a comprehensive strategy that empowers teachers, enhances their autonomy, and facilitates collaboration towards achieving better educational outcomes for students and teachers. Patil's analysis and policy suggestions will be useful beyond Australia.

Smitha Nair and her colleagues develop a community or social development case by analysing the three decades' journey of a field action project, namely, Pragati, which was initiated by the School of Social Work, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India, to practise knowledge and skills of social work and community health in a disadvantaged rural area. Successes, failures and achievements shared in their case study delineated into three phases are insightful and instructive. They emphasize the significance and relevance of the social development approach that focuses on community participation, multi-dimensions and multi-sectors, linking to social determinants of health. Three decades of 'learning by doing' is worth reading.

Finally, two books reviewed in the issue are: *Enlightening professional supervision in social work: Voices and virtues of supervisors* by Mark Henrickson and *Agrarian Change in India (Readings on the Economy, Polity and Society)* by Sohini Sengupta.

I hope you will find this scholarly work useful for your teaching research and practice, both at the field and policy levels.

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Manohar Pawar

Editor-in-Chief