

## **New Challenges for Empowering, Anti-Oppressive Practice**

*By Lena Dominelli, Durham University*

Social workers across the world are working in increasingly challenging contexts and a web of diverse social relations. The major ones include: the internationalisation of social problems; enormous disparities in wealth, as the world economy becomes configured for the one per cent, according to a recent Oxfam Report; rising levels of environmental degradation; heightened conflicts including armed conflict and forms of terrorism affecting growing numbers of people; persistent gender and ethnic inequalities; significant displacements of people and migration within and between countries; and the erosion of human and citizenship rights in different parts of the globe.

This presentation asks what social workers can do to deal with the complexities of these demanding social relations that impact upon daily practice in substantial ways. It also seeks to address how one of these major challenges has links to others, so that practice in one country has implications for practitioners in another. And, it will draw upon practice examples to demonstrate how empowering locality specific and culturally relevant practice incorporates social justice, human rights, and environmental justice within its remit. to alleviate human suffering and injustice, whether structural or not. In other words, the local and the global in social work interweave and interact with each other in an integrated whole. Social workers can promote resilient, sustainable and empowered communities by understanding and addressing the complexities that they face daily in their work.

### **Biography: Lena Dominelli**



Professor Lena Dominelli holds a Chair in Applied Social Sciences in the School of Applied Social Sciences and is Co-Director at the Institute of Hazards, Risk and Resilience Research at Durham University where she Heads the Programme on Vulnerability and Resilience. She has recently completed major research projects (as PI) an ESRC funded project entitled 'Internationalising Institutional and Professional Practices' and (as CI) an EPSRC funded project entitled, 'Climate Change, the Built Infrastructure and Health and Social Care Provisions for Older People'. She is currently working on a significant NERC funded project (as CoI) called Earthquakes without Frontiers, and another as CoI funded by the Wellcome Trust and DfID on Volcanoes (HIVE). Alongside the wealth of experience she has had as a university educator and researcher, Lena has worked in social services, probation and community development. She has published widely in social work, social policy and sociology. A recent book, *Green Social Work* (Polity Press, 2012) argues for interdisciplinary, sustainable approaches to disasters that engage with those affected by disasters to co-produce knowledge and solutions. And her latest co-edited book (with Moosa-Mitha), *Reconfiguring Citizenship*, she questions the linking of citizenship to the nation-state and finds it exclusionary. Several of Lena's books have become classics and have been translated into many languages. She is recognised as a leading figure in social work education globally. Professor Dominelli was elected President of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) from 1996 to 2004, and is currently chairing the IASSW Committee on Disaster Interventions, Climate Change and Sustainability. And, she has represented the social work profession at the United Nations (UNFCCC) discussions on climate change, since those held in Cancun, Mexico in 2010, and at the Third World Conference on Disasters in Sendai, where she gave a paper, arguing for the inclusion of disabled people's needs in policy formation there. She has also been the recipient of various honours including a Medal in 2002 for her contribution to social work given by the Social Affairs Committee of the French Senate, an honorary doctorate in 2008 from the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, South Africa, and the Katherine A Kendall Memorial Award in 2012.