



# Social Work

A BEGINNER'S TEXT

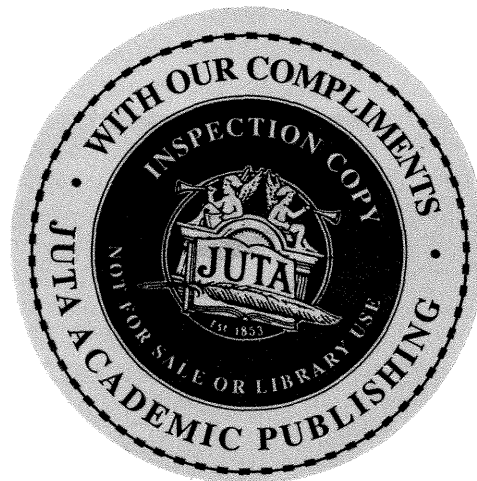
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**ISBN 0 7021 3804 5**

Published by Juta & Company Ltd

PO Box 14373, Kenwyn 7790

Tel (021) 797-5101

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layout by Gaylene Jablonkay

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Cover by Graham Hoffman & Jake Hempson

Production by Juta & Co. Ltd

Cover production by Graham Hoffman

**This edition first published 1997**

Printed in South Africa by Creda Press (Pty) Ltd., Eliot Avenue, Eppindust II

The development and production of this text was assisted by  
Caltex SA.

**This is a beginner's text which introduces students to the subject and activity of social work, particularly in a South African context.**

**It is inspired by the worlds of students, and the particular challenges of higher education.**

**This text was born out of a Foundation Series in human and social studies published by Juta & Company Ltd. It forms part of a distance learning access course of the Regional Access Programme (EASTERN SEABOARD Association of Tertiary Institutions).**

**Any comment or critique would be welcomed, and should be addressed to the department of social work or the series editor at the above address.**

# Preface

The view of social work taken in this book reflects the authors' commitments about social work in South Africa and the need for a developmental approach in social service delivery and in social work practice. In other countries and at other times in the historical development of social work, different views and approaches have been taken. These often emphasised individual and interpersonal helping rather than community and social development. For the authors, social work's mission is derived from its social purposes rather than from any particular theoretical perspective. Theoretical perspectives change but social work's purposes do not.

Each chapter in this beginner's text has its own part to play in introducing you to the academic study of social work. **CHAPTER ONE** looks at the nature of social work, and its diverse purposes. The authors give an overview of social work, with its overriding concern with social justice and with improving the quality of life for all. They introduce the reader to such key social work ideas as rights and needs, the person-in-situation, a responsive environment, a problem-solving approach, a holistic perspective, empowerment and so on.





In **CHAPTER TWO** the concept of context or environment is examined in more detail — the physical environment, as well as the social environment made up of economic, political, cultural, psychological and historical factors. We are introduced to “levels of the environment”, as an analytical structure within which to view and understand clients’ personal and social problems. The authors use a reading about Pavement People (see **Appendix 1**) living as an informal community on the streets of Durban, as a point of departure to discuss what a “responsive environment” means — and how what this means has changed over time. The discussion looks critically at past approaches, as well as at appropriate current understandings, given the reality of social work practice in South Africa’s context of deep and widespread poverty.

In **CHAPTER THREE** the authors look at the historical development of social welfare; and at how the past has shaped the institution of social welfare both internationally and in South Africa. They talk about early social workers and highlight two very different views of person and environment that lie at the root of, and influenced the form of, social welfare and social work as we know it today. One thing that remains constant though, against the ever-shifting background of historical change, is an ongoing concern with the person-in-environment. Finally, we see how the development of social welfare in this country has, in many ways, mirrored historical trends in England and America, and how, in other significant ways, it is unique to this context and its imperatives.

The focus of **CHAPTER FOUR** is the historical development of social work as a discipline, with a specific body of theory which guides its practice, and as a profession, with a particular set of values. The authors look critically at what have been, historically, the main methods of the discipline, and how the legacy of these approaches can be seen in the kind of social work that is practised today. They suggest an ecosystems perspective, as offering a suitable conceptual framework for contemporary social work practice, to encompass the breadth and diversity of social work in a holistic and unitary way. Finally the authors trace social work’s search for professional recognition, and present arguments both for and against professionalism. The reader is able also to get an idea of the current status of the profession in South Africa.

**CHAPTER FIVE** focuses in on key values for social work practice; it looks at how a profession’s philosophy, values and ethics give purpose, meaning and direction to its activities, at the same time as they mirror values of the wider society. The reader is referred to **Appendix 2** for the Code of Ethics for social work. The chapter examines what is meant by professional values, and by “levels of values” in social work, and looks at how value dilemmas arise and can be dealt with in social work practice. Once again, the authors emphasise social work’s two central values — respect for persons, and social justice — and their implications for social workers in their professional practice.

**CHAPTER SIX**, then, looks at how social workers translate these noble values into practice. The concept of “levels of the environment” is presented as central to the way social workers work, with a holistic approach that entails practice at all of these system levels. The reader is able to get a detailed view of a particular kind of problem-solving approach characteristic of social work practice. It is the practice method of choice because it has the potential to empower clients themselves to participate in problem-solving.

Finally, **CHAPTER SEVEN** focuses on the South African social, political and economic context, and socio-economic factors such as trends in population growth, education, employment, housing and so on. The authors consider the impact of such factors on social welfare policy and on determining or influencing the kind of social work that is practised here. And they focus on the future of social welfare policy, as well as the future role of social workers, in the South African context. A key consideration is how social work can be responsive to the context in which it is practised and how it can reach those in greatest need. The conclusion is that the model most appropriate to social work is a social development, and particularly a community development, model. The emphasis is on collective empowerment, an emphasis appropriate for our time and place and for the future.

**In these introductory words** there are many of the specialised concepts which we use in the academic study of social work — ENVIRONMENT, COLLECTIVE EMPOWERMENT, INSTITUTION, PRACTICE CONTEXTS, DEVELOPMENT, HOLISTIC PERSPECTIVE, VALUES — and which you might be meeting for the first time. The aim of this beginner’s text is to introduce you to these concepts and to help you become familiar with them. We define them in the margins and **Glossary**, and also show in the text how they can be used to explain, interpret and debate issues and concerns which are central to social work. Thus a final word on the content of this text; that is what you should be looking for — a vocabulary of words and ideas. We hope that through an active process of reading you will develop a growing confidence in using the words and ideas as materials for framing your own questions and shaping your own debates.

## More about the structure or form of this text:

You will notice that the text is designed in a way which is quite different from the usual form — there are KEY QUESTIONS and KEY CONCEPTS, MARGIN DEFINITIONS, a GLOSSARY, FOOTNOTES, and TASKS. These features are intended to help you “scaffold” your reading process; that is, to provide a support structure which makes it possible for you to build a sound understanding, and also to delve deeper and deeper into the meaning of the many new concepts, ideas and questions. And in your process of reading and re-reading, you will develop an increasingly complex understanding of the world of social work.

A constant feature is KEY QUESTIONS and KEY CONCEPTS given at the beginning of each chapter on a page labelled **Structure at a glance . . .** You need to use these questions and concepts to “frame” your reading and return to them again and again to test your understanding of the issues, ideas and questions which are the focus of different chapters.

And again, about introducing you to a vocabulary of concepts and ideas in this text — you will notice that the MARGIN DEFINITIONS of terms and concepts are indicated with a ▲. Look at the example given here, of the concepts **context** and **blaming-the-victim** approach which we have lifted from page 9. You will notice that some margin definitions have page references, and others do not. Those without page references (like “blaming-the-victim approach”) are terms which we feel need a brief explanation, as they might otherwise “trip up” your reading. Where you see a margin definition with page references (as with “context”), this indicates it is abbreviated from the **Conceptual Dictionary**,<sup>1</sup> an important resource for students in human and social studies. Words in the margin that are marked with a ⑨ appear in alphabetical order in the **Glossary** at the end of this text (pages 133–137). So look again at the example of context; it is both in the *Conceptual Dictionary* (page 47, where you will find a fuller explanation), and in the Social Work **Glossary** (on pages 133 and 134).

▲ p.47  
**context** — a setting, place, set of circumstances or conditions in which an event takes place

▲  
**blaming-the-victim approach** — where the individual is held responsible for the problem

Note how FOOTNOTES work — they often refer you to other texts or to a fuller explanation.

<sup>1</sup> A P Craig, H Griesel, L D Witz, 1994: *Conceptual Dictionary*. Cape Town: Juta & Co Ltd. The Conceptual Dictionary was developed as part of a Foundation Series (of which the Social Work text is also a part) and covers concepts which are explained at three levels: brief definitions; examples to illustrate the definitions; and a discussion of the concept to give students a window in on important concepts in human and social studies.

As we merely give you a glimpse of the meaning of each concept in the margins of this text, you are strongly encouraged to get your own copy of the *Conceptual Dictionary*. You may, of course, come across strange and unfamiliar words and concepts which are not defined in this text's margins or in the **Glossary** or in the *Conceptual Dictionary*; words which you can look up in other texts such as language or discipline specific dictionaries.

An active process of reading importantly requires that you formulate questions as you work through the text. The TASKS serve this purpose — they are questions which help you grasp the content which has gone before and, at the same time, they attempt to open up or direct you to what is to follow. The task shown below, from page 9, gives you a glimpse into the text and an idea of how the tasks work.

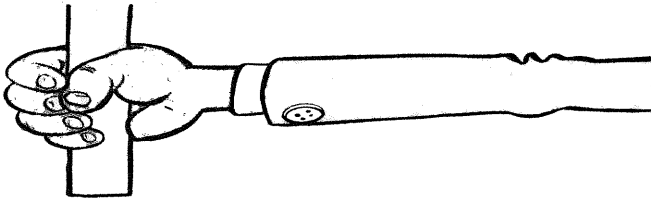


In Anna's case, her individual crisis arose when she discovered that she was pregnant. She needs to be helped to make her own decisions (even though she is still young) with the support and guidance of her family and a social worker; that is, within the context of a supportive environment. Through a problem-solving process, the social worker will help her identify the range of choices open to her and then encourage her to make an informed decision as to the best actions to follow.



Consider the case of Anna and think about the following:

- ▶ her needs and rights;
- ▶ her autonomy and control over decisions; and
- ▶ the levels at which you as a social worker might intervene to empower her.



### Holistic perspective

The case study of Anna illustrates the need for and importance of a holistic approach in social work. As we learn more about social work, we learn that it has many purposes and people interpret these purposes in different ways. We therefore cannot easily pin down a single definition of what social work is and how social workers set about achieving its purposes.

We hope that with growing confidence you will use the many layers of this text to frame your own questions and shape your own debates about social work issues and concerns.

HG and JW  
December 1996

# Contributors

**Andrea Bernstein** (PhD), former professor and head of the social work department at the University of Natal, Durban, now lives and works in Los Angeles, USA. While living in Durban, she collaborated with **Mel Gray** (PhD), current professor and head of the same department, to write this text. The impetus for its development arose out of the authors' experience of teaching first year social work students; and their perception of the value of a text which could accompany a first year, introductory course for social work students and teachers. More specifically, the authors saw a need for a beginner's text which would be relevant to South African students, given the pressing demands — some of a uniquely local nature and others in line with trends elsewhere in the world — of this context.

**Hanlie Griesel** and **Jacquie Withers** are the editors and instructional design authors of this text. Their skill is a particular structuring of texts to reveal the layered complexity of concepts and ideas. Since 1991 they have been involved in the construction of a series of beginners' texts in human and social studies. They are with the Materials Development Unit of the Regional Access Programme — a programme which aims to give students the opportunity for prepared entry into higher education. The programme is located within the EASTERN SEABOARD Association of Tertiary Institutions (esATI), a structure which includes 8 member institutions in the region.

## Photographs & artworks featured in this text

"Human rights for all", Human Rights Wall, Durban, photograph – author's collection  
"Right to social security", Human Rights Wall, Durban, photograph – author's collection  
"Right to equality", Human Rights Wall, Durban, photograph – author's collection  
Women with water, photograph – author's collection  
Mural, Community House, Cape Town, photograph – author's collection  
"Working with unemployment and poverty", poster  
"Youth power, your power", poster  
"Women painting house", calender – author's collection  
"Early industrial city"  
"Early social workers"  
"Freedom from discrimination", Human Rights Wall, Durban, photograph – author's collection  
"The right to equality", Human Rights Wall, Durban, photograph – author's collection  
"Rights are responsibility", Human Rights Wall, Durban, photograph – author's collection  
"Groupwork", artist unknown, from *Agenda*, No. 13, 1992  
"Right to education", Human Rights Wall, Durban, photograph – author's collection  
"Informal settlement, Cato Crest", photograph – author's collection  
"South Africans united against AIDS", poster

The authors and editors are indebted to Jill Bradbury and Anita Craig for their critical comment on and valuable input into this text at a crucial point in its development. While credit goes to them for helping this text along its journey, responsibility for the current form and content remains ours.

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# Chapter 1

## Structure at a glance . . .

### Key questions

What is social work all about?

What do social workers do?

What are social work's purposes, and how do social workers go about achieving them?

### Key concepts

In exploring the nature and diverse purposes of social work, we introduce the following important terms and concepts in this chapter. Make sure that you develop a thorough grasp of them:

**rights, needs & resources**

**quality of life**

**social functioning**

**basic needs**

**holistic approach**

**context**

**personal troubles & public issues**

**responsive environment**

**person-in-situation / person-in-environment**

**empowerment approach**

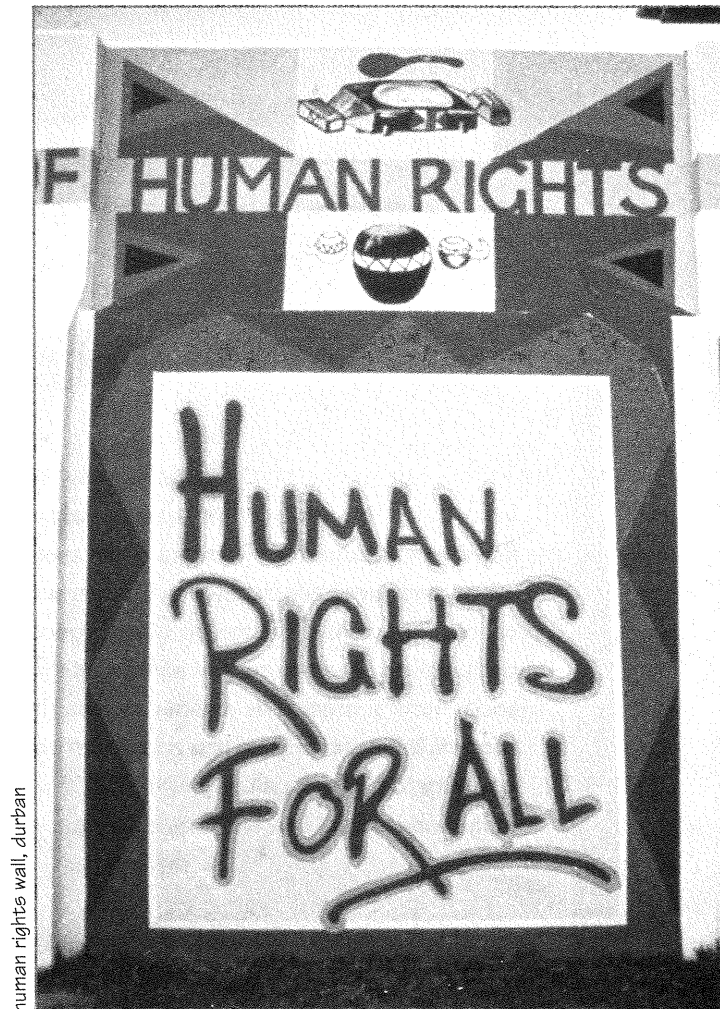
# The nature of social work & its diverse purposes

**T**he nature of social work flows from its purposes. These purposes are many and varied, and have been debated by authors writing from various personal, historical and geographical perspectives. There is general agreement though that social work's mission is defined by its overriding concern with **social justice** and with improving the **quality of life** for all.





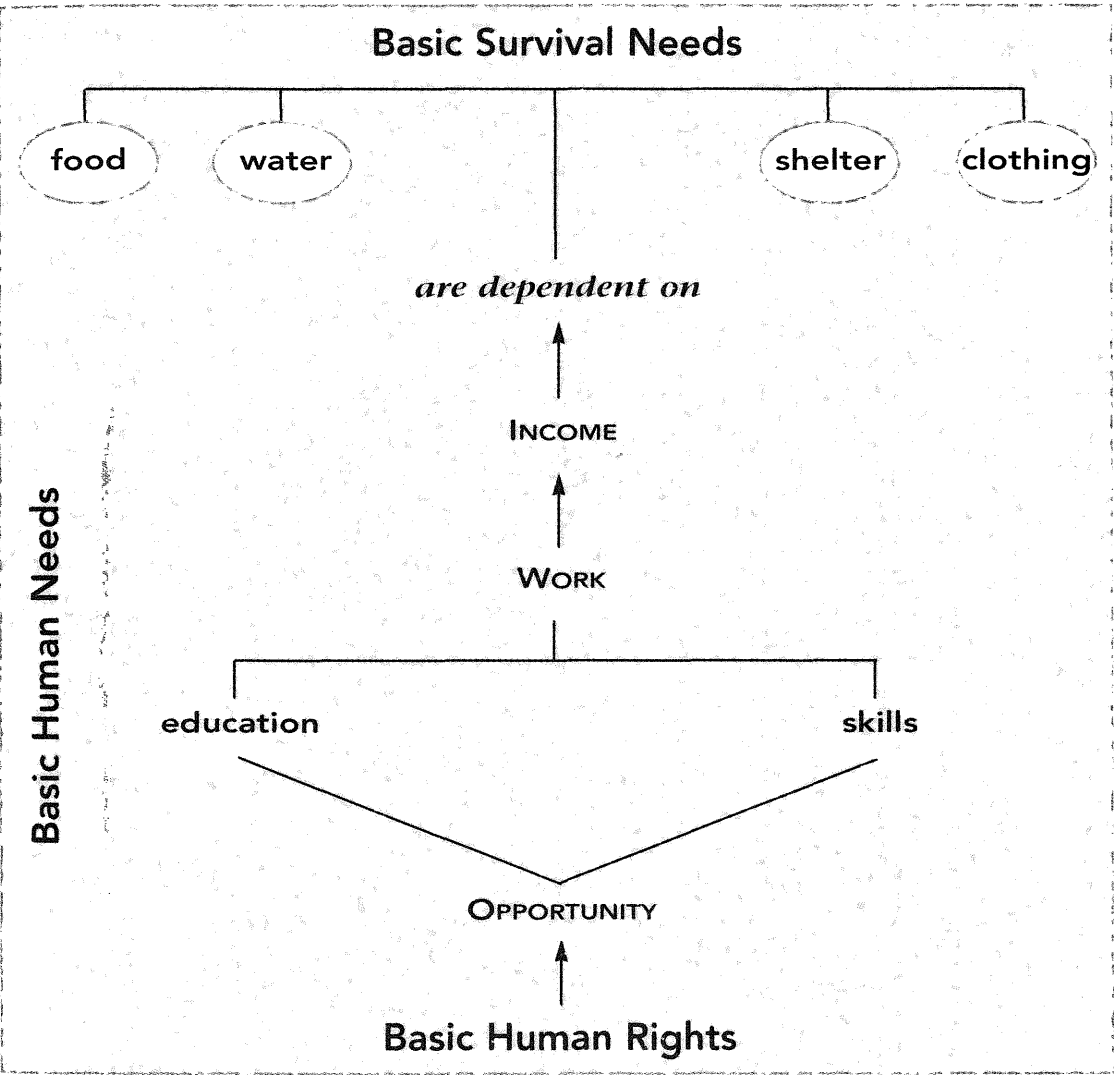
In working to achieve this mission or goal, social workers become involved in addressing social problems, as well as the needs and problems of individuals, families, groups, communities and organisations, and the issue of rights which are tied to such needs.



**The** most basic rights and needs which people can be said to have, relate to what we universally accept as minimally necessary for a decent quality of life, and for functioning well socially. As social workers we believe that everyone can attain a certain level of social functioning and that all people have the right to be provided with the opportunity to enjoy a certain quality of life.

We also emphasise that people’s most basic, general needs are related to the rights which they have in society:

For example, people have basic survival needs for food, shelter, water and clothing. To have these things in an urban, industrial environment, people need an income. To earn an income they need a job which, in turn, requires some level of education. The diagram below illustrates this interrelationship.



▲ p.150  
**phenomenon** — a fact or occurrence of something

▲ pp.179–180  
**society** — the sum of human conditions and activity; a whole functioning such that the parts operate interdependently

▲ p.99 **9**  
**holistic/holism** — an all-inclusive approach

This emphasis on the interrelationship between rights and needs is an example of social work's concern with the **interaction** between **phenomena** in **society**, and it points to the importance of a **holistic** approach in social work practice.

What do you understand by the word "needs"? Think of your needs and the needs which are evident in your community. Are all individual needs the same?

What do you understand by the word "rights"? Think of the rights people have in this society.

How could your needs and the needs of your community be met by the rights people have in this society?

Given its concern with social justice,<sup>1</sup> social work finds it necessary to address the question of what constitutes a "good society". (See the diagram on the next page.) On a very basic level, a "good society" will meet the most basic or survival needs of people by providing basic services and resources. In meeting these basic needs (such as for food, water, housing), it will also offer a variety of options to accommodate individual differences (i.e. *what* people choose to eat, *where* they choose to live and so on).

Further, a good society must offer all people access to these options, and not simply reserve them for the privileged few. And finally, in a good society the available **resources** will be used as effectively as possible and people (the consumers and users of resources and services) will be granted maximum opportunity for public participation in planning, in policy-making and in deciding on what options (that is, what resources and services) society should provide, and also in implementing such planning.

In practical terms, the kind of resources and services to which people must have equal access include public spaces, hospitals and health care services, education and employment.<sup>2</sup>

▲ pp.172–173  
**resources** — the means available to achieve an end, to fulfil a function

<sup>1</sup> Social work's social justice values are discussed more fully in Chapter 5.

<sup>2</sup> The reality is that in a developing context such resources are more readily available in cities, as is the case in South African society. This raises specific challenges for helping professions such as social work in

## "Good Society"

*provides*



### BASIC SERVICES AND RESOURCES

e.g. food, water, housing, education, health care, employment



### OPTIONS

access to all

public participation in

planning  
policy-making  
decision-making  
& implementation

This idea of options regarding

- available services and resources,
- access for all to the full range of services and resources available, and
- people's participation in planning and implementing services and resources,

reflects the **values** which social workers share regarding what is necessary and appropriate for effective human functioning.

Together these options indicate an **environment** which is responsive to the needs of its citizens; and are therefore central to how social workers conceptualise a "good society". <sup>3</sup>

▲ p.202 ⑨

**value** — a statement of what is preferred or what ought to be; values are the ideals to which we subscribe

▲ pp.76–77 ⑨

**environment** — the social, physical and organisational objects, conditions and factors surrounding and influencing individuals and society

<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed discussion of what constitutes a "responsive" environment or "good society" see Chapter 2, pages 21–32.



## What do social workers do?

In order to make the environment responsive to people's needs, social workers:

1. work with people either individually or in family groups.
2. work with groups of people with problems in common, for example, alcoholics and drug abusers, women who have been raped, children who have been abused.
3. help communities to identify their needs and to develop the skills and find the resources to meet these needs.

When we talk about social workers working with individuals or groups or communities, we say that they are working at different levels of the environment. No matter at which level they are working, they are trying to help people meet needs or solve problems (or they are trying to meet needs and solve problems on behalf of people). Their role is to facilitate a problem-solving process and they draw on their specialised knowledge and skills to do this.

Social workers also work to help prevent problems, rather than working only with people who already have problems. For example, social workers might try to help young people in planning for their careers after leaving school or with their relationships with parents, or they might work with children to teach them how to keep themselves safe in case an adult tries to harm them in any way.

▲ p.76 **g**

**empowerment** — a process of conscientisation through which people gain control over their own lives

Central to the social work approach is the idea of **empowering** individuals and groups of people so that they are better able to reach their goals. At the same time, in a context where the ideal of a "good society" may not yet be realised, the task of social workers is directly related to changing the social constraints which may prevent individuals and groups of people from meeting their goals.

In focusing on empowerment, social workers may help people to work towards changing themselves, or they may try to change factors at various levels of the environment,<sup>4</sup> or both. Social work then, needs a holistic approach (as we will discuss in more detail later, see pages 9–12 of this chapter).

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 18–20 for a detailed discussion of the different levels at which social workers intervene.

# What are social work's purposes?

It becomes apparent that what social workers do is closely tied up with social work's purposes. Thus far we have identified several general purposes of social work. In summary, these are:

- To promote the well-being of people.
- To help people meet needs or solve problems.
- To help people to find the resources to meet their needs.
- To help build a responsive environment, that is, a just and "good" society.

In 1981, the American National Association of Social Workers (1981: 6) published what it called "a working statement on the purpose of social work". According to this statement,

**social work's purpose is to promote or restore mutually beneficial interaction between individuals and society in order to improve the quality of life for everyone.**

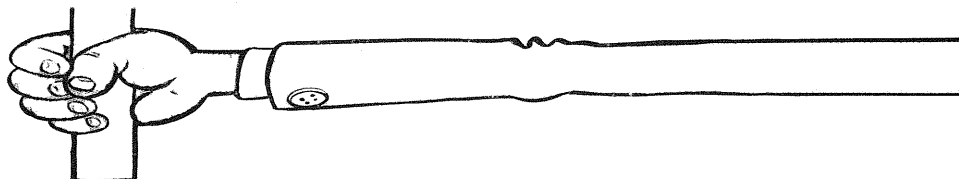
Other authors, Baer and Federico (1978: 6), have described social work's purposes as follows:

“Social work is concerned and involved with the interactions between people and the institutions of society that affect the ability of people to accomplish life tasks, realize aspirations and values, and alleviate distress. These interactions between people and social institutions occur within the context of the larger societal good. Therefore, three major purposes of social work may be identified:

1. To enhance the problem-solving, coping and developmental capacities of people.
2. To promote the effective and humane operation of the systems that provide people with resources and services.
3. To link people with systems that provide them with resources, services and opportunities”.

Think about the relationship between individual problems and society. How can social workers help individuals where a society is not responsive?

Now think how these individual problems could provide the impetus (or possibilities) for constructing a "good society". Now state how social workers can contribute to this process.



# How do social workers set about achieving the purposes of social work?

## Problem-Solving Process

▲ **clients** — the people whom social workers help are called clients; a social worker's client may be an individual, a family, a group, a community or an organisation

9 **autonomy**

Central to social work's emphasis on empowerment — as a way of achieving its purposes — is a problem-solving process or approach. This process is aimed at helping people (i.e. **clients**) to make their own informed choices and to become more self-determining. People are expected to develop the ability to act **autonomously** (or independently), to exercise their individual freedom and to make their own decisions. It is a quality or strength all people need to have or, at least, which they are expected to develop in order to have control over decisions which affect their lives.

The helping process begins when a client, experiencing a problem, seeks help from (or is referred to) a social worker. The social worker initially helps the client by discussing the problem so that together they can develop an understanding of the problem situation and all the factors contributing to it. This means that in discussion a range of potential solutions is considered, as well as possible consequences of different courses of action.<sup>5</sup>

It is important to note, however, that ultimately the client must feel sufficiently informed to decide what to do and how to solve the problem, given the social worker's support and guidance. This process might take several weeks, several months or even years, depending on the severity of the client's problem. Usually clients have had a particular problem for a long time before they seek help and, often, their seeking help is preceded by a crisis of some kind. A long-standing problem cannot be solved in one or two interviews. It takes time and hard work.

Let us consider the case of Anna, a teenager who became pregnant while still at school:

### ***Anna's Story***

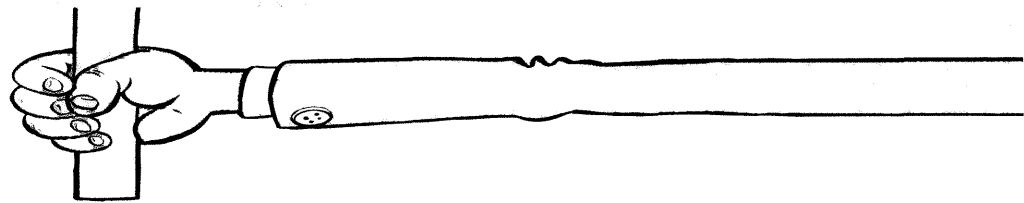
*Anna is a fourteen year old girl living in Block AK, a pavement community in Durban. She is in her first year of high school. Her mother earns a comfortable income selling containers. A few months back, Anna found out that she was pregnant. She confided in her teacher at school with whom she enjoys a good relationship. She is a bright pupil and appeared to have a good future ahead of her until this happened. She has not told her mother about her pregnancy since her mother has high expectations for her. The teacher has brought this to your attention as a social worker, and asked you to see Anna to help her with her problem. At your first interview, you found that Anna was cooperative, mature for her age and seeming to cope extremely well with her current circumstances. She is eager to have an abortion and wants you to help her make the necessary arrangements.*

<sup>5</sup> Social workers use this problem-solving approach when they intervene at different levels of the environment. Or to phrase it plainly — when helping individuals, families, groups or communities, social workers follow this sequence of steps to help people deal with their problems. Steps in the process of problem-solving are discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

In Anna’s case, her individual crisis arose when she discovered that she was pregnant. She needs to be helped to make her own decisions (even though she is still young) with the support and guidance of her family and a social worker; that is, within the context of a supportive environment. Through a problem-solving process, the social worker will help her identify the range of choices open to her and then encourage her to make an informed decision as to the best actions to follow.

Consider the case of Anna and think about the following:

- her needs and rights;
- her autonomy and control over decisions; and
- the levels at which you as a social worker might intervene to empower her.



## Holistic perspective

The case study of Anna illustrates the need for and importance of a holistic approach in social work. As we learn more about social work, we learn that it has many purposes and people interpret these purposes in different ways. We therefore cannot easily pin down a single definition of what social work is and how social workers set about achieving its purposes.

- Some people emphasise that social work is about helping individuals deal with their problems through counselling. There are many social workers who do only this.
- Then there are other social workers who believe that this is not achieving anything; it is just a “band-aid” measure which focuses the problem on the individual rather than seeing the problem in the **context** of a wider environment. They say it leads to a **“blaming-the-victim”** kind of approach.

### For example:

- If a person cannot find a job, the social worker using an individual approach might see the problem as the client’s lack of skill in finding employment.
- Another social worker who views the problem in a wider context will be aware that there are not enough jobs and will focus on the need to develop programmes to create jobs for people.
- A third social worker might see the client’s lack of education and skills as a problem in society since a “good society” should provide opportunities for

▲ p.47 **g**  
**context** — a setting, place, set of circumstances or conditions in which an event takes place

▲  
**blaming-the-victim approach** — where the individual is held responsible for the problem



**g**

**personal troubles & public issues**

education for all its citizens. Depending on the reason for the lack of educational opportunities this social worker might focus on changing social policy and how resources are allocated. In the apartheid era, for example, this social worker might have worked at changing discriminatory policy.

***Personal troubles and public issues...***

**C** Wright Mills (1974) talks about the relationship between individuals and society in terms of **personal troubles and public issues**. He says that a collection of private troubles becomes a public issue and a public issue may result in many private troubles.

Public issues may be interpreted as private troubles through a process that blames the victim and denies the need for a public solution. For example, the growth of informal settlements is seen as the fault of the people living in them rather than as the result of institutionalised discrimination or inadequate housing policy. It is, then, the residents of informal settlements (rather than public policy), who are seen as the target for change (in Weinberger 1974: 31).

We need to realise then that both approaches (i.e. focus on individual and focus on context) have merit and that our aim should be to view problems in a holistic way. We need to be aware of the individual's strengths and weaknesses but we must consider the social context of the problem; that is, the relationship between the individual's problems and the social, political and economic context in which the person lives.

**L**et us relate this holistic approach back to the example of Anna:

If we reconsider the case of Anna from the perspective of a social worker in a child welfare setting, we may find that there have been a number of cases of teenage pregnancy recently. Having identified this trend, rather than focusing solely on Anna's individual plight, the social worker might also want to go into local schools with the aim of providing educational programmes or starting small groups where teenagers can talk about their needs and learn how to deal with them. The social worker would also need to be aware that the phenomenon of teenage pregnancy<sup>6</sup> is related to other issues (e.g. drug abuse, rape, peer pressure, parental neglect and AIDS), and that related programmes — even possibly changes in legislation (law) — might be required.

What we are doing when we take this broader view of Anna's problem is approaching it holistically by taking account of the various **systems** with which Anna interacts (e.g. the school, the home and the peer group). We are also becoming aware of broader problems which may have an influence on the systems with which she interacts. Thus we can say that we are taking a broad view of the client system's problem.

**▲ p.191 g**

**system** — the way in which a set of related or connected parts is organised

<sup>6</sup> See also Chapter 5, pages 80–81 for a discussion on teenage pregnancy and value dilemmas.

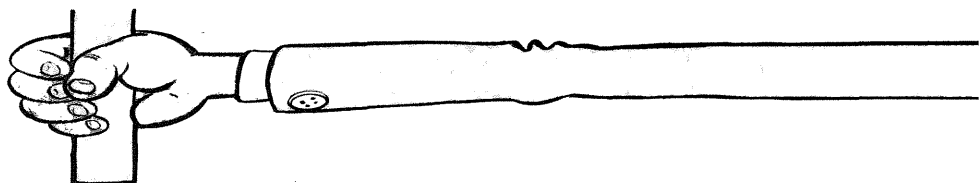
In social work we use the term “client system” to mean the client, and to remind ourselves constantly that we work with clients at different levels (see Chapter 2, pages 18–20 for a description of levels of the environment). We work with clients at the individual level, at the family or group level, and at the community level.

A “system” is a unit of analysis in social work. A person’s social environment is made up of different systems, such as the family system, the educational or school system, the employment or work system, and the community system. In order to understand the nature of an individual client’s problem, we would look at the various social systems with which the individual interacts — and we would thus find the term and concept **client system** to be useful.



Now return to the notes you made on how you as a social worker might help Anna. Do your suggestions show a holistic approach to your client and have you considered the various systems with which she interacts?

Given these considerations, reconstruct your notes in a more comprehensive way.



Consider the following extract from Gray and Bernstein (1994), *Pavement People and Informal Communities: Lessons for Social Work* (see **Appendix 1**):

Social work is concerned with how people live their lives. One of its goals is to ensure that people have access to resources and options which will enhance the quality of their lives. Social work emphasises the need to adopt a holistic approach. To this end, it focuses on the transactions or interactions between the various systems comprising our social world. In order to achieve an accurate understanding of social work reality, it is important to take into account all aspects of phenomena and their inter-relatedness.

According to Stofberg (1991), “a whole, therefore, is not a completed, rounded, ultimate entity, it is rather an open-ended, changeable and changing pattern of relationships”.

In order to understand the “whole” referred to by Stofberg above, social workers — using systems theory as an **analytical** framework — break up the whole into its constituent parts. Thus they examine the environment in terms of a framework of levels and systems. Any unit of analysis can then be examined from a micro-level (i.e. the perspective of individuals and small groups) to a macro-level (i.e. a broad structural or policy perspective). Usually, in social work, the unit of analysis is a **problem**, which is then examined in terms of these various levels.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, the various social systems influencing the problem are also examined.

▲ pp.6–8

**analysis** — taking apart or breaking down the whole into its component parts

<sup>7</sup> These levels are discussed in the next chapter.



## Person-in-situation / person-in-environment

What we are saying here is that social work practice is based on a holistic perspective which considers the “**person-in-situation**”. Phrased in a different way, the focus of social work practice is the **person-in-environment**, or the person in interaction with a particular context (be it the family, work, community and so on). This perspective takes into account the complex interplay of biological, socio-cultural, economic, political and physical forces which affect people’s functioning.

Social work is therefore concerned with the individual and her/his biological and psychological needs and resources, as well as with the environment as a whole; that is, how it helps or hinders people in reaching their goals and its impact on human behaviour.<sup>8</sup>

From this perspective, problems are a result of the stress which comes from the lack of **adaptive fit** between people and their social environment.

▲ **adaptive fit** — implies that people and their environments have to accommodate to each other; often, both people and **their environments** have to change

Think of the factors in society as a whole which affect the quality of individual people’s lives.

If there is no “adaptive fit” between people and their social environment, what must change and how can social workers contribute to this process?

## What are the objectives of social workers in the problem-solving process?

The process of problem-solving in which social workers engage in their daily practice relates to specific objectives:

### 1. To increase clients’ competence, problem-solving and coping abilities

In trying to help people or clients to expand their abilities, social workers may offer them an **alternative perspective** on their problems, and encourage them to become aware of their strengths and the resources they have to deal with the problem.

▲ p.6  
**alternative** — an approach or way of doing things which is different from the normal, usual or conventional

▲ p.149  
**perspective** — a particular way of thinking about, considering, viewing or approaching something

<sup>8</sup> In the next chapter we will discuss the environment in more detail.

## 2. To obtain resources

In assisting people in obtaining resources, social workers may refer people to resource systems, such as a legal resource centre or a health clinic. They may also help people create new resources, for example, working with a community to help its members get access to clean water.

## 3. To make organisations responsive to people

When focusing on making organisations responsive to people, social workers will try to ensure that resources and services which are offered are accessible and that the dignity of service-users is respected. One way in which organisations can make their services more accessible to consumers is by simplifying their complex application procedures and reducing needless delays. Services and resources should be available to all without discrimination.

## 4. To facilitate interactions between individuals and others in their environment

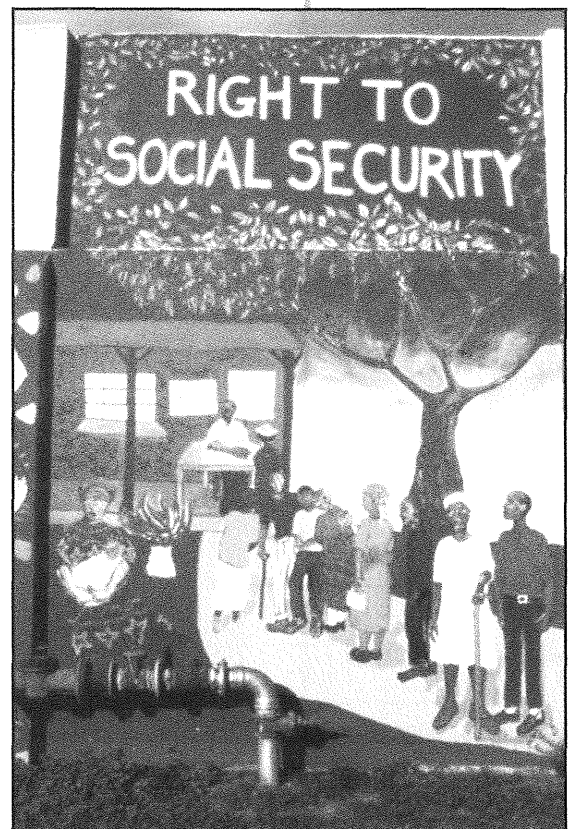
Social workers facilitate interaction between individuals and others in their environment in various ways. For example, they may help family members to communicate more openly and honestly; increase parents' involvement in the school environment; try to open channels of communication between workers and management; work to increase consumer participation in the management of health, welfare and service organisations, and so on.

## 5. To influence interactions between organisations and institutions

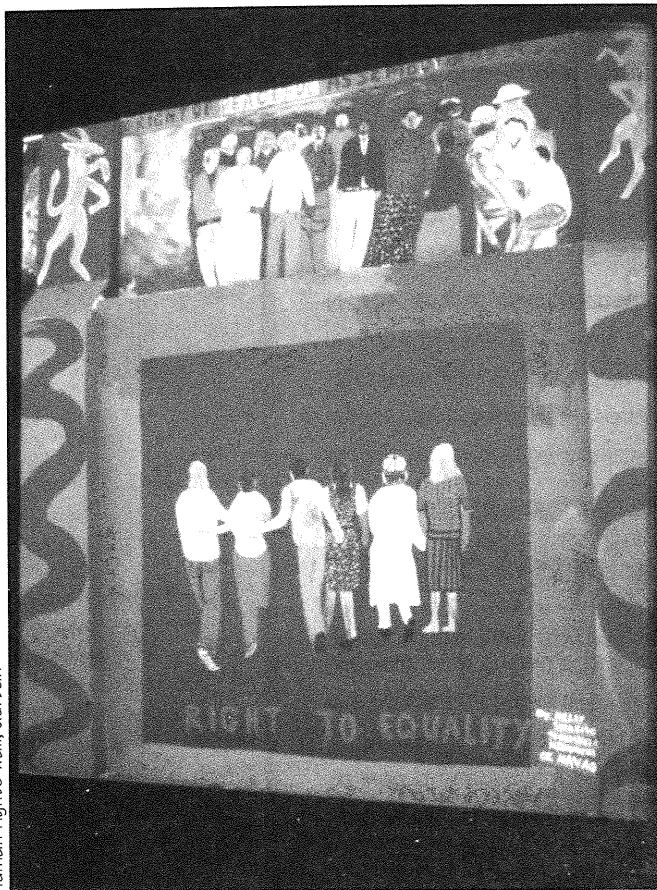
In order to have an effect on the interactions of organisations and institutions, social workers may try to coordinate all the services (such as medical, educational and social work services) being provided to an individual, household or community. If there is conflict between different groups or organisations, the social worker may act as a mediator or go-between.

## 6. To influence social and environmental policy

One of the factors which differentiates social work from other professions is its simultaneous focus on people *and* the social environment. People's social environment may include their family, their community, their work situation and, most importantly, social policies and programmes. Because all of these are critically important features of the context within which people function, they too require care and attention from social workers. In attempting to influence social and environmental policy, social work's



human rights wall, durban



overall aim is to promote equality and social justice. An example of this would be working to promote policies and legislation which ensure a fairer distribution of resources.

One of the ways social workers might achieve this would be by analysing existing policy and then by putting pressure on politicians and lobbying to support legislation focused on this goal.

The objectives that we have listed show what social workers do at all levels of intervention to facilitate change in people, organisations and society.

## Summary

In this chapter we have learned about the nature and diverse purposes of social work. We examined the goals of social work and explored what social workers do to achieve their goals and purposes. We noted that the concept of empowerment and the process of problem-solving are central. We also emphasised the

importance of a holistic perspective and the focus in social work practice on the person-in-environment. And obviously if we are interested in both "the person" and "the environment" we need to consider what kind of environment people need in order to function optimally. In the next chapter then the focus is on the environment.

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# NOTES



# Chapter 2

## Structure at a glance . . .

### Key questions

What is meant by levels of the environment?

What is a responsive environment?

What can be done about poverty?

### Key concepts

In Chapter 1 we emphasised the importance of the “person-in-environment” and repeatedly referred to “levels of the environment”. In this chapter we are going to examine more closely the notion of the **environment** or **context** of social work. In so doing we look at the following important terms and concepts:

- micro-level
- mezzo-level
- macro-level
- policy
- community
- responsive environment
- basic needs strategy
- social welfare institution
- social development
- collective empowerment

# Social work in context — the social environment

**I**n trying to make sense of the world we and others live in, we need to consider the total situation (or context) in which an event occurs. This means that we take into account all the factors, or the total set of circumstances or conditions, which could impact on the event. In other words we think about the setting, ideas and information surrounding the event. When we refer to social work in context we must include all aspects of the environment which impact on human functioning. Thus the context within which social work is practised encompasses both the physical environment (things such as climate, land and buildings) and the social environment (all the social factors — economic, political, cultural, psychological and historical).





**context** — setting, place, set of circumstances or conditions in which an event takes place

## What is meant by “levels of the environment”?

In our earlier discussion we have already briefly mentioned different levels of the environment and we will now explore this notion more comprehensively. Various factors in the environment influence the quality of people’s lives, create social needs and lead to personal and social problems. In order to understand the ways in which the environment influences individual, group and social behaviour, we need to understand how different factors contribute to the “lack of fit” between people and the environment within which they live. One way of developing this understanding is to conceptualise this **context** or environment in terms of three levels:

### 1. Micro-level

This includes the smallest units of society and encompasses individuals, individuals in small groups and families. Any one of these could be the social worker’s target of change. The family often represents an important and influential part of an individual’s immediate environment and may function as a resource (positive factor) or obstacle (negative factor) for individual family members.

*Different people may have different views of what constitutes a family. How would you define a family and who would you include in your family?*

### 2. Mezzo- or mid level

The next level of the environment is the organisational or mezzo-level. It includes **formal groups** (such as the Student’s Representative Council at a school or tertiary institution) and **complex organisations** (such as a welfare organisation, hospital or factory) within which people function. Here social workers would be concerned with organisational change.

*List the formal groups and complex organisations with which you are familiar.  
Think of the kinds of organisational change which social workers may focus on in each case.*



### 3. Macro-level

The broadest level of the environment is the macro-level. At this level, social workers are concerned with the interrelationship between social factors such as cultural values, social policies and socio-economic conditions AND **structural** factors such as the interplay between the various social **institutions** in society, which include education, religion, politics, economics and social welfare.



Hence the way in which society is organised or structured is affected by social factors such as the predominant cultural and religious values in that society. In apartheid South Africa for example social policies were designed to favour white people in society which resulted in discrimination against black people.

At the macro-level social workers work towards social change by attempting to change social policies. Policy is the level furthest removed from individual influence. To change policy, people can collectively exercise their vote, or they can group together to form powerful units (such as worker's unions) to achieve change. Social workers may be involved in policy change through providing public testimony or acting as advocates for disadvantaged or oppressed groups. Organisations may also work together to change policy. When various organisations with similar aims work together to achieve change, they start a social movement. For example, when this happens with various child welfare organisations, we can refer to the "child welfare movement".<sup>1</sup>

Social work intervention at the macro-level is also directed at communities. Here the **"community"** becomes an important unit of analysis and a major locus or site of change. Most social workers encounter people (individual clients and their families) in the community in which they are working. To help people effectively, social workers need to know the communities in which their clients live — the needs, major problems, available resources, and also the **cultural** practices and lifestyles, of that particular community of people.<sup>2</sup>

 pp.185–186 



**structure** — the ways in which different parts of society relate to one another; how society is organised

 pp.111–112 

**institution** — a custom, convention, system or practice that is the norm in society; also refers to a building or structure



**community**

 pp.56–57 


**culture** — the shared practices, meanings or ideas and beliefs of a group of people; that which is learned and passed on from generation to generation

<sup>1</sup> The development of social movements for social reform in social work is discussed in the next chapter when we look at the history of social welfare in society, and more closely at macro-level intervention.

<sup>2</sup> Note that we will come back to this idea of environmental levels in Chapter 6, pages 94–97, when we discuss social work practice in South Africa.

For social work the term “community” has a very specific meaning in that it is not just a collective term for people living in a particular geographic location. “Community” expresses the idea that people identify with the area in which they/we and the people living there, and want to have a say in how things are governed, serviced and developed.

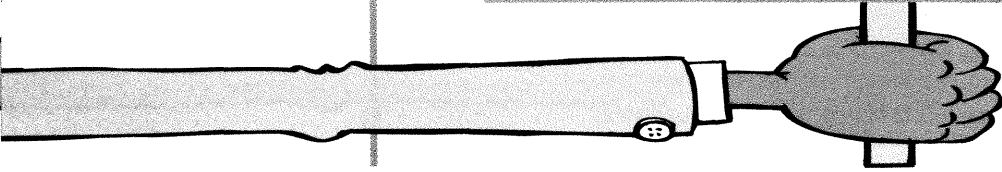
It is a normative concept (i.e. a concept dealing with ideas of what is customary behaviour) in that social workers **believe** that people want to experience a sense of belonging, that people’s identity derives from their culture and that freedom of expression is central to people’s well-being.



Think of the particular community of which you are a part. What would you consider to be the important needs, problems, resources and cultural practices of this community?

How can this macro-level of community help social workers in understanding individual problems?

Let us now turn our attention to developing an understanding of the concept “community”. We begin with a description of the community in which Anna lives (see **Appendix 1**), and then consider how our knowledge about her broad environment or context may contribute to a more thorough understanding of her particular problem (see Chapter 1, page 8).



Look up the term community in the GLOSSARY. Then read the section “Description of the Community” in the article *Pavement People* in APPENDIX 1 and respond to the following questions:

1. Is the group of women described here a community?
2. What evidence do you have for your claim?
3. What factors affect the quality of life of the members of this community?
4. Bearing in mind social work’s diverse purposes, what could social workers do to address the needs and problems of this community?
5. How does the information you have read about her context affect the way in which you view Anna’s problem?

It is clear that the women of Block AK are a community in that they identify with one another, as is evident in their mutual support and in their working together. Given its unique circumstances and its vulnerable social position, there are many different ways in which social workers might approach this community of women. By using Anna's problem as a starting point, let us examine how we might apply to this situation the analytical framework of **levels and systems** that we mentioned previously.

By using three different levels (micro, mezzo and macro) when examining the environment, we have **an analytical structure** with which to view clients' personal and social problems. So if we return to Anna's story, we can begin with her personal problems and major concerns: being pregnant, having to tell her mother, and having to make decisions about her future. At the same time, in order to develop a better understanding of Anna's problem, we want to look at the levels of the environment in which she functions and the systems with which she interacts at those levels:

- her family (micro-level),
- her school and social life (mezzo-level), and
- her community and the socio-cultural beliefs and practices which **constrain** her actions (macro-level).



p.46

**constrain** — both to open up possibilities and to limit

By examining all these levels, we can develop a clearer understanding of Anna and her problem, and of the resources available to help her deal with it, as well as the obstacles that might stand in her way.

➤ **Resources** (i.e. helpful circumstances) could include a supportive family, access to medical care, and a helpful or sympathetic teacher and/or a religious minister.

➤ Unhelpful circumstances create **obstacles** which could prevent Anna from working out the best solution to her problem. Obstacles could include a punitive parent, a teacher who tries to get her expelled from school, lack of access to medical care, and the lack of any social support in the form of an understanding minister or a strong peer group of friends.

Thus if we look at Anna's situation holistically, and pay attention to the "**changeable and changing pattern of relationships**" (see Chapter 1, page 11, an extract from the Pavement People reading), in Anna's life, we will understand that all the systems or people with which or whom she interacts make up her social environment, and are going to react to her problem. They could react either positively and be helpful, or negatively and place obstacles in her way as she tries to solve her problem.

On all these levels (micro, mezzo and macro), environmental factors may be a resource or an obstacle for the individual. Ideally, the environment should encourage and sustain people's feelings of **competence** and well-being. This is the kind of environment which we have termed a good society or a **responsive environment**.

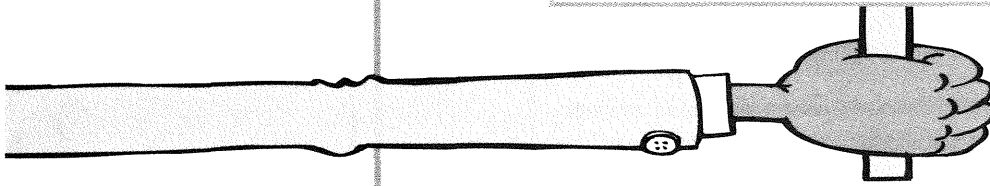


**competence**



A responsive environment can only exist in a society which is responsive to people's needs and rights. Earlier we claimed that social work is concerned with social justice and therefore that it needs to be concerned with what constitutes a "good society". In Chapter 5 we discuss the kind of values generally considered important for the creation of a "good or just society". If these values (e.g. democracy, equality, access to resources, recognition of people's rights, and fairness) are evident in society, then we believe that the necessary social conditions will have been created for that society to be responsive to people's needs and rights.

Can you think of any *social constraints* which prevent you or members of your community from meeting your/their goals?



## What is a responsive environment?

A responsive environment is an environment that responds to people's needs. All people share common biological, developmental, social and cultural needs and the extent to which such needs are met affects people's personal growth and development. In 1976 the International Labour Organisation (ILO) developed a list of **universal basic needs** which it claimed a responsive society (or environment) must address and ensure in order to achieve such social development:

► **Minimum requirements of families for private consumption (i.e. food, shelter and clothing).**



shack homes

▲ pp.66-67 **g**  
**development** —  
expresses the idea of  
planned change towards a  
more equitable (or fairer)  
system

**g**  
**social development**

Essential services of collective consumption provided by and for the community at large (i.e. safe drinking water, sanitation, electricity, transport, health and educational facilities).

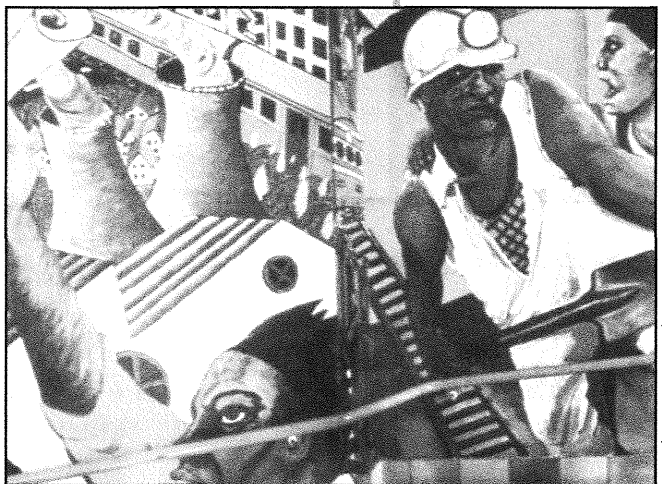


women with water

The participation of people in making decisions which affect them.

Employment both as a means and an end in a basic needs strategy (adapted from Ghai, 1977).

The satisfaction of an absolute level of basic needs within a broader framework of basic human rights.

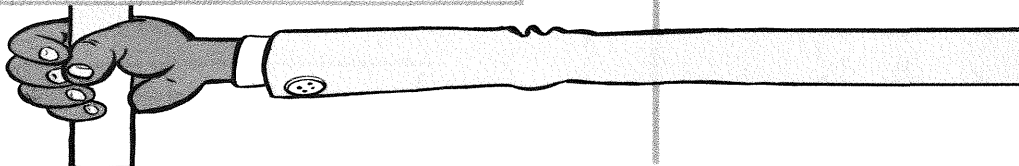


mural, community house, cape town

Does this list of universal basic needs, as presented by the ILO, cover ALL basic needs?

And are these needs indeed universal needs that all individuals, groups and communities share?

Think about whether social development can be achieved at a local level — that is, by communities without government support. What role must or should government play?



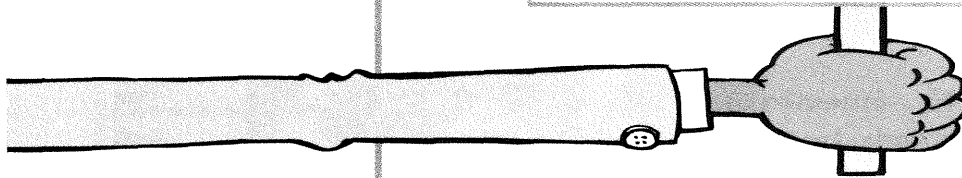
This **basic needs strategy** advocated by the ILO in the 1970s was later rejected because it resulted in programmes which were planned by policy-makers and decision-makers without the participation of particular communities in determining their own needs. This “top-down” approach did not work because, as it was later realised, people would be more prepared to participate in anti-poverty or development programmes if they were involved in designing and implementing such programmes and driving their own social development.

The fact that this basic needs strategy was rejected does not mean that people’s needs were no longer seen as important; it merely means that a “good society” is not determined solely by the extent to which people’s basic needs are met. Other factors — such as people’s right to identify and prioritise their own needs and to participate in their own development — are also important. That is why we said at the outset that “**rights are tied to needs**” (see Chapter 1, pages 2–3). Thus while the goals of the basic needs approach are mostly valid, its **method** of achieving these goals is questionable.

We will return to this theme in the next section and look critically at the idea of universal basic needs when we examine the effectiveness of basic needs approaches in anti-poverty programmes.<sup>3</sup>

Now go back to the needs you listed under the task in Chapter 1, page 4 and compare your list with the ILO’s list of universal basic needs.

In what ways are the needs you listed similar and different?



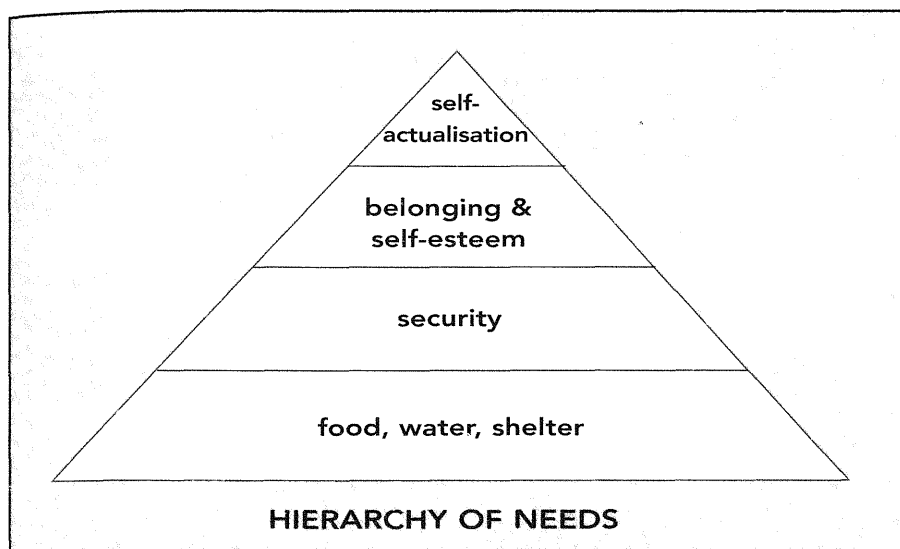
▲ pp.97–98  
**hierarchy** — a structure which has various layers into which people or things can be classified, ranked or ordered

Maslow, an American psychologist developed the idea of a **hierarchy of needs**<sup>4</sup> to illustrate that lower order needs have to be fulfilled before higher level needs can be met. He referred to people’s need for food, water and shelter as the most basic, physiological level. The second level of his hierarchy relates to security; people need to feel safe and secure in an environment which is predictable. The next level involves people’s needs for belonging and a sense of self-esteem which is bound up with feeling competent. The ultimate level in Maslow’s hierarchy is what he calls self-actualisation, that is, the opportunities needed for people to achieve their potential, to be creative and to face the challenges of life.

It is important to note, however, that in terms of the comprehensive ecosystems perspective upon which social work draws, Maslow’s hierarchy focuses almost exclusively on the individual and therefore gives a very limited explanation of needs.

<sup>3</sup> See pages 28–29 for a detailed critique of **basic needs**.

<sup>4</sup> See **hierarchy** in the *Conceptual Dictionary* (1994), pages 97–98.



While people have common needs, they are also unique individuals whose life experiences mirror their environments. Individuals have varying capacities and abilities and meet their needs in different ways, to greater or lesser degrees of success. Why should there be this variation?

Most **psychologists** would argue that this is due to differences in individual socio-historic (or cultural) circumstances, and some psychologists are also interested in the way in which biological factors determine differences.

**Sociologists** would explain this variation in terms of social structures and institutions, and their effects on human functioning.

**Social workers** would suggest that the reasons for such variation lie in the interface and transactions (or dealings) between individuals and their environment. Thus if the environment is not responsive to people's needs and does not provide resources, then, no matter how talented they might be, individuals will find that the opportunity to fulfil their potential will be limited or even non-existent. By contrast, a responsive environment will allow individuals greater opportunity to realise their potential.

The resources to help people meet their needs are usually provided through the **institutions of society**, such as the family, education, religion, the economy, government and social welfare. It is, however, also important for you to note that these institutions develop in response to individual and collective needs. **Figure 1** lists some human needs and the resources which may be called upon to meet those needs.





## Figure 1: Levels of human needs & resources required

### HUMAN NEEDS

### RESOURCES

#### Physical and Security Needs

Food, clothing, housing  
Health care  
Safety  
Protection

Economic, legal and health care institutions; formal social welfare systems; law enforcement, and disaster relief organisations.

#### Belonging and Esteem Needs

Feeling needed and valued by others  
Companionship  
Sense of belonging  
Sense of identity  
Self-esteem  
Self confidence

Nurturance, acceptance, love and positive feedback provided by significant others (parents, siblings, relatives, teachers, peer group members, lovers, friends, social networks).

#### Personal Fulfilment Needs

Education  
Recreation  
Accomplishment  
Religion

Educational, recreational, religious, employment and other social institutions.

(Adapted from Hepworth & Larsen, 1982.)

The **social welfare institution** is a response to social needs for health, education and the well-being of all members of society. Social services are defined as the means through which such needs are addressed and social workers are the professional helpers who are trained to work in the institution of social welfare and are assigned by society to assist people in need.<sup>5</sup>

The aim of the social welfare institution is to provide opportunities for people to function fully in society and to achieve their maximum potential. Romanshyn and Romanshyn (1971: 3) write as follows about social welfare:

**Social welfare includes those provisions and processes directly concerned with the treatment and prevention of social problems, and the improvement of the quality of people's lives. It involves social services to individuals and families as well as efforts to strengthen or modify social institutions.**

<sup>5</sup> Note that Chapter 3 takes a closer look at the development of social welfare and at social work's relation to the institution of welfare.

Social welfare comprises all those services in society that are designed to meet people's welfare needs. These include child welfare services, services for the mentally and physically challenged, for the elderly, for alcoholics and for prisoners and their families. They also include institutions — such as children's homes and old-age homes — for those requiring special care.

Sociologists see formalised practices in society as **INSTITUTIONS**. Thus dispensing charity, as we shall see in the next chapter, becomes formalised in society into the **institution of social welfare**. The major social institutions are the family, religion, the economy, government and social welfare (which in its broadest sense encompasses health, education and the general well-being of all members of society).

The word **INSTITUTION** is also used to describe a building or structure where people are placed out of the mainstream of society. Mental hospitals are referred to as institutions, as too are children's homes, prisons and places of safety.

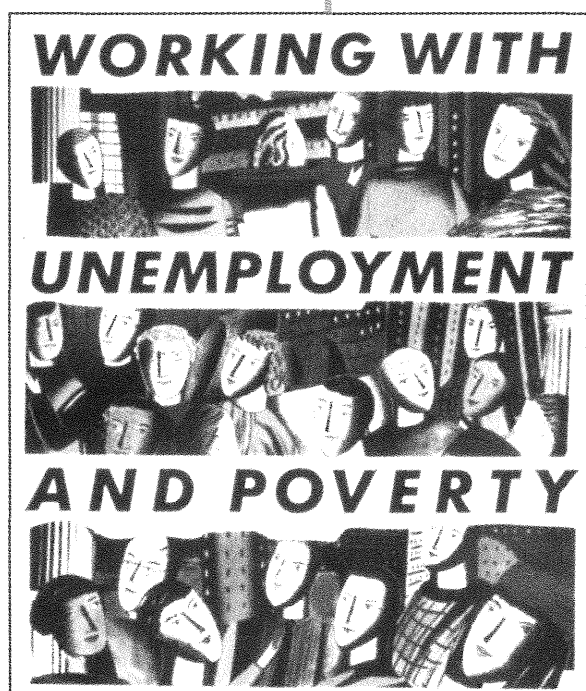
## What can be done about poverty?

We have described a responsive environment as one which is concerned and caring, and which provides people with basic protection and support. People's lives in such an environment are relatively orderly, ordered and organised.

**A responsive environment provides people with options or choices, access to those options and the opportunity to participate in making decisions about those things which affect their lives.**

As we have seen, on both the individual (micro) and the community (macro) levels, environmental factors may be either a resource or an obstacle for the individual. Ideally, a responsive environment should encourage and sustain people's feelings of competence and well-being.

In South Africa the majority of the population does not yet live in a responsive environment. This society, until recently, has been characterised by unequal opportunities and the legalised unequal distribution of resources. Poverty is therefore still deep and widespread.



poster

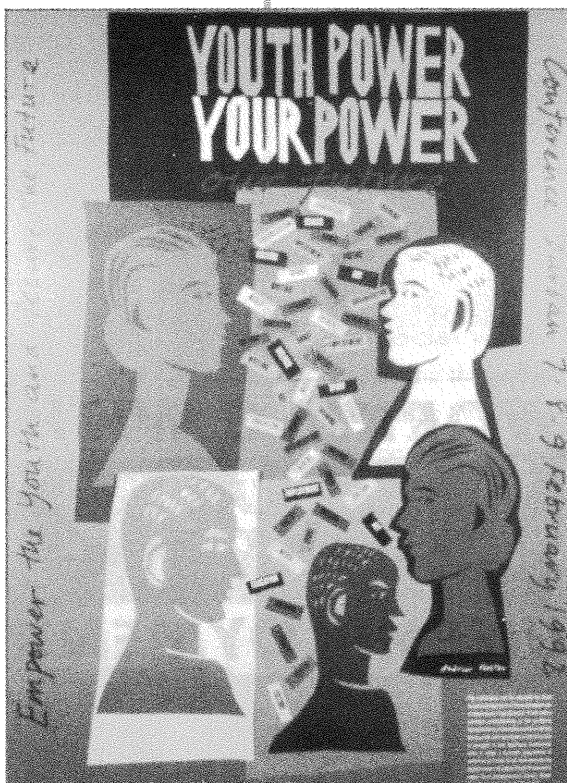
Wilson and Ramphela (1989: 4), in reporting on *The Second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in Southern Africa*,<sup>6</sup> listed **four reasons** why the issue of poverty was significant:

“The first relates to the damage it inflicts upon individuals who must endure it; the second is its sheer inefficiency in economic terms. Hungry children cannot study properly; malnourished adults cannot be fully productive as workers; and an economy where a large proportion of the population is very poor has a structure of demand that does not encourage the production and marketing of the goods that are most needed. The third reason relates to the consequences for any society where poverty is also the manifestation of great inequality. As Raymond Aron has reminded us, the existence of too great a degree of inequality makes human community impossible. Finally there is the fact that poverty in many societies is itself symptomatic of a deeper malaise. For it is often the consequences of a process which simultaneously produces wealth for some whilst impoverishing others”

If we look again at the universal **basic needs** listed by the International Labour Organisation (see pages 22–23), we can see that what might be considered basic needs in a rich country may not be affordable in a poor country. For example, running

water and electricity in every home may not be realistic expectations in many African countries. In other words, it is not practical or possible to define universal basic needs (i.e. applying to all persons or things in the world), because *contexts vary*. In fact, since 1976 when this list was discussed at an international conference on development, the “*basic needs*” approach has been virtually abandoned as a social development strategy and a way of dealing with poverty.

Rather, the emphasis has changed to an **alternative social development approach** which aims at collective empowerment — or at helping the poor to regain power and control over their own lives. This empowerment approach was pioneered by a Marxist<sup>7</sup> theorist and practitioner, *Paulo Freire*, who emphasised the importance of grassroots involvement, that is, the involvement and participation of people in their own development. This grassroots or “bottom-up” approach to social development contrasted strongly with the “top-down”, basic needs approach which preceded it.

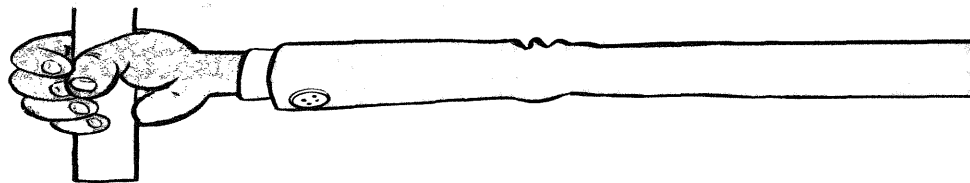


<sup>6</sup> There have been two Carnegie Inquiries into poverty; the first in 1929 investigated *white* poverty (see Chapter 3, page 47) and the second, mentioned here, investigated *black* poverty.

<sup>7</sup> Marxist theory analyses society and processes of change in terms of the material bases of social relations and the idea of class. (See **capitalism**, **class** and **hierarchy** in the *Conceptual Dictionary*, 1994.)

The grassroots or “bottom-up” approach involves local people in communities in determining their own needs and priorities, while the “top-down” approach involves people from outside the community determining needs and priorities and what should be done about them.

Now read the extract from Midgley and consider why a “top-down, basic needs approach” is ineffective.



Perhaps the most popular of the various social development strategies formulated in the 1970s was the basic needs approach. This approach was formally adopted at the International Labour Organisation’s World Employment Conference in 1976. As a result of many years of research into the problem of unemployment in developing countries, the ILO and its expert advisers came to the conclusion that conventional economic growth strategies were unlikely to absorb labour into productive wage employment on a scale that would deal with mass poverty in the foreseeable future. The alternative was to harness available resources to tackle the poverty problem and its manifestations directly. As a strategy, basic needs seeks to mobilize resources for development . . . Unified socio-economic planning, redistribution with growth and basic needs all rest on the assumption that governments should be responsible for promoting social development. These approaches also assume that governments would promote social development efficiently and justly. However, some proponents of social development did not share the assumptions of the statist approach, and believed instead that social development could best be fostered through the efforts of ordinary people themselves. This criticism resulted in the formulation of the “popular” or “community participation” approach (from Midgley, 1995: 59–60).

It is important to emphasise that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with the ILO list of basic needs mentioned earlier (see pages 22–23). It was the **way** in which planning for development — in terms of basic needs — was done which led to criticism. In order to appreciate fully the nature of this criticism, we need to examine the way in which the proponents of popular or people-centred approaches have interpreted poverty. Many of these critics have been informed by **radical** theory. For them poverty is caused by the way in which society is structured and by economic policies which lead to the exploitation of workers. Those with political and material power, they would say, have no real interest in changing a system which allows them to prosper. Therefore, these critics would argue, the only way to transform society would be by empowering those who are the victims of exploitation, by raising their awareness and mobilising them for action. Through collective empowerment society could be transformed. This political sense of transformation<sup>8</sup> (or revolutionary change) relates directly to

▲ p.164

**radical** — a radical is one who advocates extreme (or *radical*) change in society, i.e. of change to the way things are structured or ordered

<sup>8</sup> Social transformation involves a complete change of what exists. Social reform, on the other hand, aims at improving what exists.





▲ p.44 **g**  
**conservative** — one  
who seeks to keep things  
as they are (the opposite of  
radical)

**g**  
**liberal**

changing the structures of society, and thereby altering the ways in which people earn their living and live their lives.

*I*t is not only radical thinkers who advocate empowerment as a strategy for achieving change. Du Bois and Miley (1992) noted that empowerment may be achieved through a variety of strategies which may be informed by different political perspectives — **conservative**, **liberal** or radical. And they quote the work of John Longres to support their opinion:

“To the extent that change is directed toward collective attempts to change social institutions it may be considered radical. To the extent that change is directed toward making existing arrangements work better for particular clients, it may be considered liberal. To the extent that change attempts to recreate earlier, more authoritarian forms of social organization, it may be considered conservative” (Longres cited by Du Bois and Miley, 1992: 230).

Paulo Freire’s theoretical and practical framework of empowerment is an application of these ideas of change and has been used in numerous practical projects in various ways. Social work’s commitment to empowerment is built on these understandings.

Strategies for achieving this goal of **collective empowerment** are very similar to the approaches and methods used by social workers. There is, for example, a focus on people’s strengths, on the key role of women and on their claims to equality, on promoting self-reliance, on the importance of democratic participation of the poor, and on respect for cultural identities.



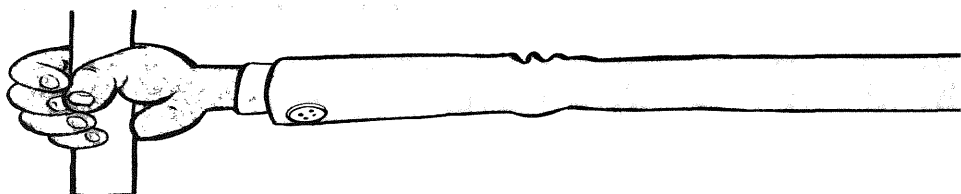
women painting house, calendar

Although people with different political points of view may advocate change through empowerment, the real meaning of the term is aptly captured in the following extract from Friedman (1992: 77–78):

“The crux of the matter, then, is how poor people are to be helped. Genuine empowerment can never be conferred from outside. In the struggle against poverty and for political inclusion, the role of external agents is to provide support in ways that encourage the disempowered to free themselves of traditional dependency. Outside agents working to help the poor to gain a foothold in the city, to reduce unnecessary expenditures of time and energy through the provision of basic services such as drinking water, or to acquire useful knowledge and skills, must encourage the poor to overcome their fear of becoming active in the communities in which they live, to acquire a positive self-image, to speak their mind confidently, to identify and support local leaders, and to seek cooperative solutions. The emphasis must always be on learning through collective action”

How does Friedman describe the empowerment process?

Now compare his description of empowerment with that of Gray and Bernstein in their article on *Pavement People* in APPENDIX 1.



Gray and Bernstein (1994) underscore Friedman’s point that “*genuine empowerment can never be conferred from outside*” by describing how the women of Block AK have empowered themselves without professional intervention.

They also describe how social workers — in partnership with this community — might facilitate empowerment by mobilising and creating resources and linking the community with existing organisations and services. Social workers might also intervene at a structural level by ensuring that **petty bureaucracy** does not inhibit the potential for trading and the development of informal business activity. Further they might advocate and lobby for a public housing programme. Income generating cooperatives, skill development programmes, resources which provide cheap raw materials or equipment, the initiation of “people’s banks”, programmes using funding to provide small loans, working on improving water and sanitation arrangements and developing health services are all examples of the kinds of services which might be developed in partnership with such communities.

This illustrates some of the practical ways in which social workers can act to help people, and yet not rob them of their autonomy. Thus while empowerment is primarily a people-driven process, it is one which social workers can facilitate at a grassroots level by enabling people to express their own needs, to build their capacity to address their needs and to organise themselves for action.



**petty bureaucracy** —

expresses a sense of endless, small administrative procedures (or “red tape”) involved in gaining permission to carry out some activity (in this case, trading); see also

**bureaucracy** on page 83

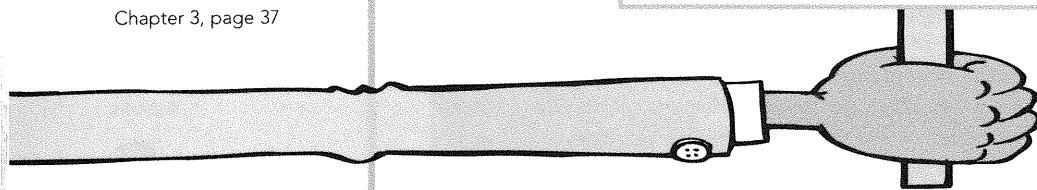




**benefactor** — a person who gives help, often financial, out of a sense of kindness; see also **charity**, Chapter 3, page 37

"Empowerment of clients and changing their victim status means giving up our position as **benefactors**" (Pinderhughes, 1983: 337).

What evidence of this do you see in the reading on *Pavement People*? (See APPENDIX 1.)



## Summary

In this chapter we have learned about the context in which social work is carried out. We noted the importance of considering the total environment — both physical and social — and discussed the various levels of the environment at which social workers intervene.

A responsive environment was identified as essential if people are to have a reasonable quality of life wherein, at the very least, their basic needs are met. In South Africa the majority of the population does not live in a responsive environment and the widespread condition of poverty is a significant issue for social workers who are concerned with improving the quality of life for all. Finally, we examined what could be done about poverty and noted, in particular, the importance for social development of empowerment in enabling people to become fully functioning social beings and responsible citizens. As became clear, this process of empowerment requires a radical redefining (or transformation) of social structures in order to change the environment and make it more responsive to people's needs.

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NOTES

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# Chapter 3

## Structure at a glance . . .

### Key questions

- How do welfare systems develop?
- What were the origins of social welfare in western societies?
- How were social welfare needs met in developing countries?
- How did early social work practice contribute to the development of social welfare?
- What are the various conceptualisations of social welfare?
- How did social welfare develop in South Africa?

### Key concepts

In exploring the history of social welfare and social work, we will work with the following important terms and concepts in this chapter:

- social welfare institution
- charity
- Charity Organisation Movement
- Settlement Movement
- social reform
- residual model
- institutional model
- developmental model
- social development & community development
- self-help & mutual aid
- voluntary organisations
- welfare legislation

# Historical development of social welfare

**T**he historical development of both social work and the institution of social welfare are closely linked and in this chapter we consider the development of social welfare, social welfare systems, the relationship between social welfare and social work and the development of social welfare in South Africa. (In the next chapter we will look more particularly at the historical development of social work as a *profession*.)

The idea of social welfare is much broader than social work. Even though social workers play an important role in the delivery of welfare services (and, as a rule, are employed by welfare institutions) they do not bear the sole responsibility for welfare in society. Social welfare institutions carry the public responsibility for dispensing social welfare services.

The idea of social welfare can be defined as

the sum total of all those factors in society which contribute to the well-being of people.

This is a broad definition which encompasses all aspects of the social, educational, health and occupational development of people. Social welfare can also be defined more narrowly and different concepts about and models of welfare have been adopted in different countries. These models are discussed in greater detail later in this chapter (see pages 43–46).

## How do welfare systems develop?

Welfare systems are a product of a society's culture, history and social systems. The effective delivery of social welfare services is thus related to many factors in society, including

- ▶ economic development
- ▶ social history
- ▶ geography
- ▶ political systems and structures
- ▶ traditional methods of meeting social needs
- ▶ values and beliefs

## What were the origins of social welfare in western societies?

Initially people's needs were met through informal means such as mutual aid provided by the family, the clan and the community. Up to the 16th century there were three forms of organised help available for the poor. These were:

- ▶ **Guilds**<sup>1</sup> which emphasised cooperative self-help and fellowship among their members;
- ▶ **Private foundations** which were established through bequests and large gifts made by individuals for the establishment of almshouses;<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A guild is an organisation of people who do the same job or have the same interests. In the Middle Ages (a period in European history from about 1000 AD to 1400 AD) social, craft and merchant guilds operated.

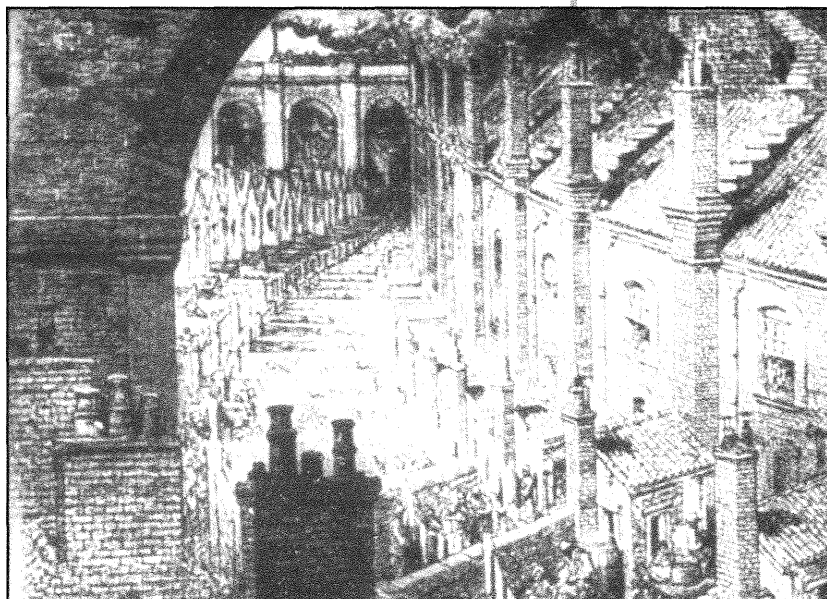
<sup>2</sup> "Alms" is an old-fashioned word which means gifts of money, clothing or food to poor people. Almshouses were houses (institutions) which were built and run by charitable organisations, and in which poor or old people, who could not afford rent, could live.

- **The church** collected funds<sup>3</sup> and distributed relief to the poor through the parish and the monasteries.

Great changes took place in the concept of social welfare and the organisation of **charity** as a result of changes in the social conditions in both England and Europe. The decline of medieval social structures and the ensuing disorganisation and undermining of the formerly tightly-structured feudal way of life, the dissolution of the monasteries, the steady increase in population, the beginning of urban migration, and the occurrence of plagues and wars, all aggravated the problem of poverty and destitution.

Private charities proliferated and the **state** became more involved in helping to meet the needs of the poor. In England, for example, the Elizabethan Poor Laws were adopted in 1597 and showed an early recognition of governmental responsibility concerning support and help for people in need. These early social welfare programmes were essentially aimed at relief of the destitute but were often harshly administered since poverty was considered to indicate a "lack of character". (This is an example of the kind of approach which we termed in Chapter 1 a "blaming-the-victim" approach.) In terms of what were called "settlement laws", paupers (poor people) were not allowed to move freely from one place to another<sup>4</sup> and were often committed to the care of institutions such as the poorhouse and the workhouse.

As the pace of **industrialisation**<sup>5</sup> and **urbanisation** increased in the 18th and 19th centuries, so it stimulated the demand for more, better and more organised services.



early industrial city

▲ **charity** — an organisation which raises money for a particular cause such as helping people in need; see also **benefactor** in Chapter 2, on page 36

▲ **state** — the framework of laws and government which keep order within a country

▲ pp.107–108  
**industrialisation** — means the replacement of human and animal power with increasingly sophisticated machinery

▲ **urbanisation** — the migration of people from rural to urban (town or city) centres, often in search of employment, i.e. paid work

<sup>3</sup> Funds were collected from members of the church who were expected to contribute 10% of their income (called a "tithe").

<sup>4</sup> Compare these so-called "settlement laws" which limited the movement of paupers from one area to another, with the so-called "influx control" which, during the apartheid years, limited the free movement of African people from rural to urban areas.

<sup>5</sup> Note that the processes of industrialisation have not only brought about positive changes and progress. Some theorists would claim that industrial societies are marked by the exploitation of the working classes because the processes of industrialisation are so closely tied to capitalism.

Midgley (1981: 17) writes that

“... *h*istorically, the emergence of social work in Europe and North America is associated with poor relief. As the rural poor were drawn into and concentrated in the industrialising cities during the nineteenth century, the problem of urban destitution became more acute and conventional public poor relief provisions were strained; social work attempted to provide an alternative which would lessen the burden of public assistance borne by taxpayers, be more humane and seek to rehabilitate the destitute”.

A number of charities were established in England, mainly as a result of the efforts of public-spirited individuals and, in some cases, church groups. A survey established that there were 640 different charitable groups in existence in 1861 in England (Woodroffe, 1962). These charities were completely uncoordinated, there was little or no cooperation among them, and relief giving was indiscriminate.

The **Charity Organisation Movement** began in 1869 to try to coordinate charitable organisations in London as well as to establish some general principles to guide their work. It is to this movement, as well as to the **Settlement Movement** (both of which will be described in the next section), that social work can trace its origins.

## How were social welfare needs met in developing countries?

A similar process can be seen in the history of social welfare in developing countries, and particularly in Africa. Although the histories and experiences of individual countries may have been different, we can identify **common themes**. Just as both England and America initially had informal systems of care, so too African countries had informal but well established structures arising out of the pre-colonial cultural values of these societies. The most important values, according to MacPherson and Midgley (1987), were the following:

- ▶ Individual needs were seen as part of the needs of the wider society.
- ▶ The household was the centre for economic production, distribution and consumption.
- ▶ Needs were met through joint effort and cooperative work within extended families, clans, villages and similar communities. As a result members of these groups were assured of a common level of material welfare.
- ▶ Kinship was very broadly defined, carried a lot of weight and demanded extensive obligations and duties.

▲ **colonial rule** — the process in history in the late 19th century when the peoples of regions such as Africa were brought under the direct political control of the states of Europe

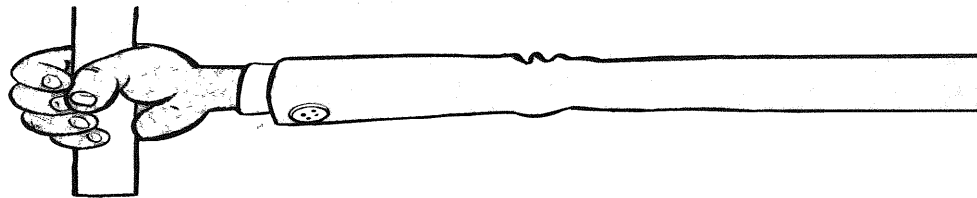
**Colonial rule** in Africa was the major social change which detached the individual from the support of the household, the extended family and the kinship-based community. Colonial expansion and the disruption of social structures which came with it reduced the ability of extended families and local communities to care adequately for their members.

The colonists' overriding concerns were to establish viable industrial economic activities and to fulfil what they saw as their "*civilising mission*". While the latter meant that the colonists believed indigenous people should replace traditional practices with westernised practices, the former goal meant that rural people became a source of cheap labour as they were forced by circumstances to migrate to towns and cities in search of wage employment. This movement to urban centres, known as **urbanisation**, eroded traditional lifestyles and systems of social welfare. It destroyed existing communities and disrupted family life as workers had to take up temporary lodgings in the city leaving their families in the remote rural areas.<sup>6</sup>

Look again at what MacPherson and Midgley identify as being the most important pre-colonial cultural values relating to social welfare (see page 38).

Think about how these values reflect the South African concept of UBUNTU and consider whether there are any important differences in values particular to the South African context.

Now give an example of how kinship networks of support might operate in relation to a particular social problem.



## How did early social work practice contribute to the development of social welfare?

In England and America, social work and social welfare trace their history to the **Judeo-Christian values**<sup>7</sup> of western society — embodied in the work of the Charity Organisation and Settlement Movements.

### The Charity Organisation Movement

This movement began in England in 1869 with the establishment of the first Charity Organisation Society, and was then launched in America in 1877. As its name implies, early non-government social welfare provision was linked to charity.

<sup>6</sup> We will look at the development of social welfare in South Africa later in this chapter.

<sup>7</sup> Some of the values which contribute to people's attitudes towards caring for those in need or being charitable derive from Jewish (hence Judeo-) and Christian religious teachings such as "Care about your neighbour as you care about yourself".





▲ **authoritarian** — emphasising obedience and conformity to authority, and discouraging questioning and criticism

▲ **moralistic** — making value judgements and dictating moral choices to others

▲ **scientific charity** — expresses the idea of a systematic, rational, coordinated, planned approach to dispensing charity and hence the need for organised fundraising

Early social workers were called "**friendly visitors**". They attempted to help poor people by providing them with food and clothing. Today we refer to these as "**in-kind**" benefits or social relief. The friendly visitors were largely from the middle and upper social classes. They were the "better off" in society who felt an obligation to help those who were less fortunate than themselves. They were usually religiously motivated and, since they regarded themselves as "better off" implying that they occupied a higher station in society, they tended to be **authoritarian** and **moralistic**.

Soon there were numerous groups of friendly visitors and the **need to coordinate** them arose. Coordination occurred on two levels: First, there was coordination of services; and, second, of fundraising efforts. Since the aim of the charity organisation societies was to implement principles of "**scientific charity**", they had to find ways to organise charity efficiently.<sup>8</sup>

The Charity Organisation Movement **focused on individuals**, particularly the poor, and its activities — initially carried out by volunteers — became the model for early professional social work training.

In 1917, Mary Richmond, a leader in the Charity Organisation Society in America, published her book *Social Diagnosis* which outlined techniques for assessment of social functioning. Her second book, published in 1922, was called *What is Social Casework?*.

These were the first important social work texts and they documented what "social workers" were doing at that time. And for the most part, what they were doing, in any particular social work case, was enquiring into the social history of the individual client in an attempt to establish the reasons for, or the causes of, the problem.

<sup>8</sup> The remnants of coordinated fundraising are still apparent in our own communities where Community Chests raise funds for the poor.

## The Settlement Movement

Besides the members of the Charity Organisation Movement, there were other groups, both in England and America, who were attempting to help the poor. These groups were part of the Settlement Movement which took its name from the **houses** or **settlements** in which its members lived and worked among the poor. The Settlement Movement was like the Charity Organisation Movement in that its members were also socially concerned people from the upper classes; but the way in which they went about helping the poor was very different.

They were more concerned with focusing on **neighbourhood** and **community welfare** than with focusing on the individual poor. They were concerned with people as members of social groups and cultures, affected by the social, economic and political conditions in which they lived. They emphasised people participation, community involvement and collective action. They believed that the poor should themselves be involved in determining programmes to deal with their problems. It was not only **people** who were seen as the target of change but also **conditions** which were identified as unjust.

And the philosophy of the Settlement Movement, which was led by Jane Adams, went even further than this — it emphasised that the people affected by unjust conditions should *themselves* be involved in changing those conditions and that settlement workers should facilitate such involvement.<sup>9</sup>

The development of these two movements is very important when looking at the history of social welfare (and the history of social work which we will discuss in more detail in the next chapter). In them we see the beginnings of **two very different approaches** stemming from two different views of people and their interaction in society and of how society ought to respond to social problems:

- The Charity Organisation Movement emphasised the responsibility of **the individual** for dealing with her/his own problems. This led to the development of charity organisations whose task it was to enable people to do this.
- The Settlement Movement emphasised **neighbourhood, community and social responsibility** in dealing with both individual and social problems. This led to the development of mutual aid and community groups whose task it was to make the environment more responsive to people's needs.

<sup>9</sup> This early philosophy, of people's participation in determining and achieving their own social development, would much later be echoed in the work of Paulo Freire from the 1970s onwards, as we have already mentioned in Chapter 2. See pages 28–30 to remind you of our discussion of the influence of Freire and his emphasis on "*people-centred approaches*".





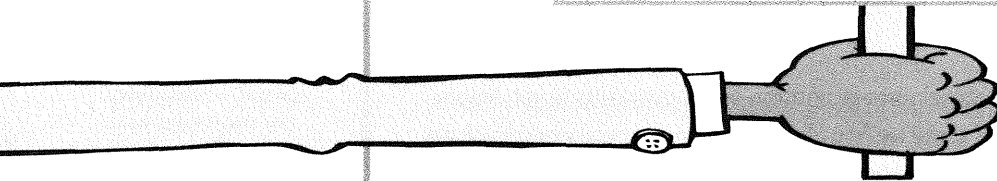
As the organisational base of the profession of social work became more sophisticated and as social welfare services became more formalised, so the need arose for personnel who were formally trained in caring skills, and training for social work became an important endeavour. It is interesting to note that, had the social work profession<sup>10</sup> followed Jane Adams's approach in this regard, social workers would have remained volunteers because she did not agree with Mary Richmond who advocated that they should be paid for their services. (We will return to this when we examine how social work evolved into a formal profession.) These early social workers were concerned with the people who were affected by **the social system** in which they lived, as well as with the social systems themselves.

At different times in the history of social work, then, varying emphasis has been given to the individual and to society. However, a constant theme has been the attempt to integrate the two. In Chapter 1 we discussed this as the "**person-in-environment**" focus of social work.

**Compare the Charity Organisation Movement and the Settlement Movement: what are the main similarities and differences?**

**Think about these two approaches in terms of:**

- **the needs and rights of individuals;**
- **the different emphases on the level(s) at which intervention is targeted.**



Thus, early social work was concerned with the provision of social services to the poor and with improving existing measures to deal with the poor. Attempts at improving existing measures were referred to as "social reform". Although the Charity Organisation and Settlement Movements approached the problem of the poor very differently, ultimately both were concerned with helping the poor.

**It was through their efforts to raise social awareness regarding the plight of the poor that the formal institution of social welfare came into being.**

<sup>10</sup> We focus on the development of social work as a profession in the next chapter.


An aspect of the reforms instituted by the Charity Organisation and Settlement Movements was to **impress upon government** that it had a role to play in improving the plight of the poor. These organisations put pressure on government to develop policies and programmes to help the poor — that is, to intervene at the **macro-level** — and these formal (or official) state policies and programmes came to be known as the “institution of social welfare”.

Thus the early social workers, then called friendly visitors and settlement workers, were instrumental in the development of the institution of social welfare in western society.<sup>11</sup>

## What are the various conceptualisations of social welfare?

Different countries pursue different models of welfare. These **models** can be grouped broadly into three conceptualisations of social welfare:

- Residual
- Institutional
- Developmental

 pp.133–134  
**model** — a system of ideas

### 1. The residual view of welfare

South Africa has consistently followed a residual approach to social welfare. This approach has the following characteristics:

- It places the primary responsibility for welfare on individuals and families.<sup>12</sup>
- It is based on the belief that too much welfare encourages dependency on the state. To discourage people from requesting welfare, benefits are kept to a minimum.
- It has been called a “safety-net” approach because, in terms of this thinking, welfare services only come into play when all other attempts to deal with personal or social problems, by the family or in the community, have failed.
- People who need welfare are required to prove their need. They have to pass a means-test; that is, they must meet all the restrictive requirements to qualify for welfare benefits.<sup>13</sup>
- Welfare is seen as a privilege, not a right.

<sup>11</sup> As we shall see (when we discuss the historical development of the institution of social welfare in South Africa), in terms of a social welfare model South Africa adopted much of what had been established as the norm in the UK and the USA (i.e. western models). See more about this on page 46 of this chapter.

<sup>12</sup> In this model social problems are viewed as “personal troubles” rather than as “public issues” (see **Glossary**).

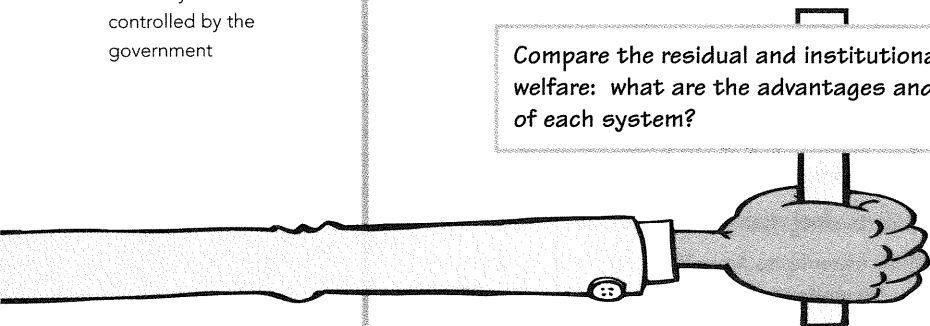
<sup>13</sup> For example, to receive an old-age pension of just over R400.00 per month, a person has to be over the age of 60 years (for women) or over the age of 65 (for men). S/he also has to prove that s/he does not have an income over a certain limit or any other assets valued at more than a specified amount.

▲ **private sector** — that part of the country's economy which is not controlled by the government

## 2. The institutional view of welfare

The institutional approach has been adopted by some wealthy industrialised, first world nations. It has been pursued most vigorously by the Scandinavian countries, especially Sweden, and is also the model of welfare used by Britain. It has the following characteristics:

- ▶ Society is seen as being primarily responsible for the welfare of its citizens.
- ▶ Welfare is believed to be the right of all people.
- ▶ It aims to provide comprehensive coverage for people's needs from birth until death and is, therefore, often called a "welfare state" approach.
- ▶ It is extremely costly to maintain and — even in highly industrialised, first world countries — has not proved highly effective in reducing poverty. Hence many countries are moving away from a welfare-state model, removing the primary responsibility for welfare from the state to the **private sector**.



*Compare the residual and institutional views of welfare: what are the advantages and disadvantages of each system?*

## 3. The developmental view of welfare

The social development approach is becoming increasingly important in those contexts where there is a high degree of poverty in society. It has the following characteristics:

- ▶ It views welfare as a basic right.
- ▶ It takes a broad, holistic view of social welfare.
- ▶ Welfare is considered to be part of all social institutions (i.e. health, education, agriculture, work and so on) which have an impact on the quality of people's lives and on their level of social functioning.
- ▶ State welfare is seen to be the primary means of creating social equality.
- ▶ On a macro-level the focus of social work is on structural change aimed at redressing inequalities while on a micro-level it encourages clients to become involved in mutual support activities such as self-help groups and economic cooperatives.
- ▶ Globally, there is an increasing recognition of social development and of the need for the international community to work together to eradicate world poverty.

**Community development** has the same overall goals as **social development** but takes place at the local level and emphasises self-help and individual empowerment. Its focus is on achieving economic and social progress for the whole community through the active participation and initiative of community members.

Social development, on the other hand, is much broader than this. It embraces social policies and programmes which link "social welfare directly to economic development policies and programs" (Midgley, 1995: 1). The state must be involved in social development and it is the state's responsibility to intervene in the economy

to encourage economic growth, to reduce structural obstacles to economic progress and to ensure that public money is used for the benefit of all but particularly for the benefit of low income groups (see also Chapter 5, pages 70–71, Chapter 6, pages 98–99, and see **Glossary**).

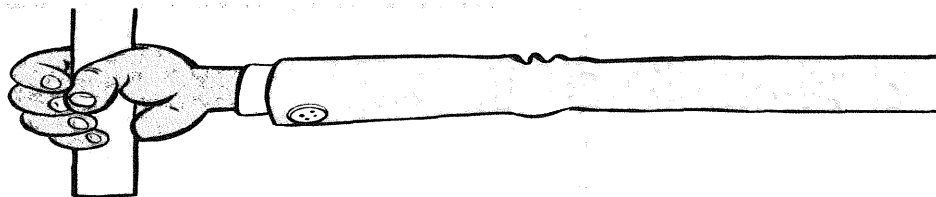
Social development is consistent with the concept of empowerment which we discussed in Chapter 1 but as you can see it is not only a "people-centred community action approach". It is also aimed at transforming society into a democracy which includes all its citizens and is concerned with the social welfare (in its broadest sense) of all, through its policies of participation, sustainable economic development and equitable distribution of resources.

In the context of current South Africa, a social development model is being pursued in line with the national Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). The kind of social work needed to fit into this model is called "**developmental social work**".

Given its history — and the social, political and economic problems facing South Africa at the present time — why do you think the developmental model would be more appropriate than:

- (a) the residual model; or
- (b) the institutional model?

The following extract from Midgley (1994) might help you decide . . .



"The roots of the social development perspective can be traced back to colonial times. The term was first used in the context of British colonial welfare administration in Africa in the 1950's, when social workers sought to transcend their conventional remedial roles. Apart from providing remedial services for the disabled, children, the elderly, the mentally ill, and young offenders, these administrators sought to foster social programmes such as mass literacy and community development that would enhance levels of welfare for the community as a whole.

The social development perspective has several distinctive features. First, social development is inclusive. It requires the mobilisation of all social institutions for the promotion of human welfare. Development is viewed as

a comprehensive process which encompasses all citizens and fosters social solidarity. Unlike approaches which rely on treatment interventions, social development does not delegate the responsibility for human welfare to the individual. Instead, collective mechanisms are used to include all sections of the population and to promote general rather than individual welfare.

Second, social development seeks to integrate the economic and social aspects of the development process. Unlike approaches which emphasize the delivery of social welfare services to poor people, it views social programmes as an essential ingredient of an overall growth strategy designed to promote human well-being" (from Midgley, 1994: 1–12).

The various strategies for social development outlined by Midgley (1994) might be represented diagrammatically as follows:



Similar approaches to helping can be identified in the histories of social work and social welfare in England, America and South Africa. This is not surprising since up until the apartheid era South African society was modelled on the British and American systems — with some important variations brought about mainly by the different make-up of its population.

As we shall see, during the apartheid years South African social work within the institution of social welfare was bound by broader social policy, defined and divided along ethnic or racial lines. And social work services were divided according to the four major racial groupings in the country, leading to impractical and unnecessary replication and a very costly welfare system.

Understanding the history of welfare in South Africa enables us to appreciate why we are currently adopting a particular approach to welfare issues. It is to this history that we will now turn our attention.<sup>14</sup>

## How did social welfare develop in South Africa?

In South Africa, as elsewhere, early **informal care systems** gave way to a **formal system** of care — a pattern which we have already identified and discussed in the sections on the development of welfare systems in both industrialised (pages 36–38) and developing societies (pages 38–39). McKendrick (1990) notes that the predominant theme which emerged in the history of welfare services in this country arose from the relationship, particularly the inequalities, between the various *races*.

<sup>14</sup> We will return to the theme of what constitutes an *appropriate* welfare model for South Africa in Chapter 7.

With increasing urbanisation — and the disruption of traditional family structures that came with it — the family as an institution became less and less able to meet the need for care of society's members. The result was the first formal welfare services, provided for whites, and started with assistance from the church — and later provided through **voluntary** efforts, particularly by women's organisations. These organisations provided welfare services and established **institutions for poor white people**. They focused particularly on the care of children and the physically handicapped, and on relief for the indigent (i.e. the needy or poor).



**voluntary** — a voluntary organisation is a private, as opposed to a public or government, welfare group or organisation

The "poor white" problem in South Africa was accelerated by the development of secondary industry following the discovery of diamonds in 1870 and gold in 1886. Immigrants from places like Britain, as well as African and white farmers, rushed to the cities hoping to participate in the new wealth and prosperity.

White urban migrants lacked educational qualifications and trade skills and were unable to compete with immigrants from abroad. They refused to accept the low wages offered to African migrants for manual work and thus could not compete for employment in the cities.

Poor farming methods, excessive sub-division of the land, and the Anglo-Boer War, all contributed to the increase in poverty among whites. A number of church and community (i.e. the white community) based organisations were started to relieve white poverty. State programmes were launched, in particular a Department of Labour which assisted (white) people in finding employment, but with limited success.

In 1929, a scientific investigation into the causes of poverty in South Africa was undertaken with funding from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.<sup>15</sup> *The Report of the Carnegie Commission of Inquiry into the Poor White Problem* blamed poverty on South Africa's changing economic and social structure (i.e. the social and economic environment) rather than on individual deficits or **pathology**.



**pathology** — disease or illness

Two recommendations of the Commission were that:

- ▶ the state be responsible for people's social welfare needs; and
- ▶ university courses for the education and training of skilled social workers be established.

These recommendations led to the establishment of degree courses at a number of South African universities and, in 1937, to a state Department of Social Welfare.

Social policy adopted during this period **reinforced the residual approach** (i.e. that individuals must take primary responsibility for meeting their own needs and, if possible, avoid the need for charity or any formally provided social service). Further, services offered by the Department of Social Welfare focused on the

<sup>15</sup> Note again that there have been two Carnegie Inquiries into poverty; the first discussed here investigated *white* poverty, and the second, discussed already in Chapter 2 (see page 28) investigated *black* poverty.

needs of the white population and even where legislation (such as the Children's Act of 1937 which provided for children to be declared "in need of care" if they were found to be living in unsatisfactory conditions) appeared to cover the needs of all, this was not applied to the African population.

The apartheid era of 1948–1990 was characterised by increased African migration to urban areas in search of employment, while government policy prohibited the permanent residence of Africans in cities. The system of influx control separated African working men from their families and thus from their community and traditional kinship support systems in times of need. Because Africans were considered temporary residents in the towns little housing was provided, squatter settlements increased and family life became increasingly disrupted. Thus African poverty too became a significant problem, even though it was of little concern to the white-controlled government.

However, over time a number of voluntary cooperative associations developed which were aimed at replacing the traditional supports lost in the move to the cities. Examples of these were:

- ▶ *abakhaya* groups (in Zulu, meaning "people who come from the same village or district") who lived communally in barracks, sharing food and helping one another adjust to a new lifestyle, as well as taking responsibility for their members in illness and death.
- ▶ groups such as sporting and social clubs, civic associations, political groups, burial societies, credit circles, and mutual aid, savings and benevolent societies, which people organised around shared interests and activities.

In the government allocation of welfare resources, racial differentiation was obvious with expenditure on "white welfare" far exceeding that on "black welfare". Many of the laws which dealt with welfare needs did not specifically exclude black people but what happened in practice was that the budgets of the departments which were to administer the laws for African people were inadequate. Thus, public assistance, for example, was not given to Africans, even if they qualified for such assistance, and only limited state help was available to the so-called "coloured" and "Indian" ethnic groups.

Discriminatory state policy led to the development of a welfare system which favoured certain sectors of the population and neglected others. For example, it led to the development of an urban welfare infrastructure, and a total lack of services in rural areas. Services in the urban centres developed in response to the needs of particular groups, and were organised into fields of service (now also referred to as practice contexts). The major fields of service or practice contexts which emerged were:

- ▶ child and family welfare
- ▶ the aged
- ▶ the mentally challenged
- ▶ the physically challenged
- ▶ chemical dependency, including alcoholism and drug addiction
- ▶ correctional services, including prison and probation work.

It is important to grasp that the apartheid government consistently pursued a **policy of partnership** between the state and private welfare initiatives. Voluntary or private agencies were allocated responsibility for developing new services but they were not to undermine the "traditional institutions" of the family and the church, nor were they to overlap with state-sponsored or existing services. As a result of this policy, the number of voluntary (community-based) welfare organisations increased. Many of these organisations provided specialised services aimed at *rehabilitation* and there was an increased demand for trained social workers.

*R*ehabilitation suggests the process of helping a client return to a previous level of social functioning. For example, we talk about rehabilitating offenders by which is meant helping people who have been in prison become reintegrated into their families and society. It implies that a problem already exists and that people have to be helped to return to the level of functioning they enjoyed before the problem arose.

The opposite of rehabilitation is prevention. Newer developmental approaches place a greater emphasis on preventing problems from occurring. These approaches emphasise that social work has an equally important preventive role.

The state controlled the activities of voluntary organisations through legislation and the welfare structure. Welfare legislation formulated during this period is still in force today, although it is currently being reviewed:

THE NATIONAL WELFARE ACT (No. 100 of 1978) provides for the registration of welfare organisations and allows the state to specify which welfare programmes should be conducted by these organisations.

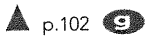
THE FUND-RAISING ACT (No. 107 of 1978) regulates organisations allowed to collect money from the public.

THE SOCIAL AND ASSOCIATED WORKERS ACT (1978) provides for the establishment of a Social Work Council to oversee the social work profession.

During the 1980s, the racist policies of the apartheid government continued through the creation of the **tricameral system**. This system distinguished between own and general affairs, the latter embracing matters to be kept firmly in the hands of the central government (such as the budget and defence) and the former being "matters which specifically or differentially affect a population group in relation to the maintenance of its identity and the upholding and furtherance of its way of life, culture, traditions and customs" (McKendrick, 1990: 21). These were to be administered through racially separate departments and three parliamentary bodies were created, each with its own administration system, for whites, "coloureds" and "Indians".<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> The House of Assembly for whites; the House of Delegates for Indians; and the House of Representatives for the so-called "coloured" race group.





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**ideology** — there is both a neutral and a negative sense to this word; the neutral meaning is the science of ideas; while the negative sense expresses the idea of false or mistaken beliefs which hide or distort reality

Africans were accounted for through the **homelands policies** which created costly administrations in ten homelands, among them what came to be known as the TBVC states, namely Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei, and KwaZulu. Each homeland had its own department of health and welfare. Africans living in urban centres had their welfare needs addressed through the Department of Education and Development Aid. This **system was extremely costly**, leading to unnecessary replication and a waste of public funds to support the **ideology** of apartheid. It created a bureaucratic nightmare for social workers.

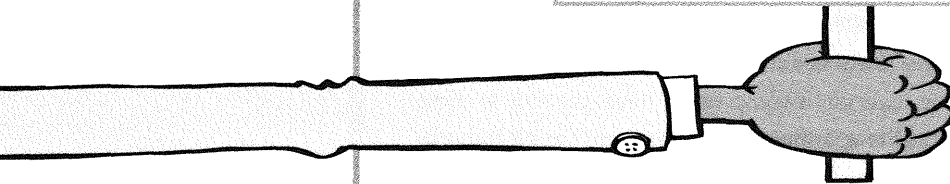
South Africa entered the **post-apartheid era** with the release of Nelson Mandela from prison on 10 February 1990. Four decades of apartheid have left most South Africans with limited or no access to adequate health and social services and, in some cases, have left whole communities without any services whatsoever. We have now entered a **period of reconstruction and development**, a period in which past policies and practices have to be reviewed and replaced by more workable ones which will correct past imbalances and address the needs of our total population.

Think about the South African context and the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation.

In what way were these processes similar to or different from the processes in Europe? (Look back to pages 36–39 if necessary.)

What have been the specific effects of apartheid?

In this context, why do you think the South African government adopted the residual model of social welfare?



## Summary

In this chapter we have looked at the historical development of the institution of social welfare in some developed and developing countries, and we have considered some of the influences on that development. We saw that the development of social welfare in South Africa in many ways mirrored historical trends in England and America. However, we identified racially unequal services as the dominant trend in South African welfare service provision. Responsibility for people's welfare, the role of the state in the provision of welfare services and the question of welfare services as a right or a privilege are some of the issues which we discussed in relation to different models of welfare. The social development model was identified as the model of choice in South Africa — that is, an appropriate model for a developing context.

Some reference was made to the links between social work and social welfare although we will consider the historical development of social work in greater detail in Chapter 4.

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# Chapter 4

## Structure at a glance . . .

### Key questions

- How did social work develop as a discipline?
- What is the current status of the social work profession in South Africa?
- What gives South African social work its professional status?

### Key concepts

In discussing the emergence of social work as a discipline and as a profession, we introduce the following key concepts:

- discipline
- profession
- professionalism
- professional status
- mission & method
- professional recognition
- criteria of professionalism
- status quo* orientation
- theoretical unity
- ecosystems perspective

# Historical development of social work as discipline and profession

**S**ocial work is both a discipline and a profession. As a discipline it has a specific body of theory which guides its practice and as a profession it is guided by a particular set of values. In order to understand the nature of social work, it is important to consider its historical development as a discipline, and as a profession which is practised within the context of the institution of social welfare.

We will see that its emergent professional status has been closely linked to its development as a discipline, and to changes in its ways of thinking over time.

## How did social work develop as a discipline?

While the development of social work as a **profession** was influenced by the way in which welfare services in society developed, social work has also developed as a discipline or field of formal study. The factors which affected the development of social work as a **discipline** relate to:

- ▶ The way in which social work went about helping people — its method-specific practice;
- ▶ The search for professional recognition; and
- ▶ The search for theoretical unity and hence the kind of training social workers needed.

### 1. Method-specific practice — the conflict between “mission” and “method”

The crucial issue in the debate about social work’s concern with “mission”<sup>1</sup> or “method” relates to the way in which it has responded to its **dual concern with individuals and society**. As we have noted before (see Chapter 3, page 42), over the years the pendulum has swung between concern with individuals and concern with communities and/or society.

Historically, social work practice tended to be method-specific — social workers worked either as caseworkers, *or* groupworkers, *or* community workers.

Thus, the use of these three main methods characterised the newly emerging profession of social work:

- ▶ **casework:**  
services to individuals and families;
- ▶ **groupwork:**  
services to groups; and
- ▶ **community work:**  
services to communities.

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<sup>1</sup> To have a mission means to believe that there is something that it is your duty to achieve.

The method-specific approach has its roots in the evolution of social casework, which developed from the work of the Charity Organisation Movement. At the time of the Charity Organisation Movement, people who were not able to function effectively were viewed as "ill" and as requiring "treatment".

However, by the time the American social worker, Mary Richmond, published her text *What is Social Casework?* in 1922, she had accepted the importance of the concept of environment, and was (albeit in a limited way) concerned with the interaction between "person and environment".

She is said to have described her approach as follows:

"The good social worker doesn't go on mechanically helping people out of a ditch. Pretty soon she begins to find out what ought to be done to get rid of the ditch" (quoted by Du Bois and Miley, 1992: 29). In this approach, although the focus is still on individual change (i.e. helping people out of the ditch), the impact of the environment (the ditch) on people's functioning is not excluded.

By contrast, the Settlement Movement (from which **social groupwork** developed) was less inclined to deal with poverty as a purely individual phenomenon and tried to use the power of the group to achieve both individual and socio-economic change.

Social work's method-specific approach was also related to its quest for professional status. Following on developments in other professions where individualistic helping methods predominated (e.g. in law, medicine and psychiatry), many social workers considered that professional status and social recognition were not possible while social workers were stigmatised by their involvement with the poor and their association with social reform.

There was a consequent reduction of interest in social reform and increasing interest in individualistic helping methods, such as **counselling** and **casework**, and in working with people with a higher social standing.

Social workers adopted methods which were seen by other professions as "scientific", "rational" or "objective" while their commitment to the whole person, to the community and to the reform of society were put aside.

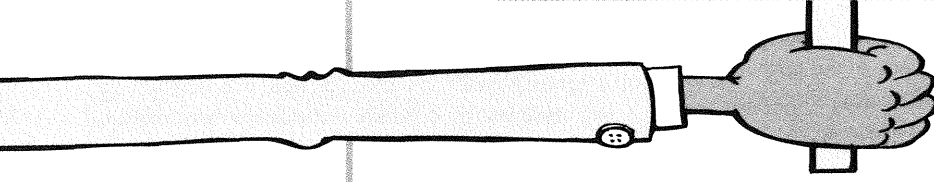
The consequence can be seen as a split between what Goldstein (1990:33) calls "*mission and method*".

As we have already seen, early social workers had a social mission which was to make society more responsive to the poor. This was embodied in social work's concern with social reform. Now we are seeing that as social workers became more concerned with other factors — such as their quest for professionalism — so their focus changed from concern with the **mission of social reform**, to concern with the **methods** which would be most conducive to **enhancing their professional status** in society.

In the early development of the discipline of social work, what methods did social workers adopt?

Why were these methods inappropriate to the mission of social work?

And how did social workers' concern with enhancing their professional status affect their methods?



## 2. Search for professional recognition

The drive for professional status has been universal and has occurred wherever social work came to be practised. Although it began historically in England and America, it soon spread to other contexts, including South Africa.

Many of those employed by charitable institutions in America and England in the early 1900s regarded their work as a profession, comparing it with the traditionally accepted professions of law, medicine and theology. At the time, Flexner (1916), a noted expert on professional education, claimed that for an occupation to qualify as a profession, it must meet the following criteria:

Involve essentially intellectual operations with large individual responsibility.

1. Derive its raw material from science and learning.
2. Use this material to achieve a practical and specific goal.
3. Have an educationally communicable technique.
4. Be able to organise and monitor its activities.
5. Be increasingly altruistic in motivation.

He accepted that the occupation's workers were altruistically motivated, but claimed that social work was not characterised by the responsibility or power of a true profession because its aims were too wide and insufficiently specific. And, as a result of its broad scope, its practitioners lacked specialised skills. While

recognising that educational efforts had been made, he claimed that social work lacked a systematic, scientific body of knowledge and theory which could be taught to aspiring professionals.

The reaction to Flexner's assessment was a "*zealous quest*" for professional status resulting in a "*flurry of activity*" in America (Du Bois and Miley, 1992: 35). The number of schools of social work expanded dramatically and training was advocated for all social workers. A professional accreditation body was formed, educational curricula were standardised, and a belief in the singular, generic nature of social work skills, applicable in any setting, was propounded at a series of conferences.

Similar aspirations can be seen in the efforts of social workers world-wide to gain professional recognition. In South Africa, for example, an Act of Parliament (Act 100 of 1978) was passed which provided for the establishment of a Social Work Council to regulate the education and subsequent professional registration and conduct of social workers. Social work education in South Africa is carried out in 21 schools and departments of social work, some of which have functioned since the 1930s.

There are arguments both *for* and *against* professionalism. Some of these arguments are set out in the table below:

<i>"for"</i> PROFESSIONALISM	<i>"against"</i> PROFESSIONALISM
Creates a sense of professional objectivity which is needed for effective service delivery	Makes social workers feel separate and distant from their clients
Ensures that social workers are accountable for what they do	Anti-democratic — puts social workers in a position of superiority and authority over clients
Establishes and regulates professional values and educational and practice standards	Encourages social workers to focus on developing their own privilege and power rather than promoting public interest

The strongest critics of professionalism point to the price paid by social work in its bid to gain a monopoly on dispensing social welfare. The highest cost, it is claimed, is that social work sacrifices its social mission or reform focus. Critics point to the danger of a profession such as social work developing expertise in order to acquire privilege and power, rather than to promote public interest and best serve its clients' needs.

Criticisms such as these raise important questions regarding accountability. To whom are social workers accountable?

- to their clients?
- or to the organisations which pay their salaries?
- or to the government which sanctions their existence?<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> These perplexing questions relate to the values and aims of social work. See Chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion of values for social work.



▲  
**status quo** — the situation as it exists; the established system or order

## Aligning with the status quo?

Professional status is bestowed on an occupational group when society is convinced that the group is making a worthwhile contribution. In gaining this status the group aligns itself with the ruling group and becomes an integral part of that society. Therefore, in order to become a profession, the aspiring occupation must clearly identify with the standards and values of the **status quo**. What arises then is a situation in which the profession is allowed to operate within the confines imposed by politicians and those in power (i.e. the ruling elite) who control the state. In the case of social work, it means that social work is granted established authority to provide welfare services and protect its territory from encroachment by other professions. One writer questions whether it was worth sacrificing a commitment to social change in return for professional recognition and argues that it is precisely this sacrifice which is an undesirable consequence of the trend towards professionalism (see Biklen, 1983).

Certainly aligning itself with the *status quo* creates a paradox for social work which started out with a mission of social reform and change and ends up as part of the ruling hierarchy with a stake in keeping society as it is. In order to resolve this dilemma we need to return to the duality of functions in social work: Besides helping individuals, groups or communities when help is needed, the profession does have an obligation to press for change and improvement in social conditions. While social workers may work with people who do not comply with social norms, the profession can, at the same time, work to change unjust norms and practices.<sup>3</sup>

## Duality of function

In working with people who do not comply with social norms (e.g. alcoholics, child abusers, absconders and juvenile delinquents or deviants), social workers often become involved in statutory work (i.e. work related to some law or statute). Social workers are then acting as agents of government, expecting and encouraging adherence to social laws.

Social workers have been criticised for doing this kind of work by those who claim that this is a social control function which is in contrast to social work's mission of social change. However, we would argue that there is a place for social workers to do this kind of work. It is possible

to expect adherence to social norms and still work towards changing unjust norms or laws.

For example, in South Africa, many social workers did not agree with the apartheid laws but they were forced to work within the parameters of apartheid policy. At the same time, though, they fought injustice and tried to make even apartheid society more humane and responsive to people.

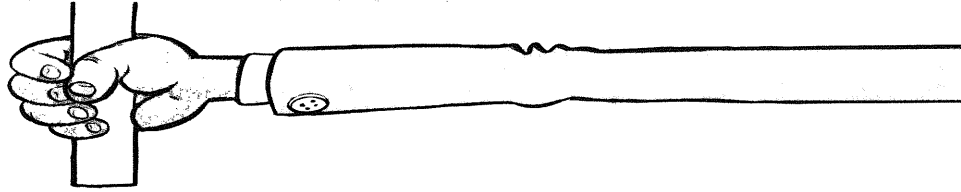
One area in which social workers were especially active was in relation to the detention of children in police cells and prisons. They insisted on counselling, educational and recreational services being made available to these displaced children while simultaneously fighting against the system which allowed such detentions to occur.

Being part of the social structure need not have a sinister face, especially where the profession and those in power share a similar quest for social justice.

<sup>3</sup> Remember social work's second central value — social justice.

In terms of your understanding thus far, do you think social work is or should be a profession?

Read the section of the article on Pavement People entitled "Lessons for Social Work" and then list what you consider to be the positives and negatives of professionalism.



### 3. Search for theoretical unity

The evolution of social work education — from charity workers or “friendly visitors” (as they were then called) to professional social workers — resulted in a number of formal schools or departments being established at universities from the late 1800s onwards. The first South Africa social work education programme was developed at the University of Cape Town in the 1930s.

Over the years social workers have been required to study the **principles and methods** of social work as well as to take courses in a variety of academic subjects. Because the study of social work is diverse, there are many areas of specialisation. Social workers specialise either in terms of:

- **method** (casework, groupwork, community work, research, supervision and social policy);
- or*
- **fields of practice** (child welfare, the aged, the physically and mentally challenged, medical and psychiatric social work and so on).

Thus, in order to practise in various contexts, social workers need both a general grounding in the theories and methods of social work, and specialist knowledge about the problems with which they deal in specific contexts.

Social work students learn about methods as well as about specific fields of practice. Of course it is impossible to know about every problem but it is possible to access knowledge as and when required. The most important scholarly skill the social worker needs to have is resourcefulness.

Besides needing knowledge of practice areas or problems, social workers also need theoretical knowledge which informs the models and approaches they use. In the next section of this chapter we show how the integrated approach is informed by ecosystems theory.

There are other theories which relate to “practice methods” but there are also theories — such as empowerment theory, feminist theory and radical theory — which cut across methods. The concepts and ideas of these theories can inform our actions at whatever level we are working. More importantly, theories are like spectacles which can help us “see” problems and situations in a new way — they enrich our perspectives. Students will learn more about these theoretical perspectives as they proceed through social work.

The following core elements are considered central to any social work education curriculum:

### **Knowledge about human behaviour in the social environment**

In order to help people effectively we need to understand the person-in-situation. This means an accurate understanding of the person and the nature of the problem, as well as the resources and obstacles which are part of the total situation.

### **Knowledge of social policy and the processes of policy formulation and implementation**

Social policies determine the actions taken by society to implement its social welfare goals. Social workers have an ethical responsibility to participate in the development and implementation of social policies which enhance the social functioning of individuals, families, groups and communities. Because of their commitment to social justice social workers need to be aware of inequities, both in terms of opportunity and in terms of the distribution of resources and services in society, and to work actively to change policies and practices related to such inequities.

### **Knowledge of social work practice methods and the development of appropriate practice skills**

In order to be effective practitioners and to accomplish the mission and objectives of the profession, social workers need knowledge of practice methods at the micro, mezzo and macro-levels as well as appropriate practice skills. Professional competence embodies knowledge, values, skills and attitudes and because situations change and knowledge is in a constant state of flux, competence cannot be considered static. It must be seen in relation to the context in which the social worker is practising. Although it is difficult to measure, attaining and maintaining competence in practice is an ethical requirement of social workers.

## Knowledge of and participation in research

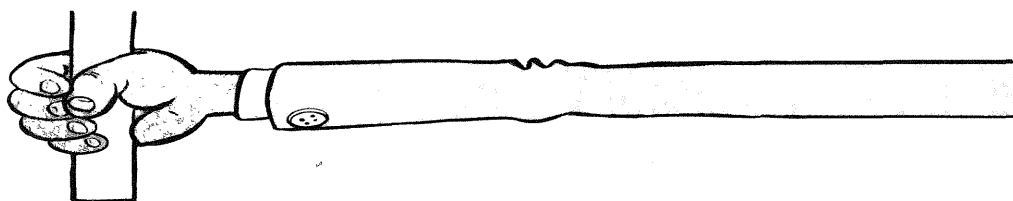
Research is an indispensable part of scholarly enquiry and the driving force behind the advancement of knowledge and understanding. Social workers need to have and to utilise knowledge about research in order to keep up to date in their field as well as to evaluate the effectiveness of their own practice. As was mentioned above, social workers draw from a wide range of theories for their practice and they need to be able to select the most appropriate theory (or theories) for a particular client-situation. This requires a knowledge of the various theories, knowledge of the extent to which a given theory has been supported by **empirical** research and knowledge of the relevant research findings.<sup>4</sup> The first question to be asked then of any particular theory or approach is whether it produced results. Without knowledge of research findings it would not be possible to make an informed decision about the best approach to use.



pp.75–76

**empirical** — based on observation, experience and/or experimentation

Think about the relationship between social work and other social science disciplines (e.g. anthropology, psychology, sociology). What, do you think, is specific or distinctive about the training required for social work?



Because it is so diverse, social work has no single or unified theory to inform its practice although, over the years, consistent attempts have been made to achieve theoretical unity. Numerous theoretical approaches have been advanced, many drawing from knowledge developed in the related behavioural and social sciences such as anthropology, psychology and sociology. Each source of knowledge adds something to our understanding and by drawing on many sources of knowledge we can develop a more comprehensive, multi-dimensional approach.

As we have already mentioned, social work's diversity comes from its various practice methods and theories and from the variety of settings or contexts in which it is practised. Thus a major concern in the development of social work has been the search for theoretical unity through an approach which integrates the wide variety of practice methods and contexts. From the 1970s onwards, concerted attempts were made to find a "holistic", "unitary" perspective for social work practice focusing on commonalities rather than differences.

<sup>4</sup> This selection of a theory or model which best matches a given problem situation and gives the highest priority to techniques which have been empirically shown to be effective and efficient is known as "systematic **eclecticism**" (Fischer, 1978).



**eclecticism** — the practice of choosing what seems to be best or most useful from several different sets of ideas or beliefs





**linear relationship** — if we say that event A causes event B which causes C then we are seeing a linear relationship between problems and their causes

The **ecosystems perspective** offers a conceptual framework which encompasses the breadth and diversity of social work in such a holistic and unitary way. It offers a common **conceptual umbrella** to unite the diverse strands of social work theory and practice. Phrased in a different way, the ecosystems perspective provides a coherent framework for social work's various influences from the social and behavioural sciences and its individual, group and community interactions (Greif & Lynch, 1983; Meyer, 1983).

In Chapter 1, the importance of a **holistic approach** to people, their needs and problems, and the environment in which these occur, was emphasised. The ecosystems perspective is holistic in that it does the following:

- ▶ Examines all the systems in which people interact and the multiple, interacting factors which contribute to and maintain a particular problem.
- ▶ Acknowledges the mutually reciprocal influences which all these interacting people and systems have with and on each other.
- ▶ Looks at what social workers can do at the various levels of the environment (i.e. the micro, mezzo and macro-levels described in Chapter 2).
- ▶ Suggests interventions at all these levels (as will be discussed in Chapter 6).
- ▶ Uses a problem-solving approach.

The ecosystems perspective is also consistent with the **social development approach** mentioned previously.<sup>5</sup> Social development focuses on the relationship between social and economic development. Those who advocate a social development approach believe that unless social workers simultaneously address social and economic issues, real development and social change will not take place.

**Social development is a specific approach to social policy formulation at the macro-level and results in community development as a strategic intervention at the community level (Midgley, 1995).<sup>6</sup>**

Adopting a holistic, ecosystems perspective has certainly brought improvements to social work. Prior to the advent of the ecosystems perspective as a way of looking at problems in social work, people tended to see a **linear relationship** between problems and their causes. This is in contrast to a circular view of causality (characteristic of a **systems** approach) which takes into account the reciprocal influences of all the systems (individual and contextual) which affect the problem.

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 2, pages 28–32

<sup>6</sup> Think again about the various strategies for social development suggested by Midgley (see Chapter 2, page 29 and Chapter 3, page 45).

Through developing our awareness of interacting systems we are forced to consider **multiple factors** which affect the well-being of clients. Consider, for example, the issue of unemployment. Linking unemployment solely to *people's laziness* involves seeing the problem only at the individual or micro-level and adhering to a "blaming-the-victim" approach.<sup>7</sup> (Remember the "friendly visitors" explained unemployment in terms of people's laziness.)

An ecosystems perspective (or holistic approach) would reveal that unemployment is a "public issue" caused by social, political, economic and historical factors. It would reveal that this combination of factors results in "private troubles"<sup>8</sup> for individuals and their families, and that this has an affect on everyone in society, albeit in different ways. An ecosystem perspective focuses attention, therefore, not only on possible deficits within the individual (such as lack of education or particular skills) but also on the bigger picture.

From this perspective, working with the problem of unemployment would draw attention to the need for broad political, social and economic changes, in addition to the micro-interventions necessary to help individuals and their families meet their specific material needs.

Another positive effect for social work of the introduction of the ecosystems perspective has been **theoretical unity**. At the beginning of this chapter we discussed briefly how, as the methods of casework, groupwork and community work developed in social work, so each began to have its own theory and ways of practising. Social workers tended to specialise in one method and were thus divided into caseworkers, groupworkers and community workers. The ecosystems perspective replaced the notion of specialisation and division with the idea of **diversity**, and used the problem-solving approach as the **common method of practice** which could be applied at various levels of intervention (i.e. at the levels of individual, group and community discussed fully in Chapter 2).

Thus, by using the idea of levels, the ecosystems perspective allows for diverse strands of social work theory and its varied practice contexts to be viewed holistically — as part of a complex whole.

<sup>7</sup> See again Chapter 1, pages 5–10 and Chapter 3, page 37.

<sup>8</sup> See also Chapter 1, page 10, and see the **Glossary**, for a discussion of this concept, which comes from the sociologist, C Wright Mills.

## What is the current status of the social work profession in South Africa?

The drive for professional status which has occurred wherever social work has come to be practised is clearly also evident in the South African context. The first important question to be considered is whether social work in South Africa can be regarded as a profession. Bear in mind in making this assessment that, in order to achieve professional recognition, social work needs to meet, among other things, the following criteria:

- ▶ achieve a recognised status in society
- ▶ have a professional culture
- ▶ be a paid occupation employed full-time
- ▶ be guided by codes of ethics<sup>9</sup>
- ▶ have educational programmes
- ▶ have a rigorous and systematic (or scientific) knowledge base

In a context such as South Africa, social work is moving increasingly towards a focus on social development. Given what we have already discussed about professionalism, the second important question then becomes whether it is desirable for social work to be preoccupied with its own professional status.

*Given your current knowledge of social work, apply these criteria to determine whether social work in South Africa is a profession.  
List what you regard to be the true hallmarks or criteria of professionalism.*



## What gives South African social work its professional status?

In South Africa, we have an **Act of Parliament** (originally called the Social and Associated Workers Act but now called the Social Work Act, No. 110 of 1978 as amended), which regulates the social work profession. The original act legally defined the acts and activities of social workers as follows:

**Any act, activity or method directed at diagnosing, eliminating, preventing or treating social malfunctioning or problematic functioning in man, or at promoting social stability in man, and includes any process which is calculated to promote the efficient performance or application of such act, activity or method.**

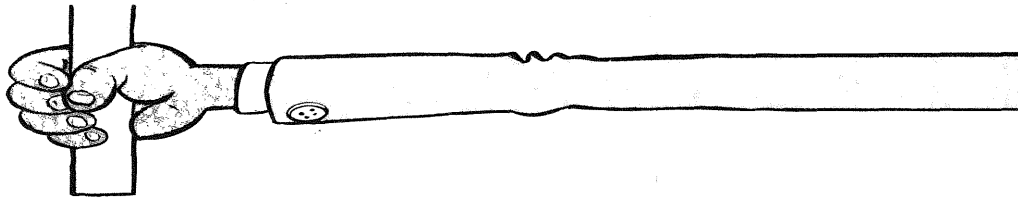
<sup>9</sup> See Appendix 2 for the Code of Ethics for social work.

This definition has some serious flaws: In addition to using sexist language (speaking only in terms of "man"), it focuses on the **individual's** malfunctioning as the subject of the social worker's activity. Further, it does not incorporate any notion of changing the environment in which the individual functions. Perhaps most problematic is the (silent) assumption that social workers are concerned with maintaining "social stability" (or the *status quo*, see again page 58)

This was particularly problematic in apartheid South Africa as no mention is made of the need for social or political change or reorganisation. The approach advocated is that of the professional social worker who has the power and expertise to attend to the "malfunctioning or problematic functioning" of individuals.

Further, this definition does not take into account the importance of an individual's active participation in interacting successfully with the environment. It therefore negates important social work principles of client autonomy, self-determination, competence and participation in decision-making and action.

How would you define the acts and activities of the social worker if you were called upon to draw up legislation for the social work profession?



Our brief critique illustrates that this definition of the activities of social work was poorly conceived and clearly inappropriate. It was eventually withdrawn in the Social Work Amendment Act, No 48 of 1989. Yet this later act also fails to offer an alternative definition. In South Africa we therefore still have a Social Work Act which does not define social work at all, possibly because social workers cannot agree on an appropriate definition of their profession!

But legislation is important too. The Social Work Act of South Africa regulates social work as a profession by providing for a Social Work Council which:

- controls social work education and practice — specifically practice misconduct, the registration of social workers and social auxiliary workers; and
- sets minimum standards for social work education by prescribing not only what social work students should be taught, but also the teaching methods and the deployment of staff in social work departments.

Given the importance of the widespread changes currently afoot with regard to welfare policy, new legislation is likely to follow and lead to a reconstituted Council for Social Work which is more representative of South African social workers, and international social work values, than the current one.



## Summary

In this chapter we have seen how social work's development as a discipline and as a profession are interlinked. As social work began to strive for professional status, so it started to develop its own body of knowledge (although it continues to draw from the social and behavioural sciences) and educational programmes. An important aspect of the development of social work's own knowledge base has been the adoption of the ecosystems perspective, which has shifted social work into a more holistic way of understanding problem situations and consequently to a more effective way of working.

In the beginning the evolving profession and discipline of social work in South Africa mirrored that of England and America, but as South Africa's racist policies began to take hold so South African social work began to assume its distinctive character. It has, however, aspired to universal social work values despite the fact that the social system made them difficult to apply, especially those values relating to non-discrimination.

We identified the processes involved in gaining professional status and briefly discussed the merits or demerits of professionalism with particular reference to professionalism in South Africa. Finally, we examined social work's evolution into a discipline in its own right, with its own body of theory and we traced its search for theoretical unity and its acknowledgement of the importance of an empirical knowledge base as being key factors in this evolution.

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# Chapter 5

## Structure at a glance . . .

### Key questions

What is the relationship between social work's values, and the wider society in which social work is practised?

What are social work's two central values, and what balance do they attempt to express?

What is meant by the value of "respect for persons"?

How should society be structured, for people to live full and satisfying lives?

What do we mean by level of values in social work?

### Key concepts

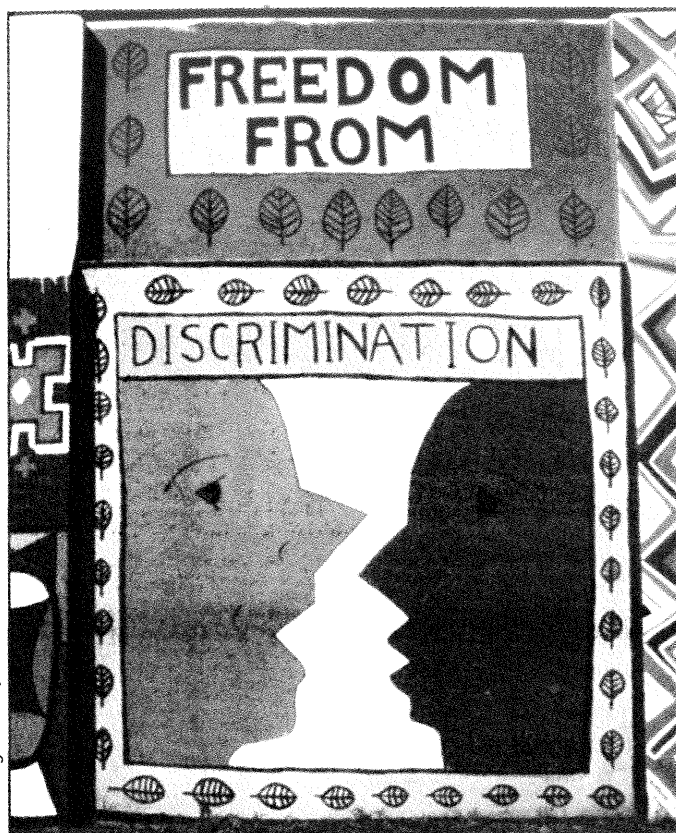
In exploring important values for social work, we talk about the following important terms and concepts in this chapter:

**respect for persons**  
**social justice**  
**self-determination**  
**autonomy**  
**accountability**  
**acceptance**  
**tolerance**  
**stereotypes**  
**confidentiality & informed consent**  
**objectivity & impartiality**  
**value dilemmas & value conflicts**  
**equality, equity & non-discrimination**

# Values for social work practice

A profession's philosophy, values and ethics give purpose, meaning and direction to its work. While there might not always or necessarily be agreement on the merits or demerits of professionalism, there is widespread support for the notion that all professions have guiding philosophies, values and ethics which influence their activities and mirror those of the wider society. Thus we have seen how the development of social work and social welfare in our society were linked to **values** and **ideologies** in the broader society.





## g

### social development

## g

### values

Early social work tended to be both authoritarian and moralistic reflecting general social attitudes of the time towards the poor. The earliest social workers were religiously motivated and the social work which evolved was heavily influenced by Judeo-Christian values. Hence the emphasis was on *individual* reform and conformity to social norms.

As the profession developed, it became more heavily influenced by policies which emphasised the need to develop a scientific approach to social work. Further, the profession was influenced by wider societal attitudes towards helping people (e.g. the emphasis on self-help and a problem-solving approach in social work intervention).

In the South African context the process of transformation, which became intensified in the resistance movement of the 1980s, led to a

questioning of the government's values and policies and, especially, of their discriminatory nature. This wider societal trend of questioning existing values and policies has given rise to the current phase of **reconstruction and development**. An important focus of this reconstruction process is the poor and all those who have suffered at the hands of the previous government's discriminatory policies and practices. The emphasis is now on developing policies and programmes that will redress these imbalances and contribute to the social development of our country.

Similarly, within this broader context of social change, social work is trying to find **new directions** which both respond to this emphasis on social development and are in keeping with its own social justice values and social change goals. It is important to note that increasingly South Africa's social development needs are being met by other occupational groups, such as community developers. This poses a challenge to social work to redefine its role in society. As part of this process of redefinition, social work is taking a closer look at its values, *ethics* and *guiding philosophies*. While these seem to point it in the direction of social development, broader societal pressures are pushing it increasingly towards playing a residual, safety-net role.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Look back to Chapter 3, page 43, if you need to remind yourself about the residual model of social welfare and its implications.

This role entails providing essential services for people with special needs such as children, the elderly, the mentally and physically challenged, alcoholics and so on.

Some social workers believe that social work's role is to provide services for special categories of those in need such as those we mention here. However others believe that if social work wants to be relevant to our society, it must address the more macro-level needs of the poor. These social workers believe that **community development** is more appropriate to our social context than casework or micro-level practice.

9

community  
development

We have already mentioned that social work values mirror the values of the wider society in which social work is practised. Hence early social work in the form of charity mirrored societal values in terms of which the better off in society should provide for the needs of the less fortunate. However as greater general awareness of society's obligation towards the poor developed, so social work became part of the evolving services designed to meet the needs of those unable to care for themselves.

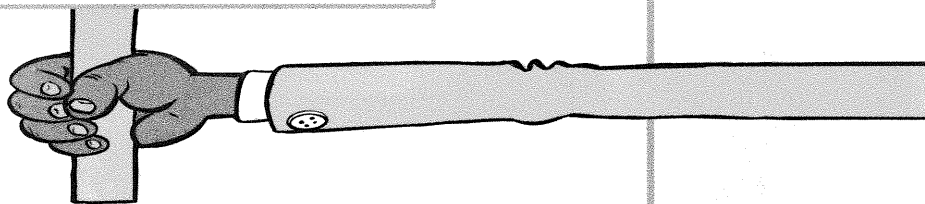
Yet the liberal values which predominated in society at the time ensured that anti-poverty measures did not threaten the *structure* of society. In the 1960s, the influence of marxism began to be felt as its proponents blamed liberalism (and its economic system — capitalism) for failing to eradicate poverty in society. Marxists claimed that it was the social structure and capitalist policies which gave rise to and maintained poverty. In social work such values were reflected in critical or radical theories. These theories were highly critical of what came to be known as

"traditional social work theories", and heated debates between traditionalists and radicals followed.

Traditional theories tended to focus more on the individual and the values of respect, self-determination and confidentiality — the emphasis was on improving an individual's competency to function within the existing society. Radical theories created a greater awareness of the social context in which individual problems arose. Radical theories gave rise to greater concern with social justice and the values of freedom, equality and the equitable distribution of resources — the emphasis was on the individual in the wider societal context as well as, crucially, on **restructuring** society to change the relationship between the privileged and the poor (remember our discussion of radical theory in Chapter 2, pages 29–30). For our current discussion, what is significant about all these values is that they emphasise the importance of seeing the relationship between people and their social environment.

How does the profession of social work (and its values) both mirror the norms of society and seek to change them?

Do the values of social work fit some social systems or societies better than others? Think about the "old" and the "new" South Africa.



This chapter takes a closer look at **social work's values**. We examine what is meant by professional values and discuss the central values of social work relating to **respect for persons** and **social justice**. And finally, we examine the various levels from which values can be viewed, that is, the personal, professional and societal levels.

## What is meant by professional values?

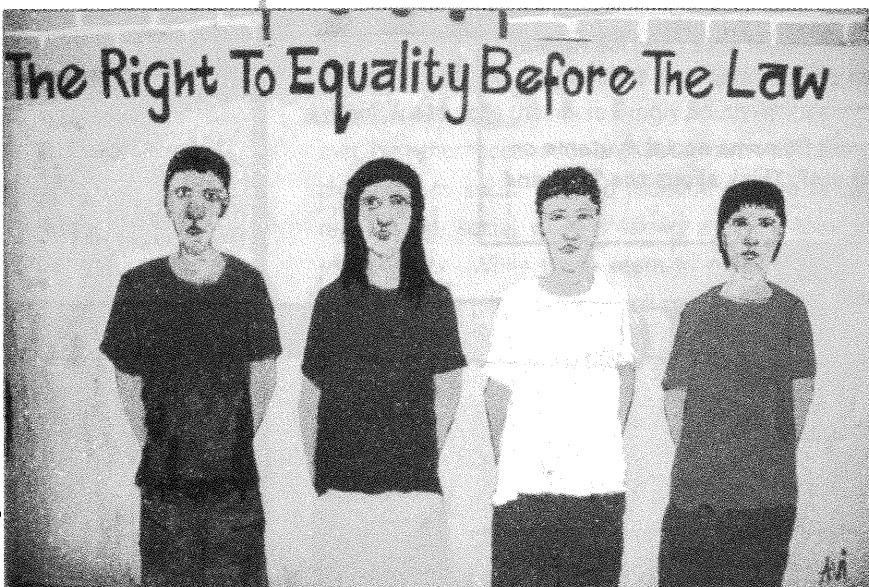
Values can be defined as **the commonly held beliefs of a society's or cultural group's members**, and they flow from moral or ethical beliefs which people hold. For example, **social justice** is a central value of social work even though a just society might be difficult to attain. Thus, even if values reflect beliefs which cannot be proven to be right or wrong in the same way that facts can, this does not diminish their importance. Values are statements of what is preferred or what ought to be — they are **ideals** towards which we strive.

As beliefs, values reflect our ideas about life, people, society, religion and politics. As ideals, values are the aims for which we strive. Simply stated, values represent selected ideals as to how the world should be and how people should behave.

The values of a profession express that profession's strongly held beliefs about people — in the form of preferred goals for people, means for achieving those goals, and a view of acceptable conditions of life.

Social work is a profession with many facets and its goals are diverse and wide-ranging. It is concerned at one level with the plight of individuals in need and at a broader level with the promotion of social justice. In acknowledging the interrelation-

ship between individuals and society, social work is committed to promoting social conditions in which people can live their lives as free, self-determining, autonomous beings.



human rights wall, durban



The profession of social work aims to promote the healthy social functioning of all people in society and to pursue policies and programmes which advocate a quality of life in keeping with its social justice goals of equality, non-discrimination, freedom and democracy.

As you can probably see from these aims of social work, professional values, as reflected in the social work literature and in ethical codes,<sup>2</sup> are usually stated in very general terms so as to attain a level of agreement as to the ideals which the profession promotes. As one writer has wisely observed, the more abstract the values, the greater the level of agreement concerning them (Timms, 1983). No-one would disagree that striving for social justice is a worthwhile ideal. However, people might disagree on the precise meaning of social justice or on the manner in which this goal could be achieved. They might agree, for example, that there should be greater equality in the manner in which social resources are distributed but they might not necessarily agree on specific redistribution practices or strategies (e.g. affirmative action) as the best ways of achieving this.

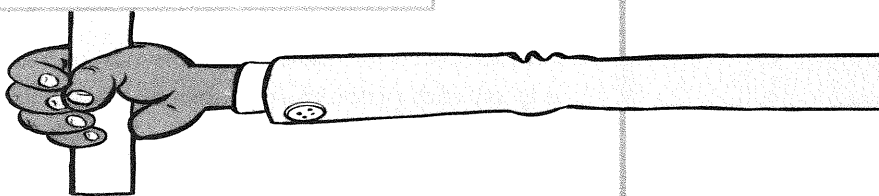
In choosing to become social workers, we also choose to promote the values of the profession, and thus it is important that we learn about our professional values. At the same time though we must reflect on our personal values; we need to examine our own **moral** and political values and how they cohere (or fit) with the values of our society and our profession, because the commitments we make are influenced by our values and morals. As prospective social workers we have a responsibility to reflect on our values and to develop an understanding of how they are likely to affect both our interactions with people and the way in which we approach the practice of social work.

9  
moral

Can you think of any values in the wider society with which you disagree? For example, do you agree/disagree with:

- the lobby to legalise marijuana?
- the notion of abortion on demand?
- the abolition of capital punishment?
- affirmative action policies?

How do current policies on these issues cohere with your personal notions of what is right and just?



<sup>2</sup> Refer to Appendix 2 for the Code of Ethics for social work.



Since most of the situations we encounter as social workers have moral implications and involve ethical decisions which require sound judgement, we need to be knowledgeable about moral issues, not only in terms of societal expectations and social work's professional values, but also in terms of our own stances on moral issues.

**Through reflection of this nature, we develop awareness, understanding and sensitivity to moral issues.**

Thus far in the text, we have emphasised the importance of the **person-in-environment** configuration in social work. This conception arises from social work's **two central values** which express the desire to balance concern for individuals and society:

- ▶ respect for persons, and
- ▶ social justice.

These values are related, and the tension or balance between the two is illustrated in the historical development of social work practice. In the discussion which follows, we will first look at what the social work literature says about the way people should be treated and then we will examine what it says about the kind of society within which people can lead full and satisfying lives.

*Go back to Anna's story in Chapter 1, on page 8 and think of your values with regard to the issue of abortion. How ought you as a social worker to deal with the potential conflict between your personal values and those of your client, or of society at large?*

## **What does social work say about the way people ought to be treated in society?**

First, social work maintains that people must be treated as deserving of respect. That is to say each person must be seen as possessing dignity and worth, and must be accepted as a unique human being. This value is encapsulated in the notion of **respect for persons**.

## Respect for Persons

The value of respect for persons is expressed in the social work literature in different ways. It is sometimes expressed as

**having respect for the inherent dignity  
and worth of each and every human being,**

*or*

**having respect for the uniqueness of the  
individual.**

Every individual is unique. No two people are alike. Therefore, each person should be valued on account of her/his uniqueness. People are irreplaceable: If a couple loses a child, they cannot replace that child by having another child; the lost child remains an individual in her/his own right.

One way in which social workers show their respect for persons is embraced in the notion of **individualisation**. Treating each person as an individual means seeing that person as a unique individual. People should not be treated as objects or as a *means to an end*.<sup>3</sup> To be treated as a means to an end is to be the subject of someone else's will; it is a process of directing people, telling them what to do to fulfil your aims or interests. For example, a husband who does not want his wife to work so that she will always be at home to serve his interests, is guilty of treating her as a means to an end; that is, as a means of getting what he wants rather than treating her as a person in her own right, with her own wants and needs.

It is important that we understand why we ought to respect other people and what it means to respect them. Therefore we need to understand where this value comes from and why it is central to social work.

The value of respect for persons comes from the **recognition that people have the capacity to reason**; that is, the ability to think for themselves. It is this which distinguishes human beings from other animals. People are respected by virtue of the fact that they are human and that they are thus capable of rational thought and choice. Respect for persons means recognising that:

people have the right to choose for themselves how they want to live,

&

society has an obligation or duty to create conditions which allow people freedom and **autonomy** to make these choices.



**autonomy**

<sup>3</sup> To treat someone as "*a means to an end*" means to use that person simply as a way (or means) of achieving a goal or objective (an end), rather than respecting that person for her/his human worth.



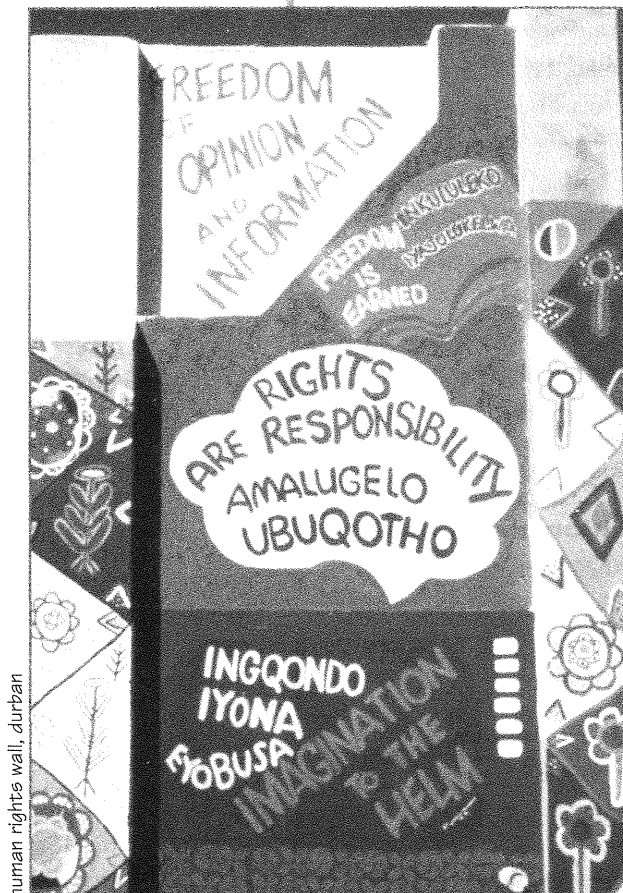
## 1. Self-determination

The value of self-determination flows from this central value of respect for persons. It relates to the right of all people to

- ▶ represent their own interests,
- ▶ speak on their own behalf, and
- ▶ be helped if help is requested and refuse help if it is not wanted.

If people have these rights we say that they have **autonomy**, which means that they are free and able to make their own decisions.<sup>4</sup>

An important goal of social work practice is to help people become more self-determining or autonomous. It is a strength all people are expected to have or, at least, try to develop; and becoming autonomous is seen as a sign of personal progress. Equally, in terms of this value of self-determination, people have the right to accept or reject social work services provided their behaviour is not harming others.



human rights wall, durban

Social work intervention is only justified where a person is harming her/himself or others. There are some circumstances in which people's capacity for self-determination is extremely limited or even non-existent (e.g. in the case of a mentally disabled person, or someone who is abusing alcohol). Such circumstances impair the person's capacity to reason and other people, including social workers, have to intervene and assume greater responsibility.

In keeping with this emphasis on self-determination social workers, through their attempts at consciousness-raising and empowerment, strive to encourage people to **exercise freedom of choice** in matters affecting them. However, at the same time as people are made aware of their personal freedom and their right to self-determination, they must be made aware of their **civic rights, duties and responsibilities**. Freedom does not come free — it is constrained by people's rights, duties and responsibilities.

Hence, with the notion of freedom of choice comes responsibility. In social work, this is often expressed as **accountability**. As human beings with the capacity

to reason and as individuals with freedom of choice, people are held responsible or

<sup>4</sup> From our discussion in Chapter 3 of how social welfare developed in South Africa, you can imagine it was very difficult to apply this value in apartheid South Africa where social work within the institution of social welfare was bound by broader social policy, and reflected a society divided along racial lines.

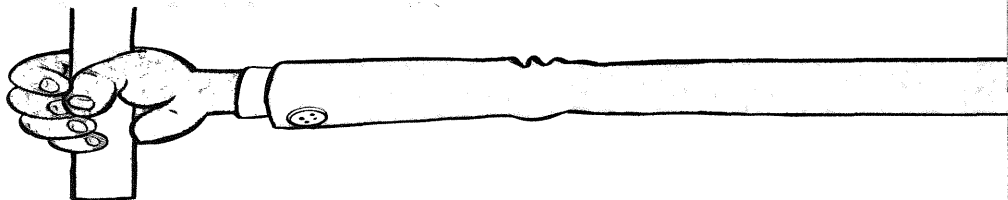
accountable for their decisions and actions. Stated plainly, people must be able to explain why they have acted in a certain way or made a particular decision. People's dignity is enhanced when these capacities are acknowledged.

When people do not behave responsibly, social workers try to find reasons and explanations for this. Often these explanations are linked to the kind of society in which we live where structural or societal arrangements make it very difficult for people to be self-determining. Hence, social workers discourage a "blaming-the-victim" approach. They dislike labels such as "people are apathetic" and rather ask questions relating to, among other things, people's feelings of powerlessness, their fear of failure, structural discrimination and oppression.

The **problem-solving approach**,<sup>5</sup> which is central to social work helping, arises from the pivotal social work values of respect for persons and self-determination. This approach or process is designed to show people the range of choices they have and then to encourage them to choose for themselves from this range of choices or alternatives.

Think of a case where a young man approaches a social worker for assistance. He has recently completed his schooling but is unable to find any kind of employment. His family expects that he will now start contributing to household expenses:

- What choices might be available to him?
- What might limit his choices?
- How will you as social worker assist him to make choices and decisions which will be self-determining?



## 2. Maintaining a non-judgemental and accepting attitude

The value of respect for persons is expressed also in social work's emphasis on maintaining a non-judgemental and accepting attitude. The people with whom social workers work are most often referred to as **clients**. Clients find it easier to relate to other people who make them feel not only that they are accepted but also that their problem is understood and that they will be helped. Respecting people's autonomy means encouraging them to make their own choices to the maximum extent that the situation and personal competence permits.

<sup>5</sup> We have discussed the objectives of the problem-solving approach in detail in Chapter 1, pages 12–14. Steps in the problem-solving approach are given in Chapter 6, pages 100–103.

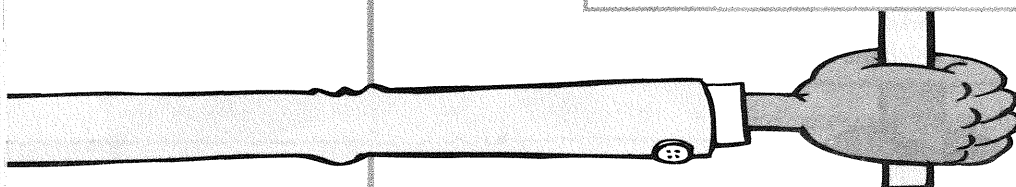
Social workers need to work hard to create a safe, accepting relationship with clients, to create a situation or context in which clients are able to reflect on and make decisions for themselves, using social work help to do so. To do this, social workers support the client and use attending and listening skills to help develop a holistic understanding of the problem. In a counselling situation, social workers focus on clients' strengths and they model (for their clients) a way of interacting with other people that clients can carry over into their everyday lives.

The more social workers explore situations with their clients, the more they begin to understand them as individuals in specific contexts with specific ways of approaching problems and coping in the world.

Sometimes clients do and say things which social workers find hard to accept. It is important to grasp that social workers do not have to accept all a client's actions. Sometimes they do need to show their disapproval of what clients have done; BUT generally they try to **accept people and not to condemn them**, because their aim is to understand and to help people.

Can you think of a situation in which a social worker would be justified in expressing disapproval of a client's actions?

How would you maintain a non-judgemental attitude in such a situation?



### 9 tolerance

## 3. Tolerance and acceptance of diversity

Respecting people for their uniqueness and accepting their values, beliefs and cultures requires that social workers be **tolerant** of diversity. In social work, diversity and variety are welcomed and encouraged, not only among individuals but also among groups and communities. Berger, Federico and McBreen (1991) point out that attempts to apply universal standards of behaviour to all situations are the result of **ethnocentric thinking** patterns; that is, one cultural group using its own values and beliefs to evaluate (usually negatively) another group. Social workers are encouraged to learn about different cultures and to engage in cross-cultural practice.

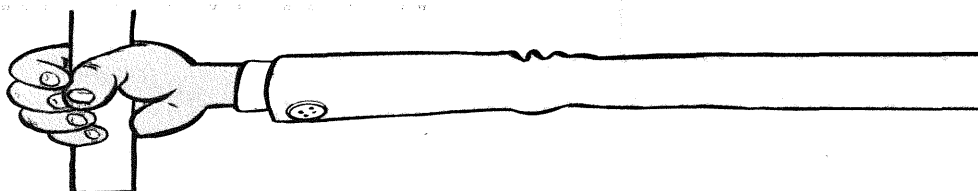
Social work is often described as a **multicultural** profession, because it formally recognises and accepts diversity and variety in human and social life. Among other differences, social workers accept differences in individual, cultural, political, social and religious beliefs and practices.

#### 4. Avoidance of classification and labelling

Respect for persons means that people must not be labelled and placed into categories such as "alcoholic", "drug addict" or "disabled". Nor should people be labelled, for example, as "old and useless" or "hopeless". Once someone is categorised and labelled, there is a danger that her/his individuality might be lost through being **stereotyped**. Stereotyping then is to be avoided, as it involves holding **preconceived views** of people, for example, regarding all drug users as the same, or believing that all old people need to be put into retirement homes. After all, some eighty year olds are quite capable of being independent while others might need care. When people are discriminated against, because they have a disability, or because they are elderly, or poor, or for any other reason, it is the result of their not being recognised or treated as individuals (i.e. being stereotyped).<sup>6</sup>

How would you respond to the situation where an alcoholic does not want to go to a rehabilitation centre when the family is putting pressure on you to help them get him into treatment? They are tired of his violent outbursts, his failure to support them and his squandering of the family's limited income.

In your response, consider also the social worker's duty to avoid classification and labelling, and the alcoholic's right to self-determination.



#### 5. Confidentiality and informed consent

In terms of the value of respect for persons social workers believe that the information shared with them by clients should be kept confidential. If information is to be divulged, the client's permission or "informed consent" is needed. What is meant by this term is that clients must be fully informed about what information is to be shared and the reasons for sharing it.

Situations sometimes arise where social workers might need to divulge information; for example, when a client is to be referred to another professional such as a doctor or psychiatrist, or when information is needed in a court case.

<sup>6</sup> The idea of stereotypical discrimination is often expressed in terms of labels or "isms", for example, ageism, sexism and racism.

▲  
**objectivity** — can be described as controlled emotional involvement

▲  
**impartial** — means fair and unbiased

▲  
**dilemma** — a situation where more than one choice can be made and both choices appear equally viable or attractive

## 6. Objectivity and impartiality

Related to the value of respect for persons is social work's emphasis on objectivity, often used to describe the way in which the social worker relates to the client. Social workers are instructed to be **objective** or **impartial**.

The term is used to warn social workers that they should not become emotionally involved with their clients beyond the point where they are in control. Objectivity, in this sense, means having an accurate understanding of the client's situation, being unbiased, and avoiding mistakes or distortion. It does **not** mean being "detached and impersonal" or, as this demeanour is often described, "maintaining a professional attitude". In other words, to maintain objectivity does not mean treating people as objects; social workers must be honest with their clients, and they can remain fair and unbiased without being cold, distant or detached.

## What is meant by a value dilemma?

Despite the fact that social workers have values to guide them in their work, there are many possible situations which might present either or both the client and the social worker with **dilemmas**.

► **Often in these situations, the person has to make a difficult choice between competing alternatives.**

For example, in the case of Anna in Chapter 1, Anna could decide to keep the baby, to have an abortion, or to put the baby up for adoption. The choice she makes will be affected by her values. Consider, for example, that if she were a practising Catholic, abortion might not be a viable option for her, despite her dismay at being pregnant and her desire to be able to continue with her life and her plans as before.

► **Further, in many situations, value conflicts may arise when personal interests and choices conflict either with societal norms or the law, or both.**

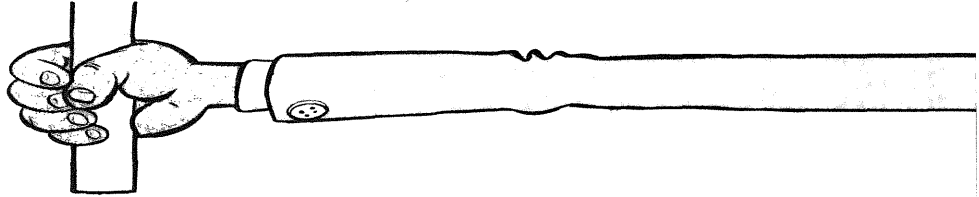
The client might want to do something which is against the law or not acceptable in society or within the framework of particular societal norms and cultural practices. For example, looking again at the case of Anna, she may feel that the only option for her is to have an abortion, while in actual fact the law might not allow her to choose this option.

► **Sometimes the client's choices might have potential negative consequences of which the social worker is aware.**

Consider, for example, a client who has a genetic defect which could result in a deformed child but who does not want her husband to know because she desperately wants a child; this would place the social worker in a very difficult position. The social worker would support the viewpoint that the husband would have the right to know

about his wife's genetic problem because the child would equally be his. As can be seen from this example, one person's interests may conflict with those of others and the choices people make can potentially bring harm to or impinge on the rights of others.

If you had a client who told you confidentially that she had been abused by her father, would you let her mother know about it? How would you deal with the confidential information you had been given?

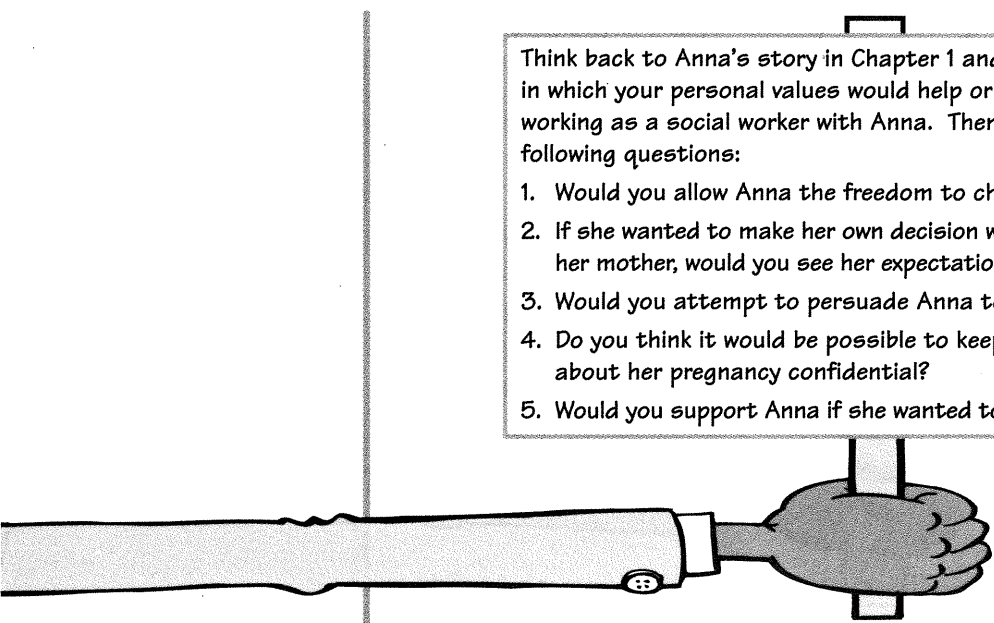


It is not always easy to make moral choices. Most people, for example, believe that killing other people is wrong, but during times of war, or in an act of self defence, this action is likely to be condoned. Likewise, stealing is generally considered to be an immoral act, but if people are likely to starve to death if they do not steal, then the moral position against stealing is less easy to defend.

The idea of self-determination implies that there are choices, and decisions to be made about those choices. Social workers work towards creating choices (or options) in order to expand people's opportunities for self-determination. However, values play a large role in influencing the particular course of action followed, and in shaping the outcome of problem situations. People will choose that course of action which they believe offers certain advantages and which they feel they ought to follow. They make a moral choice based on their values, that is, on what they believe to be the right or correct thing to do.

When people come to social workers for help they are often caught in a value dilemma which inhibits them from solving problems in their usual way. Some teenagers, for example, may hold beliefs about the value of family life, and the rights of children to be cared for within a marital and family context. Such teenagers may also subscribe to a value system which rejects abortion, or sees foster and adoptive care as unacceptable. If such a teenager were to find herself in the situation of being pregnant and unmarried, she would be faced with value dilemmas. As you can possibly imagine, then, personal circumstances often force people to reassess their value positions.



A stylized illustration of a hand in a suit sleeve holding a rectangular sign. The hand is rendered in a simple, bold style with grey shading. The sign is white with a black border and contains text.

Think back to Anna's story in Chapter 1 and consider the way in which your personal values would help or hinder you in working as a social worker with Anna. Then try to answer the following questions:

1. Would you allow Anna the freedom to choose for herself?
2. If she wanted to make her own decision without consulting her mother, would you see her expectation as a realistic one?
3. Would you attempt to persuade Anna to tell her mother?
4. Do you think it would be possible to keep the information about her pregnancy confidential?
5. Would you support Anna if she wanted to have an abortion?

There are some situations in which **people forgo their right to self-determination**, especially when there is concern for the safety of others, such as in cases of suspected child abuse. Where people's choices need to be restricted, social workers do have **legal authority** to make decisions on behalf of others, especially in relation to protective services for children, the mentally impaired, the aged, and those on probation and parole. It is important that social workers feel comfortable with this ascribed authority. People cannot be allowed to be destructive towards others, particularly with those who cannot protect themselves.

**Thus social workers need to be able to accept responsibility for those who cannot protect themselves, such as abused children and mentally ill people.**

## **What kind of society is needed for people to lead full and satisfying lives?**

Throughout the text we have emphasised the interrelationship between individuals and society, and social work's commitment to promoting human well-being and social conditions in which people can live full and satisfying lives.

Thus far in this chapter, we have examined the ways in which we, as social workers, believe that people ought to be treated in society. We have considered this under the central social work value of respect for persons. Now we will turn our attention to the other central social work value of **social justice**.

## Social Justice

Questions relating to social justice revolve around the kind of society we think is needed in order for people to be respected, self-determining, autonomous social beings. In short, such questions relate to the way society ought to be structured for people to be fairly and justly treated. Social work's ideas about what is just in society are captured in the following values:

- ▶ access to resources
- ▶ freedom
- ▶ non-discrimination
- ▶ equality and equity
- ▶ participation and democracy
- ▶ community
- ▶ collective responsibility
- ▶ social change



### 1. Access to resources

In terms of social work's social justice values, social workers believe that people should have rights to social resources such as houses, jobs and education. They also believe that people should have access to the resources they need to meet life's challenges and difficulties as well as access to opportunities for self-determination — that is, opportunities to realise their potential throughout their lives. Social workers are involved in facilitating people's access to existing resources, as well as creating new resources where none currently exist.

**Social welfare institutions** must be accessible to people and responsive to their needs. It is important that all people, even those who can't pay for services, have access to services. One of the reasons that welfare organisations are non profit-making organisations is that they do not exclude those people who cannot pay for needed services.

### 2. Freedom

In terms of social justice goals, people have a right to freedom and self-determination to the extent that they do not infringe on the rights of others. Social workers' transactions with people should enhance their independence and self-determination. People need to feel both a sense of worth and that they have the ability to make decisions that affect their own lives. They require independence and freedom to experiment, reflect and change. They are better able to exercise their freedom when they have access to resources and when social organisations are responsive to their needs.

Since this is not always the case, social work performs **a major mediating role**, representing the interests of clients and helping them negotiate impersonal **bureaucracies**. Most people experience frustration in negotiating the "red-tape" (i.e. excessive formalities) in large organisations, especially government departments, if they are unaware of the rules and restrictions surrounding the resources or benefits they are attempting to access.



**bureaucracy** — civil services; bureaucrats are civil servants or government officials; see also **petty bureaucracy**, Chapter 2, page 31

For example, there is no point in an elderly person standing in long queues to apply for an old age pension if s/he does not have all the necessary documentation. The social worker can assist in situations like this by informing the client of the documentation needed and of the procedures s/he has to follow in making her/his application.

For the most part, people are capable of making important decisions, such as where to go for medical treatment, which school to send their children to and where to live. The right or freedom to exercise choices over major life decisions such as these should not be legally restricted, as they were in apartheid South Africa, unless people are unable to choose for themselves (as might be the case with those who are severely mentally disabled, for example).

### 3. Non-discrimination

As far as social justice is concerned, non-discrimination has always been part of social work's value system as prescribed in the principle of **acceptance** of people regardless of race, culture, colour, religion or creed. Social workers are especially concerned with people against whom society discriminates, such as women, the elderly, the poor and children.

### 4. Equality and equity

The concept of justice is often associated most closely with that of equality. For social workers, equality is an important ideal. Thus social workers cannot consciously support or condone conditions and practices which promote inequality.

**The important thing (about equality) is not that it should be completely attained but that it should be sincerely sought**  
(Jones, Brown & Bradshaw, 1993: 10).

#### What is meant by equality?

It is often taken to mean that:

- ▶ Like cases should be treated alike — *equal treatment*
- ▶ People should be treated impartially — *fairness*
- ▶ The claims of each person should be equally considered — *equal consideration*
- ▶ Everyone should be given the same opportunities — *equal opportunity*
- ▶ Everybody should receive the same shares — *equal entitlement*
- ▶ Everyone ends up with the same value of shares — *equal distribution*

These "meanings" are not mutually exclusive. For example, treating people equally flows from the idea of universal human rights. However not everyone would agree that it is fair to treat people equally in all circumstances because, some would argue, in cases where people have different starting points, differential treatment would be fairer. (Affirmative action is an example of this.)

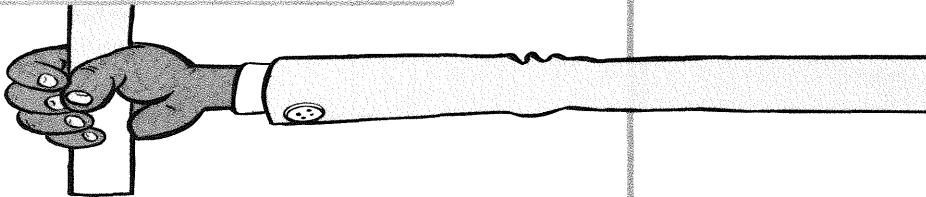
What is the difference between equality and equity?

Usually equity is taken to mean fairness.

Equality means equal shares. Equity means fair shares. If three men<sup>7</sup> have a cake, a policy of equality will give each man one-third of it; but if one man is hungry and the other two well-fed, a policy of equity would give the hungry man a larger slice (Jones et al. 1993: 8).

In social work, fairness is often **related to need** and giving to people in terms of need is regarded as just because it promotes equality. Inequality and poverty (i.e. unmet needs) are seen to be unjust.

Think of the demand for redistribution in South Africa, a society which has been unequal in its treatment of people. How might the demand for equity affect strategies with regard to, for example, education, health and basic services?



5. Participation and democracy

Social workers believe that people have a right to participate in matters which affect their lives and that **the best kind of society is a democratic one** where all citizens are allowed a say in the country’s affairs through their right to vote. For social work, a just society is one where equality, liberty/freedom, democracy (maximum feasible participation) and autonomy are all valued. Social work favours a political model of participatory democracy in which people are equally free to exercise choice and to influence decision-making processes.

6. Community

Social workers believe in the value of “community”. They believe that most people want the chance to experience **a feeling of belonging**. They do this through

<sup>7</sup> Or three women!

creating their own community of friends, neighbours, workers or believers. This sense of community

- ▶ gives people the feeling that they have greater power over their lives;
- ▶ provides ways of resolving problems; and
- ▶ gives people support and meaning in life.

When people become victims of exploitation and alienation due to such forces as unjust legislation or discriminatory social, political or economic policies, they inevitably feel powerless, vulnerable, lonely and insignificant. Social workers encourage community participation as a way of giving people **a sense of meaning and involvement** and of helping people to maintain control over their lives.<sup>8</sup>

## 7. Collective responsibility

In its aim of furthering social justice, social work promotes values which are mutually beneficial to people and society. To this end, it recognises that society should foster conditions and provide opportunities for citizens to participate in the way social, political, economic and cultural life is organised. In turn, citizens should fulfil their responsibilities to society by actively participating in these processes and by conforming to societal norms, as long as they are just. All people can have a share in building a just society and can make a contribution to society by fulfilling their civic duties and responsibilities.

Biklen (1983) talks about this notion of **civic or social responsibility** when he says that as long as one person suffers from unjust policies and practices, we all suffer from them. He believes that even if we ourselves do not build large, dehumanising institutions or are not directly responsible for discriminatory policies and practices, as long as such conditions prevail, and as long as we pay the taxes that finance such practices or remain silent while others act on our behalf, then we collaborate.

Put less harshly, what Biklen is trying to say is that we all have a **civic responsibility to contribute in some way to social development**. To him the answer lies in community organising where people ally themselves with those most vulnerable and strive to make society more responsive to their needs.

Who are the most vulnerable members of your community?  
How could alliances be formed to promote their interests?

<sup>8</sup> Imagine the difficulty of fulfilling this social work goal in the era of forced removals and state-sanctioned destruction of communities in South Africa!

## 8. Social change

Social workers place value in change as a goal. They believe in people's capacity to change and in their ability to effect or bring about meaningful change. Change is happening around us all the time and we can **influence change in a positive way**.

Past developments make us hopeful for the future. There was a time when women were not allowed the vote, when homosexuality was socially unacceptable, when the mentally and physically "handicapped" were banished to institutions. Today women have the vote, homosexuals are accepted into the mainstream of society, and the mentally and physically challenged are treated within the context of the community. However, the important point to grasp is that there is not necessarily consensus on issues of change, and also, that change is not a smooth process. Think for example of the varying views on the death penalty in the South African context — even when people participate in the forming of human rights and constitutional principles, there will not necessarily be agreement.

Further, change takes time and people are often reluctant to change. Yet every social worker can make a contribution. That, after all, is what draws people to social work — the desire to influence change in a positive way. Among other things, social workers need to believe in:

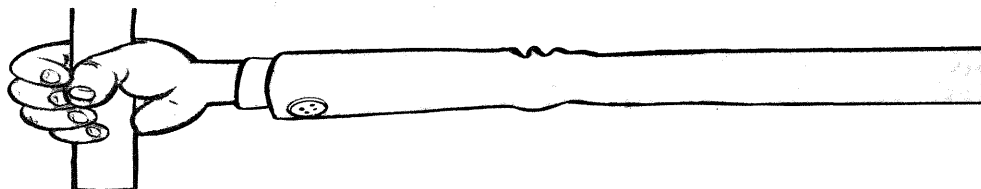
- change and the need to effect change in a positive way,
- the need for justice,
- people's right to be treated as individuals,
- the right of people to fair treatment in society,
- social work's responsibility to promote social welfare and social justice.

┌

*Drawing on your own life experiences, think of your idea of a just society. Then consider how it conforms to the kind of society social workers are meant to be trying to shape or create.*

*What would you have to change to realise your ideal of a just society?*

*How would you go about achieving these changes?*



## What is meant by “levels of values” in social work?

In the social work context of problem-solving, many different value systems may affect the possibilities for problem resolution. We will refer to these as **levels of values** with each level being further removed from the individual social worker’s sphere of control. As discussed earlier, professional values do not arise in a vacuum but tend to reflect broader, societal values. Where there are inconsistencies, the profession works to change social values (as with attitudes towards the poor in the early history of social work).

The more consistent the levels of values, the less value conflict the social worker will experience. Dilemmas arise when there are inconsistencies, as when the client’s and social worker’s values differ, or when the social worker does not agree with the values of the agency in which s/he works. Starting with the most distant level, the various levels of values influencing social work practice are as follows:

<b>SOCIETAL VALUES</b>	This level refers to the value system of the society in which the problem occurs and includes the value base of governments, particularly in relation to their policies regarding social welfare.
<b>PROFESSIONAL VALUES</b>	This level embraces the value system of the social work profession.
<b>AGENCY VALUES</b>	This level embodies the value system of the agency from which the social work service is offered and in which the social worker is employed.
<b>CLIENT VALUES</b>	This level takes cognisance of the value system of the client.
<b>SOCIAL WORKER’S PERSONAL VALUES</b>	This level, over which the individual social worker has the most control, is the value system of the social worker as an individual.

### 1. Societal values

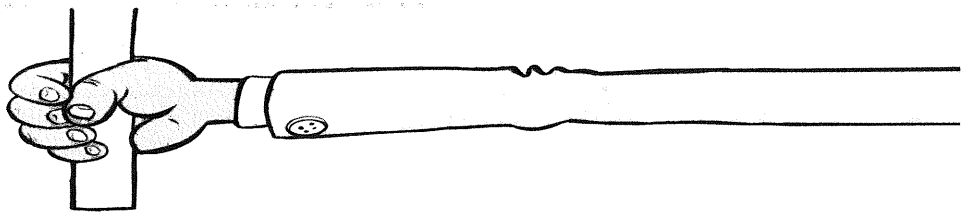
In South Africa, government has traditionally taken the **moral position** that people should be primarily responsible for their own welfare. If this is not possible, then the family has been expected to accept responsibility for the welfare of its members. The community is the next level at which responsibility has been laid. It is *only* when all of these supports have broken down that the state has intervened in providing welfare services.<sup>9</sup> This is known as a **residual model of welfare** and, as discussed in

<sup>9</sup> Note that this model of welfare — which has traditionally been the choice of the South African government — has with the new order in South Africa been subjected to scrutiny and criticism. There have been, and still will be further, moves towards a social development model of welfare.

▲ “**agency**” — the name given to the organisations in which social workers work; it is different from “institution” which usually refers to a residential setting

Chapter 3, it contrasts markedly with the **institutional welfare systems** of countries such as Sweden and Britain, where social welfare is seen as a basic right of all citizens, and where the state accepts responsibility for the welfare of the people it governs.

How might political change and changes in the value systems of a society affect the practice of social work? Think of the South African context.



## 2. Professional values

Social workers commit themselves to the values of their profession. Central to this value system is **respect for persons** and a commitment to **social justice**. Social workers believe that people should be free to make their own choices. Although clients might prefer social workers to solve their problems directly, social workers are more likely to help clients work out ways in which they can solve their own problems.

Their professional values make social workers **accountable** for their actions. In terms of professional ethical codes,<sup>10</sup> social workers are accountable to the profession, to the employing organisation, to society and to clients. Being accountable requires that social workers be able to justify or give reasons for their decisions and actions.<sup>11</sup>

## 3. Agency values

Social welfare agencies demonstrate their value positions in relation to the clients they serve. Some agencies, for example, may have policies about providing food parcels and other forms of material assistance for a limited time only. A policy such as this would reflect values according to which individuals must be empowered eventually to take care of their own welfare needs.

<sup>10</sup> See Appendix 2 for the Code of Ethics for social work.

<sup>11</sup> Social workers also talk about holding others accountable for their actions where “others” may be people or organisations. For example, social workers try to make government departments and other large bureaucratic organisations more responsive or accountable to the people they serve.



#### 4. Client values

Clients, like everyone else, have their own particular framework of values. Social workers try to provide clients with the opportunity to assess and reconsider their values in the light of the problems or difficulties which they are experiencing.

#### 5. Social workers' personal values

Social workers as individuals come from a variety of possible backgrounds. They also hold particular beliefs about what they perceive to be right or wrong. Insofar as it is possible, social workers attempt to put aside their personal preferences in order to help clients arrive at solutions with which they are most comfortable.

### Summary

Thus far in the text we have attempted to show how social work values mirror or reflect broader societal values, and how they have been moulded by historical trends as the profession has continued to seek to respond to its particular social, political and economic context over time.

In this chapter, we have examined the **nature of values** and defined them as ideals and beliefs which may be shared by many members of the society or by particular groups (as with cultural or religious values). We have seen how values influence behaviour by establishing norms of what is expected or viewed positively, and what is considered unacceptable. We talked about values sometimes being expressed as stereotypes which negatively affect some members of society, such as the role of women which, in many societies and cultural groups, is considered to revolve around the home.

**Respect for persons** and **social justice** were presented as pivotal values of social work with its dual commitment to individuals and society. It was shown that social workers are guided in their work by social work's values. Social workers need to be reflective about and critical of their own practice in the light of these values. It remains to be seen now how social workers translate their noble values and ideals into practice. Social work practice then is the subject of Chapter 6.

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# Chapter 6

## Structure at a glance . . .

### Key questions

What is the value of a holistic or integrated approach to social work practice?

What do the authors consider to be the most appropriate model for relevant social work in our changing society, and why?

What are the steps followed in the problem-solving model?

### Key concepts

In exploring social work practice, we focus on the following important terms and concepts:

**holistic or integrated approach**

**practice contexts**

**problem-solving model**

**social & community development**

**method**

**accurate empathy**

**micro, mezzo & macro-level practice**

**identifying, defining & assessing the problem**

**considering possible solutions**

**choosing an alternative**

**identifying a solution & developing a plan of action**

**evaluating the process & the outcome**

**social work's balanced commitment**

# Social work practice

**Y**ou may have noticed that social work always has a dual or balanced commitment. This is evident, for example, in its emphasis on:

- the individual *and* society,
- providing services *and* working towards change, and
- individual help *and* community practice.

In this chapter we will examine the need for this balance or tension in the process of problem-solving and the way in which the holistic or integrated approach to social work practice enables us to achieve this.

We will use the idea of three levels of the environment which we described in Chapter 2 — the micro-level, the mezzo or mid-level, and the macro-level — to structure our discussion. You will remember from Chapter 2 that we noted that social work's holistic approach entails practice at all of these system levels.



**client-system** — the term “client system” is used to show that the “client” may be an individual, a family, a group or a community (see also page 11)

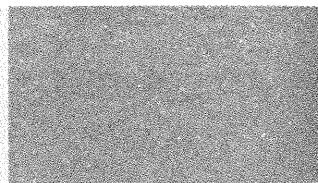
## Micro-level practice

Working with individuals, families and small groups as the **client system** is often called micro-level practice. At this level social workers engage directly with the client and may be involved in counselling or therapy, referral, or direct assistance (for example, in the provision of material aid). The helping process is a partnership which involves the social worker in **collaborating or working together with** the client. The focus is on the client’s strengths, abilities and potential competencies.

The problem-solving process is used at all client system levels (micro, mezzo and macro).

Still at the micro-level of practice, a groupwork approach can be used in helping individuals, with problems in common, to meet their needs. The social worker brings together a group of people who may be able to influence one another through sharing their experiences and knowledge and who can provide mutual support and encouragement. The group

**“is both the context and means through which its members support and modify their attitudes, interpersonal relationships and abilities to cope effectively with their environments”** (Norten, 1969: 13).



The focus of the group may be on helping members with their individual problems and on enhancing the level of social functioning of its members — for example, helping teenage drug users to change their lifestyles. Other groups may have an educational goal — for example, where parents join a social work group in order to improve their parenting skills. When the groupwork method is used at the micro-level, the group becomes the medium through which an individual grows and changes.



from agenda, 1992

## Mezzo or mid-level practice

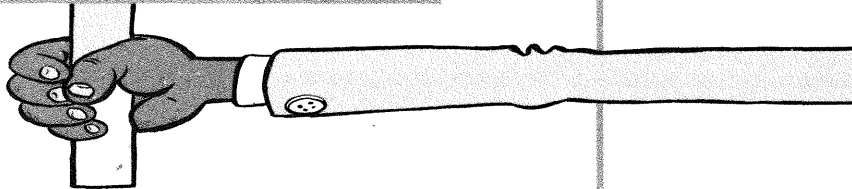
This level of practice focuses on formal groups and complex organisations. These might be associations, clubs, self-help groups, social work agencies, schools, prisons, hospitals, businesses or industries. Complex organisations include public and private

bodies. Generally, their purpose is to coordinate people and resources in order to provide products and/or services.

**When working at this level, the social worker's focus of change is the group or organisation itself, rather than individual members.**

The social worker may act as a facilitator who assists the functioning of the group or organisation. This may involve creating or strengthening links among the members of the organisation, facilitating group decision-making and evaluating programmes.

Consider again the case of the Pavement People described in the reading in APPENDIX 1.  
How could a social worker, employed by the City Council, help council members to identify their priorities in relation to providing services for this community of people?



In general, social workers may provide resources such as consulting services, information, education, staff development, service planning and evaluation.

## Macro-level practice

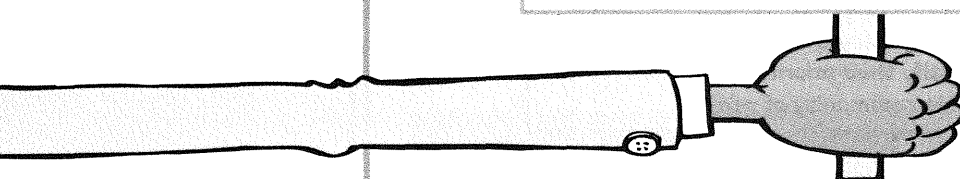
The macro-level refers to communities and societies and macro-level practices are aimed at social development and change in order to improve people's lives. Practice at this level reflects social work's values of social justice and its tradition of social reform. While the philanthropists of the 19th century were concerned with improving and uplifting the lives of the poverty-stricken and the powerless in society, today's social workers emphasise **working in partnership** with the oppressed or disenfranchised.

Social workers might be involved in such issues as planning the delivery of social services or helping to resolve intergroup conflict in a specific community. They might also be involved in international concerns such as human rights, world poverty and the protection of the environment.

**The goal of all these activities is the promotion of social justice through community and societal change.**

Often social workers need to work their way through the various levels of intervention, from the micro to the macro-levels,<sup>1</sup> in addressing the concerns of individuals and groups in society. Remember that at whatever levels social workers work — whether with individuals, groups and/or communities — problems are defined in relation to the interaction and transactions between people and their environments. Drawing on their holistic approach and awareness of both person and environment, social workers may help clients find solutions to their problems from within themselves or from their environmental contexts, or both.

Think about how you might respond to Anna's situation (see Chapter 1, page 8) at each of the levels of intervention; that is, at the micro, mezzo and macro-levels. Now read the example given below and note the holistic approach adopted to the problem of domestic violence . . .



### ***An example:***

A woman who has been battered and seeks a social worker's help may initially need help on an individual level in trying to assess her existing situation and plan her future. This may involve the social worker in working with her to help her develop a sense of self-esteem as well as working with her family or other support networks.

In addition, the social worker may organise groups for battered women to come together and discuss their common problems. Through this group experience, individuals could gain strength and help one another to deal with their particular situations. They may decide to form a mutual-aid or self-help<sup>1</sup> group and could consult with a social worker regarding the focus of an educational programme. Some groups could campaign for women's shelters to be established to protect women and give them a refuge.

The social worker may at the same time also be involved in empowering women generally to campaign for changes in the law, aimed at protecting them from attack by their husbands or partners.

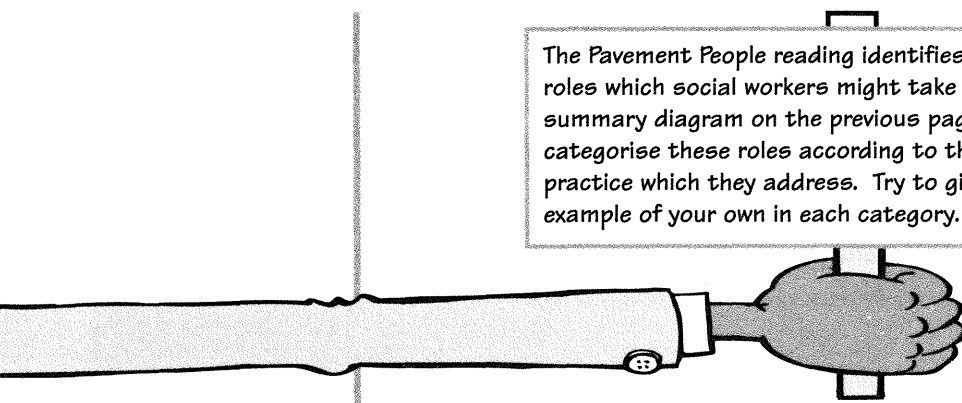
<sup>1</sup> Look ahead to the footnote on page 119 of Chapter 7, if you are interested, to read more about the concepts of self-help and mutual aid.

In the example given here, the social worker uses a holistic approach to the problem of wife battering. This approach is summarised below.

<b>HOLISTIC APPROACH TO PROBLEM-SOLVING</b>	
<b>Example:</b>	a woman who has been battered and seeks social work help
<b>MICRO-LEVEL PRACTICE</b>	
<b>Individuals</b>	The individual, e.g. a battered woman seeking and receiving help for herself.
<b>Families</b>	Family counselling could include the woman who is being abused, her spouse, her children and any other members of the household or extended family.
<b>Small groups</b>	Using groups to help individuals, e.g. battered women, men who batter, children who live in situations of domestic violence.
<b>MEZZO-LEVEL PRACTICE</b>	
<b>Formal group</b>	Consulting with a self-help group established by battered women to develop a programme which will meet their needs.
<b>MACRO-LEVEL PRACTICE</b>	
<b>Community</b>	Engaging people with common problems, as a collective, in struggling for changes in the law and for the allocation of new resources or environmental supports, e.g. women's shelters.
<b>Society</b>	Changing policies and laws, e.g. laws which affect women.

When social workers intervene at all these levels, we say that they are using an **integrated approach**.





The Pavement People reading identifies a number of roles which social workers might take on. Using the summary diagram on the previous page as a guide, categorise these roles according to the level of practice which they address. Try to give at least one example of your own in each category.

In the Pavement People reading, it is claimed that social workers could help through taking the following pro-active steps to bring about change:

- ▶ Correcting public misconceptions about the people living in Block AK.
- ▶ Facilitating interaction between the City Council and women of Block AK regarding their needs, specifically their housing needs.
- ▶ Mobilising and creating resources, for example, for cheap raw materials or equipment, and linking the community with existing organisations and services.
- ▶ Intervening at a structural level to ensure that petty bureaucracy does not inhibit the community's potential for trading and the development of informal sector business activities.
- ▶ Advocating and lobbying for a public housing programme.
- ▶ Forming income-generating cooperatives.
- ▶ Conducting skills development programmes.
- ▶ Gaining access to startup capital, perhaps through the initiation of "people's banks" or developing programmes using funding to provide small loans.
- ▶ Improving the water and sanitation arrangements.
- ▶ Developing health services.

These are all examples of the kinds of services which might be developed in partnership with this community. All of these activities would make a worthwhile contribution as part of a **community development model** which Gray and Bernstein (1994) consider to be the most appropriate model for relevant social work in our changing society.

9

community  
development

In our discussion of the historical development of social welfare (Chapter 3), we pointed out that “community development” has the same overall goals as “social development”, but takes place at the local level and emphasises self-help and individual empowerment. Its focus is on achieving economic and social progress for the whole community through the active participation and initiative of community members. Social development, on the other hand, is much broader than this. It embraces social policies and programmes which link “social welfare directly to economic development policies and programs” (Midgley, 1995: 1). See also Chapter 3, page 45, Chapter 5, pages 70–71, Chapter 6 pages 98–99, and see the **Glossary**.



social development

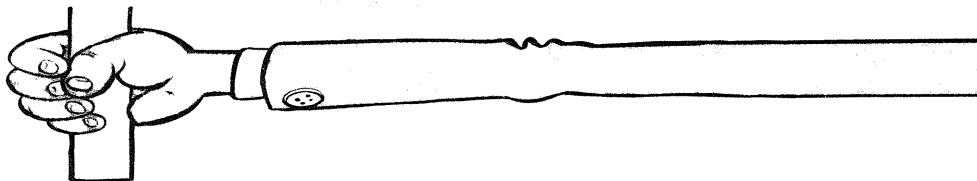
## How do social workers actually go about helping people?

The helping process used in social work is guided by a problem-solving model. This model provides a systematic, sequential or step-by-step framework to guide the helping process.

The first step in the problem-solving model involves identifying and defining the problem (a troubling situation or event) in order to develop an understanding of it. Often the troubling situation which prompts the client to come for help (referred to as the *precipitating* problem or event) is not the real problem and the real or underlying problem situation is only revealed as the situation is explored more fully. While exploring the problem with the client, the social worker needs to develop a warm, genuine and accepting relationship within which potential solutions are considered, possible outcomes and their anticipated consequences are weighed against one another, and a decision is made as to the best course of action to follow in order to reach a resolution of the problem.

Thinking back again to Anna's story, the precipitating problem or event which led Anna to the social worker was her pregnancy.

Suppose that, on further exploration of the problem, the social worker found that Anna had been taking drugs. How would this change the way in which the social worker would intervene with Anna?



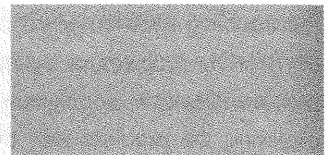
Problem-solving is a **method** which flows from social work's central values described in the previous chapter. It is designed to enable clients to be self-determining or autonomous.<sup>2</sup> It **empowers** them to solve their own

<sup>2</sup> Refer back to our discussion of social work values in Chapter 5.

problems. Social workers should not impose their values or solutions on clients; rather, the client should be involved in the whole process since the more the client is involved in solving her/his problems, the more likely it is that the solution arrived at will be a workable solution. By following this approach, the social worker is not only helping the client to resolve the particular problem which has been presented, but is also teaching the client a model for problem-solving in the future.

The role of the social worker is to recognise that individuals have strengths and competencies or abilities which enable them to direct or take control of their own lives. The social worker's aim is to help people become responsible, and this aim is achieved not by exercising power or by being manipulative but by gently yet firmly discussing expectations and goals. The aim is to enable clients to develop their potential competencies so that, as individuals, they are able to interact positively with their environment. It is important that, rather than adopting an attitude of knowing what is best for the client, the social worker focus on assisting the client to participate in developing alternatives, to make decisions from alternatives and to implement these decisions. By using a problem-solving approach to helping

**social workers aim to ensure that clients are respected and given maximum freedom and autonomy in directing the helping process.**



## A problem-solving model

### 1. Identify, define and assess the problem

In this first step of the problem-solving process, the social worker enables clients to **tell their story** (Egan, 1994).

- ▶ This involves helping clients to describe their problems in terms of their current experiences, feelings and thoughts.
- ▶ It helps to clarify all aspects of the problem situation including who else is involved and which aspects of the social environment are important.
- ▶ It is also important at this stage to be clear about who specifically is involved in any particular aspect of the problem situation (i.e. who "owns" the problem).

The social worker must consider both the person and the broader social context of the problem considered, and the problem should be defined in terms of the interaction between the person and the social environment. The **focus** of the problem identification should be the client system's strengths and competencies and the social worker and client need to arrive at a mutually agreed-upon definition of the problem.

The social worker needs to use skills of attentive listening, clarification and reflection of feelings to help the client develop a clear definition or understanding of her/his situation. The following is an example of an interaction between a social worker and a client (let us call her Susanna) as they work towards identifying and defining the client's problem:

Susanna bursts into tears as she tells the worker that her husband has left her and she has no money to buy food for her children. The social worker responds by saying, "you're feeling heartbroken and lost because your husband has left you and you don't know who to turn to for help".

This kind of response shows the client that the social worker is trying to understand the problem situation from the client's point of view. The social worker's ability to perceive and communicate — accurately and with sensitivity — the feelings of the client, and the meaning of those feelings, is termed "*accurate empathy*". Together with warmth (acceptance, liking, commitment and unconditional regard), and genuineness (openness, spontaneity and sincerity), these are the skills necessary for developing helping relationships (Fischer, 1978: 329).

**Successful relationship building helps to establish mutual trust and confidence and an environment that is conducive to change.**

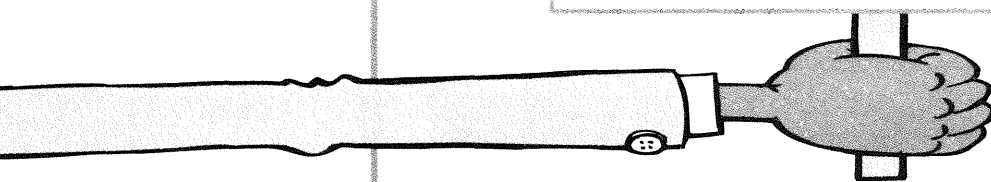
It is important that the client and social worker work together to understand the nature of the problem and how best to reduce its impact. This aspect of the helping process is often referred to as **assessment**. It consists of:

- ▶ an appraisal of the situation,
- ▶ an evaluation of the client's ability to deal with the situation, and
- ▶ a definition of the problem.

This then becomes the basis for later developing a course of action and specific goals for the client and worker.

## **2. Consider possible solutions**

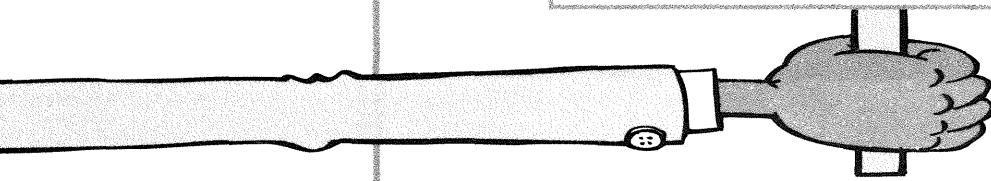
As the social worker and client continue to explore the problem, and as their understanding of the problem deepens, possible solutions to the problem become apparent. The client and the social worker try to generate as many solutions to the problem as possible. The aim of this part of the problem-solving process is to generate a whole range of possibilities. Some of the suggestions may conflict with values held by the client, the worker or the organisation which the worker represents. However it is important at this stage that neither the social worker nor the client censors any of the solutions which come to mind.



Think of as many possible solutions as you can to Susanna's problem.

### 3. Choose an alternative

The social worker and the client discuss each of the alternatives generated in Stage 2. They discuss, particularly, the advantages and disadvantages of each possibility and then choose the alternative that the client prefers; that is, the solution most suited to the needs, abilities and values of the client system.

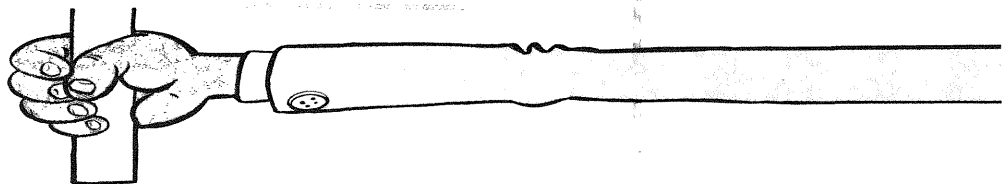


Which do you think is the best alternative for Susanna's problem? (Remember that in an actual case the client has to decide for herself.)

### 4. Identify a solution and develop a plan of action

This is the stage of the problem-solving process at which the social worker and the client set goals to enable the client to work towards a resolution of the problem. Goals establish who will do what by when and how the specific tasks will be accomplished. The proposed solution may be directed at individual change (micro-level intervention), organisational or group change (mezzo-level intervention) and/or community or social change (macro-level intervention). The plan of action may draw on the resources of the formal social welfare system, and/or the client's own social network, including the immediate and extended family, neighbours or other community members, teachers, religious leaders and friends. In considering solutions it is also important that cultural factors and values be considered. The social worker needs to be sensitive to and take into account the client's traditions and cultural practices.

Outline a possible plan of action for solving Susanna's problem.



## 5. Implement the plan of action

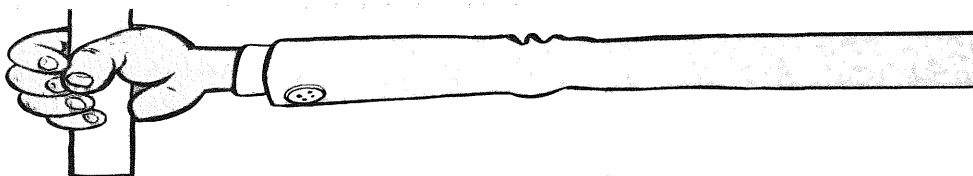
The plan which has been agreed upon is implemented. It may involve change in terms of the individual and/or the environment. During this phase activities need to be monitored regularly, results assessed and, if necessary, modifications made. The involvement of the social worker and the client in this stage of the process consists of the social worker providing regular feedback, support and an honest assessment of the progress of the problem-solving efforts. The social worker works at enabling the client to use available resources, supporting the client's efforts at improved social functioning. The social worker may also work on behalf of the client to coordinate services, plan and develop programmes, negotiate change in the environment and advocate (or lobby for) social change.

## 6. Evaluate the process and the outcome

It is crucial to evaluate both the process and the outcome of the problem-solving which has taken place. Social workers have to be accountable for what they do and it is obviously important to assess whether the outcome has been helpful — that is, whether the problem-solving process has helped to resolve or change the client's problem situation. Even if the outcome goals were not achieved, it is important to evaluate why the goals were not accomplished and how to avoid similar mistakes in the future. This evaluation of the problem-solving process helps the social worker to assess the experience from the client's perspective and occurs continuously throughout the process.

Think about the holistic, integrated approach of social work — and its method of problem-solving — and apply these to the problem of street children:

1. How would you define the problem of street children?
2. What possible solutions are there to this problem?
3. How would you offer individual services to street children?
4. What types of groups could you run?
5. What kinds of services or programmes do they need?
6. How should private organisations and local authorities respond?
7. What should be done nationally in terms of appropriate government policy to deal with the problem of street children?
8. How would you evaluate your work with the street children?



## Summary

This chapter has dealt with the various levels of practice at which social workers intervene and the problem-solving approach which social workers use at these levels of the environment.

This text is concerned with presenting a beginner's understanding of social work. We have established what the discipline is about by defining and describing it, we have acknowledged its history and noted shifts in the meanings of concepts and methods used, and we have focused in on some of the central issues and topics with which it is concerned and the methods it uses in approaching these topics. We have also grasped the language of the discipline by examining how it uses particular words to express specific ideas and realities. These views have been structured through:

1. The nature of social work and its diverse purposes, the subject of Chapter 1.
2. Social work in context, dealt with in Chapter 2.
3. The historical development of social welfare, outlined in Chapter 3.
4. The historical development of the discipline and profession of social work, discussed in Chapter 4.
5. Professional values of respect for persons and of social justice, covered in Chapter 5.
6. The practice methods used in empowering clients to participate in the problem-solving process, described in Chapter 6.

We have emphasised thus far in the text that social work is a context-based profession. The final chapter of this text outlines some particular features of the South African social, political and economic context and the impact of these features on social welfare policy and social work practice.

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# NOTES

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# Chapter 7

## Structure at a glance . . .

### Key questions

- What is the nature of the South African context?
- How has the social welfare institution responded to the South African context?
- What is the future for social welfare policy in South Africa?
- What is the future role of social workers in the South African context?
- How is social work to reach those in greatest need?

### Key concepts

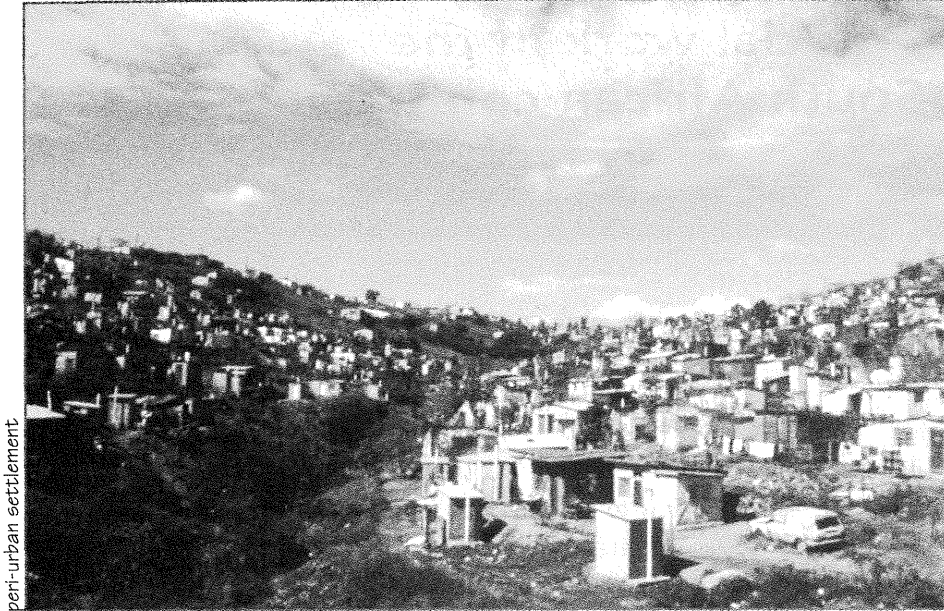
In examining the practice of social work in the South African context, we introduce the following key concepts in relation to the response of social work and social welfare:

- indigenous theory**
- managed pluralism**
- mixed economy of welfare**
- partnership model**

# Social work in the South African context

**S**ocial work, because of its concern with the "person-in-situation", is a context-based profession. Thus to practise social work in South Africa, social workers need a **thorough knowledge** of the South African context, including information on demography, the economy, the political system and the social structure, as well as an understanding of the legacy of social work history in South Africa. It is often emphasised that every country (and South Africa is no exception) needs to develop its own "home-grown" theory which accurately reflects the realities of its practice context. This is referred to as indigenous theory. Embodied in the notion of "*indigenous theory*" is the idea that theory, practice and the profession of social work are interrelated; that all arise in a specific historical and political context; and that all must in turn continually strive to be responsive to the context in which they are situated.

## What is the nature of the South African context?



peri-urban settlement

An analysis of the South African context reveals **a number of trends** which need to be considered as we attempt to develop indigenous theory and practice models. The most relevant factors are trends in population growth and distribution ([demography]), increasing urbanisation, third world characteristics (such as the growth of informal — especially peri-urban — settle-

ments and the informal employment sector), escalating crime, and social, political and economic changes in general.

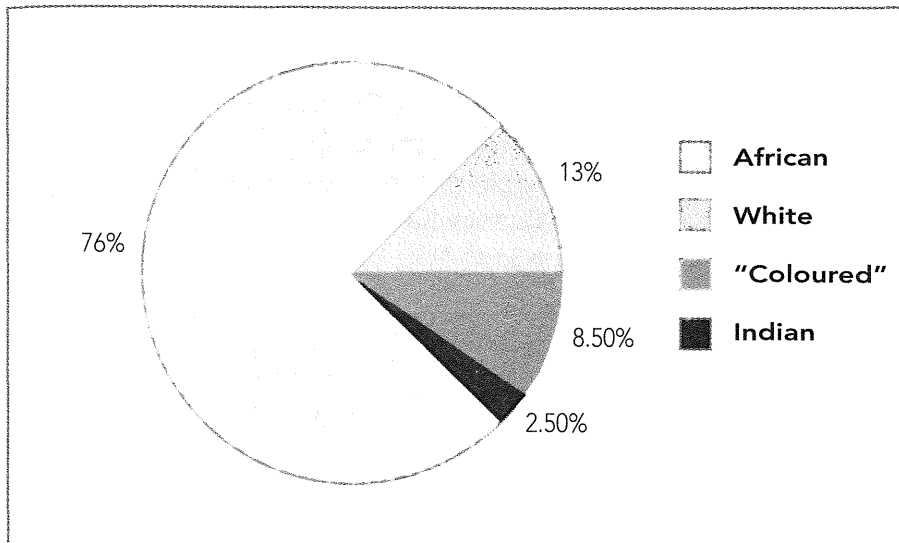
▲ **demography** — the science of population statistics such as the distribution of population and birth and death rates over a period of time

*The present government has recognised the need to dismantle some of its top-heavy, unproductive structures. (As a result of racial fragmentation, at one time there were 156 government departments in South Africa, and this fragmentation is being changed.) Increasing deregulation in the economic sphere has spawned the growth of the informal sector. Further, with the scrapping of regulations and with increased flexibility, people have acquired greater social mobility.*

### Population trends

South Africa covers an area of 1 220 000 square kilometres, of which 11% is arable (capable of being farmed). In 1960 the total population of South Africa was 16 million. In the 25 years up to 1985 the population doubled, and by the year 2000 the population is expected to have trebled from the 1960 figure to 48 million. The present population of South Africa is 40.7 million and is increasing at the rate of 2100 per day. The increase is predominantly African. It is estimated that from 1960 to the year 2000 South Africa's African population will have grown from 68% to 78% of the total population. Currently, Africans comprise 76%, Indians 2.5%, coloured people 8.5% and whites 13% (DBSA, cited by SAIRR,<sup>1</sup> January 1995).

<sup>1</sup> DBSA Development Bank of South Africa  
SAIRR South African Institute of Race Relations



**Population of South Africa — in 1995<sup>2</sup>**

The growth rate of the whole population in 1993 was 2.44%. However, the urban population is growing at a rate of approximately 4.5% per annum (per year) and 65% of South Africa's population is currently concentrated in the urban areas with 35% in rural areas. Sixty percent of African people live in rural areas. It has been predicted that this trend towards urbanisation will have both positive and negative consequences (Green and Lascaris, 1988; Sunter, 1987).

- One possibility is that the population growth rate will decrease, there will be a growth in the informal sector, a rising black middle class and a blurring of racial distinctions as free market principles take hold. Free market principles imply less state involvement in the economy. At the same time, there will be more informal settlements, increasing squalor and higher crime rates.
- Another possibility is greater state involvement in the economy through nationalisation as a way of ensuring the redistribution of resources.



**free market principles**  
— a belief in and view of the economy as a "free market", unrestricted by rules and regulations, and thus implying non-interference by government

In both scenarios there remains an increasing need for basic resources to ensure access to jobs, housing, education, health and welfare, and so on.

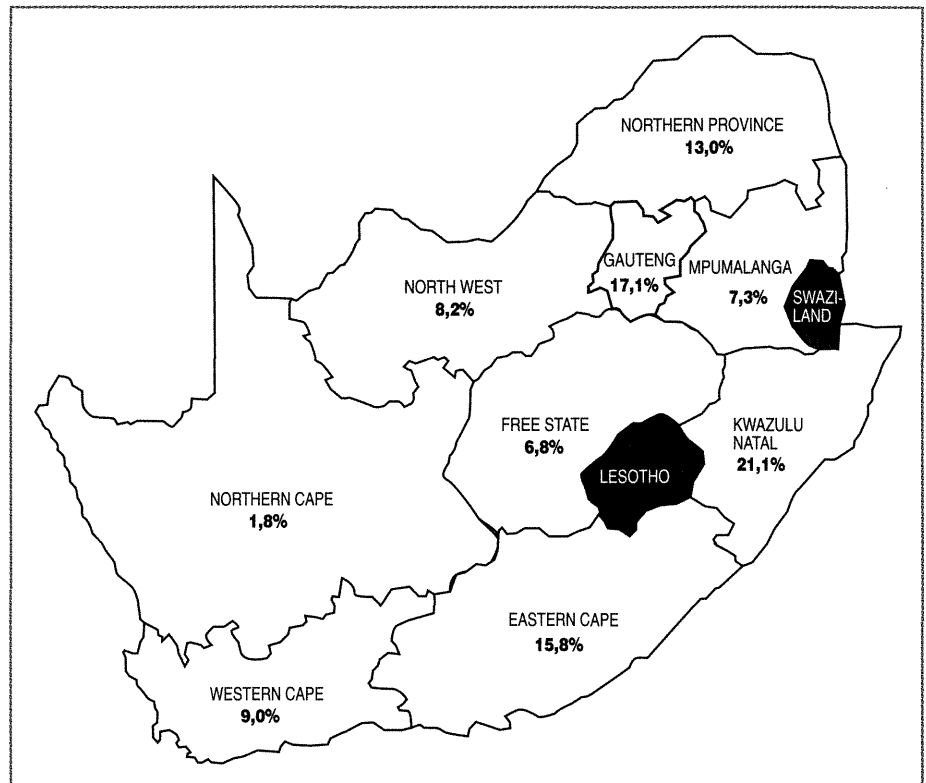
<sup>2</sup> This form of graphical representation is known as a pie chart or pie graph, with "slices" of various sizes, each slice representing a percentage of the whole pie, the whole being 100%.

## Provincial population distribution

According to the Central Statistical Services (1995), KwaZulu Natal has 21.1% of the total population of South Africa, that is, 8.6 million of the total population of 40.7 million. Gauteng has a population of 6.9 million and the highest population density rate of 369.3 people per square kilometre (Central Statistical Services, 1995). The provincial population distribution in South Africa is as follows:

<b>KwaZulu Natal</b>	<b>21.1%</b>
<b>Gauteng</b>	<b>17.1%</b>
<b>Eastern Cape</b>	<b>15.8%</b>
<b>Northern Province</b>	<b>13.0%</b>
<b>Western Cape</b>	<b>9.0%</b>
<b>North West</b>	<b>8.2%</b>
<b>Mpumalanga</b>	<b>7.3%</b>
<b>Free State</b>	<b>6.8%</b>
<b>Northern Cape</b>	<b>1.8%</b>

### PROVINCIAL DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION



From: Central Statistical Services (1995) *The Socio-Economic State of South Africa as reflected by October Household Survey and the HDI*,<sup>3</sup> (in *Indicator SA*, 1995: 5).

<sup>3</sup> HDI Human Development Index

## Education

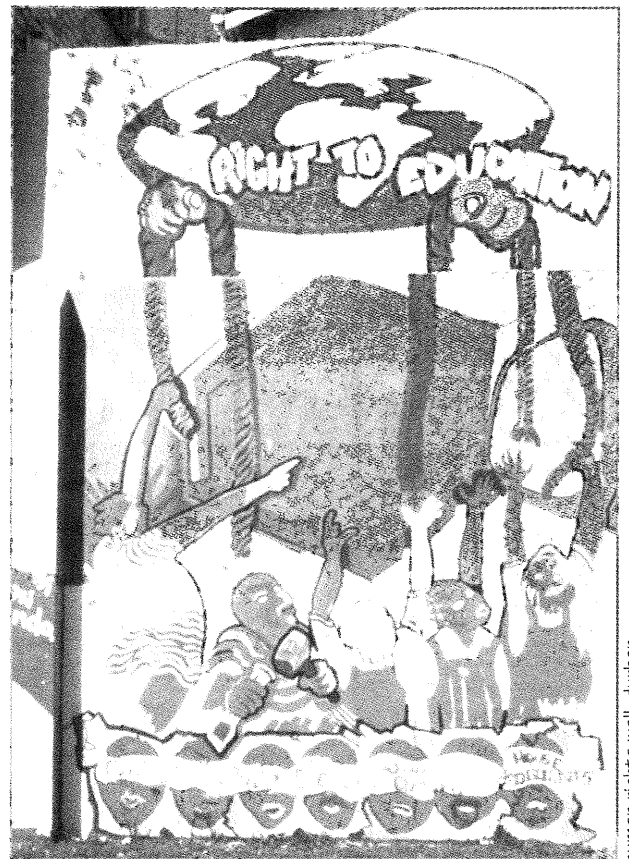
An interesting and significant feature of the South African population is that the age profile is decreasing for the total population (i.e. it is "growing younger") with an increasing number of school leavers entering the job market annually. It is estimated that 40% of South Africa's population is under 15 years of age (DBSA cited by SAIRR, January 1995). It is projected that by the year 2000, 50% of the population will be under 15 years. This contrasts strongly with western countries such as those in Europe, where there is a higher proportion of older people in the population (i.e. where the age profile is increasing for the total population). Further, more African students are matriculating as educational standards rise. It is estimated that the number of African students in schools will have risen to 8 million within the next 12 to 16 years.

In 1991 approximately 30% (11.3 million people) of the population had no education and about 3% of the population (1.1 million people) had some form of post-matric qualification. In 1994/95, 22% of the budget (R30.85 billion) went to education. In 1994, 11.8 million pupils were enrolled at schools in South Africa. An estimated 1.8 million children of schoolgoing age were not attending school. According to the DBSA, 61% of people over 13 had completed standard five by 1991.

## Employment

Currently, there is a shift in wealth with an increase in the disposable income of African people. African wages have risen by 406% since 1978. However, the highest average income for Africans remains lower than the lowest average income for whites (*Black Market Report*, 4:9, 27 February, 1989). By the year 2000, the buying power of African people is expected to account for two thirds of all disposable income in the economy, as a result of growth in population, urbanisation, and a general improvement in educational standards.

In 1995, the richest 10% of households in South Africa earned 51.2% of the total income and the poorest 40% only 3.9%. Some 40.9% of all households were found to be living below the minimum living level (SAIRR, January 1995).



human rights wall, durban

▲  
m — this stands for million

The economically active population (that is, persons fifteen years and older in the job market) are employed in the following sectors:

<b>Formal sector</b>	<b>8.2m</b>	<b>56.9%</b>
<b>Informal sector</b>	<b>1.5m</b>	<b>10.4%</b>
<hr/>		
<b>Unemployed</b>	<b>4.7m</b>	<b>32.6%</b>

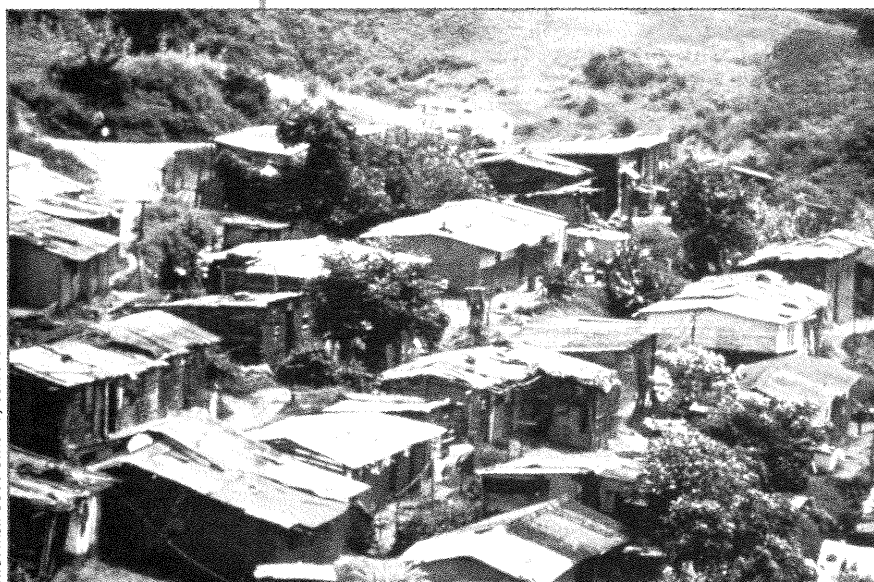
Gauteng dominates both unemployment and informal sector activity followed closely by KwaZulu Natal. The Western Province has the lowest unemployment rates. Over 800 000 people in KwaZulu Natal are unemployed while just over 200 000 are employed in the informal sector. About 27% of the urban population and 38% of the rural population are unemployed (*Indicator SA*, 1995: 41).

## Housing

According to the Council for Population Development (February, 1994), if the population were to continue to grow at a rate of 2.3% per annum, the population would double in less than 30 years, which implies that between 2 million and 3 million new houses would be needed by the year 2000.

The CSIR<sup>4</sup> states that there were 3.4 million formal housing units in South Africa in 1994 compared with an estimated 4.4 million households. Only 25% of these formal

units were occupied by African households, which numbered 2.2 million. There was an estimated urban housing shortage or backlog (excluding hostels) of 1.45 million in 1994. The national housing backlog was an estimated 3 million (including hostels and rural areas). There are an estimated 4.5 million informal houses in South Africa, 2.9 million of which are situated in rural areas (SAIRR, January 1995).



informal settlement, cato crest

<sup>4</sup> CSIR Centre for Scientific and Industrial Research

## Infant mortality rates

The current infant mortality rate is 43 per 1000 births: Africans 54.3, coloured people 36.3, Asians 9.9 and whites 7.3 (SAIRR, September 1994). Infant mortality rates declined by 46% from more than 80 per 1000 live births in 1960 to 43.1 in 1994 (SAIRR, January 1995). The variation in infant mortality rates across race groups is directly related to the living conditions or quality of life of these different groups. As already outlined, because of previous unjust policies the majority of South Africa's poor are black, and the poorest people live in rural areas. Therefore one would expect **infant mortality rates** to be highest in these areas.

We also need to be aware that data for South African infant mortality, especially for Africans, have many deficiencies. Reporting on births and deaths, particularly in rural areas, may be limited and this means that infant mortality figures for some areas are only estimates.

It is interesting to compare South Africa's infant mortality rate with figures in other countries. In October 1993 the rate in South Africa was 72 (i.e. of every 1 000 live births, 72 children died before they were five) compared with a worldwide average of 34. The rate in South Africa is not that different from many other African countries (for example: Botswana=60; Kenya=75; Namibia=81; Zimbabwe=88) but the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) stated that this rate was double that to be expected of a country with South Africa's income level (*Race Relations Survey*, 1993/1994).

## Teenage pregnancy

The teenage pregnancy rate in South Africa is high. Nearly 50% of women giving birth in 1993 were under 20. According to research undertaken by Preston-Whyte and Louw (1986) in the Durban area, the problem of teenage pregnancy is most critical in the lives of black teenagers and their parents. Although similar cases of teen pregnancy occur among whites, it is a less frequent occurrence, and whites usually have more resources (such as money and welfare facilities) available to them.

These researchers identified a number of factors which contribute to the rate of teenage pregnancies among black teenagers in urban areas. They include:

- ▶ Lack of supervision when both parents are working or in female headed households where the mother is at work for long hours.
- ▶ Children becoming involved in helping their mothers make money in the informal sector. Girls would thus come into contact with adult men who had money available for drink or food, and who would flatter the girls and "give them a good time".
- ▶ Poor or inadequate recreational facilities.
- ▶ High levels of unemployment especially among recent school-leavers.
- ▶ Late entry to school and high failure rates which mean that many scholars are nearer 20 years old and many over 20 when they leave school.



**infant mortality rate**  
— the number of children  
per 1 000 live births who  
die before the age of 5  
years

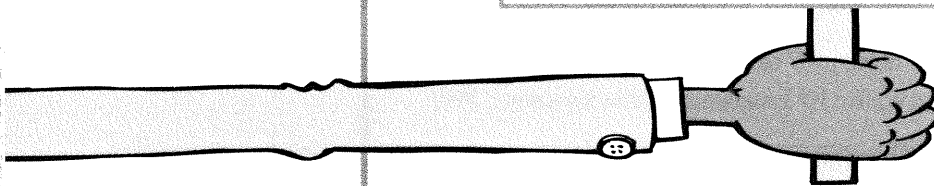


- ▶ Sexual experimentation and involvement beginning at an early age.
- ▶ Peer group pressure against the maintenance of virginity for both sexes.
- ▶ Absence of formal sex education at school and reluctance among parents to raise the subject with their children.

One would imagine that knowledge of and access to contraception would also be an important issue in any discussion of teenage pregnancy. In another research project undertaken by Preston-Whyte and Zondi (1989) the authors noted that contraception was available to the African teenage mothers in their study but that very few teenagers made use of it. The main reason for this was that parents objected both to allowing their daughters free access to contraceptive clinics and to the provision of contraception at school. The authors report that "their reasons range from those based on morality to a fear that contraception will encourage sexual freedom and experimentation and that it will impair future fertility" (Preston-Whyte and Zondi, 1989: 57–58).

Refer back to Anna's Story (Chapter 1, page 8). Do you think any of the factors identified in the research described above would be relevant in the case of Anna's pregnancy?

Explain which factors you think might apply. Use your knowledge of the context from the article on Pavement People to support your explanation.



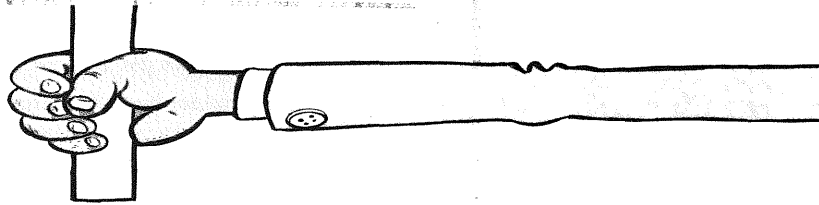
## Literacy

An estimated 70% of the South African population is literate. According to DBSA, 46% of the African population, 34% of the coloured population, 16% of the Indian population and 1% of the white population was illiterate in 1993 (*Race Relations Survey*, 1993/1994). Illiteracy was found to be much higher in rural areas and was seen to be a major contributor to the high levels of poverty in the country. These figures reflect the unequal access to education which was characteristic of the apartheid era in South Africa.

The National Manpower Commission found that "the low literacy levels of people in the informal sector contributed to the high level of poverty and low level of entrepreneurship in this sector" (*Race Relations Survey*, 1993/1994: 725).

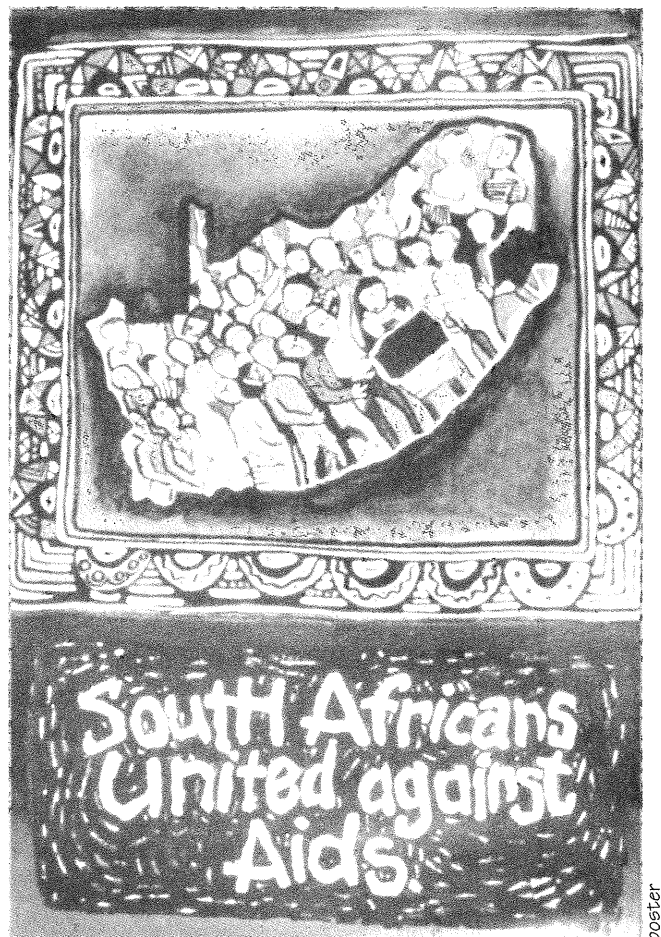
▲  
**entrepreneur** — a person who takes the initiative in seeking out business opportunities and undertakes business deals with the aim of making a profit

After reading the article on Pavement People, do you agree with the finding of the Commission?  
What evidence do you have to substantiate your view?



## AIDS

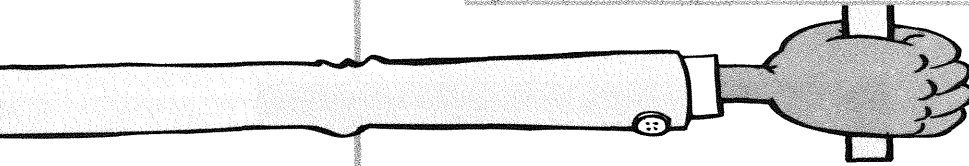
The Department of National Health and Population Development has indicated that the proportion of the sexually active population who could be HIV positive is doubling every 13 months. About 4.3% of the population was HIV positive in 1994. It was correctly predicted that, by mid-1995, 1 million people would be infected with HIV (SAIRR, September 1994).



Based on this brief review of socio-economic trends it is obvious that **indigenous helping models** need to be developed along with appropriate education for social work. As social workers we need to develop intervention approaches which are responsive to this **developing context**. However, the reality is that social work practitioners are so constrained by present structures and state policy (although this is changing), that it is difficult for them to react quickly enough with innovative programmes.

Drawing on the information you have read so far in this chapter, and on your own knowledge and experience of the South African context:

- List the main problems in the South African context to which you think social work ought to respond.
- Suggest ways in which social work could respond to each of the problem areas you have identified.
- Now consider how this information may help you to get a better understanding of the community of Pavement People described by Gray and Bernstein (1994).



We will now turn our attention to the social welfare and social work responses to this developing context.

## How has the social welfare institution responded to the developing South African context?

Social welfare in South Africa comprises social security (pensions and grants) and social services. The 1994/95 budget for state social security — that is, old age pensions, disability grants, grants for mothers and children, and social relief — was R10.7 billion which was 2.48% of the 1994 Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of R432 billion (Lund, 1995). There was a total of 2.6 million pension scheme beneficiaries in 1994 receiving a total of R9.6 billion in annual payments (SAIRR, January 1995). The balance of the welfare budget went towards social welfare services.

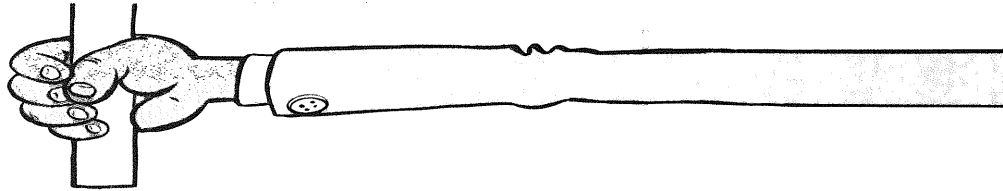
The welfare budget was the second fastest growing item of government spending (with a growth rate of 22.6%) between 1991 and 1994 as the government tried to achieve parity in pension rates for all race groups. For example, the old age pension for black people increased from R97 in 1986 to R395 in 1995 (Lund, 1995).

One item of expenditure in the budget has been the subsidisation of social workers' salaries since they were central to the delivery of welfare services. With the move towards a developmental welfare approach, social workers are no longer the key providers of welfare services but share the stage with "social auxiliary workers, social development and community development workers, social security personnel, child and youth care workers, volunteers and other categories of workers" (Draft White Paper on Welfare, 1996: 46). Social workers will now have to work increasingly as part of multi-disciplinary teams where they will be required to fulfil a variety of interacting roles with individuals, groups, communities and in policy development. Some "old" roles can be harnessed and some "new" ones added. Beginning with the "old", social workers have shown their mettle in the policy arena. The new welfare system is due largely to the hard work and dedication of social workers who have fought vigorously for a just welfare dispensation. In this struggle, they have advocated for the rights and needs of their clients and communities. They have empowered people to take control of their lives and forced organisations to change unjust policies and practices. Turning to the "new", social workers can impart their skill and expertise to others through training and consultation; they can provide leadership and guidance by, among other things, assuming "managerial" roles in project development and implementation.

▲  
**gross domestic product** — the total value of a country's output, income or expenditure produced within the country, i.e. not including income etc. from abroad

Imagine that you are a member of a group which has to determine the welfare budget for South Africa:

- What items would you include in your welfare budget?
- What percentage of the whole (represented by 100%) would you allocate to each item?
- Draw a pie chart<sup>5</sup> showing the percentages you would allocate.



## What is the future for social welfare policy in South Africa?

As shown in Chapter 3, from 1966 South African welfare policy was based on **ethnic differentiation** in keeping with the policy of apartheid. Services were provided through racially differentiated structures. This led to fragmentation and unequal service provision.

Social welfare needs to become part of a comprehensive **national social development plan**. Piecemeal or single and isolated changes will not work because prior policy based on racial differentiation and service fragmentation remains unworkable. We are now in the process of dismantling this divided welfare system but change and reconstruction will be a long and ongoing process. What is needed are entirely new welfare structures within the context of a revamped social welfare policy. Changing to a more just dispensation where equality is entrenched and resources more equitably distributed has to take place both in the system and in the hearts and minds of people.

The previous government continually stressed the value of partnership between state (the public sector) and private initiative (the private sector), and a **residual model for welfare provision**. It is unlikely, even with the present government, that the state will be able to bear the full cost of welfare because of the severe imbalances which currently exist. It is, therefore, probable that the new government will continue to emphasise the **importance of partnership** between the state and the private sector.

In terms of this partnership model, responsibility for welfare is shared between the public and private sectors and between family and state. This model is consistent with what has been called **managed pluralism** and the **mixed economy of welfare**. It is

<sup>5</sup> See the other pie charts (or pie graphs) in this chapter and the explanatory footnote on page 109.

a pragmatic approach which allows the state to take ultimate responsibility for social development while at the same time fostering individual and community involvement in an organised way, and it is consistent with the developmental view of welfare (described in Chapter 3) adopted by the present government (as seen in the national Reconstruction and Development Programme).

*This theme of joint effort is based on the idea that no one source of care — public, private, or voluntary — can by itself adequately meet the needs of dependent populations; that scarce resources will not support an indefinite expansion of public commitments; and that neither large scale public retrenchment nor public takeover constitutes a feasible course of action (Froland *et al.* 1981: 18).*

## What is the future role of social workers in the South African context?

Currently there is a great deal of debate regarding the future role of social workers and how social work practice can ensure that it is relevant to the South African context.

During the apartheid era social work services conformed to the prevailing residual model and emphasised remedial work with individuals through the use of a casework approach. Most social workers did not see themselves as agents of development, let alone of transformation. On a professional level most South African social workers, like their counterparts in the west, were concerned with seeing social work accepted as a profession (which led to a reduced interest in social reform and an increased interest in counselling middle class clients).

Our description of the South African context has shown that :

- ▶ There is a rapidly expanding population, particularly in urban areas.
- ▶ The population is “growing younger” and as a result more educational and childcare facilities will be required.
- ▶ Large numbers of people are unemployed (27% of the urban population and 38% of the rural population).
- ▶ There is an enormous need for housing.
- ▶ The high infant mortality rate among Africans when compared with other race groups is a reflection of differences in living conditions and quality of life.
- ▶ Teenage pregnancies are increasing.
- ▶ Low literacy levels contribute to people’s “unemployability” and thus to poverty.
- ▶ The rate of HIV infection is increasing rapidly.

It is to these conditions that social work must respond if it is to be relevant in the future.

## How is social work to reach those in greatest need?

Taking into account the vital need for social transformation in South Africa and the importance of relevant social work practice many argue that **community development**<sup>6</sup> needs to be practised far more widely by social workers. The proponents of community development claim that it is a model of social work practice which is relevant and appropriate to the South African context since it is an approach which emphasises change through advocacy and empowerment of the people.

Such a developmental approach is people-centred and uses **self-help and mutual aid** principles,<sup>7</sup> and the development of groups and networks based on these principles, as a strategy to facilitate the empowerment which is needed to transform society.

Social workers, with their ethical commitment to social justice, their historical concern for the poor and their acceptance of a holistic approach, are ideally placed to make a positive contribution in the South African social context.

In the light of this, then, consider the kinds of changes in the social work curriculum which are taking place in some higher education institutions. As Gray and Bernstein (1989), as academics and active critics of the role of social work in the developing South African context, point out (page 129 of this text), in the article *Pavement People*:

“We have committed ourselves to a developmental approach and to teaching strategies which will address the needs of the majority of our population. This requires a primary model of intervention. Case studies such as this<sup>8</sup> provide a fulcrum around which such a curriculum can grow. Community based problem-oriented learning of this nature empowers students, the social workers of the future, in ways in which traditional, clinical, didactic teaching cannot.”

<sup>6</sup> We have discussed community development in Chapter 3, page 45, Chapter 5, pages 70-71, Chapter 6, pages 98-99, and in the Glossary.

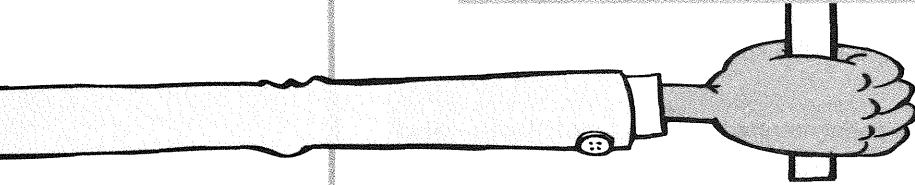
<sup>7</sup> Self-help and mutual aid — although historically these two concepts come from different philosophical perspectives (one emphasising individualism and the other cooperation) they are used here to describe two models of self-help. The first advocates self-help as a way for individuals and small groups to cope with their own problems. The second sees self-help as the correct way for communities to organise themselves in order to meet mutual goals. The self-help/mutual aid movement draws on both of these models.

<sup>8</sup> The case study to which they refer is that of the Pavement People with whom they had worked in their social work course on poverty.

From all you have read and learnt from this text, describe the kind of social work which you believe to be most relevant to South Africa.

Is this the type of social work you want to practise?

From the brief discussion of the various contexts in which social work is practised, where in the welfare sector would you like to be employed?



## Summary

In this final chapter we have considered the South African social context and looked critically at how social welfare and social work have responded in the past, and could respond in the future, to its challenges.

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## NOTES

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## appendix 1

The following is an article written by the authors of this text, who organised a social work course on *poverty*, and coordinated research into an informal community of people living on the street pavements of Durban.

Use this article to help you think further about a social developmental and specifically a community developmental model for South African social work.

# *Pavement People and Informal Communities:*

## **Lessons for Social Work**

**Andrea Bernstein & Mel Gray**

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### **Introduction**

This paper describes the situation of a community, comprising mainly women and preschool children, living in shacks on the pavement in Durban, South Africa - reputed to be the second fastest-growing city in the Southern Hemisphere. It is a community about which there has been a great deal of (mainly negative) coverage in the local media. It is not uncommon for the general public to see slum conditions and equate them with a "myth of social pathology, turning the harshness of economic inequality back upon its victims as a moral condemnation" (Marris, 1979: 424) and attempts have been made to pressurize the authorities into "doing something" about this "blot on the landscape". However, our experience of this community led us to a completely different view.

Our case study shows how this group of rural women were empowered and successfully negotiated the local government bureaucracy in order to establish themselves as a legally accepted informal urban community. Their achievements and continued functioning have been as a consequence of their own individual and combined efforts through self-help and mutual aid, both of which are essential aspects of the process of empowerment and an inherent part of the African cultural tradition. For Africans, mutual aid has been a major strategy of survival in a country where social, political and economic discrimination has been institutionalised in the government policy of apartheid (Bernstein, 1989; Tshabalala, 1986).

Poverty has a global face. Its impact is the same whether it occurs in South Africa or any other part of the world. In looking at a particular instance of poverty in a specific informal settlement on the streets of Durban, our aim was to consider whether there were lessons to be learned from the community level which might be broadened to enhance understanding at the global level.

### **The Poverty Course**

The ideas presented in this paper developed out of a social work course on poverty. It was an interdisciplinary course. Teachers from social work, economics, social anthropology, politics and geography, participated in the programme. Each brought his/her own theoretical perspective on poverty: the economist viewed poverty from a Marxist perspective, the social anthropologist followed a cultural, ethnographic approach, the geographer interpreted poverty from a spatial perspective while the politician emphasised social action and political lobbying in relation to self-identified community needs. Although these are traditionally regarded as separate disciplines,

there is a great deal of overlap between them. Attention was drawn to women's issues: specifically empowerment and the combination of women's traditional work in child-rearing roles with income-generating activities pursued through the informal economy, and their success in these independent business initiatives. The overall goal of the course was to put social work students in touch with the realities of poverty, and with the way in which it is affected by gender issues, race discrimination, and related social policy matters.

In the practice component of the programme students became acquainted with the community of women living on the pavement. An anthropology student who was undertaking research in the community at the time facilitated our entry into the community by introducing us to the community leader and providing helpful background information. His qualitative study involved in-depth conversations with residents and participant observation undertaken over a period of several months. He accompanied us (and subsequently the students) on field visits providing important information and insights into the circumstances of this community which he had gained from his research.

### **The Impact of the Course on the Students**

The nature of a problem, or even its existence as a problem, may change according to the views, beliefs and expectations of the viewer (Marris, 1979). Our social work students are generally from relatively advantaged backgrounds. Through the poverty course they encountered a lifestyle quite different from their own. They tended to hold myths and preconceptions about poor people in general and squatters in particular, as people who, amongst other things, were dirty, lazy, had too many children and did not help themselves. Taking a holistic perspective, we were able to encourage them to view the community in relation to its immediate environment and to the broader social, political and economic context. Students were able to see the irrelevance of official statistics which do not consider those engaged in the informal sector as economically active — a view which trivialises the vital roles and activities of women in society.

Students became aware that they had internalised a "blaming the victim" approach, which was one of the consequences of separating policy from practice. The holistic view led students to question not only their personal values but also their understanding of social work and its ideals. With this heightened awareness they were able to appreciate the difference between their perceptions and the reality of the community's experience. They came to

understand that this was a vibrant group of women who had endured a great deal of hardship but who, in their own terms, were leading meaningful lives and were proud of their ability to support themselves and their families.

### Theoretical Concepts

Empowerment theory and a holistic, interdisciplinary approach takes account of the variety of systems which affect the lives of the people it aims to help. The contextual focus of the ecosystems perspective with its emphasis on the interface of systems provided the theoretical structure for this particular case study on poverty. An understanding of empowerment theory contributed to its analysis and interpretation.

Social work is concerned with how people live their lives. One of its goals is to ensure that people have access to resources and options which will enhance the quality of their lives. Social work emphasises the need to adopt a holistic approach. To this end it focuses attention on the transactions and interactions between the various systems comprising our social world. In order to achieve an accurate understanding of social work reality it is important to take into account all aspects of phenomena and their inter-relatedness. According to Stofberg (1991: 5) "a whole, therefore, is not a completed, rounded, ultimate entity; it is rather an open-ended, changeable and changing pattern of relationships".

The value of co-existence is intrinsic to the notion of community. Community is frequently defined in a static sense in relation to geographic location and/or shared interests. However, it is important to see it as a dynamic concept. It implies interdependence, that is, the interconnectedness and mutuality of people, their relationship to one another and to changing economic, social and political environments and the ways in which they adapt and cope with change.

The pavement community described in this paper is not a stable fixed entity. It is evolving and changing all the time. The patterns observed in the development of this community have revolved around the importance of the concepts of complementarity, mutuality and interconnectedness and illustrate the dynamic meaning we attach to the concept of "community". The very fact that this community exists relates to its interconnectedness with its surrounding context. It is near transport networks and has access to a shifting population with whom the women can trade. What is crucial to their present survival has been the mutuality which has allowed them to unite in their attempts to gain legitimacy and to deal with external threats.

### Description of the Community

The focal community of this case study comprises women whose primary income is derived from the sale of containers (large re-usable plastic drums). They are only one of the groups living and trading in an area referred to by the

authorities as "Block A K". This is prime land situated in the heart of Durban, a modern metropolis with a population of 3.7 million. The area is a product of the discriminatory, apartheid system, a legacy of "group areas" legislation which forced the removal of people from one geographic area to another to create racially homogeneous units. The land was originally occupied mainly by families and traders of Asian origin. Their homes and shops were expropriated by the government<sup>1</sup> and they were moved to new racially segregated townships established in areas further from the city centre. Following their removal there was little development in the area and existing houses and buildings were demolished.

Over the years there has been some light industrial and shopping complex development as well as the siting of the main Durban railway station in the area. With the advent of de-regulation and the consequent increase in informal trading, the repeal of the pass laws (promulgated to control the movement of black people into urban areas) and the removal of the "group areas" legislation from the statute books in 1991, there has been an influx of people into Block A K. Many have come to the city as part of the rapidly urbanising population who have been forced to leave unproductive and impoverished rural areas in an attempt to generate some income for themselves and their families.

From a spatial perspective, vacant land in city centres becomes a prime target for informal settlement, especially land of this nature which has economic viability and is close to major transport networks. The main Durban railway station is a block away. A taxi rank across the road from the station brings a thriving passing trade into the area. These facilities contribute to the creation of an interdependent network which helps to sustain those forced to forsake the harsh reality of rural poverty or the violence and disorganisation of the African peri-urban townships for the pressures of urban life.

Structural factors have also impacted on the predominance of African women in urban shack settlements and in the informal sector. South Africa's discriminatory laws have severely limited employment opportunities open to black women and have made it legally and practically difficult for them to find permanent formal employment (Friedman and Hambridge, 1991). The migratory labour system, which drew men into urban areas, restricted the free movement of women to the cities and further curtailed their options through the shortage of hostel or family accommodation in urban areas. Women who could not find legal accommodation were thus forced to move to shack settlements where they devised numerous ingenious economic and social strategies for survival (Friedman, 1987; Preston-Whyte, 1978). Women engaged in domestic work and informal economic activities do not have access to social supports or benefits such as pensions and social security.

<sup>1</sup> These forced removals took place in the 1960s in terms of the government's "group areas" legislation.

There are interconnections between these various groups which are highlighted in the following discussion.

### The container sellers

The women who sell containers are squatters, since squatting is defined as settling on land without being entitled to do so (Reading, 1977). At the same time, they comprise a sanctioned, informal economic unit, legally recognised by the local authority which has granted them licenses<sup>2</sup> to trade in the area.



When they arrived in the city from the rural areas work and shelter were their primary needs. There was no place for them in the peri-urban and urban African townships which were wracked with violence and political unrest (Oosthuizen, 1991). They began to erect shacks on vacant land in Block A K. Anticipating insurmountable problems in dislodging them from the land once they had settled there, the government fenced the vacant lots forcing the people to erect their informal dwellings on the pavement. Thus a community of pavement people was born. This has subsequently grown and now comprises some fifty shacks housing in excess of two hundred people.

The dwellings are built on a framework of drums and wooden beams which are covered with plastic for waterproofing. These materials are highly flammable

creating constant danger since paraffin stoves are used for cooking and candles for lighting. The shacks house essential possessions including beds and mattresses, suitcases stacked for storage, tables, radios and cooking utensils. Water remains an ongoing problem. The City Council installed one tap and two portable, chemical toilets. These are obviously inadequate for the community's needs and people are forced to rely on the goodwill of shopkeepers around them for water used in washing and

cooking. In the face of these circumstances, the dwellings are kept relatively clean. Attempts are also made to keep the road area free of debris but the women, even with the regular road cleaning service provided by the City Council, appear to be fighting a losing battle on this front. Poor drainage leaves stagnant water in the gutters and it is difficult to control the rat population. The children, outsiders and passers-by, including customers, litter the area.

Due to the lack of formal employment opportunities in either urban or rural areas the women had to find creative ways of generating an income. Although they are reflected in official statistics as unemployed, they are, in fact, self-employed and highly productive. Their primary economic activity involves the sale of large plastic containers. They go into the industrial areas where they purchase old plastic containers, previously used mainly for transporting chemicals.



<sup>2</sup> This article was first published in the USA, and hence the American spelling such as license.





Since water is a primary need in most peri-urban and rural communities containers are an important commodity for the transport and storage of water. Women in rural areas spend up to three hours a day, every day, fetching and carrying water (Wilson and Ramphela, 1989). Ironically the community members are assisting with a problem which they themselves experienced, which they still experience in the city centre and which also provides their major source of income. They have a lucrative market for containers selling them to people travelling to the rural areas as well as to other countries such as Swaziland and Malawi.

Ninety litre capacity containers are bought for between R25 (US\$ 8)<sup>3</sup> to R40 (US\$ 13) and sold for between R40 (US\$ 13) to R60 (US\$ 20), a markup of 33.3% (Oosthuizen, 1991). These containers are also used for the catchment of rainwater. Smaller containers are used for the storage of dry goods for everyday and for the brewing of beer since the close-fitting lids are well-suited to the fermentation process.

Of secondary economic importance is the manufacture and sale of pillows and sleeping mats. They are sold to travellers at the taxi rank who are about to embark on long journeys and to fellow vendors forced to sleep on the pavements. Initially a hand sewing machine given to Lindiwe (a pseudonym), the community leader, was shared so that each woman had the opportunity to make the cases for the pillows. These are stuffed with rubber chips purchased in bulk from factory shops. Since a number of the women have been able to purchase their own machines the production of pillows has increased accordingly. On "market days" the pillows are laid out from one

end of the street to the other. Thick rubber matting is also sold. It provides insulation for the street vendors (for example, the basket sellers) from the cold of the pavements and is used to "carpet" the informal dwellings.

Tertiary economic activities, pursued by individuals, are diverse. For example, some buy large containers of paraffin and decant it into smaller bottles for sale. One woman is running a reasonably profitable fabric business exporting to Zimbabwe. She uses a taxi to transport her goods at a cost of R300 (US\$ 100) for a round-trip. Some do hair-dressing. If done for community residents, this does not constitute an economic activity. Only outside customers are charged for this service. Old clothes are also sold.

Basic market laws apply in this informal sector. Informal rules are operative in that the women do not compete on prices amongst themselves; profits are subject to consumer demand and the availability of customers and pricing is done in relation to the principles of supply and demand operative in the wider market place. Although the women work as a community, their profits benefit them individually. The women earn between R300 (US\$ 100) and R2 000 (US\$ 666) a month.

Their sense of community is expressed in their caring for each other, in their sharing of resources and the mutual aid and support which they provide for each other. The older women, for example, try to encourage the younger women to save rather than to spend the money as they earn it. The interdependence of the people in this community and the interconnectedness of their lives with their context operationalises ecosystems theory for social workers and social work students.

These women have endured a great deal of harassment from the authorities as, until fairly recently, informal selling was defined as illegal and they were liable to prosecution. Driven by sheer need and desperation, under the leadership of Lindiwe, who attributes her status to her ability to speak English, they have stood their ground, helped and supported each other and dealt creatively with the difficulties inherent in their situation. An example was their solution to the problem of the traffic. The pavement which the women occupy is adjacent to a major arterial road into the city centre. A newcomer to the community, unfamiliar with the hazards of city life, was killed in attempting to cross the road. The community instituted a system whereby those who have learned the rules of the road teach newcomers and only those accustomed to the traffic may venture further afield. When the women have learned how the traffic lights operate and how to cross the motorway they begin to extend their trade to the busy commuter areas.

Familial ties with relatives in the rural areas are maintained. Individuals remain in the city for periods of four to six weeks before returning to their rural homes to attend to family matters. They are then replaced by other

<sup>3</sup> Again, the rand: dollar exchange rates are given because this article was first published in the USA.

family members who come into the city to "keep the business going" until the woman's return and so the cycle goes on. In many of their families these women are, in fact, the primary earners and *de facto* heads of their households. In Lindiwe's case, for example, she divorced her husband who, due to his drinking problem failed to contribute towards the maintenance of their children. Her parents in the rural area care for her three older children. She pays a cousin to look after the children and to do their washing but still returns "home" regularly to see them and to check that the children's school clothes have been properly washed. She says that members of her family look down on her because she no longer has the status of a "married woman" (despite the fact that she is economically independent) and that when she is at home her negative status reflects on her children. When she is not there her children are better treated. Her two younger children (aged 6 and 2 respectively) live on the pavement with her. The six year old has been enrolled in a primary school in the area.

Nevertheless, in the community of women her changed status might be seen as an example of "liberation" or the gaining of personal power. In Lindiwe's case, this personal power was translated into social power by a number of interacting factors. Among them was her independent status, her ability to speak English and her relationship with the women in the community. She was recognised as the leader and her own and the community's developing political power emanated from her accepted role as advocate and spokesperson.

It is a tribute to the strength of these women that they have built an economically viable community, obtained licenses to trade legitimately and the right (albeit temporary) to live in this area. An interesting phenomenon has been the arrival of an increasing number of men in the community as the women's economic activities have become more viable. It is difficult to establish whether the men actually live there. In view of the fact that they do not have the same City Council sanction as the women traders, they are reluctant to implicate themselves in what may be viewed as an illegal presence. However, as Friedman and Hambridge (1991: 168) noted, with the trend towards deregulation and the consequent reduction in the possibility of prosecution "men may well take over many of the commercial activities which have for so long been 'illegal' and thus relatively unattractive to any but the desperate".

### The basket sellers

The basket sellers are women who trade in traditional crafts which include grass baskets and mats, beadwork, carvings and crocheted goods. Some of them come from distant areas including Zimbabwe. They travel to Durban where they anticipate a more profitable and better market for their goods. Many of them return with goods not obtainable at home partly as a result of that country's foreign currency restrictions and import controls. Those who have done particularly well might afford hotel accommodation. Those who haven't sleep on the pavements sur-



rounded by their possessions and their products.

They buy rubber mats and pillows from the container sellers to make their situation on the pavement more comfortable. Their primary interaction is with commuters since they are situated outside the main railway station where they have created a small commercial focus. Food vendors have attached themselves to this group and supply them and passing trade with hot and cold drinks and cooked meals.

### The taxi rank

The black taxi industry in South Africa is a highly organised, vast service network generating an income running into millions of rand (Barolsky, 1990). The taxis are minibuses which are speedier and more economical than buses and are able to take people into remote areas which are otherwise inaccessible. Informal food vendors at the taxi rank compete with the formal business sector restaurants and cafes in the area. Fresh produce is also sold, along with decanted cleaning agents and paraffin for fuel. Taxi owners take great pride in their vehicles which are kept immaculate. They are members of the South African Black Taxi Association (SABTA) which encourages them to use the services of the local mechanics for their repairs. Street children, who provide a car wash service, are in turn part of this informal system.

### The mechanics

Further around the block is a small group of mechanics who have been operating in the area for a period of fifteen years. This is one of a range of activities and services categorised as part of the informal sector. It has been estimated that one out of every four economically active black people in South Africa (i.e. 1.84 million people) were making a living out of the informal sector in 1985 (Kirsten, 1991).

The mechanics pay an annual license fee which gives

them legitimacy. The cost of their repairs is competitive, their service is good and, since they work on the pavement, they have low overheads which helps to increase their profit margin. They have a steady stream of customers, some of whom have been using their services for years. They also service the taxis from the adjacent taxi rank. The "owner" of the "business" lives in an urban township. While some of the mechanics in his employ live in the area, others commute to their homes where they can be reached by telephone outside their usual working hours.

### Lessons for Social Work

Our involvement with Lindiwe and this community has taught us important lessons and has stimulated our thinking about social work, particularly in relation to empowerment. In reflecting on the empowerment of these women without the help or intervention of social workers, the manner in which social workers need to reconceptualise their role became abundantly clear. These women did not need "professional experts" advising them. They needed social workers who would support them and allow them to experience the process of empowerment without interference.

Many aspects of the women's functioning impressed us: first, their achievement in establishing themselves into a viable economic and social community; secondly the way in which they overcame their traditional gender-related low status and powerlessness; thirdly, their effective use of available resources; and fourthly, their ability to negotiate with the authorities in procuring trading licenses. Their economic and social needs united them as a community and provided the source of their empowerment. In the process of negotiating with the authorities they gained increasing awareness of their rights which enabled them to fight for legitimacy. In this way they translated gains in personal and social power into political power (Friedman, 1992).

What concerned us was what we as social workers could offer them in return? Ironically, the type of help the women requested was perhaps not what social workers would regard as their rightful role. The women wanted food and old clothing. Social workers might argue that responding to this request could encourage dependency and prevent the women from finding a long term means of providing for their own needs. Simply knowing about needs does not necessarily generate helpful responses. What is important is the recognition that addressing only felt needs does not "attack the structural causes of poverty and powerlessness" (CORD, 1991). It is in response to less explicit and perhaps more abstract needs and rights such as self-direction and autonomy that social workers can and should be directing their efforts. It is the social workers rather than the community who need to be conscientised and empowered to take on more pro-active social change roles instead of seeing themselves as a "safety-net" thus maintaining an unacceptable *status quo*.

Ways in which social workers could help through pro-active change include correcting public misconceptions

about the people living in Block A K. People are generally negative about "this blot on the landscape" of Durban. In the long term, Lindiwe hopes that the City Council will build houses in the area which they will be able to occupy. Local politicians are deliberating the future of this community. While they are aware that their plans need to include the women of Block A K, political, economic and social issues make the outcome far from certain. Marris (1979: 428) makes the point that in considering the solution to housing needs autonomy should be the fundamental issue. "The more control people have over their home, their environment, their source of livelihood, the less remote the forces which control their chances, the better they will be able to cope." In order to achieve this, social workers can address vulnerability to exploitation by pressurizing policy makers (in this case the local authority) to take housing for Block A K people "out of the profit-taking sector" (Marris, 1979: 428) and advocate that it become a public housing area.

Another important social work role could be the mobilisation and creation of resources and linking the community with existing organisations and services. Social workers could also intervene on a structural level by ensuring that petty bureaucracy does not inhibit the potential for trading and informal activity development. They could advocate and lobby for a public housing programme. Income generating co-operatives, skill development programmes, resources which provide cheap raw materials or equipment, the initiation of "people's banks", programmes using funding to provide small loans, working on improving the water and sanitation arrangements and developing health services, are all examples of the kinds of services which might be developed in partnership with such communities.

All of these activities would make a worthwhile contribution as part of a community development model which we consider to be the most appropriate model for relevant social work in our changing society.

### CONCLUSION

Block A K is an ecosystem of interconnected communities. The lives and activities of the women living here illustrate the links between people's social and economic realities and their relatively unique local circumstances. The area provides a particularly auspicious combination of community-based resources: a demand for the products sold, access to suitable markets and proximity to transport networks. Empowerment, community support and mutual aid have characterised the women's response to the difficulties they have encountered. Their inter-relationship with one another, and their development into a self-sustaining system, gives substance to the essential meaning of the term "community".

Our experience with this community has enhanced our understanding of the problems experienced by the poor wherever they live. There are many similarities between this community and the community of El Salvador in



Lima. In fact, the Congress of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) held in Lima in 1990 on the theme of poverty inspired the development of the course described in this paper. It emphasized the importance of integrating policy and practice. It also provided us with the opportunity to stand back and view what we were doing and to consider ways of moving forward. It was an inspiration at the global level which enhanced our understanding at the community level.

There is much that we can learn on the international level. There is a body of professional literature on the theory and practice of community development. South African social work needs to draw on these experiences and to indigenise them. We need to overcome our reluctance to address developmental and political concerns. We have been preoccupied with the provision of individualised services, mainly in urban areas. Inappropriate theories, over-concern with professional status, large bureaucracies and overwhelming caseloads all raise questions as to the relevance of social work in our society. However, the scenario is changing. There are numerous examples of development programmes and South African universities are constantly examining and modifying their curricula. But we still lack a unified mission and a commitment to development as the future direction of social work practice in South Africa. Until we have this, changes will be piecemeal.

This paper documents the preparatory stage of a process of change. The process began at the 1990 IASSW Congress. This report on the women of Block A K constitutes the equivalent of a needs study in the sense that the area might well be viewed as a microcosm of South African society which accurately reflects the nature and extent of the needs of the majority of our population. As a consequence of our study we have revised our curriculum. We believe that the university has a responsibility to lead the way (Bernstein and Gray, 1990; Gray and Bernstein, 1989). We have committed ourselves to a developmental approach and to teaching strategies which will address the needs of the majority of our population. This requires a primary model of intervention. Case studies such as this provide a fulcrum around which such a curriculum can grow. Community-based problem-oriented learning of this nature empowers students, the social workers of the future, in ways in which traditional clinical, didactic teaching cannot.

### Note

Papers presented at the two most recent JUC<sup>4</sup> conferences, (*Transition to a Non-racial, Democratic Society: The Implications for Social Work Education, Research and Practice* held in Durban in 1991, and *Rural Social Work* in East London in 1992) described some of these developmental programmes, many of which reflected modifications in curricula.

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<sup>4</sup> JUC Joint Universities Committee on Social Work Education

## **appendix 2**

The following is a copy of the  
Code of Ethics for social work.

# S A COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL WORK

## CODE OF ETHICS



### GENERAL APPROACH

The general approach in this code of ethics (course of conduct) is based on the ethics that -

- every human being has a unique value and potential, irrespective of origin, ethnicity, sex, age, beliefs, socio-economic and legal status;
- each individual has the right to the fulfilment of his innate and acquired skills; the social worker has a responsibility to devote his professional knowledge and skills scientifically for the benefit of each individual, group, community and mankind;
- the social worker has a primary obligation to render service professionally;
- the social worker shall recognise and take into account his personal and professional limitations.

### CONDUCT THAT CONCERNS THE PROFESSION

Conduct that concerns the social work profession shall mean, *inter alia*, for a social worker to -

- scientifically evaluate and support the profession in order to enhance and raise the dignity and integrity of the profession;
- challenge unacceptable social work practices and uphold those that are acceptable;
- protect the profession from unfounded criticism which could bring it into disrepute;
- remain actively involved with the formulation, development, determination and implementation of professional policy;
- base social work practices on scientific knowledge, keep abreast of relevant developments and participate in research.

### CONDUCT THAT CONCERNS A CLIENT

Conduct that concerns a client shall mean, *inter alia*, for a social worker to -

- recognise the uniqueness of each client;
- maintain a professional relationship with the client;
- acknowledge the right to self-determination of the client;
- take into account the client's rights, preferences and objectives when structuring service-rendering, even in the absence of the client;
- strive towards the client's optimal use of his abilities;
- respect the client's right to decide whether or not to co-operate with the social worker, even in the case of a statutory order;
- maintain the client's right to confidentiality;
- not refuse service-rendering to a client, irrespective of whether or not the client is in a position to pay the fees for such services;
- inform the client of and prepare him for any decision regarding the termination of service-rendering.

### CONDUCT THAT CONCERNS A COLLEAGUE OR ANOTHER PROFESSIONAL PERSON

Conduct that concerns a colleague or another professional person shall mean, *inter alia*, for a social worker to -

- respect and honour the training and service-rendering of colleagues and other professional persons;
- respect the trust that exists between colleagues;
- resolve criticism of and differences between colleagues in terms of the authority structure of the employer(s);
- protect and defend colleagues against unfair criticism;
- promote opportunities for the exchange of knowledge and experience between colleagues and other professional persons.

### CONDUCT THAT CONCERNS AN EMPLOYER

Conduct that concerns an employer shall mean, *inter alia*, for a social worker to acknowledge and honour his employer's authority as far as it is compatible with this course of conduct.

### CONDUCT THAT CONCERNS A SOCIAL WORK INSTITUTION

Conduct that concerns a social work institution shall mean, *inter alia*, for a social worker to co-operate with those social work institutions whose policies, procedures and operations are directed towards adequate service-rendering and encouragement of professional practices consistent with this course of conduct.

### CONDUCT THAT CONCERNS THE COMMUNITY

Conduct that concerns the community shall mean, *inter alia*, for a social worker to -

- enhance and promote service-rendering to the community under all circumstances by utilising and developing resources in the community;
- have the responsibility to be aware of, initiate, develop and change social policy consistent with professional practices.

Issued as General Notice 292 of 1986 in the *Government Gazette* No 10205 of 25 April 1986.

## **glossary of key concepts**

**ACCEPTANCE** — Acceptance is a social work principle which flows from the value of respect for persons. It implies that people are regarded as rational human beings with the ability to make choices and to control and direct their own lives. As such people's choices must be accepted, whether they be decisions as to how to behave or what to believe. Hence social workers need to accept people's religious or political beliefs and their cultural practices. Social workers are also expected to be accepting of people regardless of their actions; that is you can accept the person even if you do not necessarily accept her/his actions. (See also **MULTICULTURAL** and **TOLERANCE**.)

**AUTONOMY** — All people have the right to represent their own interests, speak on their own behalf and be helped if help is requested – and to refuse help if it is not wanted. If people have these rights we say they have autonomy; that is, they are free and able to make their own decisions.

**COMMUNITY** — The term community describes a group of people who have something in common. This could be living in a particular geographical area, sharing an interest (such as studying social work), sharing a common purpose (such as working for a political party) or being involved in the same kind of work (for example, health care work). Thornton and Ramphela (1988: 30) see it as a political term used to "denote aggregations of people who have something in common, such as common residence, geographic region, and shared beliefs, or who claim membership in a common lineage structure, or who are distinguished by similarities of economic activity or class position".

Communities might not be obviously differentiated entities with clearly defined boundaries or universally accepted purposes. However, the use of the term implies a sense of belonging, of interdependence and some form of social organisation. As one writer puts it "The idea of community implies a network of reciprocal social relationships which, among other things ensure mutual aid and give those who experience it a sense of well-being" (Room, 1979:105).

The term "community" is often used to describe constituencies which are not, in fact, communities. In apartheid South Africa, for example, race was generally used as the defining feature of a community. This was an extremely limited definition based on artificially created groups and did not take into account other important shared factors such as education, language, religion or shared economic activity. (See also **Appendix 1**.)

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT** — It is a method of intervention aimed at helping people at a macro-level through enabling and empowering them to identify their needs and participate in their own development. It follows a people-centred model which is often referred to as a bottom-up, grassroots approach. (See also **SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**.)

**COMPETENCE** — Competence is the ability to interact effectively with the environment. It is based on the assumption that individuals are capable of acquiring the strengths and abilities they need to make their own choices and to control their own destiny.

**CONSERVATIVE** — One who opposes change and seeks solutions to societal problems through traditional methods. A conservative approach to social policy emphasises traditional values. With its distrust of government provision of benefits or services, the conservative view places blame for problems and responsibility for solutions on the individual and the family. When conservatives support public welfare, they consider it a temporary measure as they believe that continued assistance to the poor destroys individual initiative.

Empowerment strategies from a conservative perspective focus on acting to strengthen existing social structures and working to resist social change. (To be contrasted with **LIBERAL** and **RADICAL**.)

**CONTEXT** — Context is a word used to mean the environment or social milieu. Thus we often refer to the social, political and economic context in which people live as the broad context of social work practice. Social work is described as a context-based profession. The context is important because it enhances understanding

of why things are as they are or why people behave as they do. For example, if we are describing the social context in which the problem of street children arises, we want to develop an understanding of why street children leave home for a harsh life on the streets and we might discover that their home context is characterised by political violence, family disharmony and poverty which leads us to understand that perhaps life on the streets is a better option for them.

**CULTURE** — Culture is a word coined by sociologists and anthropologists as a collective term to denote the symbolic and learned, non-biological aspects of human society, including language, custom (i.e. established patterns of behaviour and belief) and convention, by which human social groups are distinguishable from one another. Each social group in society develops its own culture. A culture shares certain common features, among them language, religion, dress, customs and beliefs. All the learned forms of behaviour evident in the life of a social group constitute its culture. Sociologists believe that human behaviour is largely culturally rather than genetically determined. Since society is made up of numerous social groups, it is considered to comprise or consist of a plurality of cultures, hence the notion that we live in a multicultural society and hence also terms such as “cultural diversity”. Human cultures are dynamic, changing phenomena.

(The term subculture is usually used in the sociology of deviance and has negative connotations.)

**DEVELOPMENT** — The United Nations adopted this definition of development in 1986:

**A comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process that aims at the attainment of a better life for the entire population on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of benefits resulting therefrom.**

(United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development adopted by the 97th Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly, 4 December 1986.)

This declaration recognised that people were the primary force and beneficiaries of development and that development policy should be directed at enhancing people’s potential, their general well-being and the environment in which they lived. It gave rise to a broad acceptance of “people-centred” approaches to development.

Thus development implies social improvement and is concerned with social justice. Generally, development is aimed at alleviating poverty in society by reaching the poor in order to improve the quality of their lives, their standards of living, and their personal and social well-being. (See also **SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT** and **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**.)

**EMPOWERMENT** — Empowerment is directed at personal and social transformation. It is a process which begins with conscientising people about their own subjective experience in relation to the experience of others and to the context in which their experience occurs. Its aim is to broaden people’s view of their situation by developing awareness and giving them a vision of their own strength. People who experience a sense of powerlessness have to have their capacity for taking control of their lives built. Through capacity-building, people are enabled to take control of their lives, to make decisions for themselves, to organise themselves – and from this services and structures emerge. People then realise that they have the power to make decisions, to access resources, to organise themselves, to build structures and so on. In short they realise that they have access to power, and they feel empowered.

**ENVIRONMENT** (see **CONTEXT**)

**ETHICS** — Ethics is the same as morals but in social work the term “ethics” is often used to describe the principles which flow from its values and which guide practice. Thus we talk about social work’s ethical principles. These principles are usually embodied in ethical codes which are sets of principles to guide practice. Their purpose is to ensure that social workers do the right thing, protect their clients’ interests and make the right decisions. (See also **MORAL** and see **Appendix 2**.)

**ETHNICITY** — Since race is a label which has political connotations and is associated with power of dominant groups over other groups in society, ethnicity has become the basis for national separatism or for political subordination. The ambiguity of the term “ethnic group” reflects political struggles in society around

exclusive and inclusive group membership. Sociologists reject the notion that human beings can be unambiguously defined in terms of their genetic constitution. Sociologists prefer to define social groups in terms of shared culture such as language, customs and institutions, rather than in terms of race or ethnicity.

**HOLISTIC/HOLISM** — Holism is an approach which recognises the interrelatedness of all things. It attempts to view phenomena as broadly as possible taking into account all the possible factors that might impinge on them. Thus a holistic approach to the problem of wife-battering would examine all the factors contributing to this problem. This would include broad political, social and economic factors, such as the patriarchal nature of society and the huge problem of unemployment, right down to factors at an individual level, such as individuals' problems with alcoholism, stress, marital disharmony and unemployment.

**IDEOLOGY** — An ideology is a system of ideas or beliefs. Thus the ideas and beliefs of social work – as reflected in its theory or literature and in the way in which it is practised – are termed the ideology of social work or social work ideology. Other systems of belief or ideologies which have influenced social work are liberalism, marxism or socialism and logical positivism. Ideologies are often identified as “isms”. The important aspect of an ideology is that it is a theoretical explanation of reality. It is an interpretation based on a particular system of beliefs. Thus two people with different ideologies could and would explain the same phenomena or reality differently. Hence a capitalist might say that poverty was due to a lack of economic growth while a marxist might explain it as the result of capitalist exploitation: It is difficult to prove scientifically which interpretation is true or correct. There are numerous different ideologies or belief systems in society and different systems of belief can co-exist. Indeed tolerance of diversity is one of the characteristics of a just society (as discussed in Chapter 5).

**INSTITUTION** — Society is structured in a particular way. Its social structures are often referred to as “social institutions” but they are also referred to as “social systems”. The smallest social system is the family. Individuals and families interact with other social institutions or systems such as health, work, education and welfare. When people claim that problems have “structural causes”, they mean that problems arise because of the way in which society is structured or ordered. Sociologists see formalised practices in society as “institutions”. Thus, as we see in Chapter 3, giving charity became formalised in society into the institution of social welfare. The major social institutions are health, education, religion and work.

The word “institution” can also be used to describe a building or structure where people are placed out of the mainstream of society. Mental hospitals are referred to as institutions, as are children's homes, prisons or places of safety. We say people are placed in “institutional care” (implying that they need some sort of special care or assistance) to distinguish this from family care. (See also **STRUCTURE** and **SYSTEM**.)

**LIBERAL** — The term “liberal” signifies an openness to change, and respect for individual liberties within a societal framework in which all have equal opportunity. Liberals therefore actively support social policies which uphold basic human rights and social equality. Social problems are said to result from social disorganisation which affects individual social functioning. Social services supplement and support individual social functioning and help to fix or improve institutional services. However, in contrast to the conservative approach, liberals support governmental solutions to social problems for they believe that it is the state's responsibility to provide for the well-being of its citizens.

Empowerment from this perspective is directed at mutual adaptation of individuals and institutional structures. Their goal is to achieve a balance between meeting the needs of the individual and society's needs. (To be contrasted with **CONSERVATIVE** and **RADICAL**.)

**MORAL** — The moral dimensions of social work are reflected in its values, which tell us how people ought to be treated and how they ought to behave in society. These values also tell us what kind of society social workers are trying to shape or create; that is, a just society where freedom, non-discrimination and equality are all highly valued. These are the moral beliefs which guide social work. People have moral beliefs which guide the way they live, the way they behave and the way they relate to other people. Often people's moral beliefs are closely linked with their religious beliefs. Regardless of the source of people's moral beliefs, morality is about trying to do good and avoiding evil. Thus the moral dimensions of social work relate to the manner in which we can do good and achieve the best for our clients and for society. (See also **VALUE**.)

**MULTICULTURAL** — We live in a plural society in which there are many different cultures. The term “multicultural” suggests the idea of accepting people’s diversity; it means social workers having the ability to work with all people irrespective of cultural differences. In fact, social workers are expected to be acutely aware of the importance of culture and to show this by respecting people’s cultural beliefs and practices.

### **PERSONAL TROUBLES & PUBLIC ISSUES**

A sociologist, C Wright Mills (1959: 9), distinguishes between “private and public matters”. Private matters are the personal troubles which occur within the individual and within the range of the individual’s relationships with others, in other words, within the individual’s immediate social setting. Public matters, on the other hand, are those issues which go beyond the local environment of the individual. They relate to the larger social structures and policies of society.

A collection of private troubles becomes a public matter and a public matter may result in many private troubles. Public issues may be interpreted as private troubles through a process that blames the victim and denies the need for a social solution; for example, where the growth of informal settlements is seen as the fault of the people living there rather than as the result of institutionalised discrimination or inadequate housing policies. In terms of this approach, it is then the residents of informal settlements, rather than public policies, who are seen as the target for change.

**RACE** — Race is a term used to group people according to certain biological characteristics relating to their physical appearance such as facial features, hair texture and skin colour. It is a label which has political connotations as well as suggesting power of dominant groups over other groups in society. (See also ETHNICITY.)

**RADICAL** — Radicals acknowledge societal responsibility for social inequality and unequal treatment of members of society. Since it is the institutional structure, rather than the individual, who bears this responsibility, structural reform at a macro-level is advocated. Many radicals are willing to forgo ideas of individual liberty in order to impose programmes for change. Radicals believe that traditional social welfare services are used by governments to control the poor and oppress and stigmatise the recipients. Empowerment strategies from this perspective focus on a redistribution of power and wealth to be achieved through the restructuring of society to produce a state in which all citizens share societal benefits equally. (To be contrasted with CONSERVATIVE and LIBERAL.)

**SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT** — Social development recognises the relationship between social and economic development – one cannot be achieved without the other. It refers to policy aimed at eradicating poverty in society. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) in South Africa is an example of a social development policy. Social development policies provide the framework for action, and need to be translated into programmes and projects for their objectives to be achieved. (See also COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT.)

**STRUCTURE** — Society is structured in a particular way. These social structures are often referred to as “social institutions” but they are also referred to as “social systems”. The smallest social system is the family. Individuals and families interact with other social institutions or systems such as health, work, education and welfare. When people claim that problems have “structural causes” they mean that problems arise because of the way in which society is structured or ordered. (See also INSTITUTION and SYSTEM.)

**SYSTEM** — A “system” is a unit of analysis. The human body is made up of various systems, including a nervous system, a respiratory system and a digestive system. If we were examining how the human body was working we would check all these systems to ensure that they were all functioning. A person’s social environment is also made up of various systems, such as the family system, the educational or school system and the employment or work system. These systems may be a source of support or a source of stress. In the same way that we assess physical systems when someone is experiencing a physical problem, we would also need to consider all the social systems to see how someone is coping socially. Often there is a relationship between people’s physical well-being and their social environment. For example, working in a paper mill might affect the physical well-being (health) of somebody who suffers from asthma. Living in overcrowded, unhealthy conditions allows for the spread of illness and disease. Problems people experience in their social environment affect their personal well-being. A person who is unhappy at work might have problems sleeping, be impatient with her/his children and, lacking the energy and

motivation to deal with work problems, may eventually become severely depressed. (See also INSTITUTION and STRUCTURE.)

In social work we use the term *client system* to remind ourselves constantly that people are not "isolated, self-contained entities" but are rather "interdependent systems interacting in complex larger systems as persons-in-situation, persons-in-environment" (De Hoyos and Jensen 1985: 490). Because social workers work with clients at different levels their client systems may be individuals, families, groups, organisations and communities.

**THEORY** — The theory of social work is its knowledge base "which is constructed partially of empirically tested knowledge and partially of assumptive knowledge which has not yet been empirically investigated but which can be subject to such investigation" (Compton & Galaway, 1984: 37).

**TOLERANCE** — Tolerance is important in social work because social workers emphasise acknowledging people's diversity and their right to choose their own beliefs, preferences, culture, religion, and the like. (See also ACCEPTANCE and MULTICULTURAL.)

**VALUE** — A fact is something that can be proven to be true. A value is something that is believed to be true. Values are statements of what is preferred or what ought to be. They are the ideals towards which we strive. For example, social justice is highly valued in social work even though a just society might be difficult to attain. Values flow from the moral or ethical beliefs people have. As beliefs, values they cannot be proven right or wrong empirically in the same way that facts can.

Values are important in social work because social workers intervene in the lives of people and if social workers did not have values and principles such as respect, self-determination, acceptance and confidentiality to guide them in their work they would be free to control and manipulate people at will. When one looks at the values of social work, one realises that everything else flows from these values. The way in which practice theories and models have evolved is to give effect to the central values of social work. For example, the problem-solving model acknowledges people's right to choose for themselves and creates a process of guided decision-making where people are encouraged to make their own choices or decisions. (See also MORAL.)

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**g** indicates that the concept is in the **Glossary** (pages 133–137) of this text.

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