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Human Rights and Human Needs

THIS CHAPTER IS ABOUT the relationship between needs and rights, and what that means for social work practice. Social workers can be regarded as professional need definers. They are constantly in the process of identifying, and then trying to meet, human needs, as described back in 1945 by Charlotte Towle (Towle 1965). Scarcely a day would pass in any social worker's life when the word 'need' is not used on dozens of occasions. Social workers do 'needs assessments', talk about the needs of individuals, of families, of client groups (e.g. the aged), of communities, of agencies, of service delivery systems (e.g. the health care system) and of the whole society (e.g. the need for a better income security system). Social workers talk about 'unmet need', 'needing more resources', 'doing a needs survey', 'needing more social workers', 'needing supervision', and so on. 'Need' is one of the most commonly used words in the social work vocabulary, and it is significant that more often than not it is used, in the words of Noel and Rita Timms, 'in the absence of any deep sense of puzzlement about the concept' (Timms & Timms 1977: 141). Need, however, is a complex issue and requires a good deal more examination than is common in the social work literature. This book seeks to frame social work as a human rights profession rather than a human needs profession. Instead of seeing social work practice as about the assessment and meeting of human needs, we can see it as about the defining, realising and guaranteeing of human rights. To understand the difference, it is necessary to look in more detail at the relationship between needs and rights in the context of social work practice, so that the implications of an idea of rights-based practice can become clearer.

THE PROBLEM OF NEEDS

Although the concept of need is treated unproblematically by most social workers, it is in fact both complex and controversial (Doyal & Gough 1991). It is an instance where the paradigm of positivism has had a major impact, and this remains the case for many social workers. The positivist view of need sees 'needs' as existing in their own right, as phenomena to be objectively identified and measured (Ife 2002). The very phrase 'needs assessment' suggests such a view; clients, communities, agencies, organisations and so on all have 'needs' which somehow we are able to describe and measure as if they were independent phenomena. It is assumed that different social workers, if given the same 'case' (whether an individual, a family or a community) and asked to do a needs assessment, would come up with the same answer. If they do not, it would be grounds for questioning the competence of one of the workers, who presumably did not do the needs assessment 'properly'. Such a view is characteristically positivist, with its emphasis on the apparently neutral and objective assessment of social phenomena, and if there are differences in assessment, attention is given to methodological deficiencies. It is like asking two people to measure the width of a desk; if they come up with different answers, then the problem lies in the methods of measurement, and one of them either had an inaccurate ruler or did not know how to use the ruler properly. The objective 'fact' of the width of the desk is not in question; it is the same for the two measurers, and so they should come up with the same answer.

If we accept that human needs exist objectively in the same way as a desk, then the positivist paradigm is quite an appropriate way of understanding need. But it is clear that human needs are not the same as desks. Needs are, by their very nature, value-laden. Different value positions will have very different views on what, if anything, is 'needed' in a particular situation. A social worker with a strong feminist perspective, who sees traditional family structures as highly oppressive, will define different 'needs' in a case of domestic violence from the definition of a social worker with conservative patriarchal 'family values'. These two social workers will probably never agree on the 'needs' of the victim, the perpetrator and the family in a domestic violence case. The needs as defined by these two social workers are not just objective measurements; they are affected by theoretical understandings, and in particular by ideologies. Needs must therefore be understood as statements of values, of ideologies, rather than statements of 'fact'. This does not mean that they are not also matters for professional expertise; when a social worker defines what is 'needed' in any particular

circumstance, the need definition is based on a professional understanding of what is likely to 'work' in that situation and hence what form of practice or service provision is likely to lead to a desired result. Such a judgement is based on professional expertise, on relevant research, on practice wisdom, on theory, and so on. Judgements of need are both value/ideology judgements and also judgements reflecting expertise (Ife 1980).

The important point emerging from this is that with questions of need, the act of definition and the perspective of the need definer are of paramount importance. Not only will two social workers define the 'needs' of a particular individual, family or community in different ways, but other actors in the case will also have different definitions of what is 'needed', including the client her/himself, other family members, community leaders, other professionals, and so on. Social workers in the reality of day-to-day practice spend a good deal of time negotiating these various perspectives on 'need'.

One of the criticisms of all human service professionals, and perhaps particularly of social workers, is that they use their professional position to privilege their definitions of need over the definitions made by others. Illich's well-known critique of the various professions as 'disabling' specifically includes social workers (Illich et al. 1977). He claims that by increasingly taking on the role of defining people's needs for them, professions have disempowered people by preventing them from defining their needs for themselves. In the era of professionalism, we have professionals exercising control over increasing aspects of our lives. It seems as if there are professionals telling us the right way to do everything: to eat, to relax, to make love, to give birth, to raise children, to learn about the world, to deal with personal problems, to keep fit and healthy, to grieve, to grow old, even to die. There are right and wrong ways to do everything and there is an apparent army of professionals ready to teach us how to do it properly and to imply that somehow if we do not do these things in the approved way we are less than fully human. When we have any sort of problem, we are expected to seek the advice of a professional, who implicitly knows better than we do what we need. This has the effect of disempowering people and giving them less control over their own lives. It devalues human choice and renders people passive 'consumers' of professionalised services. It does not acknowledge the efforts of people to provide for themselves in their own ways: self-education is devalued in comparison to formal qualifications; representing oneself in court without legal assistance is discouraged; self-care in the health field is devalued (unless of course it means buying a book by an expert about how to 'do' self-care properly). Professionals – medical

practitioners, lawyers, planners, accountants, architects, psychologists, teachers, social workers, counsellors, health and fitness experts, and so on – seem to be in control of every aspect of our lives. When such criticism is voiced in the popular media it is commonly social workers that are singled out for criticism (Franklin & Parton 1991); they are labelled as ‘do-gooders’ trying to interfere in people’s lives and tell people what is good for them, as ‘social engineers’ and as people whose prescriptions have led to a worsening rather than a resolving of many social problems. While such popular criticisms are usually based on a limited understanding of social work practice and grossly oversimplify complex social problems, many social workers nevertheless feel a twinge of discomfort that there might be more than a grain of truth in what is being said. It is, basically, the same criticism as that of Illich, though from Illich’s position it applies to all professions, and social work, though as guilty as the rest, does not deserve to be singled out for special criticism.

The key to this criticism is that it is based on the definition of need and on the tendency of professionals to appropriate the right of individuals, families or communities to define their own needs. For the purposes of the present discussion, it emphasises that need definition is far from unproblematic and is certainly not neutral or objective; indeed the very act of professional need definition is itself ideological, and privileges the professional while disempowering the person, group or community whose ‘needs’ are being determined. It also suggests that a significant human right is the right to define one’s own needs, and that professional practice is therefore a form of human rights abuse.

Such an argument suggests the desirability of reformulating social work practice so that it seeks to return to people the power to define their own needs and seek to have them met. This is either implicit or explicit in a number of formulations of social work, particularly those regarded as in the more critical or radical tradition, or those that seek a goal of genuine empowerment (Benn 1981, 1991; Rees 1991; Fook 1993; Fisher & Karger 1997; Ife 1997b; Mullaly 1997; Gil 1998; Pease & Fook 1999; Healy 2000). It is the intention here to demonstrate that by replacing ‘needs-based’ practice with ‘rights-based’ practice, such a goal can be more readily realised and some of the problems of need definition can be avoided.

NEEDS AND RIGHTS

When we make a statement of need, we are saying that something is *necessary* in order for something else to occur. We are talking, essentially, about a

means to a particular end. I need a pen in order to write, I need food in order to stay alive, I need medication in order to cure an illness, I need a car in order to drive around the city, I need new clothes in order to look smart, I need to listen to music in order to feel relaxed, and so on. All my 'needs' are actually not ends in themselves but are means to achieve other desired ends. There are two things to notice about these statements of needs. One is that some of the desired ends might be regarded as more important than others (e.g. staying alive as opposed to looking smart), and the other is that some of these statements might be questioned as to whether the 'needed' thing is the best or only way to achieve the desired end (e.g. I could use public transport to get around the city, and there are other ways to help me feel relaxed as well as listening to music). These two points will be taken up in later discussion and are important in developing a rights-based approach to social work.

When social workers make statements of need, the desired end state can be described in terms of the meeting of a claimed right, and this is the essence of the link between needs and rights in social work practice. When we say that a community needs a child care centre, we are basing that statement on an assumption about the rights of parents to be able to participate in the workplace or have other time away from the duties of caring, and the rights of children to receive adequate care. When we say that a child needs special educational programs, we are doing so on the basis of an understanding of the right of children to an appropriate education, and the right to achieve one's maximum educational potential. When we say that an elderly person needs a nursing home placement, we are making assumptions about the right of that person to an adequate standard of care, and the rights of family members to be able to do other things with their lives than look after the needs of their dependent relative twenty-four hours a day.

Statements of need within social work are therefore also statements about rights. The problem has been that the associated rights nearly always remain implicit and unstated. There is a confident assertion of need – for nursing home placement, for a child care centre, or whatever – but the corresponding rights are seldom spelled out. Indeed the social worker her/himself may not have thought through the rights issues involved but may have taken them as given, or may even be largely unaware of them, having been so affected by policy manuals, agency procedures, office culture and the pressing requirements of the day-to-day job that questions of rights hardly seem significant. These rights are, however, at the basis of practice. One important practice principle for human rights social work, therefore,

is that social workers should seek to identify the rights issues behind the statements of need that they make every day. Rights-based practice is a form of social work where the word 'right' is used more than the word 'need' in the day-to-day discourse of social workers, and where whenever a 'need' is talked about, the rights that lie behind that need are identified and explored.

It was noted above that in talking about needs and relating them to desired consequences, not all the desired consequences would be seen as having a similar priority. Hence my need for food in order to survive would be seen as having a higher priority than my need for new clothes in order to look smart; most people would presumably agree that survival has a higher claim than looking smart. By saying I 'need' these things, I am effectively claiming a right to have those needs met, and presumably my claim to survival has a stronger claim to be met than my need to look smart. To evaluate the strength of my claim to a 'right' to new clothes, we have to examine how important it is for me to look smart. A case might be made, for example, that because of my position, and the importance of appearance in encouraging people to trust me, it is very important that I look smart, as I will not be able to do my job properly unless I do. Such a claim obviously is more readily justified with some occupations than with others. Another case might be made that it is important for my own mental health that I look smart; for some people, looks are unimportant at a personal level, but I may be someone for whom looking smart is very important to my sense of personal well-being, for good cultural or psychological reasons.

This leads to the issue of how we prioritise rights as the basis for claims of need. Clearly, some rights are more important than others, and it is necessary to make decisions about which rights should have priority because sometimes the rights will conflict (e.g. the right to bear arms and the right to personal safety) and also because we are often faced with limited resources, which means that not all needs can be met. Equally clearly, we cannot make firm decisions about the priority of rights in the abstract; some rights, such as the right to look smart, need to be properly contextualised, and in these cases the end becomes a means: it is not just the right to look smart that is at issue but the right to be able to do one's job well, or the right to mental health and a sense of personal well-being. Hence ends can become means to another end, and the distinction between means and ends is not always easy; indeed it can be argued that it is really a false distinction. This question of the validity of separating means and ends, and hence rights and

needs, and the implications for social work, will be taken up later in the chapter. The important point for present purposes is that it is not easy to assign relative priorities to claims of rights and that this cannot be done without an examination of the context within which a right is claimed.

GIVING PRIORITY TO DIFFERENT NEEDS AND RIGHTS

To assign priority to some rights (and therefore needs) over others requires some kind of universal framework or hierarchy of rights, but this is fraught with difficulty. We have already seen how the western tendency to give priority to individualised rights over collective rights has led to a significant critique from Asian commentators of a cultural bias in human rights discourse. We have also seen that different claims for rights cannot be treated in the abstract but must be contextualised; we cannot say, for example, that the 'right' to look smart should take precedence over the 'right' to be able to drive around a city. Each has to be looked at in its context if we are to assign relative importance to these two (perhaps trivial) claims for rights (Doyal & Gough 1991).

In Chapter 1, when the definition of human rights was discussed, it was noted that one of the characteristics of human rights is that they are indivisible. Human rights belong together, and hence one should never be in a position of having to make a choice between two competing 'human' rights. One of the criteria for a claimed right to count as a human right was that it should not be in conflict with other human rights. Hence human rights should not conflict with each other, and when there is a conflict between a human right and another right, the human rights perspective requires that the human right should have priority. That is one important principle which can apply when competing claims for rights need to be evaluated.

How can we tell if a claimed right, or need (with its implicit right) is a claim for a human right, and then whether it can be justified as such? One way is to keep asking means and ends questions. For example:

- Why do I need (or have a right to) new clothes? *In order to look smart.*
- Why do I need (or have a right) to look smart? *In order to improve my mental health and sense of well-being.*
- Why do I need to improve my sense of well-being? *Because it is part of my being human.*

Once the inquiry reaches an assertion that it is 'part of being human', 'what I have a right to expect as a human being', or some such statement, we have entered the domain of human rights. We can then evaluate the claim in two ways. First, we can see whether the claim satisfies the five criteria for a human right as outlined in Chapter 1. If it does, we also need to evaluate the strength of the various claims at each step of the chain. For example we may want to object that I can look smart without new clothes (a trip to the dry-cleaners may be all that is required), or that my appearance is so shabby that even a suit of new clothes will do nothing to make me look smart. We might also argue that I can improve my mental health and sense of well-being in less expensive ways than by buying new clothes (e.g. downloading some music may serve the purpose just as well), and so on. Only if we can be satisfied of the validity of each claim in the chain can we accept the claim as a claim of human rights, and therefore assign it the top priority that such a claim deserves. Many of the claims of social work clients, however, will satisfy such criteria, as for the most part it is precisely because these rights have not been met that the person concerned has ended up seeking the assistance of a social worker.

HIERARCHIES OF NEEDS AND RIGHTS

One of the best-known formulations of human need is Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Maslow (1970) outlined five 'levels' of human needs, the most fundamental being physiological needs, followed by safety needs, needs for belongingness and love, needs for esteem, and finally needs for self-actualisation. The important point about Maslow's hierarchy is that he maintained that if needs at one level are not satisfied, needs at higher levels become less significant, as the individual concerned concentrates on meeting the more fundamental needs. As the more basic needs are realised, however, the higher-order needs emerge as more important. One's need for self-actualisation is of little importance or concern if one is starving, cold and homeless, but the need for self-actualisation can become all-encompassing for an individual fortunate enough to have the needs at the four lower levels effectively met.

As we have already seen, needs are strongly linked to rights. Maslow himself, in the foreword to the second edition of his book *Motivation and Personality*, suggests that the needs he has described can in fact also be regarded as rights:

It is legitimate and fruitful to regard instinctoid basic needs and metaneeds as *rights* as well as needs. This follows immediately upon granting that human beings have a right to be human in the same sense that cats have a right to be cats. In order to be fully human, these need and metaneed gratifications are necessary, and may therefore be considered to be natural rights. (Maslow 1970: xiii; italics in original)

If we accept a hierarchy of human needs, and that needs are inevitably linked to rights, is there also, then, a hierarchy of human rights? If there were, it would mean that some rights are more fundamental and that they need to be met before we can turn our attention to 'higher-order' rights. The western construction of 'first-generation' rights as somehow more fundamental than other rights has something of this hierarchical flavour, and might be seen as a Maslow-like approach to attaching priority to human rights. As we have seen in earlier chapters, this privileging of civil and political rights has caused difficulties. It is necessary to reject such a framing of human rights, and instead to accept the idea of human rights as indivisible, namely that all human rights come together as a package, and to privilege none of them over the others. In this sense, the 'essential' components of our shared humanity, which is what human rights attempt to encapsulate, should not be ranked in a hierarchy but belong together; each is necessary and none is sufficient without the others.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs does nonetheless represent a useful way of thinking about human rights. Because needs imply rights, all five levels of Maslow's hierarchy have rights implicit in them. From a human rights perspective – this is also implicit in Maslow's work – we can see the goal of self-actualisation as a right of all human beings. This means that there is a powerful case for the rights implied in all four of the lower levels of Maslow's hierarchy to be seen as human rights, since from Maslow's position it is necessary to achieve them all if one is to achieve self-actualisation. This does not imply that the human rights inherent in Maslow's work are hierarchical in the sense that one is more important than the others (though it does suggest that some rights may precede others in that if some rights are not realised others seem to be of less immediate priority). Interestingly, this implied 'hierarchy' of rights does not correspond with the priority implicit in the 'three generations' framework (see Chapter 2). From the perspective of Maslow's hierarchy, civil and political rights would not be the first to be met (a reading of Maslow's definitions suggests that these rights belong with the second 'highest' level of need, namely the need for esteem),

and rights to food, clothing, shelter, health and some degree of economic security are more fundamental for the meeting of human need than are first-generation rights. Indeed one could even make a case that third-generation environmental rights come first, since without an environment in which we can breathe the air and drink the water, other rights become irrelevant. But one should be cautious about applying a hierarchical view of human rights too strongly because such a view militates against the notion of human rights as indivisible, which is one of the strengths of a human rights perspective. It may be that at some times and in some circumstances particular human rights are seen as of more immediate concern than others, for example when people are without food and shelter, other rights that are also being denied may receive less immediate attention. But the danger in this is that those other rights will be ignored; for example aid agencies will provide adequate food and shelter but will not bother with education, even though education is also a human right and is certainly necessary if people are to achieve the self-actualisation discussed by Maslow, which is surely the goal of human rights-based practice. In addition, different people will assign different priorities to rights. For some people a perceived right to freedom and liberty is so important that it takes precedence even over survival rights ('give me liberty or give me death', 'better dead than red'), while other people would see survival rights as taking precedence over civil and political rights. There can be no universal consensus on a hierarchy of rights.

NEEDS AS CONTEXTUALISED RIGHTS

Another way of thinking about the relationship between needs and rights is to relate it to the issues of universalism and cultural relativism, as discussed in Chapter 4. The universality of human rights does not mean they have to be applied or realised in the same way in different cultural contexts. Taking a view that sees human *rights* as universal, but *needs* as being the way in which those universals are applied in different contexts, is one way of addressing the issue of universality and relativism, though others were also outlined in Chapter 4. As we have already seen, need statements contain implicit rights, and hence it is by making need statements that we often try to operationalise rights and show how those rights can be met. For example, we can accept that the *right* to education is a universal human right, but this does not mean that educational *needs* are, or should be, the same in all cultural contexts. The right to education can be met in different ways, using different structures and processes. It may mean school buildings in

one context but something else in another. For example in remote areas with sparse populations, communication using computers, telephones and video may be a much more appropriate way of realising the right of each child to an education. In other contexts it may mean something different again, such as itinerant teachers without a formal classroom, or it may mean education provided largely through a tribal or extended family structure. Similarly, the right to education does not imply a uniform or universal curriculum – the content of education will vary with the cultural context, and a claim of a universal right to education need not become a constraint on curriculum diversity, as what counts as ‘good’ education will not be the same across cultures. Thus there will be a large range of ‘needs’ associated with meeting a single human right of education. In one context it will mean a need for buildings, in another it will mean a need for computers, in another it will mean the need to train local people in basic educational methods, in another it will mean the need for books and videos, and so on. Similarly, the right to shelter means very different ‘housing needs’ in different parts of the world, depending on such factors as climate, terrain, available materials, culture or family structure.

In this way, statements of need become the way in which cultural and other variations can be incorporated into a universal human rights framework. Generalised *rights* are seen as universal, and constant across all human situations, but their different contexts result in different definitions and assertions of *needs*. In this context, to impose a single set of universal human needs on all people would count as oppressive and dictatorial, and does not allow for diversity. But a relativist approach to needs, linked to a universal understanding of rights, is an invitation for fundamental human rights to be met in different ways in different contexts. The important thing is that the rights be met for all people, but they do not have to be met in the same ways, and indeed in a world that values cultural diversity there should also be maximum diversity in the ways in which human rights are realised.

There will still be instances, however, when a human right cannot be realised within a particular culture, despite different possible definitions of need. For example a culture that reinforces the oppression of women and denies women full participation in society, access to education or the right to self-determination is contravening human rights, and no amount of relative need definition will stop that. The point is that a human rights perspective requires that all societies meet human rights obligations; it does not matter how they do this, and it is precisely because societies will do it in different ways that we can learn from each other’s experiences and

can maintain a rich cultural diversity. But if a particular cultural tradition does not and cannot meet those human rights objectives, then people from outside that culture are fully justified in criticising and seeking to engage with people from within that cultural tradition about potential change. This does not mean that one solution is being imposed on them, as it must be recognised that human rights can be realised and guaranteed in different ways.

Another result of this perspective on rights and needs is that, within multicultural societies, there are likely to be different ways in which human rights can be met and guaranteed, for different cultural communities. Educational needs, for example, may vary significantly within a society because of cultural variations. There is an obvious value in diversity, and it is important that a human rights practice should not seek to impose a uniform system on the entire society. To do so amounts to colonialist practice, which a human rights perspective must, by definition, avoid, as colonialism represents a significant violation of people's human rights.

NEEDS AND RIGHTS, MEANS AND ENDS

Much of the above discussion has focused on needs as always being means, rather than ends in their own right. The word 'need', deriving from the idea of being necessary, carries with it the idea of something being needed in order to do, have or be something else. Rights have been seen as the ends, and human needs are seen as having to be met so that human rights can be realised. The distinction between means and ends, however, is not as clear-cut as this. One example used above was the idea that I may need new clothes in order to look smart. But looking smart was not the end (or right), it was only another means – I need to look smart so that people will trust and respect me in my work. And that too is a means – I need people to trust and respect me so that my work with them can be more effective. It is not so easy to separate means and ends, and similarly it is not always easy to separate needs and rights. I may *need* food (in order to survive), but we also talk about a human *right* to food. Often needs are talked about as ends in themselves, without great thought being given to why the particular provision in question is needed, and often that 'need' is defined instead as a 'right'.

It is perhaps naïve to seek more clarity in language, since the relationship between needs and rights is so complex, and the two so deeply enmeshed,

that such clear linguistic separation is often quite artificial. From the point of view of rights-based practice, it is important, however, that a discourse of needs not be allowed to dominate the social work profession, to the exclusion of a discourse of rights. It is important that whenever the word 'need' is used, social workers stop to assess what are the implied rights behind the claim of need, and examine the link between the two. And whenever human rights are claimed, social workers will often have to translate this into some statement of needs; it is one thing to talk about the right to housing, for example, but it is also necessary to identify what that right means in terms of needs within the specific cultural, social, political and economic context of practice. One family or community's housing 'needs' will be very different from another's, if the human right to housing is to be met adequately for all.

The distinction between rights and needs is thus important, and despite some of the conceptual difficulties it throws up, including the problematic relationship between means and ends, it is nevertheless a significant part of human rights-based practice.

WHO DEFINES NEEDS AND RIGHTS

The focus of this chapter has been on both rights and needs as being defined, and as only attaining meaning in the act of definition. As outlined in Chapter 1, the approach to human rights taken in this book is that they are discursive: they are constantly constructed and reconstructed through dialogue, rather than existing in any objective positivist sense. And needs are clearly the same: they cannot be said to 'exist' objectively, but are the result of somebody deciding what is 'needed' in order to achieve some rights-based goal.

If the focus of both rights and needs is on the act of definition, this raises the question of whose definitions are to count and whose voices will be heard most strongly in the ongoing dialogue that establishes what is to count as a human right. This is a fundamentally important question for social workers who are concerned with human rights, and has significant implications for practice. It will not be dealt with here, as it deserves a chapter to itself (Chapter 8). In relation to need, however, it is worth remembering the argument of Illich (Illich et al. 1977) that social workers are to be counted among the 'disabling professions', whose enthusiasm for defining the needs of others acts only to 'disable' those whom the professionals claim to be helping. This is the opposite of

empowerment-based practice, which many social workers claim is the basis of their work, and therefore the place of needs and need definition in social work discourse requires closer examination (Pease & Fook 1999). The important practice principle is that social workers have to give up their appropriation of the right to define people's needs for them, and find ways in which the people concerned can reclaim that right and define their own needs. This does not mean that the social worker has no role in need definition; in reality a social worker can assist the process considerably. People will not define a service or provision as 'needed' if they do not know that it exists or what it can achieve, and social workers are knowledgeable about a wide range of resources that may be unknown to the people or communities with which they are working. A person will not define him/herself as 'needing', for example, trauma counselling if they are unaware that such services are available or what they can accomplish. Similarly, social workers may well have expert knowledge of the effectiveness or otherwise of particular forms of provision, and this can be made available. A community troubled by an apparent rise in juvenile crime may argue that they 'need' more police, whereas a social worker is likely to realise that more police alone will do little to reduce juvenile crime and that other programs are likely to be much more effective in the long term.

A social worker therefore has an important role to play in *assisting* in the definition of need, but this does not mean that the social worker takes on that responsibility to the exclusion of the people with whom he/she is working, at whatever level. Rather, need definition must be seen as a *partnership* between the social worker and the person, family, group or community, where the expertise of each is shared and where the social worker assists and facilitates the need definition process *by the people most directly affected*. This approach to practice applies not only to the definition of needs but also to the practice of human rights-based social work, and it will be described in more detail in Chapter 10.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between needs and rights, as discussed in this chapter, lies at the heart of social work. In making the connection between needs, which social workers consider every day, and rights, social workers can move towards developing a human rights basis for practice as advocated in previous chapters. The connection between needs and rights is critical. It provides a stronger moral reference point for the meeting of need, it grounds

human rights in the day-to-day practice of social work, it contextualises human rights within particular cultural and organisational locations, and it helps to establish a social work praxis which incorporates both relativist and universal themes. It is therefore a key component of human rights-based social work practice.