

Some More about Manfred Max-Neef's Concept of Needs¹

Manfred Max-Neef, a Chilean writer also known as *The Barefoot Economist*, has developed a practical model of human needs². Max-Neef deliberately does not engage with the question of whether absolute *human rights* exist. He sees existing notions of *human rights* as essentially Western, and argues that a new, more sophisticated, theory is required to address inequities in the Third World.

Max-Neef's theory was initially designed as a practical tool for assessing the merits of international aid programs. He sees most interventions as having multiple effects - meeting one need commonly either undermines or enhances another. The schema can be readily transferred to needs analysis in a wide range of contexts. It can be a useful framework for diagnosing the possible effects of an intervention in a community ... or your own life.

9 Human Needs

The following table articulates the 9 human needs identified by Max-Neef, and what it takes to meet them³. The **Being Column** talks about attributes of this need being satisfied, the **Having Column** focuses on institutions, norms, mechanisms and laws etc which can meet each need, the **Doing Column** addresses individual or group actions indicating achievement of this need and the **Interacting Column** talks about where satisfaction of this need may be expressed.

	Being	Having	Doing	Interacting
Subsistence	Physical health, mental health, equilibrium, sense of humour, adaptability	Food, shelter, work	Feed, procreate, rest, work	Living environment, social setting

¹ This summary was written and compiled by Suzi Quixley 1999 & 2010. It draws heavily on:

- Max-Neef, Manfred A. (1991) **Human Scale Development: Conception, Application and Further Reflections**, The Apex Press, New York.

This summary is largely a lightly edited version of material in this book. It has been produced because of the difficulty in accessing Max-Neef's book. When in print, it's available in Australia through Urban Ecology Australia Inc. ph/fax: (08) 8232 4866. The more enquiries they receive, the better the chance it will be reprinted!!!

² Max-Neef 1991

³ *ibid*:32-33

Protection	Care, adaptability, autonomy, equilibrium, solidarity	Insurance systems, savings, social security, health systems, rights, family, work	Cooperate, prevent, plan, take care of, cure, help	Living space, social environment, dwelling
Affection	Self esteem, solidarity, respect, tolerance, generosity, receptiveness, passion, determination, sensuality, sense of humour	Friendships, family, partnerships, relationships with nature	Make love, caress, express emotions, share, take care of, cultivate, appreciate	Privacy, intimacy, home, space of togetherness
Understanding	Critical conscience, receptiveness, curiosity, astonishment, discipline, intuition, rationality	Literature, teachers, method, educational policies, communication policies	Investigate, study, experiment, educate, analyse, mediate	Settings of formative interaction, schools, universities, academies, groups, communities, families
Participation	Adaptability, receptiveness, solidarity, willingness, determination, dedication, respect, passion, sense of humour	Rights, responsibilities, duties, privileges, work	Become affiliated, cooperate, propose, share, dissent, obey, interact, agree on, express opinions	Settings of participatory interaction, parties, associations, churches, communities, neighbourhoods, family
Idleness	Curiosity, receptiveness, imagination, recklessness, sense of humour, tranquillity, sensuality	Games, spectacles, clubs, parties, peace of mind	Daydream, brood, dream, recall old times, give way to fantasies, remember, relax, have fun, play	Privacy, intimacy, spaces of closeness, free time, surroundings, landscapes
Creation	Passion, determination, intuition, imagination, boldness, rationality, autonomy, inventiveness, curiosity	Abilities, skills, method, work	Work, invent, build, design, compose, interpret	Productive and feedback settings, workshops, cultural groups, audiences, spaces for expression, temporal freedom
Identity	Sense of belonging, consistency, differentiation, self esteem, assertiveness	Symbols, language, religion, habits, customs, reference groups, sexuality, values, norms, historical memory, work	Commit oneself, integrate oneself, confront, decide on, get to know oneself, recognise oneself, actualise oneself, grow	Social rhythms, everyday settings which one belongs to, maturation stages

Freedom	Autonomy, self esteem, determination, passion, assertiveness, open-mindedness, boldness, rebelliousness, tolerance	Equal rights	Dissent, choose, be different from, run risks, develop awareness, commit oneself, disobey	Temporal/spatial plasticity
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Needs Violators

Max-Neef argues that apparently meeting needs can actually function to undermine more needs than are addressed. He calls these **Violators** or **Destroyers**, because *applied under the pretext of satisfying a given need, they not only annihilate the possibility of its satisfaction, but also render the adequate satisfaction of other needs impossible*⁴. For example⁵:

Supposed Satisfier	Need Supposedly Being Satisfied	Needs Impaired
Arms Race	Protection	Subsistence, Affection, Participation, Freedom
Exile	Protection	Affection, Participation, Identity, Freedom
Censorship	Protection	Understanding, Participation, Idleness, Creation, Identity, Freedom
Bureaucracy	Protection	Understanding, Affection, Participation, Creation, Identity, Freedom

Pseudo-Satisfiers

A more subtle issue is where an action may, at a first glance, seem to satisfy a need. In fact, it gives a false sense of satisfaction, and is generally driven through advertising or some other form of persuasion. Max-Neef calls these **Pseudo-Satisfiers**, for example⁶:

⁴ ibid:33

⁵ ibid:33

⁶ ibid:35

Satisfier	Need Which it Seemingly Satisfies
Mechanistic medicine (<i>A Pill for Every Ill</i>)	Protection
Exploitation of natural resources	Subsistence
Formal democracy	Participation
Stereotypes	Understanding
Cultural Control	Creation
Status symbols	Identity
Obsessive productivity with bias to efficiency	Subsistence
Indoctrination	Understanding
Charity	Subsistence
Fashions and fads	Identity

Inhibiting Satisfiers

Another illusion of satisfying needs is called ***Inhibiting Satisfiers***. These are actions that, whilst meeting one need, inhibit the meeting of multiple needs, for example⁷:

Satisfier	Need	Needs, the Satisfaction of Which are Inhibited
Paternalism	Protection	Understanding, Participation, Freedom, Identity
Over-protective family	Protection	Affection, Understanding, Participation, Idleness, Identity, Freedom
Authoritarian classroom	Understanding	Participation, Creation, Identity, Freedom
Messianism (Millennialism)	Identity	Protection, Understanding, Participation, Freedom
Unlimited permissiveness	Freedom	Protection, Affection, Identity, Participation
Obsessive economic competitiveness	Freedom	Subsistence, Protection, Affection, Participation, Idleness
Commercial Television	Idleness	Understanding, Creation, Identity

⁷ *ibid*:35

Singular Satisfiers

And then, there are **Singular Satisfiers** - actions which only meet one need⁸:

Satisfier	Need that it Satisfies
Food and housing programs	Subsistence
Curative medicine	Subsistence
Insurance systems	Protection
Professional armies	Protection
Ballot	Participation
Nationality	Identity
Gifts	Affection

Synergic Satisfiers

Clearly, the best way to address human needs is through **Synergic Satisfiers**, that is actions which in meeting one need stimulate and contribute to the simultaneous satisfaction of other needs⁹:

Satisfier	Need	Needs Stimulated by Satisfaction
Breast feeding	Subsistence	Protection, Affection, Identity
Self-managed production	Subsistence	Understanding, Participation, Creation, Identity, Freedom
Popular education	Understanding	Protection, Participation, Creation, Identity, Freedom
Democratic community organisations	Participation	Protection, Affection, Creation, Identity, Freedom
Barefoot medicine	Protection	Subsistence, Understanding, Participation
Barefoot banking	Protection	Subsistence, Participation, Creation, Freedom
Democratic trade unions	Protection	Understanding, Participation, Identity
Self-managed house-building projects	Subsistence	Understanding, Participation
Meditation	Understanding	Idleness, Creation, Identity
Cultural Television	Idleness	Understanding

⁸ ibid:36

⁹ idid:36