

## Max-Neef on Human Needs and Human-scale Development

Conventional western ideas of development and progress are seen by many as a root cause of rainforest destruction and other aspects of the global ecological crisis, but what are the alternatives? Development as it is usually conceived is based on a particular view of human nature. This view, which is taken for granted by economic rationalists, assumes that human beings are driven by a limitless craving for material possessions. Max-Neef's conception of what human beings need, and what motivates them, is fundamentally different. If decision-makers operated according to his assumptions rather than those of most economists, then the choices they made would change radically. This article by Kath Fisher outlines Max-Neef's ideas on human needs and Human-scale Development.

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### The Max-Neef Model of Human-Scale Development

Manfred Max-Neef is a Chilean economist who has worked for many years with the problem of development in the Third World, articulating the inappropriateness of conventional models of development, that have led to increasing poverty, massive debt and ecological disaster for many Third World communities. He works for the Centre for Development Alternatives in Chile, an organisation dedicated to the reorientation of development which stimulates local needs. It researches new tools, strategies and evaluative techniques to support such development, and Max-Neef's publication *Human Scale Development: an Option for the Future* (1987) outlines the results of the Centre's researches and experiences

Max-Neef and his colleagues have developed a taxonomy of human needs and a process by which communities can identify their "wealths" and "poverties" according to how these needs are satisfied.

Human Scale Development is defined as "focused and based on the satisfaction of fundamental human needs, on the generation of growing levels of self-reliance, and on the construction of organic articulations of people with nature and technology, of global processes with local activity, of the personal with the social, of planning with autonomy, and of civil society with the state." (Max-Neef et al, 1987:12)

The main contribution that Max-Neef makes to the understanding of needs is the distinction made between needs and satisfiers. Human needs are seen as few, finite and classifiable (as distinct from the conventional notion that "wants" are infinite and insatiable). Not only this, they are constant through all human cultures and across historical time periods. What changes over time and between cultures is the way these needs are satisfied. It is important that human needs are understood as a system - i.e. they are interrelated and interactive. There is no hierarchy of needs (apart from the basic need for subsistence or survival) as postulated by Western psychologists such as Maslow, rather, simultaneity, complementarity, and trade-offs are features of the process of needs satisfaction.

Max-Neef classifies the fundamental human needs as: subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, recreation (in the sense of leisure, time to reflect, or idleness), creation, identity and freedom. Needs are also defined according to the existential categories of being, having, doing and interacting, and from these dimensions, a 36 cell matrix is developed which can be filled with examples of satisfiers for those needs.

Fundamental Human Needs	Satisfiers			
	Being (qualities)	Having (things)	Doing (actions)	Interacting (settings)
subsistence	physical and mental health	food, shelter work	feed, clothe, rest, work	living environment, social setting
protection	care, adaptability autonomy	social security, health systems, work	co-operate, plan, take care of, help	social environment, dwelling
affection	respect, sense of humour, generosity, sensuality	friendships, family, relationships with nature	share, take care of, make love, express emotions	privacy, intimate spaces of togetherness
understanding	critical capacity, curiosity, intuition	literature, teachers, policies educational	analyse, study, meditate investigate,	schools, families universities, communities,
participation	receptiveness, dedication, sense of humour	responsibilities, duties, work, rights	cooperate, dissent, express opinions	associations, parties, churches, neighbourhoods
leisure	imagination, tranquillity spontaneity	games, parties, peace of mind	day-dream, remember, relax, have fun	landscapes, intimate spaces, places to be alone
creation	imagination, boldness, inventiveness, curiosity	abilities, skills, work, techniques	invent, build, design, work, compose, interpret	spaces for expression, workshops, audiences
identity	sense of belonging, self-esteem, consistency	language, religions, work, customs, values, norms	get to know oneself, grow, commit oneself	places one belongs to, everyday settings
freedom	autonomy, passion, self-esteem, open-mindedness	equal rights	dissent, choose, run risks, develop awareness	anywhere

Satisfiers also have different characteristics: they can be violators or destroyers, pseudosatisfiers, inhibiting satisfiers, singular satisfiers, or synergic satisfiers. Max-Neef shows that certain satisfiers, promoted as satisfying a particular need, in fact inhibit or destroy the possibility of satisfying other needs: eg, the arms race, while ostensibly satisfying the need for protection, in fact then destroys subsistence, participation, affection and freedom; formal democracy, which is supposed to meet the need for participation often disempowers and alienates; commercial television, while used to satisfy the need for recreation, interferes with understanding, creativity and identity - the examples are everywhere.

Synergic satisfiers, on the other hand, not only satisfy one particular need, but also lead to satisfaction in other areas: some examples are breast-feeding; self-managed production; popular education; democratic community organisations; preventative medicine; meditation; educational games.

This model forms the basis of an explanation of many of the problems arising from a dependence on mechanistic economics, and contributes to understandings that are necessary for a paradigm shift that

incorporates systemic principles. Max-Neef and his colleagues have found that this methodology "allows for the achievement of in-depth insight into the key problems that impede the actualisation of fundamental human needs in the society, community or institution being studied" (Max-Neef et al, 1987:40)

This model provides a useful approach that meets the requirements of small group, community-based processes that have the effect of allowing deep reflection about one's individual and community situation, leading to critical awareness and, possibly, action at the local economic level.