THE MEANING OF COMMUNITY IN THE LOCAL TO GLOBAL CONTINUUM

The meaning of community varies with each new generation, each distinct geographic location, and each community of interest. Scholars in the areas of sociology, psychology, anthropology, history, philosophy, and social work have all explored the meaning of community (Creed 2006; Martinez-Brawley 1995; Park 1952; Stein 1960; Warren 1963, 1966). Community can evoke the image of the traditional, bucolic village drawn from Ferdinand Tönnies’s classic work that described small rural communities as characterized by *gemeinschaft*—that is, close-knit, face-to-face relationships imbued with a sense of mutual responsibility and obligation. Or community can call forth Tönnies’s contrasting image, *gesellschaft*—that is, mechanistic relationships found in the growing industrial cities and characterized by larger, impersonal networks, broader working and exchange relationships, and weakened local ties (Tönnies, 1887/1957).

In small-scale geographic settings, bioregional location, socioeconomic assets, and cultural and political currents influence the human relationships and networks that give our lives meaning and purpose. These relationships and networks can be variably supportive or oppressive, depending on how inclusive and welcoming the accepted social, cultural, economic, and environmental norms are toward diverse individuals and family groups. Today, both the supportive and oppressive aspects of small-scale communities are inescapably affected by global political and commercial activity that may be initiated in faraway places.

In many parts of the world, elements of traditional, small-scale local communities remain very much alive, and supportive social and economic networks provide a basic community foundation. Today, however, we live in a world with...
unprecedented capacity for communication and travel that is expanding both our personal opportunities and our views of our local communities. Urban communities are exerting a strong pull as more people move to urban areas every year. By the year 2050, the United Nations predicts that 70 percent of the world’s population will be living in urban areas (International Herald Tribune, February 26, 2008).

When the Apollo Mission astronauts sent the world the first photographs of Earth from space, most of us internalized the image of that beautiful blue marble as our home and “community.” In that transformational moment, many began to think of community globally and to understand the larger sense of community as the interconnection of all living systems on Earth. From the perspectives of First Nation peoples and spiritual leaders, however, the interconnections go even deeper and wider across time and space (Berry 1990; LaDuke 2005). The rapid advances in technology and media have fostered this larger view of community by giving us instant access to events and images from around the world. This global access allows us to perceive that we are directly affected by each other’s activity—whether that activity is downriver, downwind, across mountains, beyond borders, or across continents. Technology also helps us to create communities of interest, which connect people who wish to belong together because of loyalty and self-identification, and functional communities, which join people together in common causes for purposeful change in social, economic, and environmental arenas (Fellin 2001; Garvin and Tropman 1992; Park 1952).

William G. Brueggemann (2006) described community as

natural human associations based on ties of intimate personal relationships and shared experiences in which each of us mutually provide meaning in our lives, meet our needs for affiliation, and accomplish interpersonal goals. . . . Our predisposition to community ensures that we become the persons we were meant to become, discover who we are as people, and construct a culture that would be impossible for single, isolated individuals to accomplish alone. (116)

In rural traditional communities, these relationships may encompass an entire village, whereas in townships, cities, and megacities, a sense of community is more likely to relate to a neighborhood, workplace, or other smaller geographic or functional grouping.

COMMUNITY COMPONENTS

Maureen Hart’s practical picture of community incorporates social interaction and natural resources to describe the raw materials from which we create the
social and economic aspects of community (Hart 1999). Hart’s Community Capital Triangle (see figure 1.1) describes community as a three-level pyramid that includes natural capital, human capital, and built capital. Natural capital forms the base of Hart’s model and contains three systems: (1) natural resources, such as food, water, minerals, wood, and energy; (2) ecosystem services, including fisheries, fertile soil, water filtration, and carbon dioxide; and (3) the beauty of nature, such as mountains, seashores, sunlight, rainbows, and bird songs. In the pyramid’s second level, human and social capital, Hart defined two categories: (1) people, which includes their skills, health, abilities, and education; and (2) connections, which includes relationships of family, neighbors, community, companies, and governments. At the top of the pyramid, supported by the other
five building blocks, is what Hart calls built capital, which is composed of all the things humans make and produce (e.g., buildings, equipment, information, infrastructure, art, music, clothing, roads). Hart’s picture of community capital helps us understand the relationships between the resources available to community members and the way our communities can strengthen or preserve those resources.

COMMUNITY PRACTICE EXAMPLES

How do we engage with a community, in either a local or a global context, to work toward community improvement? Each of the boxed examples in this chapter provides a brief description of community from the perspective of

KENYA

For the past thirty years, all over Kenya, Wangari Maathai, winner of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize, has provided leadership to the Green Belt Movement with the aim “to mobilize communities for self-determination, justice, equity, poverty reduction, and environmental conservation, using trees as the entry point” (Green Belt Movement 2006). The Green Belt Movement has organized numerous community networks that are now caring for 6,000 tree nurseries across Kenya. These community networks have already planted more than 30 million trees throughout Kenya, transforming not only the environment but also attitudes about the future and thoughts of how to shape it. Currently, the Green Belt Movement has projects that move beyond Kenya’s borders and that are continuing the mission of working with ordinary people to improve their lives and future, using tree planting as the motivational beginning point for community development and citizen involvement.

CHILE

For fifty years, and under widely divergent national governments, residents of La Victoria, a poor neighborhood on the edge of Santiago, Chile, have struggled to find meaning and justice in their lives. Even during the dark years of the Pinochet regime with its concentrated military effort to crush any popular movement, ordinary citizens continued to organize and to break down the fear created by the military. For example, during the Pinochet years, the people of La Victoria organized a huge outdoor tea on March 8 to mark International Women’s Day. The women of La Victoria were seated at tables that stretched down the entire street, while the town’s men and children served the tea and snacks that they had cooked in church kitchens. The people of La Victoria seized this and every other opportunity to have a public celebration, and in so doing, they “reclaimed symbolic power as they rejected the regime’s imposed reality,” thereby creating “spaces of possibility and resistance in the face of powerfully determining forces.” (Finn 2005:22)
people interested in community practice, whether in professional capacities or as neighborhood leaders. Although these examples focus primarily on local communities, they recognize connections to a larger environment, and some acknowledge both the past and present forces that are part of their experience.

These examples are representative of deep and enduring aspects of community. Equally important, they describe the varied roles of neighborhood leaders, organizations, and collaborative public and private efforts in strengthening and promoting community structures that are just and supportive. The community improvements and struggles described in these examples relate to “meaning, context, power, history, and possibility,” the five concepts Janet Finn and Maxine Jacobson (2008a) identified as defining a “just practice framework.” According to these researchers, this framework emphasizes social work intervention guided by social justice, human rights, and progressive change (42–50). Throughout

---

**CHINA**

In Guangzhou, a large city in the Guangdong Province of South China, more than 12 percent of the population is comprised of older adults, and 365 people are officially recorded as 100 years or older. To meet the needs of the growing population of older adults, especially older women, both the national and provincial governments are working with the families, who have traditionally been responsible for care of older relatives. Although much remains to be done to meet the needs of China’s older adults, especially those living in rural areas, the provincial administration has shown a remarkable commitment to making adult services a priority. Already, adult services centers have been built in every neighborhood and district within Guangzhou city. The goal of these centers is to provide social, educational, recreational, health care, and respite care for the older adults and their families.

*(Lee and Kwok 2006)*

**UNITED STATES**

The nonprofit South Eastern Efforts Developing Sustainable Spaces (SEEDS) program in Durham, North Carolina, has been working to build community, neighborhood by neighborhood. SEEDS workers establish neighborhood programs that teach gardening, cooking, educational, and art skills to the children, youth, and adults of Durham. The overall goal of the SEEDS programs is to teach “respect for life, for earth, and for each other” *(City Farmer 2006)*. The neighborhoods served by SEEDS are composed of a mix of African American, Latino, and Anglo families, reflecting the city’s recent population changes. Children in the “Seedlings” program plant snow peas, and later carrots and onions, both to eat and to sell at the local farmers’ market. Parents and other volunteers build raised gardening beds, teach classes, and help with the general focus of “gardening, nurturing, gathering, and education.”

*(City Farmer 2006)*

---
this volume we will discuss how the values of social justice, human rights, economic fairness and opportunity, and environmental protection and restoration are basic to all social work practice.

COMMUNITY PRACTICE PROCESSES

Community practice social workers generally engage with communities through a range of processes. Brueggemann (2006) has suggested that “of all the assets and tools that humans have for constructing their social environment, community is the most basic and the most important” (131). Thus, exploring the processes that underlie community practice is essential to the social work perspective.

Marie Weil (1993, 2005a) described the four major processes of community practice as organizing, planning, development, and change. These four processes are most easily observed in arenas where efforts are under way to improve community conditions and mitigate community problems. We have refined the terms, modifying development to sustainable development and expanding change to progressive change. These changes recognize that, to be successful, community development must incorporate the “triple bottom line” by working concurrently toward improvements in social, economic, and environmental conditions. Thus, we consider sustainable development a holistic term that encompasses those three arenas. Similarly, progressive change recognizes that the change we are working toward embodies positive movement toward social justice and human rights, which are basic values in social work.

Most efforts in community practice involve the four processes of organizing, planning, sustainable development, and progressive change in order to improve opportunities for all community members as well as to limit or eliminate factors that contribute to community degradation and disintegration. In addition, these four processes provide an overarching framework for the eight models of community practice that are the focus of our discussion in chapters 5 through 12.

ORGANIZING

Organizing includes efforts to engage citizens in developing their local leadership capacity and to equip them with the knowledge, skills, and organizational power to make positive decisions affecting their social, emotional, environmental, and economic conditions. Herbert Rubin and Irene Rubin (2007:5) describe organizing as “working with people to help them recognize that they face shared problems and to discover that by joining together they can fight to over-
come these problems. [It] . . . builds upon and strengthens interpersonal, social, and community relationships while establishing ongoing organizations that enable people to sustain collective actions.” The community considered in the organizing process may be defined by a geographic location or may apply to those with shared goals who are living and working in distant locations. Michael Reisch (2005b) described organizing that emphasizes achieving social justice as radical community organizing that is “focused on the attainment of social justice and fundamental structural and institutional changes in communities and society” (287). In his analysis of the root causes of social problems, Reisch bases his assumptions on the perspective that most existing social and economic structures have effectively prevented people of low wealth from reaching their optimum potential. He concludes that it is only with “the development of alternative economic, political, social, and ideological systems” that people of low wealth can hope to participate in community building (Reisch 2005b:278).

In his work in Brazil, Paulo Freire (1972) used adult education as a method for community organizing and development. His “problem-posing education” brought groups of people together to examine their current problems in light of their contextual past. Working and learning with the poorest people in Brazil, Freire learned that people, “for whom immobility represents a fatal threat, for whom looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are,” can develop the capability to participate in and build their future (1972:57). Freire sought to foster this capability through a group discussion process that he called conscientization. This process involves bringing together a group to engage in reflection and analysis of their present situation, to plan for change based on understanding the past, to take action to change negative aspects of the present condition, and then reconvene to reassess and reflect. Freire’s views on education and development are used in many parts of the world today (Castelloe and Gamble 2005; Chambers 1997; Hope, Timmel, and Hodzi 1995; Reisch, Wenocur, and Sherman 1981).

The principle that underlies organizing derives from the democratic value that emphasizes how important it is that people be involved in decisions affecting their lives (Austin and Betten 1990; Kahn 1991). However, not all organizing efforts will be equally effective. If the community members do not perceive the organizers as “legitimate,” or if an institution outside the community imposes constraints on organizers’ efforts, then organizing is unlikely to succeed (Schmid and Salman 2005). When organizing is successful, the process yields important effects on the psychosocial aspects of communities as well as benefits that improve the physical, social, and economic conditions of communities. These effects of the organizing process were noted by Mary Ohmer and Wynne Korr (2006), who found that organizing
can influence citizen participation and its effects on participants [and] . . . can also facilitate personal and collective competencies among participants and increase their connections to their communities, including increasing self-esteem, personal empowerment, and community empowerment . . . leadership and political skills . . . and community pride and belonging. (142)

Another important aspect of organizing is bringing organizations together into networks or coalitions that can efficiently combine the separate efforts of many individuals or small groups to effect a specific policy or change (Brueggemann 2006; Homan 2008; Mizrahi and Rosenthal 2001).

PLANNING

Planning is a process widely used in community practice, and it will also be identified later in this book as one of the eight discrete models of community practice. Planning is recognized as having a fundamental role in working with community groups. Community planning involves identifying a shared vision for change and outlining the steps required to achieve the desired changes. The planning process seeks to engage citizens in identifying a condition for change, specifying the intended outcomes, and defining activities that will produce the desired outcomes. A number of researchers have examined the various aspects of planning. Murray Ross (1967), for example, advocated the use of both local and centralized social planning in social welfare and program development. Terry Mizrahi (2009), drawing on years of practical experience, identified planning as “a complex sociopolitical and technical process” (872). Marie Weil (2009b) reflected on the complex nature of planning and emphasized both the need for and importance of “participatory” planning methods. She defined planning with communities as “the process of social, economic, and physical planning engaged in by citizens and community practitioners to design services, community infrastructure, and neighborhood revitalization plans that are appropriate to given communities—urban and rural” (218).

In recent years, both the W. K. Kellogg Foundation and the United Way of America (UWA) have provided comprehensive planning manuals to community-based programs to help them practice step-by-step planning. The aim of promoting systematic planning is to help the community programs succeed and to better measure the results of their action strategies (Kellogg Foundation 2004; United Way of America 1996). In part, developing the planning manuals became necessary when both the community-based programs and their funding sources saw a need for concrete, specific information about the results of the program’s actions. These planning manuals rely on the logic model, which takes participants through planning by requiring specific identification of program
resources, inputs, outputs, activities, outcomes, and changes. Planning tools of this type can be useful with large groups because it allows each participant to better understand and envision the direction of the organization’s efforts. Using a planning tool also provides an opportunity to gather comments and feedback from the entire group, which can increase engagement and the likelihood of reaching the group's intended goals.

In our recent work with grassroots organizations in North Carolina engaged in sustainable development projects, we co-created a workbook with members of community organizations, which they used as they planned, carried out, and evaluated hoped-for social, economic, and environmental changes. Our workbook expands the logic model process by incorporating the rationale behind the creation of the community-based organization. In addition, we integrated organizational and developmental theories with planned change theory to create a continuous planning model (see figure 1.2) for use by and with grassroots groups (Gamble, Weil, Kiefer et al. 2005). We describe the model’s action plan in eight steps (represented by the eight boxes in the continuous circle), which were adapted from our experience and review of planning and evaluation literature. This body of literature is important because it aims not only to help community groups improve their collective effectiveness but also to improve the economic, social, environmental, and emotional aspects of community life (Arnold et al. 1991; Castelloe and Gamble 2005; Freire 1972; Kellogg Foundation 2004; Pretty et al. 1995; United Way of America 1996). The eight steps shown in figure 1.2 are intended to be iterative rather than sequential, which more accurately reflects the way groups function in the real world.

When elaborating the planning steps for any community project, whether local or global, it is important to ensure community participation at all points in the process (Fals-Borda 1998). Although organizers might assign specific responsibilities to task forces, action groups, or committees, guidance from the whole group is required throughout all stages—planning, implementation, evaluation, and reflection. This type of participatory planning takes time and requires the skills of a good facilitator, but it will yield big rewards in the number of people who actively support the plan and hope for its ultimate success. In addition, participatory processes embody widely valued democratic principles (Castelloe and Gamble 2005; Chambers 1997; Couto and Guthrie 1999; VeneKlasen and Miller 2002).

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Interest in sustainable development emerged in part from the dialogue among those working to alleviate social and economic disparities across the globe and those concerned with environmental degradation (World Commission on...
The relationships among community/organizational issues, goals, objectives, inputs, outcome evaluation/documentation, and reflection, with an emphasis on the value framework of sustainable development.

**Community Vision**—the dream of how we want the community to look in the future, including community economic development, environmental conservation, and social equity and justice

**Goal or Goals**—What will be accomplished

**Objectives**—Specific ways we want changes to happen

**Inputs**—What we have and can invest in activities toward our objectives

**Outputs**—Activities, projects, and programs we plan and carry out to reach our objectives (e.g., workshops, meetings, events, training, actions, recruitment, testifying at public hearings, holding press conferences, etc.)

**Evaluation of Impact**—Indicators and methods to measure change in community social, economic, and environmental conditions over time

**Reflection**—What did we accomplish? What did we learn from these actions?

**Evaluation of Outcomes**—Indicators and methods to measure the results of what we did or did not do toward changing social, economic, and environmental conditions in our community. **Short Term:** how people’s knowledge, awareness, attitudes, skills, aspirations, and motivations changed. **Medium Term:** how people’s decisions, conditions, actions, advocacy efforts, and policies changed.

**Evaluation of** Outcomes—Indicators and methods to measure the results of what we did or did not do toward changing social, economic, and environmental conditions in our community. **Short Term:** how people’s knowledge, awareness, attitudes, skills, aspirations, and motivations changed. **Medium Term:** how people’s decisions, conditions, actions, advocacy efforts, and policies changed.

**FIGURE 1.2 Continuous Sustainable Community Development**


Environment and Development 1987). Although traditional wisdom suggested that market-based economic development was the single most important way to decrease poverty and increase opportunities, such narrowly focused efforts often came at the cost of the depletion of finite resources, lasting environmental damage, extreme gaps between wealthy and poor populations, and rapid extinction of plant and animal species (Daly and Cobb 1989; Escobar 1995; Korten 2001; Prigoff 2000). The movement promoting sustainable development
emerged to foster human development in a more holistic way, protecting people, resources, and the environment. In describing the origins of sustainable development, Richard Estes (1993) focused on global stewardship, defined as human development that is just both socially and economically, while at the same time protective and respectful of the environment. Estes called for community workers to engage others (i.e., communities, nations, regions, and world organizations) in sustainable development. Practitioners in this movement now range from local entrepreneurs and farmers to multinational corporations (Hart 2007; Khor and Lin 2001; Soeteman and Harkink 2005; Wentzel 2003). In addition, many cities and countries have created task forces to focus on developing sustainable development goals, establishing benchmarks for protecting the environment, and promoting equal economic and social development opportunities. On a global level, the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals provide a broad, worldwide agenda aimed at achieving the first steps toward sustainable development by 2015. This program’s special focus is on cutting extreme poverty in half, eliminating gender inequalities, preventing and treating HIV/AIDS and other deadly diseases, and ensuring environmental sustainability (United Nations Development Program 2003).

The United Nations evaluates a nation’s efforts to achieve sustainable development in four areas: human development, environmental recovery, economic equality, and social justice. The principles and benchmarks used in these evaluations are included in the annual Human Development Report published by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) since 1990. This publication includes the Human Development Index (HDI), which is a composite measure of a population’s development progress combining health, education, and basic economic standards. The HDI incorporates a summary of three measures: (a) “a long and healthy life” (i.e., life expectancy at birth); (b) “knowledge” (defined by the adult literacy rate and the combined primary, secondary, and tertiary gross educational enrollment rate); and (c) “a decent standard of living,” defined as gross domestic product per capita (UNDP 2005:341). For example, even though the United States had a relatively high per capita GDP in 2005, the nation ranked only tenth on the HDI because of its lower scores for education and life expectancy (UNDP 2005:219). In the 2007–2008 Report, the United States’ ranking dropped to twelfth (UNDP:2007).

Gross domestic product (GDP) is the most frequently used measure of development, but it has significant shortcomings as a measure of the human population’s true progress. Being strictly an economic measure (i.e., the total value of goods and services produced in a country), GDP excludes important development characteristics that cannot be measured in terms of money (e.g., voluntary care of children by grandparents, unpaid work in community-based service
organizations). In addition, as a measure of a country’s economic output, GDP incorporates as positive production such negative drags on the economy as the costs of illness resulting from toxic industrial and farming practices, the environmental toll of contaminated water and air, and the price of war and prison construction. In chapter 7, we present a further discussion of the sharp contrast between GDP and measures of human development by incorporating ideas from the Human Development Report and other progressive perspectives that set benchmarks for social, economic, and environmental well-being.

**PROGRESSIVE CHANGE**

The process of progressive change is often rooted in ameliorating negative conditions in local, regional, or global locations. In this book, we focus on purposive, planned change that seeks to produce better social, economic, and environmental outcomes for the most disadvantaged populations. Progressive change also gives particular attention to improving the lives of those who have been consistently excluded from community planning and decision making on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, limited assets, ability, age, religion, or sexual preference. From our perspective, each community must individually define what kind of change would be “progressive” for them. When considering the meaning of progressive change for the local level, it may be useful to examine some international perspectives on change.

**INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLES OF PROGRESSIVE CHANGE** One example of an international perspective on progressive change is the Earth Charter, which outlines principles for “a time when humanity must choose its future” (Earth Charter 2008). Specifically, the Charter formulates principles that will guide a nation’s transition from a system that exploits people and resources to a system that promotes sustainable development, and thus provides a global road map for change. The concept of the Earth Charter was born in 1987 within the UN World Commission on Environment and Development. Through the leadership of both Maurice Strong (former secretary general of the Rio Earth Summit) and Mikhail Gorbachev (president of Green Cross International), as well as the help of the government of the Netherlands, the idea of the Charter was rekindled in 1994 and launched as a civil society initiative. The Earth Charter, formally approved in 2000, outlines four main principles:

- Respect and care for the community of life
- Ecological integrity
- Social and economic justice
- Democracy, nonviolence, and peace (Earth Charter 2008:2–5)
The Earth Charter has been widely accepted by many international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) as well as local, national, and international governing bodies. Overall, these groups recognize the Earth Charter as a consensus statement for the kind of change needed as countries move toward sustainable development. The Charter is also widely used as a resource for developing global standards and codes of conduct.

**SOCIAL WORK AS PROGRESSIVE CHANGE AGENT** The four principles of the Earth Charter resonate with the principles described in “Ethics in Social Work, Statement of Principles,” which was adopted in 2004 by the International Federation of Social Workers and the International Association of Schools of Social Work. This Statement of Principles, including the definition of social work, is a central source for community practice social workers as they seek to ground their values and purpose and define progressive change.

Change in our physical, environmental, emotional, economic, and social condition is continuous. Community practice helps promote positive and progressive change, so that local conditions can help all people develop to their optimum potential—and without harming the environment that sustains them. In part II, we describe in depth the eight models of practice that work toward strengthening community leadership, social capital, planning skills, and action strategies, all of which can bring positive change to communities.

In the final analysis, community has meaning everywhere along the local to global continuum. We identify not only with our immediate neighbors as part of a community but also with others outside the community with whom we feel an affinity, incorporating them into our sense of global community. Communities can be geographic places, virtual groups linked by technology, functional groups with whom we work toward a specific purpose, interest groups with whom we play or pray, and ad hoc coalitions with whom we engage for short-term purposes. Each one of us is a member of multiple communities at any given time.

---

The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.

*International Federation of Social Workers and International Association of Schools of Social Work, 2004 (IFSW/IASSW 2008)*

---

Downloaded from cupola.columbia.edu
JUSTICE, RIGHTS, AND EMPOWERMENT IN COMMUNITY PRACTICE

The eight models of community practice presented in chapter 2 and elaborated in part II of this volume are intended for use as practice reference points. The models illustrate how specific practice approaches might be considered as ideal types for comparative purposes (Weber, 1903–1917/1997). Each model presents different aspects of how community workers engage with communities in a variety of locations, cultures, and contexts to work toward specific purposes. The models have a twofold comparative purpose: (1) to serve as general guides to practice in organizing, planning, sustainable development, and progressive change; and (2) to raise questions about the “why” and “how” of different action approaches. All eight models are grounded in a set of principles based on promoting social justice and human rights. We provide an expanded discussion of values and approaches in chapter 3; here we introduce the value base related to social justice, human rights, and empowerment.

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Social justice and human rights are critical values for social work and especially for community practice (Dominelli 2007; Finn and Jacobson 2008b; Ife 2006; Reichert 2007). Embedded in these two values are the right to a decent standard of living and the elimination of abject poverty, which we will discuss in relation to the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the mission of empowerment in social work.

The profession has both recent and historical precedents on which to build a strong commitment to social justice and human rights. Social justice is one of the six core values identified in the U.S. National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics (NASW 2008). At the international level in 2004, both the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) adopted “Ethics in Social Work, Statement of Principles” (IFSW/IASSW 2008). In addition to the international definition of social work noted above, this document states that human rights and social justice are intrinsic, fundamental elements of social work. Furthermore, the document emphasizes human rights, human dignity, and social justice as the primary principles of social work practice (IFSW/IASSW 2008:1–2).

Human rights and human dignity relate to “respecting the right to self-determination; promoting the right to participation; treating each person as a whole . . . within the family, community, societal and natural environments . . . ; [and] identifying and developing strengths . . . of individuals, groups, and communities and thus promote their empowerment” (IFSW/IASSW 2008:2)
These principles are intended for all social work interventions, whether used in direct practice or community practice. The understanding of social justice in “Ethics in Social Work” means “challenging negative discrimination; recognizing diversity; distributing resources equitably; challenging unjust policies and practices; [and] working in solidarity . . . towards an inclusive society” (IFSW/IASSW 2004:2–3). Such a universal statement will not have perfect agreement among all its stakeholders. However, the “Ethics in Social Work” marks an important first step in collaborative identification and definition of social justice and human rights for social workers around the world; it is a point of shared understanding from which we can move forward together.

The concern for the number of people in poverty, the number of children who die each day for simple lack of adequate nutrition, and the widening gap of access to wealth between the world’s richest and poorest populations has been brought into clearer focus by a variety of United Nations organizations (notably, UNDP, UNICEF, and UNIFEM). Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection. (UDHR 1948)

In 2000, the world’s political leaders adopted the Millennium Declaration and the eight Millennium Development Goals (table 1.1; see also boxed information, UNDP Human Development Report 2003); in accepting this declaration and set of goals, they made promises about how to respond to this disparity of income. The formal endorsement of the Millennium Declaration was a courageous step aimed at reducing poverty and advancing human development by the year 2015. According to the UNDP, many NGOs and national nonprofits have realigned their program goals in order to support the 2015 deadline and to work toward the Millennium Development Goals. However, more developed countries need to respond positively by providing the promised aid and debt relief; otherwise, the promises made in 2000 will be broken (UNDP 2003:1–14; InterAction, October 18, 2007). The current economic crisis should not be used as an excuse to abandon the MDG benchmarks. The devastating and destabilizing forces of global poverty require a broad and consistent response.

The Millennium goals give each of us an opportunity to work within our own countries to promote international collaboration and policies that will bring us
### TABLE 1.1 Eight Millennium Development Goals with 2015 Targets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOALS</th>
<th>TARGET FOR 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.</td>
<td>Halve the proportion of people living on less than a $1 a day and those who suffer from hunger. More than a billion people still live on less than US$1 a day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Achieve universal primary education.</td>
<td>Ensure that all boys and girls complete primary education. As many as 113 million children do not attend school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Reduce child mortality.</td>
<td>Reduce by two-thirds the mortality rate among children under five. Every year, nearly 11 million young children die before their fifth birthday.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Improve maternal health.</td>
<td>Reduce by three-quarters the ratio of women dying in childbirth. In the developing world, the risk of dying in childbirth is 1:48.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.</td>
<td>Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS, the incidence of malaria, and other major diseases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Ensure environmental sustainability.</td>
<td>Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs and reverse the loss of environmental resources. Reduce by half the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water. More than one billion people lack access to safe drinking water, and more than two billion lack sanitation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Develop a global partnership for development.</td>
<td>Develop an open trading and financial system that includes a commitment to good governance, development, and poverty reduction—nationally and internationally. Address the least developed countries’ special needs and the special needs of landlocked and small island developing states. Deal comprehensively with developing countries’ debt problems. Develop decent and productive work for youth. In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries. In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies—especially information and communications technologies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from the UNDP Human Development Report, 2006.
closer to reducing poverty among world populations. Whether we are among nations with greater or lesser wealth, we all have policy-level and community-level work to do to increase opportunities for those living on less than $1 a day. We will return to the concern for poverty and the urgent need to engage in policy and community strategies in chapters 7, 12, and 13.

**POWER AND THE MISSION OF EMPOWERMENT**

The concepts of power and empowerment have a close association with social justice and human rights. Power is typically defined as the ability to exercise influence, control, or authority over decisions, resources, or outcomes. Power derives from a number of sources depending on the context and history of a situation. Power may come from historical events or conditions that influence a wide range of contexts such as the status of families, occupations, resources, policies, networks, religions, castes, gender groups, ethnic/tribal groups, age groups, or sexual preference groups. Negative uses of power often emerge as the result of a combination of discriminatory factors based on gender, race/ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, age, sexual orientation, geographic location, or disability (VeneKlasen and Miller 2002:337–39).

Feminist views of power include both power with and power to do, “an alternative to the patriarchal finite notion of power . . . power [is] a widely distributed energy of influence, strength, effectiveness and responsibility” (van den Berg and Cooper 1986:6). We discuss these kinds of power in greater detail in chapter 5. In her work *Black Empowerment: Social Work in Oppressed Communities*, Barbara Solomon (1986) presented the first social work text devoted to helping practitioners to assist people in freeing themselves from internally imposed restrictions and in developing empowerment strategies to overturn external challenges to their exercise of human, civil, social, and political rights.

According to Homan (2008), “Power is not dominance. Dominance is the way some people use power . . . Power can be used in a spirit of cooperation as easily as it can occur in a climate of conflict” (131–32). It is important for community groups to study the history of power. Those seeking to change conditions need to understand the nature of power and influence and to be aware of differential access to resources and information. When exploring the meaning and use of power, it becomes clear that power can have both negative and positive results. The use of power can result in state-sponsored violence, or it can result in moral leadership, mediated equity, and peaceful revolutions.

The roots of this kind of empowerment in the Western historical development of social work were provided in Barbara Levy Simon’s (1994) *The Empowerment Tradition in American Social Work*. Her analysis concluded that “full participation by citizens in the social contract hinges . . . upon the interrelated trinity of civil
liberties, political rights, and socioeconomic entitlements” (1994:45). In that work, Simon points to the many influences in developing and broadening the social work knowledge base for empowerment, including Gandhi, African Independence Movements, Freire in South America, the civil rights and the black power movements in the United States, liberation theology in South America, feminism, gay and lesbian liberation, and the disability rights movement. Richard Estes (1993) and Paul Hawken (2007) added worldwide indigenous movements and the all important movements toward environmental protection and restoration.

People who have been working together toward empowerment often express their newly gained insight and collective efficacy in song, art, and drama. Si Kahn (1994), songwriter, singer, and community organizer, provided a manual, How People Get Power, to help organizers envision and carry out work that empowered people in local communities. Successful community workers from various corners of the globe have effectively facilitated the incorporation of local music, poetry, drama, and other cultural expressions into community awareness and empowerment activities (Boal 2000; Chambers 1997; Couto and Guthrie 1999; Kleymeyer 1994; Slocum et al. 1995).

VeneKlasen and Miller (2002) describe citizen empowerment as “a process of learning and action that strengthens people’s self-esteem, analytical and organizing skills, and political consciousness so they can gain a sense of their rights and join together to develop more democratic societies” (59). As community groups become empowered, they are better able to engage in planning, action, and evaluation of programs and projects that will improve the quality of life for all community members. Measuring empowerment, evaluating how people become more engaged as social actors and how changes come about in the community, requires forethought and participation by community members to specify what the changes will look like.

Brueggemann (2006) suggests that when social workers engage with people to develop empowerment they should aim to “help people break the bonds of external and internal oppression, raise consciousness, challenge perceptions, and stimulate reflection” (488). Empowerment is an outcome we work toward and a process that we work through as we describe the eight models of community practice in part II.

CONCLUSIONS

In this introductory chapter we have set forth our perspectives on the meaning of community along a local to global continuum. We introduced a strong focus for incorporating social justice and human rights in the work of community practice, including a discussion of the importance of eradicating poverty and of developing
community empowerment. Three additional chapters in part I establish the foundation for understanding and preparing for community practice. Chapter 2 presents the eight models of community practice, provides the rationale for selecting the eight models, explores the three lenses that we believe will color community practice in all parts of the world during the twenty-first century, and identifies the primary roles used by social workers in the eight models. Chapter 3 describes the evolution of values, the history of approaches to community practice, and the purposes of community practice work. Chapter 4 provides an overview of the theories, knowledge base, and perspectives that guide community practice.

In chapters 5 through 12, in which our community practice models and skills are presented in detail, we discuss specific philosophies, methods, and information technologies that facilitate the development of powerful and effective organizations. Helping people to engage in progressive community change, to develop an understanding of the change process, and to make use of participatory decision making, planning, strategy, development, and evaluation requires a skilled community practice facilitator. Through participation, people can be engaged in politics and policy development that can lead to progressive changes in social, economic, and environmental arenas from the ground up. Through engagement in the political process and the development of policy, people are more likely to take active roles and become participants in the efforts working for change. We understand that increased participation does not always lead in progressive directions, nor does political leadership necessarily help a population value diversity, collaborative engagement, responsibility for future generations, or environmental stewardship. However, the progressive changes we envision, and those that are convergent with the values of social work, include social justice, economic opportunity, and environmental restoration and protection.

Throughout this book we will frequently return to our perspectives on social, economic, political, and environmental well-being. Social well-being means that all people have access to the supports and opportunities offered by social institutions and relationships; economic well-being means that all people have opportunities to achieve a wide variety of livelihoods and that wages should pay enough to meet a family’s needs for shelter, food, health care, and transportation; political well-being means that all people should have freedom to associate, speak, vote, and participate in the governments that make policy for them; environmental well-being means that present generations must not live beyond the resources in the biosphere and must repair, to the extent possible, damage to air, water, soil, fisheries, forests, and other species. In all the chapters that follow, we focus on the work of community practice social workers and the knowledge, roles and skills necessary for helping communities to identify goals and to work toward progressive outcomes for themselves, for their regions, and for the world.