



The Importance of Infrastructure and Process in Realizing Human Rights

Shirley Gatenio Gabel¹ · Susan Mapp²

Published online: 26 February 2018

© Springer International Publishing AG, part of Springer Nature 2018

This issue explores a diversity of social topics from around the world—all of which point out lagging social infrastructure and processes that perpetuate disparities and violate human rights by marginalizing populations in a variety of ways. This point is made loudly and clearly in a paper by Muchacha and Yeupenyu that points out that despite our recognition of child marriage as a violation of human rights and hindrance to social development, the practice of child marriage continues in Zimbabwe in part because there is no capacity within the Ministry of Social Welfare to address this. The authors call upon social workers in Zimbabwe to advocate for structural changes that will end this harmful practice that perpetuates poverty and denies children of their rights. Likewise, we learn how persons with albinism in Cameroon are marginalized and stigmatized by society from authors Ayuk, Nzefa, and Monebenim. Lacking the infrastructure to provide relief from the visual and dermatological issues often accompanying albinism, the suffering of persons with albinism is perpetuated by societal stigma and lack of education about the disease, its causes and its transmission. Social workers are urged to work to develop interventions such as support groups for persons with albinism and their families; educational awareness programs; and advocacy for the rights of persons with albinism to healthcare, education, and employment opportunities, and to demystify all myths and cultural beliefs surrounding albinism.

Bokek-Cohen and Ben Asher demonstrate how marginalization can be magnified by traditional practices and social welfare systems that are not sensitive to the specific plights of minority populations. Bedouins living in Israel have the option of participating in the Israeli Defense Forces—an activity that is not supported by all members of the Bedouin communities. As Israeli citizens, widows of fallen soldiers are entitled to collect widow benefits but cultural practices that diminish the status of women within Bedouin society often result in only the father of the deceased soldier being informed of the death and deciding funeral arrangements (such as rejecting an honorary military funeral for a male only funeral ceremony) and the alienation of bereaved widows and their children from the community for economic and political reasons. The author considers ways in which traditional practices conflict with social welfare policies and how these policies could be modified to reduce discrimination of Bedouin widows and facilitate the realization of their human rights.

Equally important as the social infrastructures we build are the processes we create. As we learn from Willis and Nagel, the language we develop to describe and understand trauma affects its responses. The development of specialized vocabulary involves both internal and external processes, which facilitate learning, psychological reframing, and neurological wiring or rewiring. Willis and Nagel look at how language development can be used for rehabilitation in post-conflict Northern Uganda to overcome war-related stress and trauma and the need for such interventions to be culturally sensitive and specific. McCardle, Bliss, and Grudzinski examine learning and segregation in the USA. The focus of integration efforts has been based on outcome measures of integration but McCardle, Bliss, and Grudzinski argue that we also need to be paying attention to how the learning processes within schools prolongs segregation or facilitates integration. Their study found that access to support and resources, and understanding of the impact of segregation differs considerably by race. Social workers are well positioned to work toward implementing policy and system changes in education to further integration.

✉ Shirley Gatenio Gabel
gateniogabe@fordham.edu

Susan Mapp
mapps@etown.edu

¹ Graduate School of Social Service, Fordham University, Bronx, NY, USA

² Department of Social Work, Elizabethtown College, Elizabethtown, PA, USA

It is not only old systems that need to change but we need to be more sensitive to how new systems advance rights-based approaches as they are being developed. As we implement the Sustainable Development Goals across all countries of the world, Goldkind, Thinyane, and Lam argue that we should be more aware of ways in which community-based organizations (CBOs) can contribute to the process. Using CBOs in Macau as an example, the research highlights the unique positioning of CBOs to moderate participation of the marginal-

ized populations groups, and to broker their potential for data collaboration with specific stakeholders within the sustainable development data ecosystem.

Each of the articles reminds us that process in social work and in rights-based approaches is at least as important as the realization of rights. Many of today's world leaders have goals that diminish human rights but our strength may be in focusing on building a rights-based infrastructure and processes that will outlive these leaders.