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# Social Work Values and Ethics in a Time of Change

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2022 so far has already been a huge year in the development of social work. The profession is moving so fast in leading and pioneering new approaches to social development that there are already calls up updating the 2014 Global Definition of Social Work and the 2016 Global Statement of Ethical Principles in order to more fully express the developments, see [Beyond the pandemic: Exploring social work ethics and values as a contribution to a new eco-social world](#).

One of these major advances was the People's Global Summit held in July. Initiated and co-facilitated by IFSW, this process drew together, for the first time, the United Nations, social movements, indigenous networks, global faiths, community representatives, concerned governments and many professions to establish a new set of values for social and economic development and environmental sustainability. In the Summit it was agreed that we all needed to come out of the silos that have divided us. It was further agreed that we need to develop new values, beyond the Western traditions that have dominated global discussions and strategies, to include cultures and philosophies from across the globe. This inclusive way of working was also reflected in the way that people from throughout the world contributed to the Summit. This included song, dance, storytelling

and visual contributions that were honored equally to the academic and research presentations.

The Summit concluded with [The People's Charter for a New Eco-Social World](#). The key emphasis of this Charter relates to the need to shift power from centralized governments more directly into the hands of people. This is in recognition that the large modern nations states are often blind to the needs and aspirations of the people and communities that live within them. The Charter also acknowledges that large modern states struggle to cooperate with each other and are often mandated by national interests. It was recognized that such states have failed to attain the United Nations founding goals of working together to secure peace, freedoms, rights and alleviate poverty.

The Summit and its Charter acknowledged that people, worldwide, do not want war, uncertainty, poverty, crime, corruption, and violence in their lives. They want sustainability, dependability, belonging, freedom of identify and equality with others. They want to have a real say in the change that affects them and not be at the mercy of an unseen policy controller. It was also recognized in the Summit that our diversity is our strength which leads to new ideas, innovations, and more vibrant and enriching lives. To progress these understandings, it was agreed that we need to recognize new forms of localized democracy and cooperation within and between communities and along with new systems for interconnecting communities with broader agendas.

For those readers that were not able to be a part of the Summit process, you will see that this is a fundamental change in global thinking, and you may be interested to learn that our profession has been identified as crucial in taking this, the largest global movement, forward.

Social work was seen by many in the Summit as being a key actor because of the profession's specific skills of seeing and utilizing strengths in communities, assisting people to work together in finding sustainable solutions, and because of our focus on addressing structural issues to enable all people to participate. To support us, policies are already emerging hot off the press, such as [The Role of Social Workers in Advancing a New Eco-Social](#)

World, but we may also need to ask ourselves, if the descriptions of the profession, especially its ethics and values, need updating in line with these global changes. For example, do we continue to talk of ‘self-determination’ or do we talk of ‘self and co-determination’. Rather than ‘human rights’ should we talk of ‘holistic rights and responsibilities’. Instead of ‘empowerment’, still used in much of the literature, should we discuss ‘mutual or multi-relational empowerment’.

Each of these possible rephases speaks more clearly to the co-design and co-production approaches in social work. This of course is not new for many parts of the profession, especially in the African, Asia-Pacific and South American regions where community work is often the primary approach, but we need to all think and consider together: ‘How do we in this generation and at this point in time, interpret and describe our profession’s values and ethics?’

These are exciting times and IFSW is delighted that this journal is creating space and place for such an ongoing examination. We look forward to your contributions as the discussion unfolds.