

# Human Needs

## ABOUT THIS UNIT

This unit on Human Needs is designed to give young people an opportunity to think about the essential needs of human beings; those things which help us to survive and lead a “fulfilled life”. The work of the psychologist, Abraham Maslow, is presented. We ask you to apply Maslow’s principles to understanding: (a) how well human needs were met in the lives of early Ugandans, represented by the forest dwelling Twa people, (b) how well they are being met in the lives of people living in Uganda now, and (c) what changes you would like to see to better meet the life goals of future generations of Ugandans.

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## INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION

This activity is in two parts. In each part, start by working in small groups and then come together to compare and rank in importance the ideas from each group.

### ACTIVITY 1: What do you understand by the phrase “Human Needs”?

- In small groups, make a list of what you consider to be the important Human Needs (all those things that people need to survive and live a fulfilled life).
- Next, bring everyone together and make a combined list of the human needs that the groups have identified.
- Finally, try to come to an agreement of how you would rank them in order of importance.

**Commentary:** Points that might be raised include having enough food, water and firewood; having money from the sale of produce or paid work carried out by members of the family; being in a happy family where members get on well together. There is no right or wrong answer.

### ACTIVITY 2: “*Man does not live by bread alone.*”

The quotation above is taken from the *Authorised Version of the Bible*, published in 1611. It has become a popular everyday saying.

What do you think it means in modern day life?

**Notes for Teacher/Group Leader:** If it is true that man cannot live on bread alone, what other things do people need if they are to experience a full life? The following questions may guide your answers.

- *What are our basic needs?* (nutrition, clean air, clean water, clothes, shelter, sleep, reproduction, safety, good health).
- *What other things do people want from their lives?*
- *How important to you are your relationships with other people?* (Family, love, friendship, community).
- *Who are the people you most like and respect in your school or community?*  
How important to people are respect, self-esteem, status and recognition?
- If there was nothing to stop you, how would you choose to spend your life?

In order to make sense of the above questions it helps to have some ideas from psychology.

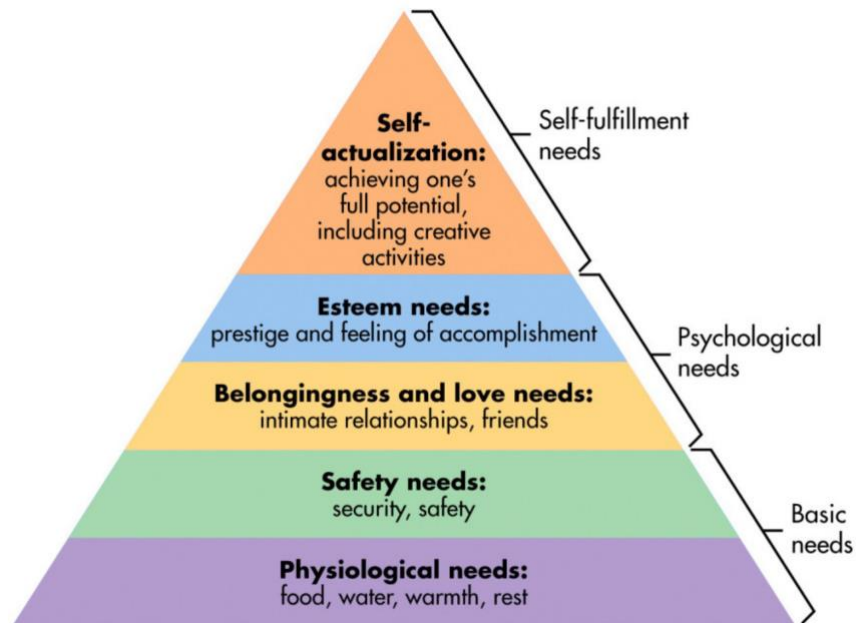
## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF HUMAN NEEDS

Reference: <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>

In 1943 a psychologist, named Abraham Maslow, came up with the theory that human beings have different sorts of needs. Maslow wrote:

*"It is quite true that man lives by bread... But what happens to man's desires when there is plenty of bread and when his belly is full? Other "higher" needs emerge."*

He listed, what he called, a "**Hierarchy of Human Needs**".



1. **Physiological needs** - these are biological requirements for human survival, e.g. air, food, drink, shelter, clothing, warmth, reproduction, sleep. Without these we would find life difficult.

2. **Safety needs** – we need to avoid life-threatening danger – e.g. from wild animals, people who might cause us harm, diseases, or threats to livelihood (such as droughts and floods). Humans do better when we live in a peaceful society, with good law and order, good disease control and health care.

3. **Love and belonging needs** – as well as the basic needs above, human beings are social animals. We thrive on friendship, trust, receiving and giving affection and love. We like to be part of a mutually supportive group (family, friends, community).

4. **Esteem needs** - This includes (i) personal dignity, which we get from achieving things, and (ii) the desire for respect from others (which affects our status in the community).

5. **Self-actualisation needs** - refers to the need for self-fulfilment. This comes from being happy with the life we lead and the contribution we are making to the lives of others.

Self-actualisation means different things to different people. One person may wish to become a good parent, be part of a loving family or play a useful role in the community. Others might be driven by personal goals they have set for themselves such as: being skilled in a craft, gaining knowledge and expertise in an area, becoming an accomplished singer or musician, keeping fit, building a successful business and improving lives, or living a more mindful or spiritual life.

## FOR DISCUSSION

- What obstacles might prevent you from achieving all of Maslow's Needs?
- How might you overcome those obstacles?

Now read the following account of the life of the Batwa, who were the first inhabitants of Uganda. As you read it, think about the extent to which their forest lives enabled them to meet the full hierarchy of Human Needs.

## **CASE STUDY**

### **The Batwa: The First Inhabitants of Uganda**

The first human beings evolved in East Africa around 200,000 years ago. For over 90 percent of our time on earth, our numbers remained small. We lived in small family groups, surviving as hunter-gatherers, exploiting what nature had to offer. Gradually, over many thousands of years, we spread out across Africa and migrated to other parts of the world.

As recently as two thousand years ago, there were very few people living in Uganda. Most of the land south of Lake Kyoga, west and east of the great River Nile, was covered with high tropical forest. These forests were dense, with a huge variety of trees and plants. They were rich in wildlife, including elephant, buffalo, leopards, antelope, bush pigs, primates and birds and butterflies in huge variety. There were few roadways through the forest.



The first human inhabitants of the forest were the Twa (Batwa). The Batwa were semi-nomadic. Being short in stature, they were well adapted to the forest. They could move briskly through the dense undergrowth and this made them good hunters and foragers. They made temporary houses in places with good supplies of food and water and stayed in one place, so long as life was good there. The picture above shows a Batwa hut and a tree



platform, where they could retreat if elephant or buffalo came along. If food or water became scarce, or if they were endangered by animals, by another group or a senior member of the group died they moved on to find another place to live. The Batwa existed like this, moving through the forested areas of the Congo, Central Africa and the Great Lakes Region of East Africa for thousands of years.



The lives of the Batwa were well adapted to the forest, and they made full use of its resources. From material such as twigs and branches, bark, plant fibres and animal skins they made weapons for hunting and protection, huts for shelter, to keep them dry in the rains and safe at night, and clothes to protect their skin and for warmth during the cooler nights, especially in the uplands of Ruwenzori and the volcanic landscapes of Virunga and Mgahinga.

The Batwa were skilled hunters. They used bows and arrows, spears and traps to catch forest animals for meat, which made up half of their diet. They had a varied diet because they also ate fruits, nuts, plants and roots from the forest and were adept at finding and harvesting wild honey.

They could make fire to keep warm and to barbecue meat. Food was plentiful. They met their need for water from streams and by collecting rainwater. In the Batwa culture, food was shared among the group, so nobody went hungry.



The picture above shows how fire can be made by spinning a stick in a hole in a piece of wood. In case you want to try here, here are some detailed instructions;

<https://www.skilledsurvival.com/starting-fire-with-sticks/>

It is not easy!



Although they took what they needed from the forest, their lifestyle was self-sustaining. The forest met all their physiological needs and there were so few of them that any forest they cleared had plenty of time to regenerate. They lived in harmony with nature. They never took more than they needed, and the animals and plants they used were never under threat. For thousands of years they had the forests to themselves and there were no other people to compete with them.

#### **Question for Discussion:**

**What do you imagine were the main threats to the safety of the Batwa?**

Possible answers: Wild animals – attacks from elephant, buffalo, leopard (especially on the children), snake bites. Diseases (e.g. bat droppings can be the source of many virus diseases) and parasitic infections – malaria, schistosomiasis, jiggers. Accidents e.g. from falls. The Batwa had relatively short lives – their “average” life expectancy was not much more than 30 years. Although some people lived much longer than this, the average was low because of the large numbers dying in childhood. 1 in 5 Batwa children died during birth or in the first month of life. 2 in 5 children never lived past 5 years.



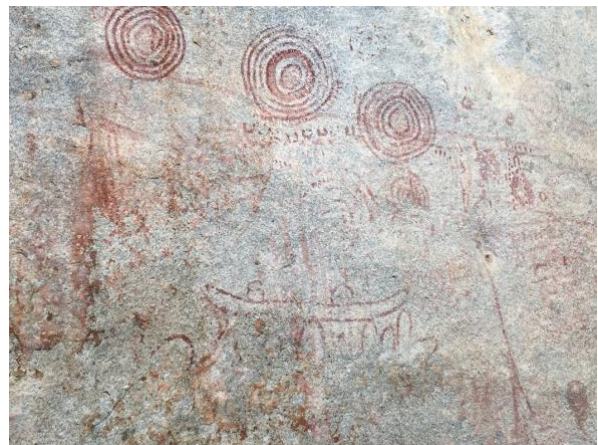
## How would you imagine the lifestyle met their Psychological Needs?

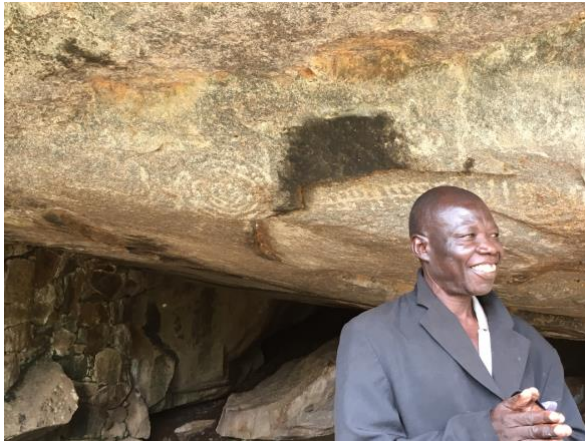
The Batwa lived in extended family groups. People in each group took care of each other. They worked together to provide food for the group and to protect members of the group from outside threats from animals. If someone was wounded or ill the group would care for them and use medicinal herbs to cure different ailments. The group was a source of friendship, love and mutual support. On days when the hunt failed to catch anything, they might go hungry. There would also be seasons where fruits and nuts were not so plentiful. At times like this they would console each other, knowing that the next day would probably be better. At times when food was plentiful, they would have spare time to work together building and repairing shelters and making the other things they needed. There would also be free time for relaxation, for socialising and for singing and dancing. The Batwa used their leisure time to develop a wide repertoire of music and songs. The following is an example, recorded by the Singing Wells Project in 2011:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n7bOXG6dlaQ>

Members of the groups gained dignity from the recognition of their particular strengths whether as housebuilders, cooks, hunters or musicians and storytellers.

The Batwa had places that were important to them for rituals. One of these places was Nyero Rocks, between Soroti and Mbale in the Eastern Region of Uganda. Nyero has become a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is famous for its rock paintings and carvings. They were created by the Batwa over a long period from 12,000 years ago to as recently as 1,000 years ago. Here are some examples:





Pottery with concentric circles and geometric designs found in most of the sites in eastern Uganda.



Sketch by Merrick Posnansky 1961:108.

There are images that appear to show a dugout canoe (top right), a crocodile tail (behind the man) and more abstract artistic patterns using concentric circles, almost like basket weave patterns. The 2,500-year-old pottery found at the Nyero 2 site uses some of the designs found in the rock paintings. Whether the paintings were made for pleasure or for ritual we may never know. What we do know, is that for many hundreds of years after the Batwa had left the area, other later people visited the Nyero rock site to make offerings of food, beer and money in times of drought, misfortune or for childbirth. It was regarded as a magical place and ceremonies, including those to bring rain, were held there.

For further information about the Batwa see:

<https://www.bwindiforestnationalpark.com/the-batwa-people.html>

## FOR DISCUSSION AND DEBATE

*For many thousands of years, the Batwa had freedom to move through the forests. They survived by hunting and gathering but had time for the higher things in life. However, gradually the forest has been chopped down and burnt, forcing the Batwa to survive in smaller and smaller stretches of forests, which remained in the extreme south-west of Uganda.*

*In recent decades the last remaining areas of forest in Mgahinga, Bwindi and Ituri/Semuliki have been turned into National Parks to preserve habitats for gorillas and other abundant flora and fauna. Income from tourists from Uganda, other parts of Africa and the rest of the world brings in many millions of shillings to the government of Uganda and to local councils. The money builds schools and health centres for the local communities and helps to fund services, such as roads, education and health, provided by Central Government. Sadly, the few remaining Batwa are forced to make a living outside the forests selling pottery and crafts, taking tourists into the forest, farming and working in labouring jobs. Many of the long to be back in the forests, which their ancestors inhabited for many millennia before them. In the forests, there were dangers, but the Batwa were free people able to make decisions about how and where they lived. Today, they earn money, send their children to school, have access to modern goods, but they have lost many of their ancient freedoms.*



## QUESTIONS

1. Check again the different elements of Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs. How well did the traditional forest life of the Batwa enable them to meet these?
2. How well does their modern life outside the forest meet their needs?
3. Preserving natural forests, and the flora and fauna that inhabit them, is important for the whole of humankind. However, society needs to enable change.
  - a. Should we regard the Batwa as unfortunate victims of modernisation, but something we have to accept?
  - b. Should the Batwa be financially compensated for the loss of their forest home?
  - c. Should a way be found for the Batwa to continue to live in the forest in harmony with the environment? (Perhaps they could earn money by introducing visitors to their way of life. They could demonstrate how they make sustainable use of the natural resources of the forest. They could become guardians of the wildlife of the forest and be paid for undertaking conservation and education work with visitors. Such measures might bring harmony between the needs of tourism, with its benefits to the national economy, conservation of the forest habitat and wildlife, and provide a livelihood to the native inhabitants of the forest.

## PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS ABOUT FAIRNESS

1. *When major changes are taking place in society, e.g. the creation of a national park or the building of a new highway, should it be a condition that everyone agrees?*
2. *Should those who lose from a change receive cash or some other form of assistance, to compensate them for their loss?*
3. *When we talk about Human Needs, do all human beings matter equally?*

## NOTES FOR TEACHERS/GROUP LEADERS

Philosophers and Economists have expressed different views on how a society should manage change:

- a. **THE PARETO PRINCIPLE:** The Italian Economist Vilfredo Pareto argued that:

*"A change (e.g. the creation of a National Park or the building of a new highway), should be allowed if the gain of the gainers (those visiting the*

*park or using the highway) is greater than the loss of the losers (those who have had to move home to make way for the Park or Highway)".*

The Pareto Principle recognises that change involves gainers and losers. When many changes are occurring in society then people gain from some changes and lose from others. So, overall, it may balance out and everyone benefit overall, as change occurs. This is called the "**Swings and roundabouts argument**", what you lose on the swings you gain on the roundabouts!

The problem with this view is that, sometimes, it seems that it is always the same people who seem to lose, and that is surely not fair. Some would even say that the gainers are overwhelmingly rich people, and the poor, who have less power, are the ones who keep losing.

- b. **THEORY OF JUSTICE:** A contrasting view is that put forward by the American Philosopher, John Rawls. Rawls believed that, whenever changes are being made, society should think carefully about whether the change is "fair" towards its most disadvantaged members. Rawls goes so far as to say that we should judge how good a society is by how well it treats its poorest and most disadvantaged members. In a humane society, the losers should always be compensated for their loss. According to Rawls every society should do its best to promote:
- equal basic rights,
  - equality of opportunity
  - the interests of the least advantaged members of society.

When we look at the needs of *individuals*, then Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs is a good starting point. However, when we look at the needs of *society* as a whole, we have to add another requirement:

***The need to build a society based upon Justice and Fairness.***